

New Utopias for Old: Fordist Dreams and Post-Fordist Fantasies

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There is a widespread belief, on both the Left and the Right, that capitalism has managed to resolve the crises which beset it in the 1970s, and that changes in the 1980s have laid the foundations for a new 'Post-Fordist regime of accumulation', based on new 'flexible specialist' methods of production, which combine new technologies, new patterns of demand, and new forms of the social organisation of production. The theory is based on the experience of a few successful industrial regions, the generalisation of elements of which is supposed to define the new regime of accumulation. 'Post-Fordism' finally makes it possible to realise the social democratic dream of reconciling the interests of capital in securing high rates of productivity with the interests of the working class in combining fulfilment at work with rising levels of income. Although the theory has been comprehensively criticised on theoretical and empirical grounds, not least in the pages of *Capital and Class*, it has only drawn strength from such criticism, rising above the ground of scientific debate to present itself not as a description of present realities, but as a vision of a possible future. In this paper, having briefly summarised the criticisms, I too will leave the terra firma of rational debate and follow Post-Fordism into the ideological stratosphere of competing Utopias.

The model of post-Fordism, as proposed by Marxism Today, can be briefly disposed of, for it merely concatenates a number of superficial observations on contemporary society, without even specifying the theoretical relationships between the various elements of the supposed post-Fordist regime of accumulation, let alone subjecting them to any critical examination. However the theory of 'flexible specialisation' is no more coherent. Karel Williams, Tony Cutler, John Williams and Colin Haslam (1987) have provided a thorough empirical and theoretical critique of the theory of 'flexible specialisation', showing that the model postulates no coherent relationships between its different elements, while there is no empirical evidence for the claimed break-up of mass markets, or for the supposed inability of mass production to respond to changing economic conditions, or for the claimed correlation between new technology and the scale and social forms of production. Anna Pollert has shown that in the British case 'flexibility' has involved the intensification of labour on the basis of a shift in the balance of class forces in favour of capital (Pollert, 1988). Peter Fairbrother (1988) has stressed the leading role of the state in promoting 'flexibility', which, far from expressing the technological requirements of modern manufacturing, has been taken furthest in the public sector. John Holloway (1987) has similarly stressed the role of the state in the restructuring of class relations in the auto industry, not as the consequence of the introduction of new technology, but as its social and economic precondition. Tony Elger (1990a, 1990b) has reinforced this conclusion on the basis of a comprehensive survey of the evidence, which shows that there have been widespread changes in work organisation, wage bargaining and payments systems, but that these changes reflect the growing strength of management and the weakening of labor, rather than having any determinate relationship to technological change. The characterisation of the Post-Fordists' favoured examples has been challenged by a series of studies which all show that the ambiguous benefits of post-Fordism have been limited to small groups of privileged workers. Charles Sabel's original study of the 'Third Italy' (Sabel, 1982), on which all this utopianism is based, showed clearly that the privileges of the new artisans rested on a combination of a scarcity of skilled labour in a particularly dynamic branch of specialist production and the availability of a pool of unskilled low-wage workers, so that the profitability of the new methods of production was secured by very favourable conditions in the product market, on the one hand, and the intensification of the labor of a majority of low-paid workers, on the other. These conclusions have been further reinforced by a wide range of recent research.

Far from being chastened by the array of empirical argument deployed against the models of 'Post-Fordism' and 'flexible specialisation', even on their chosen ground, the proponents of the models draw strength from their apparent failures. 'Post-Fordism' and 'flexible specialisation' do not describe a contemporary reality, they describe an ideal, a potentiality concealed within the new methods of

production, whose liberating power can only be unleashed when it is harnessed to an appropriate political programme. Thus they have come to recognise that even their chosen examples are only an imperfect realisation of their ideal, and acknowledge that 'flexibility' and automation have more generally been introduced as the means of deskilling, disorganising and intensifying labor. However they insist that this failure is not a failure of the model, but a failure of short-sighted capitalists, managers, workers, trades unionists and politicians, who are still locked within the outdated vision of the Fordist model. The necessity of post-Fordism lies not in its own definable virtues, but in the implicit claim that there is no alternative basis for a 'progressive' politics in the face of the supposedly terminal crisis of Fordism. Post-Fordism is not a reality, nor even a coherent vision of the future, but is merely an expression of hope that the tendencies of capitalist development will prove to be the salvation of social democracy.

The Crisis of Fordism and the Crisis of Social Democracy

Post-Fordism is represented as the resolution of the terminal crisis of Fordism which supposedly underlay the crisis of the 1970s. However the ideological roots of the theory lie in the crisis of social democracy and the rise of neo-liberalism. For neo-liberalism the crisis of the 1970s was precipitated by the erosion of the normal mechanisms of capitalist economic regulation by growing political intervention. For the Right this intervention expressed, above all, the power of the organised working class, institutionalised in the corporatist apparatuses of trades unionism and the Keynesian Welfare State and expressed politically by social democracy. The recovery of the 1980s has been achieved by the destruction of these apparatuses, so that the market can once more play its liberating role. The crisis in Eastern Europe only confirms the diagnosis of the Right that 'socialist' social relations are a fetter on the development of the forces of production.

The crisis of social democracy undermined many of the orthodoxies of the Left. Social democrats and revolutionary socialists had differed in their evaluations of the Keynesian Welfare State, but most had shared a view of social democracy as the political form appropriate to developed monopoly capitalism. Thus the immediate response of most of the Left to the rise of neo-liberalism was to regard it as an aberration, a brief interlude before the resumption of social democratic normality. Instead neo-liberalism appears to have gone from strength to strength, and it is social democracy which has been forced to revise its programme in the light of new 'realities'. The ideological problem presented to social democracy is that of explaining away its acknowledged failure, without accepting the full force of the neo-liberal diagnosis.

The theoretical solution to this social democratic dilemma which has emerged over the past few years is to acknowledge the force of the neo-liberal critique of the old forms of socialism, while locating these forms historically as a set of social relations appropriate to a particular phase in the development of the forces of production, but one which has been undermined by the further development of the latter. Thus there is no one set of social relations which is universally appropriate to the regulation of the growing forces of production. Social democracy was appropriate in its time, social democratic policies and institutions being well-adapted to the regulation of 'Fordist' methods of production. Neo-liberalism is appropriate to the first phase of the transition from one set of social relations to another, but it is unable to achieve the second phase, the construction of new social relations appropriate to the regulation of the new phase in the development of the productive forces. If social democracy can identify these new social relations, and place them at the heart of a new reformist strategy, it can once more ride the tide of history. The key to the future of social democracy is the discovery of the principles of regulation appropriate to the new 'Post-Fordist' forms of production.

Although the various analyses of the crisis of Fordism and the transition to post-Fordism borrow heavily from the most sophisticated and avant-garde analyses of the bourgeois social sciences, their foundations lie firmly in the theoretical traditions of the orthodox Marxism which came to underpin both the reformism of the Second International and the state socialism of the Third. While neo-liberals, following Adam Smith, have an ahistorical view of the development of the forces of production, and so see the market as the form of regulation universally appropriate to that development, Regulation Theorists stress the changing forms of the forces of production, and so locate the appropriate forms of the social relations of production within an historical dialectic which recognises that 'at a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production ... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution'. The Regulation Theorists are similarly entirely orthodox in

their insistence on a 'scientific' conception of socialism, which builds the new society on the material foundations of the emerging forces of production: 'higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve ; since ... it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation'.

These Marxist formulae are notoriously ambiguous, and subject to a range of interpretations. Within the Second International the formulae were taken to refer to the contradiction between the socialisation of the forces of production and the private appropriation of the product. The progressive socialisation of production both intensifies the crisis tendencies of the capitalist mode of production, and provides the material foundations on which the proletariat forges an ever-wider class unity as the basis for the building of a new society. However the formulae were reinterpreted by the revisionists, following Bernstein and the Fabians, who saw the principal focus of the contradiction not in the class character of capitalist relations of production, but in the anarchy of the market, and saw the basis of the new relations of production not in the growing unity and self-consciousness of the working class, but in the concentration and centralisation of capital, which made it possible to overcome the anarchy of the market, without overthrowing capitalist social relations, through the conscious regulation of production. Thus the rise of cartels and the state regulation of production could overcome the contradictions of capitalism.

The political advance of Social Democracy in the First World War, culminating in the electoral success of the German Social Democrats and the Bolshevik seizure of state power in Russia, gave a massive boost to the identification of socialism with state capitalism, whether in its reformist or revolutionary forms, the distinction being reduced to the supposed class affiliation of the Party holding state power. The triumph of the revisionist interpretation of historical materialism was sealed as the attempts of the Social Democrats in Germany and the Bolsheviks in Russia to consolidate their hold on state power in the name of socialism met with growing resistance from the working class. Henceforth the subjective expression of the socialisation of the forces of production was identified not with the organised power of the working class, but with the Organised Power of the Working Class: the State under the direction of the Party. This interpretation of historical materialism, according to which history is the story of the adaptation of social relations to the functional requirements of the productive forces, was finally canonised by Stalin's Dialectical and Historical Materialism.

This interpretation of Marxism became the basis of the orthodox periodisation of capitalism, and the orthodox Communist theory of State Monopoly Capitalism. Although Regulation Theory rejects the orthodox periodisation, and the theory of State Monopoly Capitalism as the characterisation of the current epoch, it retains the orthodox theoretical foundations in seeing the historical development of the social relations of production as the development of forms of regulation appropriate to the stage of development of the productive forces.

It might seem strange to accuse the proponents of Post-Fordism of basing their theories on the most vulgar form of economic Marxism, when they regard their theories as being profoundly anti-economic, stressing the role of cultural, ideological and political factors in history. However there is no contradiction involved here. Plekhanov (1956) had long ago rebutted the argument that the 'materialist conception of history' could not account for the role of ideas and the historical contribution of the individual. Plekhanov stressed that 'dialectical materialism' does not claim that the contradictions which drive forward the historical process are spontaneously resolved, but that they create the conditions which call forth their historical resolution: if they are not resolved they continue to intensify, leading to ever-deepening crises in which the continued reproduction of society is thrown increasingly into question. Stalin probably attributed a greater role to such factors than did anybody else: far from having an inordinate faith in the automatic unfolding of the materialist dialectic, Stalin saw historical progress threatened on every side by reactionary cultural, ideological and political forces which had to be ruthlessly repressed and exterminated.

The proponents of 'Post-Fordism' do not draw on Plekhanov or Stalin for their theoretical inspiration, but on Gramsci, and most particularly on Gramsci's Prison Notebooks. The significance of Gramsci's work is that he too was writing at a time when the organised working class had suffered a series of catastrophic defeats, which had landed Gramsci himself in prison, dashing his earlier hopes that the working class movement was on the verge of achieving a socialist revolution. He too looked to the technical

imperatives of modern production as the base on which to ground both his explanation for the failures of the past, and his optimism for the future. The failures of the past were explained by the persistence of outmoded ideologies in the working class movement, based in part on outmoded forms of craft production, which enabled the bourgeoisie to assimilate a deformed version of the socialist vision to its own class perspective. The new utopia would not be realised by the struggle of the working class, so much as by the decline of outmoded ideologies in the face of the failure of the fascist programme and the demonstration of the technical superiority of the new social forms. While the moral degeneration of capitalism would accelerate its economic decline, the New Soviet Man would demonstrate the moral superiority of socialism by developing the forces of production to an unprecedented degree.

The main difference between Gramsci and his contemporary heirs is in the content of their vision. Gramsci's utopia, developed in his essay 'Americanism and Fordism', was unequivocally Fordist, while the Post-Fordist utopia is almost an inversion of Gramsci's Fordist dream. Nevertheless the form of argument is remarkably similar. Before examining Gramsci's argument in detail it is necessary to set the historical record straight by outlining the essential features of Fordism, as developed by Henry Ford and understood by Gramsci.

Henry Ford's Revolution

Henry Ford's name is most generally associated with the technological revolution inaugurated by the introduction of the assembly line. However there was nothing particularly original about the technological principles introduced by Ford - they had already been systematically expounded by Marx in his discussion of 'Machinery and Modern Industry' in Volume One of *Capital*, and simply marked the culmination of the real subordination of the labour process to capital. Nor were any of Ford's particular innovations especially original. The assembly line, for example, is widely believed to have been inspired by the transfer lines which Ford had seen in the slaughterhouses. Although the savings in assembly time were dramatic, assembly was only a small part of the costs of the automobile. The most complex assembly line, that of chassis assembly, cut the labour required to assemble the chassis sixfold, but this only represented a saving of 10 hours of labour-time, or about two dollars fifty in wage costs, for a car which was selling for around five hundred dollars.

At the heart of the Fordist revolution lay not so much the technological changes introduced by Ford, but the revolution in the social organisation of production with which the technological changes were inextricably associated. The key to Ford's technological revolution was not the assembly line, but the fragmentation of tasks and the standardisation of components which made the assembly line possible. The mechanisation of a wide range of tasks, which had formerly been performed by skilled craft workers, broke through the technological and social barriers to the subordination of the labour process to the dynamics of capital which had been presented by continued reliance on craft labour. The immediate context of this Fordist revolution was the coexistence of shortages of skilled craft labour, which underpinned high wages and powerful craft unions, and a growing supply of unskilled unorganised labour, which provided both the incentive and the means to break craft control.

The destruction of craft control removed the principal barriers to the development of the capitalist labour process. However it also destroyed the traditional methods of controlling labour, which had been achieved through skilled workers, paid on piece rates, on the basis of internal sub-contracting and the gang or helper systems. Although the new technology removed the pace of production from the direct control of the workers, the technology could not itself force the worker to keep up with the pace which it imposed. Thus the technical subordination of the worker to the machine had to be reinforced by external supervision and rigorous discipline. However Ford's attempt to introduce the new methods of production soon confronted the barrier of the inadequacy of such repressive forms of regulation. The crux of Ford's revolution was his realisation that the requisite intensification of labour could only be achieved if he could find new methods of encouraging the worker's subjective motivation.

The problem of labour control appeared in a number of different forms in Ford's plants: interruptions in production, deterioration in quality, absenteeism, sickness, labour turnover and the growth of trades union activity. All these problems threatened to undermine Ford's technical achievements. The first attempt to combat these problems, in late 1913, involved the creation of a new 'skill-wages' ladder, to reimpose a hierarchical structure on the labour force and to provide incentives, and a Savings and Loan Association, to combat insecurity, but this had little impact. In 1914 Ford introduced a much more radical

scheme, which used higher wages and pervasive supervision in an extremely ambitious exercise in social engineering, the 'Five Dollar Day', which cut working hours and promised a more than doubling of pay, in the guise of 'profit sharing', for those who conformed to the standards set by Our Ford. The Five Dollar Day involved a more radical restructuring of job categories, but more importantly it was used to set standards of morality and behaviour both on and off the job.

Although the Five Dollar Day provided the workers with material incentives, it was certainly not designed to exploit or to foster an instrumental attitude to work. On the contrary, Ford's purpose was to achieve the moral regeneration of the working class, on the basis of traditional Puritan values of sobriety and hard work. The payment of higher wages was intended to provide the material basis on which the working class could enjoy a stable family life, centred on the family home, the family car, and Christian family values. Thus only mature workers with six months service whose moral and personal habits passed stringent tests were eligible for the bonus payments. To enable them to pass these tests, Ford set up churches and established a welfare and education programme to provide moral guidance, to teach English, to inculcate American values and to build the American Way of Life. Workers who failed the tests were allowed a period of probation before dismissal. The Sociological Department was set up to develop, monitor and enforce the scheme. Needless to say there was no place for the mass worker, or trades unions, or full employment, or the welfare state, all of which Regulation Theorists see as essential components of Fordism, in Ford's individualistic and family-centred vision.

The initial impact of the new scheme was dramatic, and seemed amply to vindicate Ford's utopian vision. Absenteeism fell from ten per cent to less than half a per cent. Labour turnover fell from nearly 400 per cent to less than 15 per cent. Productivity rose so dramatically that despite the doubling of wages and the shortening of the working day production costs fell. However Ford could not afford to pay high wages for very long. While inflation eroded the wage gains, the market for his car remained limited, despite the continued fall in price, and Ford faced growing competition from those who had followed his lead, but who had taken his revolution further. General Motors offered a greater product range, while the growing second-hand market undercut the model T. Nevertheless Ford was too inflexible to respond to these changes. Ford remained convinced of the wisdom of his ways, and sought to meet growing competition by further cutting costs. However, technological improvements alone could not cut costs sufficiently to restore Ford's fortunes, the only alternative being wage cuts and the intensification of labour, with Fordist morality increasingly being enforced not by high pay, but by rigid and ruthless discipline, imposed by the re-named 'Service Department', with its private police force and its network of spies inside and outside the plant.

Modernism, Americanism and Fordism

Although Ford's utopian vision was soon compromised by his resort to increasingly ruthless repression, his early success seemed to indicate that the vision itself was not necessarily compromised by its degeneration in Ford's hands. This degeneration was not inherent in Ford's project, but expressed the external pressure of unregulated competition in a period of depression. Thus it seemed to many that the Fordist vision could still be realised if it could be integrated into a wider project, which could extend the Fordist principles of functional integration from the individual workplace to society as a whole. These were the terms in which 'Fordism' entered the European vocabulary in the 1920s, and these were the terms in which Gramsci appropriated the Fordist project.

In the US the term 'Fordism' was used to refer to the industrial machine which Our Ford had created, with little reference to its wider social context (although the Ford Foundation was originally established to generalise Ford's vision). Ford's own utopia was intensely moralistic and individualist, the social regulation of the working class being secured by the Christian family, backed up by the church and the police. In Europe, on the other hand, the higher level of organisation of the working class, and the greater politicisation of the class struggle, made such a limited vision inadequate. In Europe Fordism was seen in the 1920s as a central component of 'Americanism', which was itself hailed as the herald of Modernism. From this perspective Fordism involved not simply the transformation of production, according to strict criteria of technical rationality, but also the development of new forms of social stratification, in which social position was determined in strict accordance with technical function, and corresponding new forms of morality and of personality, of socialisation and education, to 'elaborate a new type of man suited to the new type of work and productive process' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 286).

The precise relationship between Americanism, Modernism and Fordism was a matter of fundamental debate. While some acclaimed all things American, others sought to draw on the American model more selectively, or even to reject it altogether. Some wanted Hollywood, Jazz and the Speakeasy, without the grime of industry, the vulgarity of a meritocracy and the greyness of a homogeneous working class. Others wanted the cleanliness and precision of the industrial and social machine, without industrial conflict or the immorality and degradation of gangsterism and ghettos. While the old ruling class was at best lukewarm about Fordism, both Communist Left and Fascist Right saw Fordism as the image of the future. This is the context of Gramsci's famous discussion of 'Americanism and Fordism'. This text is generally read, on the basis of a single sentence, as an attempt 'to shift the superstructural analysis of hegemony back to its infrastructural origin in the factory'. Since most Gramsci commentators ignore what Gramsci actually wrote in this text (for understandable reasons), I will deal with it at some length.

Gramsci unequivocally identifies with the Fordist project, which in this sense is the heart of Modernism, at the same time disengaging Fordism from Americanism as the universal from the particular, so that the European adoption of Fordism does not imply the 'Americanisation' of European culture, 'American' culture being only a remasticated version of the old European culture (p. 317). The question Gramsci addresses is that of whether the Fordist project can be realised in a class society, and more specifically whether fascism can deliver its promise to modernise Italy by introducing Fordist production methods. His answer is that it cannot, because the social implications of Fordism are such that fascism could only introduce it by dissolving its own class base. More generally Gramsci argued that the Fordist project cannot be realised in a class society because it relies on external coercion, high wages providing too limited a base on which to manufacture consent. Thus, for Gramsci, only communism can realise the Fordist utopia.

Gramsci saw Fordism as deriving 'from an inherent necessity to achieve the organisation of a planned economy', the problems to which it gives rise 'marking the passage from the old economic individualism to the planned economy'(p. 279). Thus Fordism represents the 'ultimate stage' (p. 280) of the socialisation of the forces of production, based on the subordination of financial to industrial capital and the creation of a new form of morality. The issue is thus that of the adaptation of the social relations of production to this ultimate stage in the development of the forces of production.

Fordism could arise in the United States because the US had already achieved a 'rational demographic composition', which 'consists in the fact that there do not exist numerous classes with no essential function in the world of production', so that industry does not face a mass of unproductive costs, and surplus value is immediately directed back into production. Attempts to introduce Fordism into Europe, on the other hand, have met with powerful resistance because 'Europe would like to have a full barrel and a drunken wife, to have all the benefits which Fordism brings to its competitive power while retaining its army of parasites who, by consuming vast sums of surplus value, aggravate initial costs and reduce competitive power on the international market' (p. 281). According to Gramsci this resistance to Fordism comes not from the industrialists or the workers, but from marginal, backward and plutocratic forces, which are precisely the popular base of fascism.

It may be that fascism can gradually introduce a Fordist rationalisation of technology and class relations, against the interests of the classes on whose support it depends, on the basis of its control of the state. The destruction of the working class movement means that the workers 'are not in a position either to oppose it or to struggle to become themselves the standard-bearers of the movement' (p. 293). However fascism has come to power not as a positive renovating force, but as a negative repressive force, in response to the 'need for economic policing' (p. 292). Moreover Americanisation requires a competitive regime enforced by a liberal state, which fascist corporatism cannot provide. Rather than reducing parasitism, fascism has increased it, becoming 'more and more a machinery to preserve the existing order' (p. 294). Thus it is most unlikely that Fordism can be introduced by such a 'passive revolution'.

Fordism is a project which has by no means yet been realised, so that its class character is still to be determined. The elaboration of the 'new type of man ... is still only in its initial phase and therefore (apparently) still idyllic. It is still at the stage of psycho-physical adaptation to the new industrial structure' (p. 286). In Italy the working class has certainly not opposed Fordism, indeed 'it was precisely the workers who brought into being newer and more modern industrial requirements and in their own way upheld them strenuously' (p. 292): the Workers Council movement had confronted capital with 'its own type of "Americanism" in a form acceptable to the workers' (p. 286), which Agnelli tried to co-opt, but which was crushed. On the other hand, in the United States the issue of the class character of Fordism

has not even been raised by the working class. The resistance of American unions to Fordism has been in defence of 'craft rights', so that 'the industrialists' attempt to curb them have a certain 'progressive' aspect' (p. 286). However, even in America the Fordist project is far from successful realisation, nor is it clear that the new Fordist morality can be realised in a class society.

The regulation of morality, and particularly sexuality and family life, is an essential part of the formation of the new man. 'The history of industrialism has always been a continuing struggle ... against the element of "animality" in man. It has been an uninterrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugating natural (i.e. animal and primitive) instincts to new, more complex, rigid norms and habits of order, exactitude and precision which can make possible the increasingly complex forms of collective life which are the necessary consequence of industrial development'. However these new norms and habits do not develop spontaneously, but have to be enforced mechanically from outside, before they become 'second nature' (p. 298), a process which has hitherto involved the brutal imposition of the new morality by a ruling class. On the other hand, the ruling class has not been willing to accept these standards as its own, so that 'crises of libertinism' regularly arise, affecting the middle classes and even a part of the ruling class.

In general such a 'crisis does not affect the working masses except in a superficial manner, or it can affect them indirectly, in that it depraves their women folk. These masses have either acquired the habits and customs necessary for the new systems of living and working, or else they continue to be subject to coercive pressure through the elementary necessities of their existence.' (p. 299) However, the 1920s saw a 'crisis of morals of unique proportions', affecting all strata of the population, as a reaction to the enforced repression of 'wartime life and life in the trenches', and the sexual imbalance in the post-war population. This libertinism comes into conflict with the new methods of production, which 'demand a rigorous discipline of the sexual instincts (at the level of the nervous system) and with it a strengthening of the "family" ... and of the regulation and stability of sexual relations' (pp. 299-300). Gramsci insists that this libertinism is alien to the working class: 'the most depraving and "regressive" ideological factor is the enlightened and libertarian conception proper to those classes which are not tightly bound to productive work and spread by them among the working classes' (p. 300).

This crisis of morality raises the question of whether Fordism can be realised at all in a class society. Gramsci is strongly insistent on the progressive character of Fordism, at least as a transitional stage. Fordism and Taylorism 'represent simply the most recent phase of a long process which began with industrialism itself ... a phase which will itself be superseded by the creation of a psycho-physical nexus of a new type, both different from its predecessors and undoubtedly superior' (p. 303). Gramsci ridicules the critics of Fordist 'puritanism'. It is not the workers, but the upper class, who evade prohibition. The stable monogamy of the worker is no mechanised sexuality, but 'a new form of sexual union shorn of the bright and dazzling colour of the romantic tinsel typical of the petit bourgeois and Bohemian layabout' (p. 304). However Ford's attempt to create a 'new type of worker and of man' failed, primarily because it was hypocritically and repressively imposed from outside the working class simply to prevent the physiological collapse of the worker, rather than being 'proposed by a new form of society with appropriate and original methods'. The requirements of industrialism, reinforced by the offer of high wages, induce the workers to adopt the new morality, but this also means that a gulf is opening up between the sobriety and stable monogamy of the workers and the drunkenness, licentiousness and divorce of the upper classes, a gulf which 'will make more difficult any coercion on the working masses to make them conform to the needs of the new industry' (p. 306). Moreover the high wages, on which the Fordist project relies, can only be paid while American capital enjoys a monopoly, and even then only to a narrow stratum of the working class. The implication is that it is only under communism that the Fordist project can be realised.

Gramsci is clear that the future lies with the 'new man'. The 'humanity' and 'spirituality' of artisan labour is being destroyed, but this is precisely the archaic "humanism" that the new industrialism is fighting', so that the destruction of artisanal work and craft unionism is progressive. But the 'deskilling' of labour does not turn the worker into Taylor's notorious 'trained gorilla'. 'Once the process of adaptation has been completed, what really happens is that the brain of the worker, far from being mummified, reaches a state of complete freedom'. Just as one 'thinks about whatever one chooses' when one is walking, so the Fordist worker 'has greater opportunities for thinking ... Not only does he think, but the fact that he gets no immediate satisfaction from his work and realises that they are trying to reduce him to a trained gorilla, can lead him into a train of thought that is far from conformist' (pp. 309-10).

Gramsci was by no means complacent about the ability of a communist society to realise the Fordist dream. The influence of 'the petit bourgeois and Bohemian layabout' is a particular problem under socialism, 'where the working masses are no longer subject to coercive pressure from a superior class' (p. 300), but have not yet 'assimilated' 'virtue' in the form of more or less permanent habits', and so are very vulnerable to moral corruption, precipitating a serious crisis. Gramsci agrees with Trotsky that the crisis can only be resolved by the exercise of coercion by an elite of the class which can struggle against the libertarian conception, but Gramsci argues that Trotsky erred in proposing a purely repressive solution, through the militarisation of labour, rather than recognising the need for the development of self-discipline.

In the event Gramsci proved right. Neither Americanism nor Italian fascism could realise the Fordist dream of creating the New Man, although German Nazism was rather more successful. The hedonism of Bohemian layabouts proved to have a greater influence over the working class than Gramsci had anticipated, so that workers were not reconciled to their labour by sobriety, savings, safe sex and an early night, but demanded rising wages, shorter hours, welfare benefits and secure employment to give them access to a wider range of pleasures. In the end the corrosive influence of petit-bourgeois libertinism even undermined the attempt to create the New Man as the psycho-physical foundation of socialism in the Soviet block. Despite its best efforts to provide hard work and a frugal life, supported by edifying art, music and literature, with extensive facilities for healthy Fordist sports, the state was unable to protect the working class from blue jeans, rock music, Coca Cola, alcohol, modern art, fornication, homosexuality The collapse of the Romanian regime of Nicolai Ceausescu, leaves only the Great Leader, Comrade Kim Il Sung, pursuing Gramsci's dream!

Dreams and Nightmares: Escape from the Brave New World?

History has shown that Gramsci's dream was not so attractive after all. It was not only Bohemian layabouts who rejected Fordist puritanism, but also the working class. The repression and coercion which was employed by Ford to impose his system of production on the working class did not simply represent the degeneration of a utopian vision under the pressure of the economic constraints of capitalism, but the failure of that vision to respond to the needs and aspirations of real human beings. The limits of the Fordist vision lay not in the hypocrisy and exploitation which marked its capitalist implementation, and which prevented the workers from internalising the values of the New Man, but in the vision itself, as a vision of the reduction of the worker to an appendage of the industrial and social machine. This vision may have appealed to the Modernist intellectuals of the 1920s, but it had little appeal for the workers, who proved to have a far more instrumental attitude to work. In the event it was not the puritanical revolutionary, Gramsci, who proved right, but the archetypal Bohemian, Aldous Huxley, for whom the Fordist project was the nightmare of an ultimate totalitarianism, which penetrates the last detail of private life and the deepest recesses of the body and the mind.

For Huxley drugs, alcohol and sexual promiscuity are not, as Gramsci believed, a threat to Fordism. They are the condition for its realisation. For Huxley Gramsci's dream is the ultimate horror, when the really efficient state of the Brave New World does not have to rely on physical coercion because Fordism has become 'second nature', the state controlling 'a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced because they love their servitude. To make them love it is the task assigned, in present-day totalitarian states, to ministries of propaganda, newspaper editors and schoolteachers' (Huxley, Foreword to the 1950 edition, 1955, p. 12). But these crude methods achieve only the negative side of propaganda, in their 'silence about truth' (p. 12).

For Huxley Our Ford's sociologists were only the advance guard of an army of scientists who face 'the problem of making people love their servitude', which can only be achieved through a 'deep, personal revolution in human minds and bodies' requiring, among other things, improved techniques of suggestion, through infant conditioning and drugs; 'a fully developed science of human differences, enabling government managers to assign any given individual to his or her proper place in the social and economic hierarchy'; less harmful, but more pleasure-giving, narcotics; sexual freedom, which, Huxley argued, tends compensatingly to increase as political and economic freedom diminishes; and as, a long-term project, which Huxley in 1951 believed 'would take generations of totalitarian control to bring to a successful conclusion', 'a foolproof system of eugenics' (pp. 13-4).

Huxley had an alternative to the Fordist nightmare, a vision of a Post-Fordist community in which 'economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque and cooperative. Science and technology would be used as though, like the Sabbath, they had been made for man, not ... as though man were made to be adapted and enslaved to them' (p. 8). Huxley saw such a revolution as the result of 'a large-scale popular movement toward decentralisation and self-help technology', although he saw 'no sign that such a movement will take place' (p. 12).

Huxley's pessimism derived from his belief in the technological superiority of Fordist methods of production, and a Gramscian belief in the viability of Fordist forms of social control, so that his own utopia could only be realised by a moral and political revolution which would subordinate technology to human values, but whose social base he could not identify. But maybe Huxley was unduly pessimistic. Perhaps the smiling artisans of Emilia-Romagna have discovered the Philosopher's Stone, or at least the personalised numerically controlled machine tool, which can set humanity free by defining new methods of production which are both technologically superior to those of Fordism, and which embody an altogether more attractive vision of the New Man, one which might even find a place for the New Woman too. Perhaps there is no need for Huxley's 'large-scale popular movement'. Perhaps we need only embrace the liberating potential of new technology.

But just what is the content of the New Utopia? Is it the narcissistic culture of consumerism acclaimed by Marxism Today, in which all human values are dissolved in the construction of the Image; an alienated world of universal commodity fetishism in which the worker is no longer condemned to a life of wage slavery only by material want, but also by an insatiable need to acquire the means of consumption through which alone she or he can construct a social identity? Or is it the reconstitution of the traditional craft culture, acclaimed by Sabel and Piore, made possible by the rise of the 'flexibly specialised' worker, who can derive creative satisfaction from the activity of labour?

The post-Fordist Utopia, which combines the apparently antithetical visions of self-realisation through insatiable consumption, and self-realisation through creative labour, may make sense to contemporary academics, playing at desktop publishing, anticipating a lucrative home-based consultancy, and voraciously consuming artisanal products from the four corners of the globe in the name of a solidaristic internationalism, but this kind of Yuppy vision can hardly be expected to have a wider appeal.

But maybe there is an alternative basis on which to build the New Man, which will protect him from the corrupting influence of degenerate modernism. Gramsci noted that 'The new type of worker will be a repetition, in a different form, of peasants in the villages' (p. 304). Maybe we can find a new technology which can directly link the old and the new, which can turn the traditional villager directly into the New Man. Ceausescu's mistake was that he was blinded by Fordism, and so set out to destroy all the villages in which the 'small town virtues, old-style familialism and deeply conservative social attitudes', which the New Man must adopt, still persisted, precisely the values and attitudes which are most conducive to the success of the technology of 'flexible specialisation' (Hirst, in Hall and Jacques, 1989, p. 325). Maybe Ceausescu, like Gramsci, had just forgotten the principles of dialectical materialism, and its magical law of the negation of the negation. Maybe socialism is not the linear development of Fordism, which can never escape the moral degeneration of the mass worker, but the dialectical synthesis of Fordism and Not-Fordism.

For once we can echo Gramsci, responding to an earlier (and rather more explicitly conservative) round of Proudhonist fantasising. 'The term "quality" simply means ... specialisation for a luxury market. But is this possible for an entire, very populous nation? ... Everything that is susceptible of reproduction belongs to the realm of quantity and can be mass produced ... if a nation specialises in "qualitative production", what industry provides the consumer goods for the poorer classes? ... The whole thing is nothing more than a formula for idle men of letters and for politicians whose demagoguery consists in building castles in the air' (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 307-8).

We should have seen enough failed utopias in the twentieth century to warn us against another round of utopian fantasies. Socialism is not about moulding human needs and aspirations to some preconceived vision of the New Man or the New Woman, but of developing social forms through which human needs and aspirations can be directly expressed and self-consciously realised. These social forms cannot be imposed, according to some ideal blueprint, but can only be created through the free association of real men and women in their attempt to bring the social forms of production and consumption under self-conscious collective control.

Post-Fordist technologies can no more liberate the working class than could the technology of Fordism because the working class is not exploited and oppressed by technology but by capitalism. Of course the socialist movement needs a realisable vision of the future towards which it works, but it can only be through the self-organisation of the working class in its struggle to overcome the differentiated forms of capitalist exploitation and oppression that such practical visions, corresponding to the needs and aspirations of real men and women, are formulated and realised. Of course such practical visions of co-operation, of guild socialism, of syndicalism, of council communism, of workers' councils, of libertarian communities which have emerged from popular struggles have in many ways been as flawed, as limited and ultimately as unsuccessful as have been the idealistic utopias of the many variants of Fordism, State Socialism, Social Democracy, and Post-Fordism. The difference is that the former have been visions of the oppressed, developed out of their own experience of exploitation and of struggle, whose failure has been the consequence of historical defeats from which lessons can be learned. The latter have been visions for the oppressed, imposed on the oppressed with all the power at the command of capital and the state, whose ultimate failure has been the result of working class resistance, the consequence of their failure to correspond to the needs and aspirations of the working class.

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Footnotes

There are as many versions of the theories of 'Post-Fordism' and 'flexible specialisation' as there are proponents, covering the whole political spectrum from Christian Democracy (Hirst and Zeitlin), through Proudhonian Socialism (Sabel and Piore), Social democracy (Marxism Today) and Municipal Socialism (Robin Murray), to Revolutionary Socialism (Bob Jessop). While the details of the various models differ, primarily in the regions chosen as their favoured examples, and in the elements of the experience of those regions which they choose to emphasise, these are variants on a common theme.

See Paul Hirst's criticism of 'post-Fordism' from the standpoint of 'flexible specialization' (Hirst, 1989).

I am particularly indebted both to Tony Elger's published work and to his comments and advice.

On the 'Third Italy' see Murray (1983, 1987) and Amin (1990). On the questionable benefits of Japanisation see Kamata (1982), Dohse, Jurgens and Malsch (1985) and Kato and Steven (1989), and the ensuing debate in successive issues of the Japanese journal MADO. On the equivocal benefits of flexibility in German manufacturing see Lane (1988). More generally see Hyman and Streek (eds) (1988), Hyman (1989), Pollert (ed) (1990), Tomany (1990), Gilbert, Pollert and Burrows (1991). For a different interpretation of the crisis of the Keynesian Welfare State see Clarke (1988).

Acceptance of this kind of analysis does not necessarily imply a commitment to social democratic politics. Appropriate forms of regulation may provisionally stabilise the crisis tendencies of capitalism and accommodate the class struggle without eliminating them. However, if such stabilisation is always possible it is difficult to see where the objective or subjective foundations of any socialist alternative might lie. Although this kind of analysis draws on a wide range of sources, for convenience I will refer to all these theories as variants of Regulation Theory.

Marx, 1968, pp. 181-2. I will leave aside the question of the extent to which Marx himself tended towards a productivist economism, particularly in programmatic statements such as this.

Engels's Anti-Duhring was, in addition to the 1859 Preface and The Communist Manifesto, the standard text of the Marxism of the Second International. Although Engels represented the fundamental contradiction as that 'between socialised organisation in the individual factory and social anarchy in production as a whole' (Engels, 1962, p. 390), and regarded the rise of cartels and the state direction of production as 'economically inevitable' (p. 381n), he was quite clear that 'state ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict, but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution' (p. 382), and denounced the 'kind of spurious socialism which has arisen, degenerating, now and again, into something of flunkeyism, that without more ado declares all state ownership ... to be socialistic' (p. 381n).

The immediate theoretical source of this conception of historical materialism is the structuralist Marxism of Althusser and Poulantzas, through whom most of the contemporary exponents of Regulation Theory were first drawn towards Marxism. I have discussed the orthodox foundations of structuralist Marxism in Clarke (1977 and 1980). It is important to note that the original development of regulation theory, in the work of Aglietta, was economic but not technologicistic, but was formulated in terms of value relations, Fordism being characterised by the generalisation of the production of relative surplus value. Thus Aglietta and Palloix were clear that the key to any possible resolution of the crisis of Fordism lay not in a new 'post-Fordist' technology but in the intensification of labour, the restructuring of the working class, and the 'neo-Fordist' extension of the principles of Fordism to the state and service sectors.

The charge of 'reductionism' made by turned-again Althusserians, such as Paul Hirst (Hirst, 1989, and Hirst and Zeitlin, 1990), is misplaced in failing to understand that 'culturalism' and 'politicism' are only the other side of 'economism'. Hirst and Zeitlin counterpose 'flexible specialisation' to post-Fordism, but this is misleading, since they identify 'flexible specialisation' not with any particular technology or capitalist epoch, but with relations of 'trust' and 'co-operation'. Their original development of the thesis of flexible specialisation was based on a Fabian critique of the 'anarchy of the market' which emphasised the role of the state in co-ordinating production, but more recently the emphasis of their work has shifted from politics to morality, contrasting the conflict inherent in competition to the trust which is the essential basis of co-operation, offering what is essentially a Christian Democratic critique

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