

TPTG's Conversation with George Caffentzis

PREFACE

George Caffentzis, an offspring of Greek immigrants from Lakonia, a place in southern Greece, is associate professor in the Department of Philosophy, University of Southern Maine. But, as you will see it for yourselves, the 15th of October, 2000, was not for us "an evening with a philosopher". George is an activist to a fault. We met him for the first time in Athens on the 14th of October, 2000, but we have been in correspondence with Midnight Notes editors since 1993. By that time we had published two texts of our own on the Gulf War and the Macedonian Question and we had distributed here some important documents about the Gulf War (like *Ten Days That Shook Iraq*). So, we were looking for comrades abroad who had done some theoretical work on the connection between capitalism and war and who had also taken part in anti-war movements. That year we discovered the 10th issue of Midnight Notes which was devoted to the "New Enclosures". We immediately understood that we had to do with a very important work and that we had to learn more about their activities. So we came in touch with them and they sent us a few back issues and their book called *Midnight Oil* which had just been published by Autonomedia in New York. Without any exaggeration, only Marx's and Kropotkin's work, Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Barrot's *Fascism/Antifascism* and the critique of counterculture by the american Situationists had as a decisive influence on us as *Midnight Oil*. Some of the articles in the book lent credit to our belief that war is a means of keeping the working class under discipline. But, most important, we discovered in it one of the most original and open-minded definitions of the working class and its struggles.

The study of Zerowork/Midnight Notes' work was fundamental for us. In the last 8 years we've tried to combine their views on unwaged work, the community/circulation of working class struggles and the crisis of social reproduction with Marx's and the Situationists' critique of alienation and ideology and we believe that this has helped a lot the development of our theoretical/practical activity. (For example, see our articles on Mexico and the struggles in education in Greece). But our disagreements with George are fundamental, too. His text, "*Notes on the Antiglobalisation Movement 1985-2000*", which he had given us the night before, sparked off the debate between us in the second part of the conversation. Our disagreements do not arise from different interpretations of the debt crisis (it certainly was a crisis of class relations) or of the origins of the "antiglobalization movement" (if the word "globalization" is another word for Structural Adjustment Programmes or global neoliberalism, it is certainly true that the "movement" started as a series of non-coordinated, spontaneous reactions against it)-- they arise from George's refusal to draw a distinction between *social uprisings* against SAPs and *their political, reformist representation* (a form of representation one can find both in the "first" and the "third" world). Then again, unlike George, we consider a movement to be proletarian judging not only by its social composition but also by its forms of activity and its objectives. We believe that this conversation was of benefit to both sides: we started examining "globalization" and the movements against it more carefully and George -- in

a critical text he wrote about Genoa -- admitted that the "movement" is disconnected from the needs of the inhabitants of the cities in which the demonstrations take place (which is an indirect admission of the fact that there is a communication gap between the "movement" and the working-class).

Certainly a lot of things have changed, especially in the US, after September, 11, but we cannot discuss this now in this short preface.

The conversation was published in *Ta Paidia tis Galarias*, no 9 (November, 2001). The Greek version was accompanied by 38 notes written by the editors but they're not included here. George's part is in plain letters in the conversation while the editors' (G and K) and another comrade's (A) is in italics.

Athens, November 2001

TPTG's Conversation with George Caffentzis

Part I

G: Tell us about how you got involved into politics. I guess it was in the general context of the '68 movement.

Actually, it was not the '68 movement. I got politically involved in the early 1960s.

I was a child of a conservative Greek-American family, even though many members of my family in Greece were left-wing people. In fact, in this trip to Greece I was trying to remember what was the turning point that led to my political involvement and I think it was in 1958, when I visited Greece with my parents. I spent four or five months here and I think, in retrospect, that it had an enormous influence on me. At that time I was thirteen years old and I can date that I began to "go to the left" immediately after I returned to the US. I began to be a "beatnik" and to hang out in Greenwich Village. I also started getting involved in the civil rights movement. 1958 Greece was the turning point. What happened in Greece in that year?

G: At that time there were big demos for Cyprus' independence and union between Cyprus and Greece.

My political turn might have been due to something that happened here, but the US was beginning to become very "hot" then. The civil rights movement was having an impact by the time I left high school and went to Antioch College in 1962. It was a "radical" school in Southeastern Ohio, designed to have students "work and study" throughout their time there. You'd spend three months working at a job, then come back to school, study three months, then go back to another job. These jobs were situated all over the

country, and they would be of all kinds, from working on a scientific project to being an office worker. So Antioch became something like a coordinating center, with people coming back periodically from all parts of the country, with stories to tell of the movement.

I immediately got involved with the movement when I arrived there. I went to prison a few times for civil rights activities. That was also when I met Harry Cleaver at Antioch. I was reading Marx, doing defense of Cuba work, etc. The 1962 missile crisis also had a big impact on me. Antioch College was only a few miles away from one of the biggest B-52 bases in the country. Fifty or sixty of us from the college went to the base to demonstrate in the middle of the crisis. I can still see and hear those bombers taking off, filled with atomic bombs, getting ready to blow up one or another part of the planet.

The period was a rich conjuncture of events and movements: the missile crisis, the defense of the Cuban revolution, the civil rights movement.

In 1965 I left Antioch and went back to New York City to study at the City College. By 1965 the Vietnamese War started and a new movement to resist it had begun. I was nearly drafted then. I went to the induction center and I was about to be shipped off, when someone stopped and asked me if I had been arrested. I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, can you prove it?" I said, "Call my lawyer," who happened to be in New York. My lawyer verified my arrests and convictions which were being appealed and still pending (eventually the convictions were reversed.) I was never drafted, since the Army didn't want to have people with such a record. So, I continued to be involved in the Cuba thing and the movement...

G: *When you say, "the movement" you mean both the anti-war and the civil rights movement?*

They joined together in a complicated way. By 1965 the civil rights movement had been profoundly changed by the Watts riot and other uprisings. There was also a split in the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), one of the most important and radical civil rights organizations. The SNCC leader began to demand an end to the white presence in SNCC. So many whites who had been involved with SNCC in the South were told to go back to their white neighborhoods and organize there. Many did at the time of the war and this gave a further impetus to the anti-war movement. I too got involved in various anti-war demos.

G: *Were you also in the famous demo in Washington when the Pentagon was levitated?*
Yes, I was there.

G: *Did it really happen?*

Allen Ginsburg was in charge of the levitating. Let's put it this way, he tried. But it was a very heavy demo, full of soldiers and tension. The war was very hot at the time and the government was concerned about the anti-war movement at home. All the major figures of the Johnson administration, including McNamara, were watching us from the roof of the Pentagon.

Although the roughest demos I was involved in occurred on Wall Street. We used to go there to demonstrate the connection between capitalism and the war. Invariably, we were attacked by the little stockbrokers and their assistants. They were not the latte-drinking yuppies then, they were really rough characters.

G: *Like gamblers?*

Yes, gambler-types. They were literally little quasi-gangsters who were ready for a fight to defend their Street. These "stockies" really hated us then and took personal offense at our presence.

Anyway, it was an interesting time to be in New York. Of course, it was the period of the counterculture and a lot of things were happening.

G: *I was about to ask you: were you involved in what was called "the counterculture" or were you more political?*

I was more political, although I went through most of the usual countercultural experiences. I also went through a variety of political groups at the time. I spent some time with a Trotskyite group and with a Students for Democratic Society (SDS) group, but I was not very interested in getting involved in any one political group. I was interested in the movement.

G: *So you were not involved in Maoist groups? They were popular at the time.*

Certainly there were Maoist groups then in the US, but I wasn't involved with them. I remember going to a few meetings of a Trotskyite group, but it was not for me. I was more interested in getting involved in going to demos and causing trouble. I was not developed politically and was not thinking in an organizational way, that's for sure. I was young, about 20.

G: *And you were a student...*

I was a student, I had started a serious love affair which eventually led to marriage...and always in the background was my Greek American family. My father, mother, uncles and aunts didn't like my behavior, but they were not sure what to say about it. Even though they had been in the US for many years, they were still so unsure of what it was to "do" American life. I could almost make them think that maybe going to prison to support the rights of black people, was what Americans did. I won't say that this description was exact, but my parents, aunts and uncles couldn't put their foot down and say, "This is the American way." I used to tell them, "This is what Americans do."

G: *And then they'd accept it?*

They were taken aback, let's put it this way. Maybe it was a bit sophistic on my part, but I said to them, "I'm preparing myself for life in America." Anyway, they never said, "If you get arrested in a civil rights or anti-war demo, we'll never see you again." It was very interesting because many other straight American friends had a lot more trouble from their families.

G: So, being an immigrant's son helped you.

Ironically, it did help in keeping relations with my family. They knew what left-wing politics meant because they had left-wing relatives in Greece and they knew the problems they faced. But immigrants understand revolutionary social changes in their new country in a different way than in their home.

I certainly thought there was a revolution going on in the US. American Apartheid was ending, at the least. It didn't mean the end of capitalism, of course, or even the end to the oppression of black people, but a certain type of US capitalism was finished and we in the movement were involved in it. So by the end of the 1960s, I had a tremendous high. I felt that I was involved in a revolutionary movement that changed the world. There was a generalized sense that "We can do great things." But I was still immature politically. I had not really joined political groups and I never really thought through issues of working class struggle, though I had all the terminology.

In 1967 I went to graduate school at Princeton University to study philosophy of science. Princeton was one of the last universities to be touched by the movement, because it was so elite and reactionary. It took two or three years but my cohort of anti-war students eventually had an effect. Princeton came fully into the movement during the major student strike of 1970 which closed down hundreds of universities and colleges after Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia and the shooting of the students at Kent State and Jackson State. Princeton became one of the coordinating centers for the strike. The movement there went a long way in breaking down the old American academic ideology that found any kind of class movement an anathema. We opened up this rich little haven of establishment scholars to the revolutionary winds.

G: They were educating the new generation of leaders.

Yes, but Princeton was also a major theoretical research center for physics and for social theory involved in war research. The movement caused them a lot of headaches. We went after the research centers and actually shut them down for a while.

G: How did you come to be involved with "Anti-Samuelson"?

This is what happened. At the peak of the Cambodia/Kent State-Jackson State strike a number of graduate students said, "We are fed up! Let's take on this reactionary curriculum and teach a counter-curriculum." The idea of doing "counter-courses" was in the air. During occupations, during student strikes we created counter-courses; instead of standard sociology courses we put on counter-sociology courses, instead of history courses we created counter-history courses and instead of the standard bourgeois economics courses we had counter-economics courses. These counter-courses required their own educational material and texts. A number of radical graduate students from different disciplines got together to do a project that would be a model for writing this kind of material, and we decided to take on the ideologically most prestigious capitalist discipline, economics. At that time the official economics textbook was written by Paul Samuelson, the first Nobel Prize winner in economics. It was taught everywhere and he had become a millionaire from the royalties from the book. His claim was to have

brought Keynesian and classical economics together in a "neo-classical synthesis." It was the book to attack if you wanted to do a counter-course in economics.

We got together and said, "We are going to put together something for the fall semester of 1970." The great strike had occurred in the spring and we wanted to have a counter-text ready for the return of the students. But by the fall of 1970 much of the energy of the movement had petered out at Princeton, partly because some of our demands had been won (including some changes in the curriculum and in requirements). We discovered that we could not get enough graduate assistants in economics to adopt our counter-text.

This left us without an activist project. What were we to do with our work of the previous few months? Should we abandon it? Many who worked on the project decided to leave, but a core of us decided to "really do the job" and thoroughly attack Samuelson's textbook. So slowly we started work on a text that would teach students that bourgeois economics was an ideological illusion.

G: Why are you apologetic about it?

Well, we started to take the project of writing the book as a political-intellectual project of its own, instead of taking it as means to an end. We started writing counter-chapters for each of Samuelson's. We went through all of Marx, including all of *Capital* and the *Theories of Surplus Value*. Although I had read Marx before sporadically, in the years between 1970 and 1973 I was involved in systematic collective study and I really learned my Marxism.

G: Was it something unusual at that time in American universities to have students' study groups studying Marx's Capital or other revolutionary texts?

No. All the major Marxist texts were seriously studied by different groups during that time.

K: In an autonomous way...

Yes, not as parts of a university course as you often have it now. For many members of these original autonomous study groups became teachers and used Marx in their courses later. I would venture to say that in the 1970s Marx's texts were more studied in the US than in any other part of the world.

G: And it was possible at that time to have a course in Marx's Capital let's say like Harry Cleaver does now?

It was only beginning to be possible in the 1970s. Remember, when my generation went into the universities in the 1960s there had been fifteen years of intellectual purging in US academe called McCarthyism. Many left-wing professors were kicked out, intimidated or even exiled in the 1950s. So the universities were political-intellectual wastelands when we entered, on the one side, but, on the other, we entered them with a powerful revolutionary experience gained through political work in the civil rights and anti-war movement. Hence, we were forced to educate ourselves and each other in the ways of the class struggle, there was no other way.

G: *And so you came out of this project with what?*

I suppose I should be a little embarrassed saying this, but what began as a small political project ?putting together a counter-course in economics for the Fall 1970 Semester? turned into a four-volume tome in 1973. One of my comrades, Marc Linder, had done the bulk of the writing. He had studied in the Free University in Berlin, before he came to Princeton, and he was a competent Marxist scholar. I was something of a novice, but I had studied Mathematics and the Philosophy of Science and I was able to contribute my expertise to the book. Marc, Julius Sensat (another philosophy graduate student) and I produced this four-volume work (which was much larger than Samuelson weighty text!) but there was no interest in publishing it in the US. Marc left in 1973 and went to Germany where he translated the book into German and arranged for its publication there. It was called "Anti-Samuelson."

Looking back I would say that, though writing the book was a great experience, the actual tome was crude in terms of its method, bookish in terms of its style, and politically very problematic. I quickly distanced myself politically from it, and so when it was published in English in the US in 1977 I was not included as an author with my tacit permission.

1973, however, was a major turning point for many things. It was certainly true of my life, both personally and politically. I separated from my wife, I became a weekend father, I moved back to New York City and I became involved, at first apparently by accident, with a new wave of political people, experiences and perspectives. The most important influences at that time were Wages for Housework and the Italian extra-parliamentary left.

G: *It was at this time you were introduced to "social factory" theory, class composition analysis...?*

Yes. There were many similarities between these ideas, there were a lot of common views especially about the importance of working class struggle as a way of understanding how things change but there were also many differences I did not see at first. I thought at first that they were part of the same theoretical package. But there were evident tensions, which I thought were due to the fact that Wages for Housework was a feminist organization and insisted on feminist autonomy.

G: *What was the first Wages for Housework group? Was it in Italy?*

I do not know the precise organizational history, so when you ask about "the first," I cannot say. Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa definitely originated it when they wrote *The Power of Women* in 1971/72. Within a short time after there were Wages for Housework organizations in other countries. Silvia Federici, who I met in 1973, was mainly responsible for the Wages for Housework network in the U.S. at the time.

K: *In these groups in the U.S. were there any housewives involved or were the members mainly politicians?*

At first the members were self-identified political feminists, I think. Of course, many of them were housewives as well; they had children and jobs. But within a short time more

and more "ordinary women" joined. By the mid-1970s these groups had developed enough strength to go into working class neighborhoods, talk with women and set up "store fronts." Let me clarify this for Greek comrades. U.S. political groups in the 1960s and 1970s would rent a store on a commercial street and turn it into a political space. People walking by would say, "Here's something," and walk in and talk. Of course, the store fronts would be organized to appeal to the local population and slowly a connection would be made with the neighborhood. They were similar to "social centers" in Europe in some ways, but quite different in others, for they were usually rented and rather often small.

Wages for Housework became a very serious national network in this period and developed in many cities from New York to LA.

G: It was during this time that Zerowork originated?

Yes, it originated in the spring of 1974 and the editorial board consisted of the following: Paolo Carpinano, Bill Cleaver, Peter Linebaugh, Mario Montano, Bruno Ramirez, Leoncio Schaedel, Peter Taylor and myself. Bill Cleaver was Harry's brother and Harry joined the collective after the first issue was published.

It took a while for the editorial collective to work together (we were separated geographically from the beginning). But as we were preparing the first issue I began to realize that the "refusal of work" and "end of work" perspective, explicit and/or implicit in much of the theory coming from Italy, was really clashing with the Wages for Housework. The latter pointed to a tremendous amount of unwaged work that was going on which capital was appropriating and turning into surplus value. The Italian extraparlimentary left theorists seem to be oblivious to this work.

G: Let's talk about the introduction of Zerowork 1. It was really very much influenced by the Italian autonomists' idea of the "refusal of work" and the theory of class composition.

We were influenced by Italian Marxist theory of the 1960s and early 1970s as well as feminist theory, which was not exactly "autonomist". But it was hard to talk about specific Italian organizations, since this was a period of the breakdown of many of the extra-parliamentary groups. Theoretically, the period of the early 1970s was both rich and confusing to me after my long study of the standard Marxist texts. I was trying to grasp, on the one side, the crisis of the mass worker, the conception that capital was "beyond" work, the rereading of the "Fragment on Machines" in Marx's Grundrisse (which had just recently been translated into English) and, on the other, the feminist notion of "unwaged work" which was really an important theoretical and political innovation. These ideas were attacked heatedly in the U.S. Left of the time. I sensed that they held politically important insights in the contemporary class conjuncture. I was so excited by the possibilities that it took me a while, however, to think, "We've got a problem here, because these ideas do not fit together."

G: Were there any articles on unwaged work in the first issue of Zerowork?

Yes, there was the piece I wrote, "Throwing Away the Ladder: The Universities in the Crisis." It was about university students and it attempted to show how class analysis

could use their work as an example of how Capital absorbs unwaged work into the accumulation process. Paolo Carpinano's article on US Class composition in the 1960s analyzed welfare recipients from a now classic social wage/refusal of work perspective which was quite at odds with Wages for Housework. But at that time the points of cleavage were still unclear and there was a sense of excitement and confrontation of capitalist crisis in the Zerowork collective. This sense of confrontation was part of the general ambience in the US, for there were a lot of rank-and-file revolts against work. 1973-1974 was one of the peaks of strike activity in the post World War II period.

G: The most well-known strike of that period was the one at the General Motors' Lordstown plant.

Yes, that was an important "refusal of work" strike, but there were many other examples. Peter Linebaugh's and Bruno Ramirez's piece on the autoworkers in Zerowork 1 gives a chronology of the wildcat strikes of early 1970s.

But you should understand how I came to Zerowork and Wages for Housework at this time after almost four years of studying the Marxist classics, especially all the Volumes of Capital and the Theories of Surplus Value, and the work of bourgeois economists like Paul Samuelson which all felt so dry and historically dead. I suddenly felt in 1973 that I was involved with forming a new theory that was grappling with real social, working class movements, here and now. It was a time when I felt I touched class history in thought and body.

G: So, what exactly was the disagreement between the "refusal of work" theory and Wages for Housework?

Silvia Federici pointed out the contradiction most forcefully because she was very familiar with refusal of work perspective. She wrote a beautiful piece in 1974 called "Wages Against Housework" whose argument was that women do not want wages for housework in order to do more housework. On the contrary, the whole point of the demand for wages for housework is to be in a better position to refuse this work!

She also pointed out that the refusal of work perspective is largely dependent on the existence of a hierarchy within the working class, for only the most powerful sectors of the working class have taken it as their motto. But as long as only they are in a position to refuse work, new divisions within the working class can be created by this politics. For example, it was all well and good for white workers in apartheid South Africa or segregationist U.S. to take up a refusal of work politics, but if it led to capital intensifying the exploitation of black workers, it could hardly be the basis of the recomposition and homogenization of the working class! For one has to take into account the hierarchies and divisions within the working class before taking up a political slogan, because a slogan or demand that might appear perfect for one sector of the class might actually be catastrophic for another.

G: What do you mean by "the most powerful sectors of the working class"?

Generally in these discussions the most powerful sector is the one that works with capital of the highest organic composition, for such workers are at the highest technological level and a tremendous amount of constant capital is vulnerable to their immediate action.

G: *Are they the skilled ones?*

Often the identification of skill with power is made, although, as has been pointed out so often, the notion of skill can obscure things. Surely, the training, discipline and sensitivity required to become a parent is equal or superior to the training, discipline and sensitivity required to become a software programmer, but only the latter is considered a skilled worker.

Now in the debates of the 1970s it was assumed that only the skilled industrial workers were the vehicles of the refusal of work. But what did that mean for other workers? Were the workers at the highest technological level going to support the lower levels?

This was the political problem of the refusal of work, but there was still another theoretical problem involving zerowork. I referred to it then as the contradiction between the 24-hour and the zero-hour work day. For, on the one side, the discovery of unwaged work made it clear that there is much work going on outside of the standard 8-hour work day. Women who are wives and mothers, for example, are on call 24-hours a day. But, on the other, many who worked with Zerowork claimed that capital had effectively reduced the necessary labor time close to zero, i.e., that capital had gone beyond work.

In the first years of Zerowork, therefore, I realized that the theoretical innovations we were developing were taking us to two quite different directions.

K: *I think that the tendency of the refusal of work in Europe led to some important political and social consequences. I'm not sure about the U.S. but certainly there must have been some there, too. Many of those who were involved in wildcat strikes actually left the factory after the defeat or bitter outcome of those struggles. There was created a mass of people who chose temporary or permanent unemployment or even self-employment and it was the most political or active people who did that and, of course, those who could afford to do it. So, there were some practical consequences.*

Yes, this was also true in the U.S. The 1970s was a period of high unemployment in response to a wave of strikes (wildcat and official) and a profits crisis in the period between 1972-1975. It was the beginning of the capitalist counter-attack, with recessions and oil crises. At this time (unlike today) unemployment benefits were extended, in some cases, to two years and, if you had a relatively high paying job, the payments were adequate to live on. Many of my friends and I did political work on the basis of this money.

The attack on unemployment benefits did not begin in earnest until the 1980s, but welfare benefits were already under pressure in the mid-1970s. In New York, guards in the welfare offices were beginning to beat up women who came in and made demands.

Eventually, by the 1990s in the U.S., unemployment benefits have been cut to six months (and are not available to most strikers), while in most areas welfare benefits require some sort of "workfare."

But in the mid-1970s we still had a sense that capital would not be able to overcome the crisis which we, as I mentioned, approached through two conflicting lenses. One through unwaged work and the other through zerowork. On the one side, the realization of the immense amount of unwaged work that is essential to capitalist accumulation and, on the other, a model that said: "Well, in a way, capital now produces with so little necessary labor that it can accumulate on the basis of almost any type of regime. The real issue for capital is how it can control the working class and work becomes a matter of control (and not accumulation). For increasingly capital does not need to valorize work itself. The process of production is almost self-valorizing. The real problem now is to prevent the working class from taking over the almost automatic accumulation process."

G: So there was a disagreement between those people in your group who were influenced by the "Fragment on Machines" and were thinking that capitalist production was becoming laborless...

Yes, they claimed that capital was a production system where necessary labor is almost zero and the law of value is no more a determinant in the system.

K: Negri had also said that in the early 1970s.

Yes, it was also Negri's idea.

K: Negri still has this idea.

Yes, as far as I can see, but he's changed the details over the years. That is another story.

G: Anyway, on the other hand, there was this other faction which was paying attention to unwaged labor and how surplus value is created not only by the labor of productive factory workers. Was there a discussion about what is productive and unproductive labor? Did you completely abandon this common Marxist distinction?

The terminology of productive and unproductive labor was used in the standard Marxist discussion of this issue. But I found Marx's texts on productive labor, Theories of Surplus Value, his weakest. He did not deal at all with the reproduction of labor power, the most productive labor that exists in capitalist society and absolutely necessary for the production of surplus value.

G: Apart from housework you also meant students and education...

Yes, we included a whole range of work, from housework, to student's work, to the work of subsistence farmers in the "Third World." We meant that whole area of production that appears to be "outside" of capital, but is actually essential to the accumulation process.

G: Was Harry Cleaver the first in your milieu who started studying the Green Revolution and agrarian reforms?

Harry was very important because he had finished a thesis on the Green Revolution from a more conventional Marxist perspective in 1973/74. It was a very valuable piece of work

for all that. He began to use these ideas from both Zerowork and Wages for Housework. Cleaver was also important because he had done a lot of work on agriculture already, he had gone to India and had studied the Rockefeller projects in Mexico. His role was crucial in my estimation. Although Selma James and Silvia Federici had already begun to write on the importance of the "wageless of the world," especially subsistence farmers in the "Third World" in antagonism to the standard categories of development/underdevelopment that were so much in use even on the Left at the time.

G: Did you put more emphasis on those parts of the working class that had been underestimated before? Did you put more emphasis on housewives or peasants than on factory workers? Or was it just that the "working class" was becoming a broader category than the traditional Marxist one?

Our understanding of the working class evolved and expanded at the same time that we began to understand how capital used the wage to divide the class. We began to realize that the wage was not just the value of the commodities needed to reproduce labor power. It was also a tool to divide workers. So the binary, waged/unwaged, became as important for us as high/low wage distinction. Wages for Housework thought of sex, race and class from a wage perspective and tried to understand how the wage is used to create these categories. It saw long before Foucault and the postmodernists the constructed character of gender and race. The argument is that capitalism uses the wage to construct what it was to be a woman and a man. I see the point you are making: was it a matter of "expanding" the notion or putting new emphasis on previously marginal figures? I would say, both are good descriptions of what happened.

K: But politically what did it mean? As a political activity, who did you address?

First, this perspective changed the nature of anti-capitalist organizing. For previous views of capitalism put the exploitation of waged workers as primary, hence any attack on capitalism had to begin with the waged. Once you saw that the unwaged sector of the working class is really the foundation of the accumulation process then a new priority inevitably develops. This approach is not identical to a "social movements" conception of "resistance to capitalism" that became so popular in the 1990s. I genuinely saw the feminist movement, the welfare movement, the student movement, many anti-colonial struggles as integral to the working class struggle for liberation from capitalism.

K: So, then you think the unwaged are the core?

Yes, the discovery of the importance of unwaged work shifted the center of anti-capitalist strategy for me.

K: Which means housewives, students or peasants...

Peasants, especially subsistence farmers, are a central, but often neglected, part of the reproduction process of the international proletariat.

K: So reproduction becomes more important than production.

Introducing unwaged workers is not a matter of a contest over who is of "more or less importance" or of who is more or less exploited, but of having a better understanding of what keeps capitalism alive. Once you bring into focus the largely unwaged part of the

reproduction cycle of labor power, then your politics change dramatically. You immediately have to deal with divisions and hierarchies that are often neglected by working class movements and are even engineered into working class organizations. One merely has to glance at the scandalous history of working class racism and sexism to get the point.

K: *This was also Negri's idea. I mean he started from this idea of the generalized factory, the "social factory" and then there was actually a shift from factory workers, that directly productive part of the working class, to the "social worker."*

But in the 1970s, Negri's "social workers" were not peasants or housewives.

K: *I mean the similarity was that he also abandoned the factory, the industrial proletariat.*

He "abandoned" the factory, since he argued that, after all, the factory was not producing surplus value anyway.

G: *I also think that in the late 1970s, because of his idea of an "area of autonomia" and his abandonment of factory-centered politics, he started putting much emphasis on the unregistered workers, the immigrants, etc.*

He was not alone in this shift away from the primacy of the factory proletariat. At that time there was a huge discussion which involved many more people and tendencies than Wages for Housework, Negri and those interested in "the marginals." First, there was a capitalist perspective on this question which was theorized by Gary Becker, who won a Nobel Prize in economics for his work on the family, crime and "leisure." From an anti-capitalist perspective, E. P. Thompson was beginning to write about the notion of a "moral economy" in 18th century England which characterized a period in capitalist history when there was no fully developed labor market and there were proletarian-imposed restraints on capital outside and before the existence of the factory system. Sociologists were also taking an interest in the reproduction sector of the economy.

Although it is now buried under an avalanche of writing, research and organizational efforts, Wages for Housework contributed enormously in forcing a change in the way unwaged, reproductive labor was understood. People like Selma James, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici could not be ignored, especially when they claimed that truly decisive anti-capitalist politics needed to address unwaged labor. If capital's capacity to exploit the ocean of unwaged labor was reduced, it would be seriously threatened.

K: *And you still hold on to these views?*

For me the Wages for Housework perspective was like a social Copernican revolution, once on the other side of it, I never went back.

G: *So your emphasis is not on the mode of production, but on the mode of reproduction, on those who are responsible for reproducing the conditions of production...*

Yes. But my political problem has been to get a practical politics appropriate to the theoretical change Wages for Housework produced. In the 1970s Wages for Housework activists launched a campaign in Western Europe and North America to have the state

pay a wage to houseworkers directly. This campaign was rooted in the late Keynesianism of the period which was still using the wage as part of a productivity deal. The Wages for Housework campaign attempted to turn this strategy on its head, by uncovering the enormous work done by women and demanding that it be paid.

Capital responded to the Wages for Housework campaign with reproductive neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s: the monetarization of all forms of reproduction. So much of reproduction work that had been unpaid, from cooking to housecleaning to child care, was "privatized."

G: I can also see why in your theory struggles in education became very important.

You have to have a broad enough view of education and its importance to the reproduction of labor power in capitalism. It certainly cannot be identified with what goes on in schools.

I would like to mention an important fact about the Wages for Housework campaign in the US in the mid-1970s that I did not properly emphasize. It was launched at the very moment when a major division appeared within the US women's movement and when capital was restructuring employment, imposing austerity, increasing unemployment. The leaders of the official US women's movement decided that they would not back the welfare movement, instead they would put their efforts in getting women into the waged workplace. This meant supporting affirmative action laws and putting forward an Equal Rights Amendment and abandoning support for women who were demanding the state pay them a wage for bringing up their children.

The strategy of the women's movement at this time was to get women into waged jobs and make it ideologically acceptable for men to help in the house.

This gave more power to the state's proto-neoliberalism which was saying, "I am cutting back welfare payments if these women do not do real work, i.e., waged work for private companies."

Thus there was a major conflict over the wage within the women's movement that offered the state a perfect opportunity (in the Reagan period) to eliminate its responsibility for reproductive work. As a result, the "service industry" became the major "growth sector" in the economy. But, after all, what is the service industry but a monetarization of reproduction? Thus in the US the majority of meals are eaten outside the home and increasingly maids are hired by even "middle class" families from the Philippines or the Caribbean.

G: And what happened to the other tendency, "the refusal of work"? I suppose it was also affected by capitalist restructuring and mass unemployment.

For sure. In fact, it was viciously attacked as well. Real wages began to fall dramatically beginning in the 1973 for almost twenty five years while the work week actually increased and strike activity was nearly terminated. So that now the notion of a generalized "refusal of work" has become almost utopic in the U.S.

G: *How long could you be on the dole if you were made redundant in the 1970s?*

As I mentioned before, in some states it was almost for two years. Along with unemployment benefits there were also a variety of "make work" programs where male workers could still get money from the state for basically doing nothing. But by 1979-80, those games were over. Interest rates shot up, oil prices went up again, real wages declined, recession followed recession.

In the mid-1970s a number of us formed an organization of the "Income Without Work" (IWW) Campaign, demanding a social wage for all. It was a "serious joke," and it tried to revive a demand for a universal guaranteed income. But in the face of the crisis, it got nowhere.

G: *You had mentioned in your pamphlet "From Capitalist Crisis to Proletarian Slavery" that some people in the ruling class had started thinking of giving some kind of a guaranteed income for everyone. But it never started, right?*

Ironically, it was Nixon's advisors who first proposed to substitute all the various welfare and social security programs with a guaranteed annual income. It was formulated into a bill in 1969 which almost passed, but it was eventually scrapped. Nixon went on to impose a wage-price freeze in 1971. He, of all the US Presidents, was probably the most convinced Keynesian. After all, he realized Keynes' dream of a world currency completely detached from precious metals in 1971.

G: *The strategy was not to integrate the working class but to start a new era of division and repression. So the guaranteed income had no place in that strategy.*

True enough for the late 1970s on. But for a brief time in 1969 Nixon felt the temptation to try ease the class conflictuality. But by Reagan's time class war was officially declared and we have been in it ever since. But the guaranteed income was not just "pie in the sky," it was seriously considered in the late 1960s and even Milton Friedman had suggested a "negative income tax" scheme that might implement it.

G: *The whole thing about the "guaranteed income" is coming back again in various countries, for example Italy and France. In Italy it was proposed by the post-autonomists around the social centers. But they talk about "citizen's income" which is a very different idea from what you meant with "wages without work" which was connected with the "refusal of work" and was meant to be a working class demand. Now this "citizen's income" is more connected with a new organization of "civil society," the formation of a more democratic society in capitalism. I think this new discussion in Italy and France is very different from the discussion in the 1970s.*

You are right.

G: *Why was the Zerowork project abandoned?*

It had much to do with the theoretical and political divergences I mentioned, but the focus of the official split was an article by Christian Marazzi, who developed a corollary of the end of work theme: money is no more a part of the process of measuring work. Some in the collective who supported the "end of work" line wanted the article in the second issue

of Zerowork, others like myself did not. There was an attempt to mediate the conflict but it didn't work and the collective split in March 1977.

Marazzi, himself, did not know that his article would precipitate the split. In fact, when he came to the US from Switzerland a year later we became quite friendly.

There were other issues, like the political divisions in the Italian extraparliamentary left movement, that generated the split as well. In retrospect I can see a number of reasons for the split in the international conjuncture of the Spring of 1977; but I don't want to be grandiose, Zerowork was a small political journal with a few people who could not continue to agree to disagree any longer. The contradictions had grown too sharp.

With logical hindsight, of course, I don't think I would have become involved in Zerowork if I'd really known what the problems were before hand. I would have said to my comrades in the collective, "We're dealing here with very different perspectives. Let's work them out, if we can, and if not, let's not publish this stuff."

G: So, later, Midnight Notes was your initiative?

Yes, it was basically my initiative at first. I started to gather the people together in the Fall of 1977. The Midnight Notes Collective had its first meeting in 1978, about a year after the split in Zerowork.

G: The first issue of Midnight Notes was about the anti-nuclear movement and it was published in 1979, right?

Yes. It was published right after the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in Pennsylvania. We were able to come out quickly after the accident because we had been working on the issue in the months before. Part of the idea of the issue was to begin to be more coherent about work and capitalist accumulation both theoretically and practically. The anti-nuclear power movement was the place where it naturally began at the time. The Midnight Notes collective was involved in the anti-nuclear movement and some of us helped form an anti-nuclear group in Brooklyn. We started trying to develop a strategy for the anti-nuclear movement that was directly connected with the energy price crisis. I think the effort was successful, and it did have an impact on local New York anti-nuclear politics which was largely directed at the shutting down of a nuclear plant that was under construction about 50 miles east of the city. The electric company had sunk a lot of money into what was going to be one of the largest nuclear plants in the world, but in the end they abandoned it under pressure from the movement. I think that it was a decisive decision. In the first place, it cost the electric company billions of dollars.

G: At that time you had a critique of the anti-nuclear movement as one that couldn't go beyond its limited class composition.

The anti-nuclear movement at the time was centered in the areas around the nuclear plants that also included places where traditional small farmers and a new kind of intellectual worker (which we later would associate with the computer industry, for example) were living. We argued that the anti-nuclear movement had to go beyond this limited class composition if it was going to be effective. It had to go into the cities. That

was why we were concentrated on New York City instead of centering our efforts in the nuclearized countryside. We also thought that it was important to link up the issue of the energy price crisis with the development of nuclear power, for that was not being done in the US.

G: Were Sergio Bologna and Ferruccio Gambino in Italy some of the first people who tried to connect the oil crisis with the work crisis?

Yes. Already before the oil crisis in 1973 there was a discussion in Italy about a major crisis of capital being initiated by working class struggle, especially after the "Hot Autumn" in Italy. Sergio, Ferruccio and others were beginning to consider the ways capital was going to respond. So by the time Zerowork 1 was out in December of 1975 it was a year and a half after the 1973 October War and the first major oil price hikes that followed. As we were writing the articles there was an intense international discussion as to the way capital was using oil and other energy prices to counter the working class offensive.

But we in the Midnight Notes collective approached the question of the connection between energy prices and class struggle in a different way than Zerowork did. In the first three issues of Midnight Notes?Strange Victories, No Future Notes, and The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse?we developed a different notion of the price of oil and other energy commodities. We saw these prices as devices by which surplus value was transformed from many parts of the social factory outside of the energy industry into the accumulation of profits in the energy branches. The price hikes were not a product of a sort of Machiavellian planning by capital. The energy price crisis was simply an application of an ancient and on-going process of capital?the transformation of values into prices. What we did is to turn the problem?why were the energy prices the basis of accumulation in this period??into the answer?the energy price rises were the basis of a new shift in accumulation which always shifts the relative branches of industry to the places of new investment.

G: In what way was the Italian movement analyzing the oil crisis?

Well, consider Mario Montano's piece in Zerowork 1, "Notes on the international crisis." This piece reflected thinking among Italian extraparlimentary left comrades at the time. Mario basically argued that the oil was produced with relatively no necessary labour. He was wrong. In fact, there is a lot of labor that goes into the production of oil, but often it is in an indirect way. His argument was: "Oil production is a classic example of laborless production. The use of the price mechanism (which gave oil a relatively high price) is simply a mechanism for the imposition of work. Rebellious workers in Europe and the US were going to be forced to work more because they were faced with much higher energy prices." The energy price rises were therefore tools of control over the working class that were situated outside of the factory, so workers could not respond by going on strike. Because you can't go on strike in a steel plant to protest an increase in the price of oil. Our analysis in Midnight Notes was to say, "Oil is a basic commodity, but it is a commodity whose price is being determined by the amount of investment that is going in; it is being determined by the social factory within the oil-producing nations. You simply can't judge the amount of labor that is going into the production of oil by simply counting

the noses out on the oil rigs. Oil production is a vast, continuous process that involves prostitutes, engineers, truck drivers, and cooks in the workers' camps. There is also a whole system of security. It's a complex story to understand and the investment that goes into oil production is huge. There is an enormous amount of capital in the oil business that has to be valorized." Our argument was simply that Mario and others in the Italian extraparlimentary left movement's way of thinking had ignored something very basic. They were counting into the price of oil simply what it costs to produce a barrel of oil, once everything had been set up, i.e., the oil had been found, the pipelines laid, the workers recruited and their reproductive system set up, etc. Under those conditions, it might be true that it takes 10 cents to produce a barrel of oil. But that is just simply looking at how much it takes to bring the petroleum from down below the earth up to surface. That is the wrong number.

G: So, can *"The Work/Energy Crisis"* be considered a critique of Zerowork?

Yes, it was directed against the assumptions of Zerowork. For Zerowork tended to argue that capitalism was ending work; but in fact it is in the process of expanding work, and it is introducing more and more elements of the human population into the capitalist work process as well as expanding the work process on a grand scale. If capitalists were really getting rid of work, and just using it as a method for controlling the working class, the last thirty years of history would have been quite different. The accumulation process does depend upon work, it does depend upon transferring the value of the work that is produced in one part of the system to another. The mechanisms concerning how capital gets valorized were initially described in Capital Volume 3, but these mechanisms were at best approximations. There are real problems in applying this analysis when you evaluate computer technology or genetic engineering, for how do you actually measure that amount of work that goes into the production of a computer and its software? One must not only include all the hand work done by women in production zones in China and California, but also the enormous amount of water required to produce the chips, and also there is the actual work in the production of writing the software, which is a work process as well. Since *The Work/Energy Crisis* I have tried to develop different aspects of this analysis and my work has gone in many different directions, some of them surprising to me. For example, in the study of the reproduction process and the unwaged labor typical of this kind of production of labor power, I have begun to see its connection with slavery. The issue of slavery is very important for us now, both in terms of understanding that capital never was tending to the totalization of wage labor in the past or now. That is, starting from the examination of high tech, high organic composition capital one must encounter slavery at the other end of the system.

G: Since you mentioned slavery, have you read this book by Kevin Bales called *"Disposable People"*? He has the idea of slavery expanding.

Yes, parts of the book are very good, for what they are doing, but he sees this development of slavery in contexts that are still not broad enough, as far as I am concerned. He has us look at the slaves in Mali; at the child workers in India, at the Brazilian miners in the Amazon; and they comprise millions of workers in terrible situations. And he does well in pointing out that much of this slavery is not even of the older type that made of the slave the master's commodity, so that the master had some

investment in the slave's well being, just simply in the interests of resale. The new slavery involves "disposable" slaves who do not necessarily become resaleable commodities.

But he does not chart the reemergence of coerced, unwaged, non-legal work and of non-contractual labor in the US and Europe. He doesn't introduce prison labor and "workfare" into the book. Whereas, if you are going to use this category of slavery you have to apply it to the most advanced capitalist countries. If you do this, you will see that this is not a throw-back to the past or a revival of this "ancient" phenomenon of slavery in the more marginal areas of capital.

Bales' failure to include the slave-like forms of work in the US and Europe was a lost opportunity, perhaps one which he didn't want to take.

G: Not a lot of people do such work nowadays.

But more and more are beginning to because slavery is just a reality that you find everywhere around you in the US?everytime you talk over the phone to a "salesperson" in an airline, say, you wonder if s/he is in prison?and you need this category to begin to understand why wages go up so sluggishly when there is a dramatic drop in unemployment, as you have seen in the last years of the Clinton regime.

G: You know, along with Rifkin, Negri and Hardt there have been other people in Europe who have started talking about the "end of work" and I don't know if you have heard of the Krisis group in Germany. This group is looking again at the "Fragment on Machines" and is trying to prove that the third industrial revolution, i.e., the microelectronic revolution has rendered productive human labor superfluous and that capitalism has entered into its final crisis. So when you see books written even by liberals like Bales saying, "Look, what's really going on in the world..."

You are right. One can only say that people in this Krisis group or Negri and Hardt are not looking at what's going on or are looking at a very small sector of contemporary reality. That is not unusual among Marxists, and that is why some liberal observers are most useful, I'm afraid. There is always a Marxist group that has not ever looked at the planetary proletariat but has only looked at different sectors which they have considered the most important ones, the revolutionary subjects, and let the rest fall where they may...to be dealt with "after the revolution." For example, if you believe that factory work was the basis which everything depended on, and if the power of industrial workers was really what determined whether capitalism will survive or not then you are not going to worry about what is happening to corn farmers in Chiapas or rice farmers in Bangladesh...

G: This will bring us to the second part of the interview. My question is: what has this "antiglobalization movement" contributed to the cause of the liberation of the planetary proletariat? I saw in the text you gave us that you consider the "antiglobalization movement" to be a working class movement. I don't agree with that. Until now we have been talking about issues of wage, capitalist restructuring, decomposition and recomposition of the working class. Now this political movement which started growing

in the late 1990s (due perhaps to the social movements against Structural Adjustment Programs in the so-called Third World) doesn't care to mention any of these things we have been discussing. As far as I see, the "antiglobalization movement" is putting the whole question in terms of institutional reforms. That is why I was surprised to see that you considered this as a working class movement.

A: May I give an example? The Ya Basta group, they did their show in Prague defending the bridge, but in Italy they consider working-class struggles of industrial workers for example, as struggles of people who want to maintain their "privileges" instead of struggling, e.g., for a "guaranteed income" that would cover the whole of society. Or the anarchists that participated in the march in Prague; they do not intervene in working-class struggles because they think these struggles are "corporatist" and merely "economic" struggles that don't bring any social change. These are examples of groups from both Greece and Italy who participated in major "anticapitalist" events, but don't participate or rarely participate in class struggles in their own countries.

But there is a continuity with our previous discussion of the wage, capitalist restructuring, and the decomposition and recomposition of the working class, for one of the central objects of the antiglobalization movement has been the debt and how the debt has been used to attack the wage of the planetary proletariat. That insight is at the heart of this movement.

G: *You think so? That's what **you** say.*

Of course, that is how **I** interpret this movement. Very little in the class struggle comes to us with its essence written on its face. When you look at certain events and you're trying to make sense of them, you have to interpret them. For example, was the Paris Commune a working class rebellion?

G: *Of course it was.*

O.K., but when you look at the Paris Commune you find all sorts of "non-working class" people involved (for example, the teenager Arthur Rimbaud). In fact, in every working class rebellion there are all sorts of "funny" things happening that are not directly expressing its working class content, but does that make it any less a working class rebellion?

G: *But the Paris Commune was the expression of a social movement. I think that you don't make a distinction between social movements and pure political movements. I mean the movement in Prague was a pure political movement, it was not a social movement.*

No, I would say there was no movement in Prague. The Prague demos were one point of the movement that involves a large number of people, many incidents, many confrontations that were going on long before. In the same way, when you look at the history of the workers' movement in Europe and say that the Paris Commune was one moment in the story which comprised a large number of strikes, meetings, and organizational initiatives. The movement was a complex phenomenon.

G: *I see what you mean. But this is our difference. I mean that we think that Prague is a moment in that political movement that tries to represent the social movements against Structural Adjustment Programmes.*

What do you mean by "represent"?

G: *I mean that these fora that organize the "antiglobalization" events try to act on behalf of diverse and opposing sectors of society: small land-owners, workers, petty-bourgeoisie or fractions of capital that are the losers in the global rat race. They are obsessed with the idea of "exercising power" (directly by the "people" or reforming existing power structures). They try to bring together the most diverse oppositions, some of which are certainly working class, under a social democratic umbrella that aspires to unite these separate movements. For example, the Algerian rioters against SAPs in 1988 never tried to make any connections with Moroccan rioters in 1990 and the Moroccan rioters never tried to make any connections with the Yugoslav workers during the 1980s. So for years you gradually had--although it suddenly appeared to the world in the late 1990s--the building of networks of political groups which were talking about these struggles and were trying to find a way to unite these struggles against the SAPs. I think that the Chiapas uprising in 1994 gave a great push to these political groups. I'm not only talking about the CND in Mexico in 1994. I'm also talking about the Encuentros and Consultas and the Zapatista solidarity movement in Europe and the US, which consisted of political groups and not working-class movements, according to our knowledge of what was going on in the previous years. The movement came to the fore in Seattle, in Washington and now in Prague.*

I think that if you had movements of unwaged people, peasants, factory workers, unemployed people (in France there was an unemployed people's movement in 1997-98) who had rioted against SAPs or other programmes of the IMF, the World Bank and national governments (since there have also been neoliberal programmes imposed by national governments which are not directly connected to World Bank and IMF directives), if these people got together only then would we have some kind of working class internationalism like that in the 19th century, when you had the First International and the workers had started exchanging experiences doing something like what you have called the "circulation of struggles." I think there is a big difference between circulating social struggles and circulating political activities and political programmes.

K: *I think that the struggle in Chiapas is a typical example of the transformation of a social struggle into a political struggle. It was begun by the ejidatarios, who were against their own exploitation, their "own" government but it soon became a political campaign against "foreign capital" or for the "democratization" of the Mexican state. The struggle aimed at the heart of the capitalist relation, but the EZLN (which sprung from this struggle) and the FZLN managed to represent it and divert its actual social content whose form was the land occupations. The EZLN and the FZLN put forward political demands, institutional reforms, calling for the democratization of the national state and abstractly talking against the "rule of money", the IMF and the "end of national sovereignty." So, in a way, they paved the way for what we see now at all these meetings of the "antiglobalization movement" where you have NGOs of all different kinds, environmentalists, trade unionists, etc. People from Greece went to Prague not as*

subjects of concrete social struggles looking for class comrades but as members of political organizations, from PASOK Youth to anarchist and Stalinist groups.

G: You even had right-wing groups fighting against the Multilateral Agreements on Investments (MAI) and collaborating with left-wing groups in Europe. Two years ago the Dutch anti-racist organization "De Fabel van de Illegal" quit the international campaign against MAI denouncing these coalitions.

K: And in this protest movement which is not rooted in everyday class struggle the class composition is very weak and I can't see how it is a working class movement.

First, if you look at the "Chronology of Struggle against Structural Adjustment: 1985-2000" Silvia Federici and I put together, you'll see that the antiglobalization movement involves many different kinds of struggles and people over a long period of time. Seattle 1999, Washington and Prague 2000 are merely more recent points of a lengthy line. For the anti-SAP struggles of the 1980s and early 1990s are the foundation of the "antiglobalization movement" and these struggles have a particular class composition and they involve particular kinds of struggles. Debt has not been the basis of working class movements for a long time in Western Europe and the US, but in some periods of history the struggle against debt, debt bondage, and the consequences of debt in terms of disenfranchisement has been very important. A debt struggle (which involves the delegitimization of debt and a refusal to pay it) is a different kind of struggle than the kind you find in the typical wage struggles.

Second, the present debt struggle has been shaped in two ways: (a) the transformation of large-scale national debt into an attack on wages, (b) the use of this debt by the World Bank and IMF to restructure capital internationally (which set the stage for "globalization"). There were many "debt crises" in the history of capitalism which the working class was involved in, but because of the type of capital we have nowadays the debt crisis of the 1980s was used in a new way. For in the past banking was very decentralized, so when British banks invested in Argentina's government bonds in the 19th century and the Argentinean state declared bankruptcy, the British government would send gunboats to Argentina to save "its" banks. In the 1980s the possibility of a Third World state's bankruptcy was used by the World Bank and IMF to take control of that country's economy instead. For the World Bank and IMF could seriously claim to keep the country out of the world credit market for many years in the future in a way that no 19th century institution could.

K: But still there are all forms of debt, from individual debt (which is not an individual affair at all) to farmers' debts to banks.

Surely the struggle between farmers and banks is a very common one in the history of capitalism. But what is important in the contemporary story has been the way that national debt has been used as a mechanism of exploitation and how the World Bank and IMF have used it to coordinate the takeover of dozens of economies in Asia, Africa and the Americas. This is a new phenomenon which even the World Bank and IMF were not capable of using before the 1980s.

K: But there are also consumer loans which are quite new as well.

True, individual proletarians now have credit cards and can get into debt. In the 19th century there were three things that capitalists were really worried about which in the 20th century they have completely turned around. They were worried about the working class getting the vote, they were worried about the working class being armed, and they were worried about the working class having money. In the 20th century, in fact, capitalism has figured out how the working class can have a vote, a gun and a credit card, and each of these instruments have been turned around against working class power to the point where they have been major moments of legitimation of capital and an attack on proletarian power. It has reached the point where we have to attack electoral democracy, a move that many workers in the 19th century would have thought to be mad. Similarly, in the US much of the proletariat is armed, but the result has been that most often the guns are used to shoot each other. It is important to understand how these reversals were managed. The extension of credit to the working class has been a similar reversal. It has been made a non-issue even though interest rates on individual credit card accounts are far above levels that would be considered usurious a few decades ago.

This was not the case in the 19th century when debt was a big issue for farmers who were dispossessed by bankers due to debt foreclosures. In the 1890s the attack on debt was the basis of one of the most powerful anticapitalist movements in US history.

G: What I want to ask is, how do you connect individual debt and the issue of credit in every nation state with the strategy of the IMF and World Bank?

This has occurred in a number of ways. The debt of large corporations (financial, industrial and agricultural) has been transferred to the national debt in Third World countries since the early 1980s. The state has transferred that debt into taxation. Thus the national debt has now become an attack on the wage and a form of exploitation. Much of the national debt has been the product of state corporations or even private corporations or banks that have been nationalized at the moment of bankruptcy. Consequently, their debts have been nationalized. Similarly, the debt of state corporations run by "corrupt" officials (as in Indonesia, Zaire/Congo, and Nigeria, to name some of the most glaring examples), who were extracting loans and banking them in Switzerland, is now considered national debt, even though the officials are long gone.

G: Yes, but why in the 1970s and early 1980s did nation-states start taking loans from the IMF? This is the crucial question I want to pose. Yugoslavia, for example, is on my mind. It entered the IMF in 1981. How did this happen? Why did the Yugoslav leadership do this? Was it just because of debts of "corrupt" private or state corporations or was it that the Yugoslav national capital needed to attack the working class and restructure class relations and they found some very powerful allies in the IMF and World Bank to achieve this?

"Corruption" is not, of course, a useful category for explaining this development. After all, it is just another name for capital accumulation. So it is important to look at the individual cases. Consider Yugoslavia and other so-called socialist eastern European countries in the period you mentioned. The ruling class in these countries decided that the only path for them was to enter into the world market and to try to find a niche for their

manufacturing industry in the world market. This required, from their point of view, large-scale investment in certain industries, e.g., the auto industry in Yugoslavia and the ship building industry in Poland. In retrospect, it was certainly a most ill-advised decision and it was probably the foundation of the collapse of so-called "communism" in these places (although not of the collapse of the ruling classes in these countries!) The loans that were negotiated for this industrial overhaul were accepted at high interest rates. But they were to be the basis of an attack on the working class in two ways. First, these loans immediately became part of the national debt since these countries were socialist! Second, export-oriented industries imposed a totally different work relationship on the whole working class. The pace of the world market is quite different from the pace of the national market. They embody two different logics. The relationship between the worker who produces a commodity and the person who buys it are totally different when you are working in an export-based model compared to producing for a national-market. Surely, the decision to opt for an export-oriented industry in eastern Europe was rooted in a crisis of class relations. At some point at the beginning of this period, the state planners said: "No, this kind of national, inward-looking kind of development does not work, i.e., it does not achieve enough capitalist accumulation and control of the working class."

K: Yes, the explanation can only be based on the crisis of class relations. Until then, it was due to the disconnection between wages and the productivity of labor that federal Yugoslav commodities were not that competitive. And when they realized they needed the Yugoslav economy to get more internationalized they had to subsidize commodities, because this so-called social contract they had with the workers, upon which the federal Yugoslavia was based, didn't allow them to attack the working class by cutting wages, rationalizing production and generally imposing a flexible labor market.

The loans were taken out, in this particular case, with the expectation that they would lead to the reshaping of industry and the imposition of a new level of discipline which working on the international market would bring. But the effort was not successful, they couldn't do it, they could not make the leap into the world-market and therefore they were stuck with these loans and with a recalcitrant working class that was not doing its job to transform Yugoslav capital into a world-class manufacturing industry.

K: Yes, because there were successive waves of strikes against national capital during the 1980s.

The Debt Crisis begins in the early 1980s. The capitalists and state planners in the socialist world and the Third World begin to face the consequences of the loans and their high interest rates in this period. They cannot pay even the interest charges, but they desperately want to remain on the credit market. This is the decisive point for understanding the contemporary antiglobalization movement, for **this movement arises from the failure of socialist states and the nations born out of the anticolonial struggle to join together in a debtors' cartel in the early 1980s**. This failure made it possible for the IMF and the World Bank to begin to impose structural adjustment conditionalities upon these nations as the price for "turning over" the loans. The IMF and World Bank could say in the face of this failure to each separate country's government, "Look, you've got a billion dollars of principal and interest payments due, but you do not have the money. If you default, we will make it impossible for you to enter into the credit

market again. We will loan you the money for the payments, but you must accept and implement this structural adjustment program, however difficult it will be on your people." Here was the decisive moment when all the wisdom of the socialist moment and the anticolonial movement needed to be applied. There were even organizations already in place (like the non-aligned movement with Yugoslavia at its head and the economic organization of socialist states allied to the Soviet Union) that could have taken the lead in saying "No, we are not going to go back to becoming pawns of international capital again." This was the chance of the Third Worldists and Communists to "just say no." But they did not.

G: *Why do you think they didn't do that?*

The ruling classes of these countries, when they looked at the class situation, saw that the alliance with the most powerful sectors of international capital (represented by the IMF and World Bank) was their only lifeline. They could not ally with the needs of their own workers.

G: *So it was a decision dictated by the needs of national capitals.*

Yes, but another decision could have been made then. The third world and socialist states still had the possibility to do something else then...it was a real decision. But since then, the collapse of Third Worldist and Communist national ideologies and international organizations was inevitable.

G: *You know that the "antiglobalization movement" doesn't stress the responsibility of the national capitalist governments. They just say, "Look at what these big bad guys, the IMF and the World Bank, do to the poor nations."*

What do you mean by the "antiglobalization movement"?

G: *This is what most of the NGOs and the leftist organizations that take part in this "movement" say.*

Yes, perhaps in Greece, Europe and the US, but there are many organizations in Africa, Asia and the Americas that do look at the nation state's failure to say "No." After all, the slogan--"Don't Pay!"--has been chanted in the streets of Sao Paulo, Lagos and Soweto and thousands have died in anti-IMF riots and insurrections since 1985.

G: *This is not the only slogan, and it is not clear what is meant by that.*

My friends, I appreciate everything you say, but I don't understand something. When you look at any movement you are going to find a tremendous number of different kinds of organizations and groups with a multiplicity of demands and programs.

K: *Within a social movement we are not in favor of "purity," if that is what you mean, we're not saying that. To promote our interests we have to collaborate with other fellow workers who have different ideas or a different way of life from ours, but this is not the case with the "antiglobalization movement." We are not talking about a working-class struggle, during which various political ideas certainly play a role, but about NGOs, political organizations, etc., which stress the fact that certain nation-states are "weak" in the face of the IMF and the World Bank which are THE rulers, THE capital.*

G: *So they say we've got to support these nation states.*

K: *There's a revival of Third Worldist ideas around issues of "weak" nation states, the hierarchy of states, etc.*

Can I make an example here? Are trade unions part of the working class struggle?

A: *Sometimes yes, sometimes no.*

G: *There are unions set up by the bosses or unions which collaborate with the bosses.*

A: *I wouldn't say that the AFL-CIO or the GSEE here in Greece are working-class organizations. The GSEE doesn't support my interests.*

But to understand the working-class movement you've got to understand how the working class is related to bodies like the AFL-CIO or to particular unions. They may be "company unions" or not, but the unions themselves are very important parts of how you tell the story because they are part of the way the struggle is structured. (It is, of course, a much worse error to identify the working class with the unions!) It would be like trying to describe a forest without talking about some trees (even though a forest is not simply a set of trees). One of the most important things that you need to do to tell the story of the working class is to talk of organizational forms, otherwise the story becomes untellable. Surely, you also need to say, "OK, here are organizations, are they 'true' to the working class or not?" But an adequate answer to this question depends on what the working class is at that particular phase. Further, we should recognize that certain organizations that are NGOs now have the character that trade unions had in the past.

G: *Yes, they are part of the whole story, but they are not part of the anticapitalist story. What's the use for the working class of a slogan like "Fair Trade, not Free Trade," which was one of the dominant slogans in Seattle? What have we, the workers, got to do with "Fair Trade"? What does it mean for the liberation of the working class? Nothing...*

It might be a slogan that, in fact, must be attacked, but it is an important one. Was the working class for or against the Corn Laws in the 1830s in England? In fact, much of the working class movement at that time was for abolishing the Corn Laws (i.e., ending the tariffs on imports of grain). Was it a working class slogan or not at the time? Well, in fact, there were many discussions and debates within the working class movement on this issue. Are workers now really for or against particular aspects of Free Trade? I agree with you, "Free Trade versus Fair Trade" is not the issue, "Trade" is the problem. It is like the argument you have now in working class circles in many countries about privatization. As far as I am concerned, the privatization issue is simply a matter of choosing state capital or private capital, whereas the problem is capital. I might then conclude, why should I enter into that debate? But it is a live discussion among workers, especially those facing privatization, and it is probably the way in which a lot of working class struggle is being shaped. So how can I not enter into the debate, if I want to be involved in the movement? After all, you cannot talk about the present state of class relations unless you speak of neoliberalism and an important part of neoliberalism is privatization. Unfortunately, you cannot choose the terms of engagement in these struggles.

G: *What I mean to say is that whenever there is a movement you have to take your stand on it. You have to criticize other people's views, you have to say, "This is not the right slogan, this is not the right thing to do, we should do it this way or that way." But in the "antiglobalization movement" there is almost no essential critique at all. All the people seem to be extremely happy just for participating in it. It looks like everybody is a brother...*

This is not correct. Maybe you should have been in Prague and talked to some people to see that there are a lot of debates and differences there and more will go on in Athens as time goes on. There are debates concerning what are the proper slogans, what are the proper demands, what is the way to move ahead, and, even, what is this movement. Does the movement begin in Jamaica in 1985 or in Seattle in 1999? These are some of the issues in the field. Your impression of a placid, homogeneous agreement is mistaken.

The antiglobalization movement challenges us to apply the tools of analysis we have developed over the years. We have to start somewhere in defining the struggle, and I propose that we start with debt. As far as I see, the struggle around debt is one of the most important ones the working class is fighting.

K: *The question is **how** you face the debt problem and the struggle. It is one thing to face it as a worker, to see it as an attack on your wage, as a life-devouring process, to fight with the class perspective that you are not the only victim in the world and it's different to see it as a national problem, as a problem your "own" government, your "own" country faces. That is how I think the NGOs and a lot of the political organizations are trying to present it, as a problem of certain nation-states, as a conflict between "weak" nation-states and the supra-national powers, the IMF and World Bank. I don't want to underestimate these institutions, I think they are responsible for certain decisions as well as for capitalist coordination, but I think that the most important decisions, as I said before, had already been taken by national governments and inside the enterprises. So, if I see the IMF as my main enemy and not "my" boss, "my" government, my everyday alienation, then **this** is the problem.*

Of course, but this also is a debate that was going on in Prague and other places. It takes the form of tactical questions like: Who do you work with? Do you work with national governments? Do you work around reforming the World Bank and IMF? Do you do neither? Do you try to create a movement that does not aim to reform the nation state? Can you afford to ignore the nation state?

G: *Can you imagine a workers' organization of the past, like the First International, discussing with liberals and debating with people like those in NGOs, what should be the strategy of the Workers' International? You can't debate these things with those who want to create a capitalism with a "human face."*

From what I know of the First International, the International Working Men's Association, it was a pretty "liberal" operation, as far as I can see. (As indeed, was the Communist Manifesto whose final program was similar to that of the social democratic

parties of the 20th century!) The First International was not an explicitly communist organization.

G: *Well, it was made very clear in the Provisional Rules of the First International that "the emancipation of labor is neither a local nor a national but a social problem," and that "this association is established to afford a central medium of communication and cooperation between working men's societies existing in various countries, and aiming at the same end, viz., the protection, advancement and complete emancipation of the working classes."*

In fact, most of the people involved in the First International, e.g., the trade union leaders, were what we would consider now pretty reformist types. Indeed, one of the most important fights Marx made in the First International was to justify trade union struggles over wages and working conditions in Wages, Price and Profit and reject a purely insurrectionist strategy.

G: *At that time Marx, Engels and other socialists believed that it was important to demand an extension of democratic liberties so that trade unions were not outlawed; they believed that it was important to set up workers' political parties--this was done especially after the First International, although the idea was always around--which would try to represent workers' interests in the national parliaments. But they wanted these parties to be distinct from and be opposed to all parties formed by the "propertied classes." As far as I know, there wasn't any collaboration with certain fractions of the bourgeoisie or any debate with them about how the workers' issues will be settled inside the capitalist system.*

The First International did discuss with parliamentarians all sorts of things. They sent letters and petitions to parliaments, they had debates and discussions with parliamentarians about workers' issues.

G: *Had they ever thought of supporting a nation-state that was against a big power of the time, let's say England...?*

Yes, they supported the northern states of the US during the Civil War against Britain which was threatening to break the blockade around the southern states. The First International's first order of business was to influence the British state's position on the Confederacy. Representatives of the First International discussed this issue extensively with parliamentarians representing industrial areas.

My job in writing about the antiglobalization movement is not to judge it, but to analyze it. **First**, it is to say what are the antiglobalization struggles and how they are now being increasingly interconnected and responding to each other. **Second**, it is to identify the movement's organizations--unions, parties, NGOs, affinity groups, etc. This is not just a census but it involves finding out their programs, the changes they have undergone, and the debates they are involved in. Many of these organizations might be terrible, but we are not writing a Michelin guide, after all. **Third**, it is to identify the divisions and hierarchies within the movement. **Finally**, it is to assess capital's response to the movement on the level of social planning (e.g., police tactics), investment, technological innovations and eventually political structure. These are the most elementary levels of

analysis. Before we can come to a definitive conclusion about this movement it should be analyzed on these levels.

What should be first on our agenda is to gather information in order to understand the antiglobalization movement's story from a working class perspective.

At one time, capital thought that the idea of allowing workers to legally come together and collectively bargain was revolution. It took them centuries to come around to see that they could "live with it" (although the US capitalists are still not sure, hence the last quarter century of union busting!) This change in capital's attitude is important for us to understand, but this can only be done if we look at the whole story. If you say before hand, "Trade unions are reactionary enslavers of the working class, I'm not interested in them and in the trade union experience," then you end up not being interested in much of the working class' history of the last two centuries.

G: Yes, there is already a whole history of working class movements which is almost two centuries old and many things have happened during that long period of time. You have already mentioned the weak side of the First International, one could also mention some other mistakes that have been made, for example, in the Russian Revolution or in the Spanish Civil War or in May '68. But don't we learn anything from past mistakes? I mean, every time there is a new movement, is it going to start from scratch? Do we have to reproduce again all the past mistakes of the working class, socialist, communist or anarchist movements?

There is a nausea to history, isn't there! The problem with "mistakes" is that they appear in new forms and for many they were not clearly mistakes in the first place. In order to make an assessment that there was a "mistake" you must have a yardstick, and an answer to the question: Did certain strikes and insurrections increase working class power? It is impossible to answer this question in an a priori fashion. Moreover, there are inevitably many novelties in the history of struggles.

G: I'm very suspicious of working class movements that do not make a balance sheet of what they had done in the past or of what their predecessors had done and say that "we will start again from the beginning." That's completely irrational for me. In this case, I don't think that the "antiglobalization movement" is a working class movement, but if it was, I think that this would be its first mistake, not to assess what had been done in the past, what we did wrong in the past. What happened with this or that movement that we had taken part in, this or that state that we had supported. For example, what were the countries of Eastern Europe? Socialist? Communist? State capitalist? What? If people in the Balkans or Eastern Europe, the workers who will start fighting again against capital do not try to assess what happened in the past...

That's the job that has to be done. It is what is always done in struggle with comrades when one says, "Let's see what happened, let's understand it and let's make some conclusions and use this knowledge to move ahead."

G: Do you think that this is being done inside the "antiglobalization movement"?

It is being done in many different ways. In my work, I have decided to begin with a hypothesis--the antiglobalization movement is a working class movement--and to see what are the results. It is only after you apply class analysis to a movement and the result does not make sense, can you come to the conclusion that it is not a working class movement.

I have just begun by getting together (with Silvia Federici) a Chronology, and that is only a draft. As Hegel pointed out long ago, chronology is only the first level of the study of history. Even at this level there is contestation: Are the riots of Algeria in 1988 and of Morocco in 1990 part of the antiglobalization story?

K: These were the real social struggles against SAPs. But their sequence is not Prague. Although I don't know what is going on now in Morocco or Algeria.

G: I think that in this article you gave us you have presented the most sophisticated defense of this "antiglobalization movement" and it doesn't deserve it.

I am listening to your deep and comradely suggestions, but I would say that the jury involves eleven people, and you only comprise three of the eleven! I want to put together a more thorough presentation than the draft notes I have presented. I want to also deal with objections you and others have made.

For example, consider the rather remarkable organization called "Jubilee 2000." Where did it come from? Why has it split in so many ways? There are parts of the organization demanding total cancellation of Third World Debt and there are parts that are calling for cancellation of the so-called most indebted and poor countries and a gradual pay down for the others. This is a split within an organization that involves more than a thousand groups in all the countries of the world. Where does this split come from? Why is it being articulated in this way? How does this split enter into the debates taking place throughout the world? How does capital respond to this debate? This is really crucial because even now there is a theoretical threat of a debtors' cartel being formed if every indebted country is pushed beyond a certain point.

K: If tomorrow the IMF says, "OK, we must reform ourselves because of this pressure we get from NGOs or from the 'antiglobalization movement' in general," it will have an impact on workers' lives, but in what direction?

Of course, it would be like the Russian Revolution which was a very big development, but it also had problematic consequences for workers' lives both in Russia and the rest of the planet.

G: There are things that a lot of people in the "antiglobalization movement" have not made clear. Do they want to go back to national protectionism? Or do they want to make a breakthrough and create something new, something beyond private and state capital?

That is a big debate within the movement, moreover, this is something you have to make a political decision about yourself. Are these questions politically so important for your work that you will have to take part in these debates? This is the decision you have to make.

I have been involved in these debates for many years because I have been involved in Structural Adjustment struggles in Africa since the mid-1980s. Moreover, I can hardly lightly treat a movement that has brought thousands of people in the streets making the same demands I have been pushing for more than a decade!

As for you, I believe that there is going to be a point where, if you don't deal with the debates this movement is putting up, you will be considered irrelevant.

K: *We **are** dealing with it.*

One can deal with it by saying, "I'm not going to deal with it, because it is not an important part of my political work."

K: *Criticizing is already taking one's stand.*

A: *For me it is more important to communicate with people I work with than try to convince members of political organizations that do not seem open to persuasion. It is also important what you are debating about.*

K: *There are some political choices that have already been made. And for me, apart from the criticisms I have already made so far, there are some dangerous tendencies that can already be seen in this "movement." For example, this transformation of NGOs into something like unions. The union leaders, as pimps of the working class, have been very harmful, but the NGOs are even more harmful. Because at least within trade unions, even in their worst corporatist form, there is preserved some sense of fragmented but still collective worker identity while the members of NGOs are mere individuals/citizens who philanthropically deal with other people's problems and give priority to the notion of "civil society" which is taking us even further away from a class struggle perspective. So, I think there has already been a damage. It is not enough for me to say, "Let's wait and see what will happen in ten years' time and in the end we can judge."*

G: *I want to continue on what Katerina has said. You say in the article you gave us that it's a mistake for these people who are involved in the "antiglobalization movement" to use the term "civil society" instead of using the term "working class struggle." Well, I don't think this is a mistake on their part. They know very well what they're doing when they are talking about civil society. This is the kind of society they want. They don't want to destroy class rule. They want to democratize capitalism.*

The "they" you are speaking about is very varied, and on examination you'll discover that there will be plenty of people in the movement who don't use the notion of "civil society." There are, in fact, many industrial workers' and farmers' organizations involved in the antiglobalization movement who use categories like "working class" and "peasants" as their operative conceptions and they demand the preservation and expansion of common land, they refuse to pay the debt and they refuse national debt slavery. So, I would say to you that you have certain preconceptions of what the movement is all about (due to your experience in Greece perhaps) that I do not share.

There are many more questions, debates and discourses in this movement than you recognize.

G: We know all the Greek organizations and groups that went to Prague one by one. We even know some of the people personally. We know what are the ideas of the anarchists who went there to raise hell. We know what are the ideas of the social democrats who went there, the members of PASOK and Sinaspismos, the Socialist Workers' Party and some of the NGOs and, of course, we had criticized these people on various occasions, long before they started participating in events like Prague. For example, in the struggles against the education law 2525 we had come in conflict with these PASOK and Sinaspismos trade unionists who were trying to undermine the movement. When I see these people going to Prague to shout slogans against the IMF and World Bank and I know that they had tried to undermine a social movement which, in my opinion, was very important because it was against the capitalist restructuring in education, then I'm saying to myself, "These people are playing a game that I've got to find out what it is."

You should find out what the game is and realize that the game changes, for the organizations you mentioned are not eternal essences. They too are in motion. They too must live. They too must change their game to respond to the forces arising around them. Yes, "what is their game?" That is what you should find out about. Perhaps you will find that in the process of being involved with the antiglobalization movement, these organization too are beginning to change. Certainly I have noticed that many organizations have changed their "game" quite dramatically in the last five years. I've even seen one of the most dinosauric organizations on the planet, the AFL-CIO, change in the last five years. So if it is changing, then perhaps organizations like Sinaspismos are in transformation as well. If you are not looking for this kind of change, you often won't see it until it is very far advanced.

G: Do you really think that social democratic parties like Sinaspismos would ever come close to our ideas?

No, I don't think that they are coming close to our ideas, but that is not how I measure change.

G: I mean close to anticapitalist ideas.

I say, "Take a look." Five years ago I would never have said that the AFL-CIO would be calling for amnesty for undocumented workers. It was not in my dreams that this would happen. But it has. An organization which has millions of workers as dues-paying members and has billions of dollars has actually begun a campaign to demand amnesty for undocumented workers in the US! Surely, the AFL-CIO has not been transformed into an anticapitalist organization and its leadership is not doing this in order to agree with George Kaffentzis's conception of the need to abolish capital. These things are certainly not happening. But the AFL-CIO officials are responding to something very important which is described by the process of "globalization" and they have become part of the antiglobalization movement in order for their organization to survive. I don't judge this change on the basis of whether the AFL-CIO uses "Midnight Oil" as the reading text for its next congress. If that was the way I judged things, I would not see much change on this planet.

G: Again, you're talking like there can't be any lessons of the last two centuries of struggles. That's the problem with what you're saying.

I know that this criticism is given in a comradely way, but I am using the method developed in the last two hundred years to understand the present planetary class struggle. I am saying that there are features of the antiglobalization movement which do require some different thinking about organizational forms that looked like total impossibilities before. If you are claiming that the antiglobalization movement has nothing to do with the class struggle now, then I am asking you to take another look. The processes and programs variously called globalization, neoliberalism, recolonization, structural adjustment, or the new international division of labor are putting so much pressure on many older organizational forms that they are being forced to undergo a major transformation. I am not saying that these transformations mean that the end of capitalism is around the corner. But I should point out that the process is not only defined by capital. There has been a real change in working class power in the recent period. Perhaps this power is coming from a recomposition from the bottom, since billions of people have been driven so badly, have lost or are losing everything. You know, if you and the people around you are paying 30% of your income for water--as in Cochabamba--then you all are going to blow up and decide that it's time to fight to the finish.

K: My final comment is that you are too optimistic. We would like to continue this discussion in another way in the future.

Athens, October 15th 2000