

What in the F—'s name is Fordism

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There is a widespread belief that the 1980s marked a period of transition to a new epoch of capitalism, underlying which were fundamental changes in the forms of capitalist production. There is little agreement over the precise contours of the new epoch, or even over the term by which it is to be called, but there is a near universal consensus that it derives from the crisis and breakdown of something called 'Fordism'. The one thing that unites the exponents of 'neo-Fordism', 'post-Fordism', 'post-Modernism', 'Toyotism', 'Nextism', 'Benettonism', 'Proudhonism', 'Japanisation', 'flexible specialisation', etc. is that the new 'mode of accumulation', or 'mode of life', is 'Not-Fordism'. Behind all the disagreements is a consensus that the 1960s marked the apogee of something called 'Fordism', the 1970s was marked by the 'crisis of Fordism', the 1980s marked the transition to 'Not-Fordism', which will be realised in the 1990s.

Much energy has been expended in debating the diffuse characterisations of 'Not-Fordism'. However, much less attention has been paid to the characterisation of Fordism. In this paper I want to ask the simple question 'What in the Ford's name is Fordism?' In view of the title of the session as a whole I will keep a particular eye on the supposed 'inflexibility' of Fordism.¹

¹I am very grateful to Tony Elger, Syd Houghton, Bill Taylor and Graham Taylor for helpful discussion of the issues explored in this paper. I make no apology for the tone of the paper. However I would like to stress that any hints of scorn are directed not so much at the authors of the works we are obliged to address, who are but honest seekers after immortality, as at the epigoni who compel us to take those works seriously.

The Life and Works of Our Ford

The Fordist technological revolution

Where better to begin our quest than with the technical revolution which Henry Ford carried through at the Ford Motor Company. The story is well known, and doesn't need much re-telling.² There was nothing original in either the detail or the general principles which Our Ford applied to the production of motor vehicles. The decomposition of tasks, the specialisation of tools, the assembly of tools into the machine, and even of machines into the machine system, were all typical of the transformation of craft production into large-scale industrial production, a process which had already proceeded further in the US than anywhere else, spurred on particularly by the scarcity and organised strength of skilled workers.³ The originality of Our Ford's project was that he applied these principles to a new branch of production, and he applied them with such a single-minded ruthlessness that he transformed the conditions of production of motor vehicles almost overnight.

Although Ford's achievement is popularly attributed to his introduction of the assembly line, and this certainly provided the most rapid and dramatic increases in productivity, this was only a small part of the revolution he carried through.

On the one hand, the introduction of the assembly line presupposed the mass production of standardised and interchangeable parts to a very high tolerance, which could only be achieved by specialist machines, which permitted both the deskilling of skilled work and the rigorous separation of production from assembly. Once this had been achieved the development of the assembly line was almost a formality. The most complex line, that of chassis assembly, took only six months to develop. Although this led to an immediate sixfold cut in the labour required to assemble the chassis, this

²Hew Beynon, *Working for Ford*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, Chapter One gives a concise version of the story. Stephen Meyer III, *The Five Dollar Day*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1981 is very useful. Henry Ford *My Life and Work*, Garden City, New York, 1922 is the sacred text.

³The general principles were first systematically expounded by Marx in his unsurpassed discussion of 'Machinery and Modern Industry' in *Capital*, Volume 1, a discussion which could apply, with barely a word changed, to Ford's project. In this sense Fordism is 'a shorthand term for the organisational and technological principles characteristic of the modern large-scale factory' (Charles Sabel, *Work and Politics*, CUP, Cambridge, 1983, p. 33).

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.

On the other hand, the development of an organic system of production internalised the sources of technological development. The fragmentation of tasks and of work processes meant that production bottlenecks were clearly and immediately identified, providing well-defined technological and/or organisational problems for Ford's engineers and production managers to tackle. It also meant that technological changes could be introduced discretely, replacing individual tools or machines or altering the organisation of particular shops, without having to transform the system of production as a whole. Thus Ford's revolution was not exhausted by the introduction of the assembly line. It did not mark a one-off technological change, but the internalisation of technological dynamism, and the incorporation of scientific and technical progress into the labour process. In this sense the Fordist fragmentation of tasks and standardisation of components introduced a new *flexibility* to the labour process which was the condition for technological dynamism, and so the culmination of the penetration of capital into production.

To avoid needless repetition the point probably needs to be emphasised once and for all: 'Fordism' broke down what had been an extremely rigid technology, and an equally rigid organisation of the labour process, into its component parts, in order to reassemble it according to the principles of its own rationality. While there is no inherent virtue in 'flexibility' for its own sake, and established methods may certainly become a barrier to further development, the constant technological dynamism inherent in the principles of Fordism implies a maximum of flexibility and adaptability of methods of production. Moreover, while Fordism deskilled large parts of direct production labour, it also created a need for new skills. On the one hand, to keep the line moving Ford needed a stratum of workers with 'polyvalent' skills to fill gaps in the line, overcome bottlenecks and maintain machinery. On the other hand, the dynamism of Fordism, which had to be sustained to maintain a plant's competitive edge, implied the constant development of new tools, dies and machines which could only be developed by highly skilled workers, using flexible and general purpose machines.⁴

Ford's project was associated with a number of further characteristics

⁴On the flexibility of Fordism see Karel Williams, Tony Cutler, John Williams and Colin Haslam, 'The End of Mass Production', *Economy and Society*, 16, 3, 1987, pp. 405-439.

which probably were essential to his own achievement, but which introduced elements of rigidity which soon proved to be a barrier to the further development of Fordism. In particular Henry Ford saw the vertical integration of production and the standardisation of the product as essential elements of his revolution. Vertical integration was necessary in the first instance because of the need to apply Fordist principles to the production of all the component parts of the motor vehicle. However, once these principles had been adopted by component producers, vertical integration presented a barrier to their further development because independent suppliers could achieve further economies of scale and of rationalisation by supplying identical components to a number of manufacturers.⁵ The issue of vertical integration, as opposed to sub-contracting or purely market relations, is a complex one, involving a range of advantages and disadvantages associated not only with technological constraints, but also with legal, financial, commercial and competitive considerations, as well as considerations of labour control. 'Fordism' requires the central co-ordination of the production process, and the integration of the parts into the whole, as moments of the expanded reproduction of capital. But this subordination may be achieved as well, or as badly, through the anonymous processes of the market as by centralised bureaucratic regulation.

Similarly, the standardisation of the product was probably necessary at first in order to provide long enough runs to carry through the rationalisation of production and the standardisation of components. But once this was achieved standardisation of the product was a barrier to the further development of the technology of the factory. The massive growth in production of the model T, and the equally rapid growth of a second hand market, meant that the market for the basic car soon approached saturation. On the other hand, the market for more sophisticated cars remained too restricted to support Fordist production methods on its own. Ford's failure fully to appreciate that the key to his revolution lay in the standardisation of components, not the standardisation of the product, left open the gap

⁵Thus the OEEC report on the development of the European motor industry after World War II warned against vertical integration on these grounds. The report is a fascinating glimpse of Proto-Not-Fordism, emphasising the decentralisation, multi-sourcing, sub-contracting of the US auto industry, and the centrality of the standardisation of parts to the ability of the industry to reconcile high productivity with a wide model range. Chrysler was typical in sourcing from 10,000 suppliers of auto parts in 42 states, 75 per cent of whom employed fewer than 100 workers. How's that for Flec Spec?!? OEEC, *Some Aspects of the Motor Vehicle Industry in the US*, OEEC, Paris, 1952.

which General Motors immediately filled by diversifying their model range. In this sense ‘Sloanism’ cannot be counterposed to Fordism since it is only the development of the principles of Fordism, removing barriers erected by the limited vision of Our Ford. It was the application of the principle of using standard components for the production of a range of models, and even as parts of quite different commodities, which permitted the rapid diffusion of Fordist production methods.

If ‘Fordism’ is to be identified narrowly with either the technical and organisational achievements or the production philosophy of Our Ford, we have to conclude that Fordism had failed by the 1930s, to be replaced by more flexible forms of production, which alone made the wider diffusion of Fordist principles possible. However, these features are so clearly peripheral to the revolutionary significance of Ford’s project that it makes much more sense to discard them, and to identify Fordism more broadly with the decomposition and recomposition of the labour process as the basis for the generalisation of industrial production methods and the internalisation of the sources of technological dynamism.

The Fordist transformation of the labour process

The Fordist revolution involved not only a technical revolution but also a revolution in the social relations of the immediate process of production. This revolution had, in the first instance, two elements. On the one hand, the rigorous decomposition of tasks, including the rigid separation of skilled from unskilled tasks, permitted the rigorous differentiation of the labour force. This was both conditioned by and reinforced the existence of a ‘dual labour market’ composed of a small stratum of skilled workers and a mass of unskilled immigrant workers.⁶ On the other hand, the transition from craft to industrial production threatened to reduce the labourer to a cog in the industrial machine. The industrial labour force no longer comprised a more or less co-ordinated mass of discrete individual workers and work-groups, each of which was under the direction of a skilled or supervisory worker. Fordism sought to fuse the labour force into an organic whole, a genuinely collective labourer, in which the productive contribution of each individual and group was dependent on the contribution of every other.

⁶The idea that Fordism creates a homogeneous mass worker, to be replaced by the dual labour market of ‘post-Fordism’ is patently absurd. Not only did Fordism create new categories of skilled manual worker, it also created a growing ‘new middle class’ of managerial, technical and supervisory workers.

The distinction between these two aspects of the development of the industrial labour process is essentially the distinction between ‘Taylorism’ and ‘Fordism’. Taylorism decomposes tasks and assigns those tasks to individual workers, while Fordism recomposes the tasks by welding the individual labours into a human machine.⁷

The ‘flexibility’ and ‘autonomy’, which are supposedly characteristic of the skilled craft worker, are certainly a barrier to the Fordist socialisation of production, whose full development depends on the worker performing his or her allotted task, however skilled or unskilled it might be, in the allotted place, at the allotted time. For this reason craft workers tend to resist the ‘Fordising’ of the labour process, the destruction of craft unions being a precondition for the full capitalist application of Fordist principles. However this is not a requirement imposed by technology, whether it be ‘Fordist’ or ‘Not-Fordist’, but by the capitalist subordination of technology, and the associated social organisation of labour, to the task of minimising labour time and accelerating the turnover of capital. Thus the extent to which the autonomy of the worker was in fact subordinated to the human machine was determined not by technology, but by a persistent class struggle, which in turn constrained the particular ways in which Fordist principles were institutionalised at different times and places.

In the United States employers had been able to exploit the mass influx of immigrant workers, and the very sharp sectional and racist divisions within the trades union movement, to destroy craft unions and, temporarily, to establish almost unchallenged capitalist control of production. In Europe the employers did not enjoy such favourable circumstances. Although they had broken the power of syndicalism by the mid-1920s, they still had to take account of the interests of skilled workers, and to organise the labour process in such a way as to reproduce and reinforce inherited divisions within the working class.⁸ This in turn reproduced the differences in the skill composition of the working class and the institutional forms of class relations which distinguished Europe (and Japan) from the US. That

⁷Christian Palloix, ‘Le procès de travail. Du fordisme au néofordisme’, *La Pensée*, 185, February 1976. Translation in the CSE/Stage One pamphlet, *The Labour Process and Class Strategies*, 1976. In this sense too Fordism is only the full development of Marx’s characterisation of the development of the capitalist labour process.

⁸Thus even Ford’s attempt to import Fordism to Europe was not completely successful, despite every attempt to prevent the development of shop-floor trades unionism. C.f. Beynon, op. cit.; Ferruccio Gambino, *Workers’ Struggles and the Development of Ford in Britain*, Red Notes, London.

Fordist principles could nevertheless be generalised is testimony once again to their flexibility.

The full ‘Americanisation’ of industry could only have been achieved by confronting shopfloor power to establish ‘management’s right to manage’, a right which skilled workers had never recognised. This was the primary consideration which underlay the resistance of European capitalists, as well as workers, to the ‘Americanisation’ of European industry right up to the 1950s and beyond. While new technology could be introduced, and healthy profits earned, on the basis of negotiation within the existing framework, there was no incentive to change. In Germany, Italy and Japan even the destruction of the trades unions by fascism, war and occupation did not completely clear the ground for Fordism, not least because of the need in the period of reconstruction to ‘make the world safe for democracy’. In Britain it was not until the 1970s that employers sought to restructure skills and shop floor trades union organisation, a restructuring which was thoroughly Fordist, although facilitated by new forms of technology.

It is a commonplace that the development of new technology and the social organisation of the labour process are moulded by the wider context in which they take place. In this sense Fordism is a project (to subject the working class, and indeed the whole of society, to the technology of relative surplus value production) which can never be completely realised. The other side of this commonplace is that the technology has to be sufficiently flexible to be able to accommodate human imperfections and human resistance. Neither tasks nor workers can ever be perfectly standardised, so that a degree of flexibility has to be built into the industrial system to ensure that normal variations in the pace of work can be absorbed without bringing the whole system to a grinding halt. This may involve the holding of buffer stocks, reduction in the speed of the line, provision of a body of relief workers, permitting workers to move up or down the line, the breaking up of the process into discrete groups, etc. This in turn implies that the willingness and ability of the worker to perform his or her allotted task cannot simply be imposed by the technology, for the flexibility which has to be built in to allow for individual variations and interruptions can easily be exploited by workers, individually and collectively, to re-create a degree of autonomy and to relieve the burden of work.⁹ On the other hand, the benefits of the system

⁹Thus Aglietta is quite wrong to claim that ‘workers are unable to put up any individual resistance to the imposition of the output norm, since job autonomy has been totally abolished’ (Michel Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, NLB, London, 1979, pp. 118–9) so that ‘assembly-line work tends to unify workers in an overall struggle against

for capital will be progressively eroded if the system is simply adjusted to the needs and aspirations of the workers.¹⁰ Thus the industrial system, far from providing a technological solution to the problem of regulation of labour, brings the problem of labour control to the fore.

The problem of labour control was by no means new. It has been capital's fundamental problem since it first sought to establish control over production, and it has tried a wide range of different approaches, none of which has ever provided a lasting solution. But without appropriate forms of control of the labour force, new technology is useless to the capitalist, however much more productive it might be. Thus the resolution of the problem of labour control was a condition for the profitable introduction of Fordist technology.

The traditional method of controlling labour in craft production was through the payment of piece-rates, with supervision achieved through skilled workers, on the basis of internal sub-contracting and the gang or helper systems. Taylorism involved the rigorous individualisation of the piece-rate as the means of monitoring and regulating the effort of every worker. However such a method of payment was inappropriate to the new collective forms of organisation of labour in which individual productive contributions were subsumed under the whole. On the other hand, the technology could not in itself serve to impose a collective discipline on the workers. Thus labour control could only be based on a combination of the technical subordination of the worker to the machine, enforced by external supervision and reinforced by new methods of encouraging the worker's subjective motivation.

The Fordist Regulation of Labour: the Five Dollar Day

The problem of labour control appeared in a number of different forms: 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

their conditions of labour' (ibid., p. 121). I have criticised Aglietta's theory at length in 'Overaccumulation, Class Struggle and the Regulation Approach', *Capital and Class*, 36, 1988, pp. 59-92 so I will lay off his theory in this paper.

¹⁰Of course this did not apply to the deskilling and routinisation of work to match tasks to the abilities of the large reserve of immigrant labour, an adjustment to the restricted 'needs' and 'aspirations' of an oppressed group of workers which proved extremely profitable to Our Ford.

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. 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, Our 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.¹¹

The initial impact of the new scheme was dramatic. 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 it was Ford, not Fordism, that 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, 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.

Meanwhile other producers had been developing alternative, and more economical, systems of labour control. Ford's attempt to create a New Man

¹¹For the details of the project see Meyer, *op. cit.*

(supported by a traditional woman) fit for his New Age bred only hostility and resentment, while incurring escalating costs of supervision and enforcement. While high unemployment enabled Ford to recruit labour through the 1930s, and he was able to use his wealth and power to keep out the trades unions, other employers were conceding union recognition and realising that new forms of industrial relations, built around collective bargaining, could reconcile labour control with industrial peace by trading acceptance of managerial prerogatives for better wages and working conditions. The development of more complex job classification and payment systems, including bonus, incentive and piecework payments, fragmented and divided the labour force, while providing a means by which individual workers could be subordinated to the discipline of their colleagues, reducing the costs of supervision. Such payment systems accorded the workforce a degree of collective control over the pace of labour, but at the same time, through productivity bargaining and the ideology of ‘profit-sharing’, institutionalised a common interest between the employer and the trades union, representing the ‘collective labourer’, standing above the daily conflict of interests between employer and individual workers or sections. Moreover the development of responsible trades unionism, with the ideological, financial and political encouragement of the state, proved itself a powerful force for political stabilisation during the New Deal, a stabilisation which was threatened by Ford’s continued virulent opposition to the unions. Nevertheless, it was not until he was forced to recognise the UAW by a massive strike in 1941 that Ford conceded the failure of his divinely-inspired mission.

It may well be the case that the full realisation of the Fordist project could only be achieved by the creation of Ford’s New Man, but the project foundered on the resistance of real men and women. In this sense Fordism was an impossible dream, never realised even in Ford’s own plants, and never even fully attempted elsewhere. On the other hand, absurd as it now seems today, Ford’s dream was very real in its day, his utopia of human perfectibility capturing the imagination of millions, while for others it depicted the nightmare of totalitarianism gone mad. But before looking more closely at the Fordist dream we need to look briefly at some aspects of the broader social impact of the Fordist revolution.

The Fordist revolution in consumption

Fordism involved not only a revolution in the technology and social relations of production, but also a revolution in consumption, Ford’s project depend-

ing on his vision of the motor vehicle as the basic means of transport. This revolution was by no means associated with a narrowing of choice, with the suppression of differentiation, or with the homogenisation of either products or consumers. Before the model T you could buy any mode of personal transport as long as it was a horse. Ford offered a more limited range of colours than could be provided by horse-breeders, but there was more scope for bolt-on additions than the simple horse-brass. With the generalisation of Fordist production methods other manufacturers soon moved into the mass market, offering middle class consumers a range of choice which had hitherto been available only to the ultra-rich. Moreover the standardisation of components, and improvements in vehicle technology, extended the benefits of Fordism, in terms of both price and reliability, to specialist luxury and custom producers. Although hitherto every horse, cart and carriage had been unique, physiological, technological and economic constraints meant that there had in fact been a very limited range of distinct models available.

The rapid reduction in the cost of production of motor vehicles transformed them from a luxury toy into the element of a new mode of mass transport, which restored the flexibility and individuality of personal transportation which the railway age had threatened to destroy, although the need for cambered roads meant that the car could never match the flexibility of the horse. The motor-bus cut the costs and increased the capacity of local public transport, enormously increasing the mobility of the working class in search of work and in pursuit of leisure.

The impact of the development of commercial road transport was at least as significant as the development of the private motor car. The growth of the railways had been an enormously powerful and pervasive lever of the concentration and centralisation of capital, not only in railways and the directly associated industries, but also in industries as varied as banking and finance, steel and coal, commodity dealing and wholesale and retail trade. This was not only an effect of the concentration and centralisation of railway capital, but also because of the rigidity of the railway system. The railways had opened the mass market, but had enormously narrowed and concentrated the channels of access to that market. The concentration and centralisation of capital in a whole range of consumer goods industries had led to competition based on the differentiation of homogenous products and on the industrial processing of raw materials to provide a rapidly widening range of consumer goods, but at the same time the rigidity of railway transport confined such opportunities to the largest corporations, while restricting the distribution of their products. The development of road transport overcame

this barriers, both extending the distribution of the new range of consumption goods, and providing smaller producers with access to the new mass markets.

The Fordist transport revolution transformed the relation between town and country. The revolution in production and consumption inaugurated by the railway age had been essentially an urban revolution, which largely passed by those communities which had no railway station. The growth of motor transport extended the revolution to the countryside, integrating the most remote hamlet into the single framework of capitalist reproduction, and laying the material foundations for the revolution in mass communications provided by the development of radio and then tv.

Finally, the generalisation Fordism made possible an enormous diversification of mass consumption, as the standardisation of components made it possible to assemble an almost infinite variety of products without losing the benefits of mass production. In all these respects the 'revolution in consumption' acclaimed by contemporary proponents of 'post-Fordism' is directly or indirectly not a reaction against Fordism, but a development which was only made possible by the Fordist revolution.

Modernism, Americanism and Fordism

In the US the term 'Fordism' was soon used to refer to the industrial machine which Our Ford had created. In Europe, on the other hand, it 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 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'.¹²

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

¹²Antonio Gramsci, 'Americanism and Fordism', *Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971, p. 286.

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 luke-warm about Fordism, both Left and 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'.¹³ 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 (ibid., 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. Gramsci is more ambivalent in answering the more general question, but is at least sceptical that the Fordist project can 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 project.¹⁴

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' (Ibid., 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

¹³(C. Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980, p. 76. C.f. J. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, OUP, Oxford, 1981, pp. 29–31). The sentence is 'Hegemony here is born in the factory and requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries' (Gramsci, op. cit., p. 285).

¹⁴It is ironic that our 'New Times' Communists still acclaim Gramsci as a political ancestor when his true political heir, Nicolai Ceauşescu, has fallen so dramatically from grace!

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*' (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' (304). However Ford's attempt to create a 'new type of worker and of man' failed, primarily because it was hypocritically and mechanically 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'. Nevertheless 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' 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 socialism 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' (309-10).

Gramsci was by no means complacent about the ability of a socialist 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’ (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. The crisis can only be resolved by the exercise of coercion by an *élite* of the class which can struggle against the libertarian conception, as Trotsky correctly understood. However 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 fascism could realise the Fordist dream of creating the New Man. 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, modern art, fornication, homosexuality . . .

But hang on just a moment.

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. Ceauşescu’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 ‘Not-Fordism’.¹⁵

¹⁵Paul Hirst, ‘After Henry’, *New Statesman*, 21/7/89, reproduced in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, eds, *New Times*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1989, p. 325.

Maybe Ceaușescu, 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.

Or maybe the Fordist dream is not so attractive after all. Maybe it must always involve repression and coercion, to impose the constraints of capitalist technology on recalcitrant human beings. Maybe Aldous Huxley was right, and the Fordist project is the nightmare of an ultimate totalitarianism, which penetrates the last detail of private life and the deepest recesses of the body and the mind.

Maybe drugs, alcohol and sexual promiscuity are not, as Gramsci believed, a threat to Fordism. Maybe they are the condition for its realisation.

Maybe 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'.¹⁶ But these crude methods achieve only the negative side of propaganda, in their 'silence about truth' (p. 12).

Maybe 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).

Maybe Not-Fordism offers not the culmination of Fordism, but an alternative to the Fordist nightmare, the basis of a community in which 'economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque

¹⁶Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, Foreword to the 1950 edition, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1955, p. 12.

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).

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.

Maybe anything is possible if we struggle for it, but if all you want is the dream you can have it now.

It is time to stop dallying with ideas which would just be silly, if they were not so pervasive. Proudhon and Kropotkin made sense to nineteenth century artisans and peasants, and to the landed class whose privileges industrialism threatened to extinguish, and they 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 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'¹⁷. It's time to come back down to earth.

1 The Routinisation of Charisma: Our Ford and his Foundation

We left Fordism in the 1940s, with Ford recognising the UAW in 1941. Fordism had resolved its first crisis by developing quite different forms of labour control from those initially advocated by Ford, forms of control which

¹⁷op. cit., pp. 307–8.

abandoned the attempt to create the New Man, and which instead allowed a degree of negotiated autonomy to the workers' own organisations. The development of a stable industrial relations framework at plant-level was obviously closely associated with the development of industry-wide negotiating structures, and with the political recognition of the trades unions as the legitimate channel for the representation of their members' interests within a liberal pluralist political framework, all of which made rapid headway under the pressure for class conciliation imposed by wartime mobilisation.¹⁸ To the extent that Fordist production methods had been established outside the United States, they had very largely been adapted to local conditions, whether the militarisation of labour in Japan and in the labour camps of the Third Reich, the fascist corporatism of Germany and Italy, the workerist productivism of the Soviet Union, or the more archaic industrial relations framework of Britain.

The end of World War Two marked a decisive moment in the development of Fordism. The victors had to superintend the economic, social and political reconstruction of the vanquished, but they also had their own problems of conversion to peace-time, and these were their first pre-occupation. These problems centred on the appropriate forms of institutionalisation of class relations once wartime conditions had passed. Employers sought to reverse the gains made during wartime by the organised working class, while workers sought to take advantage of relatively tight labour markets, high profits, and potentially booming product markets, to secure further advances. The result, particularly in the United States, was a period of sharp, if episodic and fragmented, class struggle and marked institutional instability. The problem of stabilising the system of industrial relations in the US was acute, but abroad it was even worse, not least because of the naïvety of the first US attempt to export the New Deal to the defeated powers by encouraging the growth of trades unions as the bulwark of democracy. They did indeed prove to be bulwarks of democracy but not, in non-American hands, dedicated to the realisation of Fordism and the American Way of Life.

Once again it was Sociology that rode over the horizon in the nick of time. Not Ford's defunct Sociology Department, but a much grander institution, the Ford Foundation, with intimate links with the US government, and

¹⁸This liberal pluralism needs to be very clearly distinguished from corporatism. Trades unions are voluntary associations, not corporate bodies, which represent sectional interests, not class interests, and which have few, if any, regulatory or directive powers over those whom they represent.

particularly the CIA. In 1948 The Ford Foundation commissioned a study on future policy whose report (the Gaither Report) was enormously influential in determining both the strategy of the CIA in its 'liberal' phase of the 1950s and the development of the social sciences. The most influential single project which resulted from the latter part of the initiative was the 'Inter-University Study of Labor Problems and Economic Development', which first bid for funds in 1951, and submitted its final report in 1975.¹⁹

The Gaither Report was concerned to identify those critical social problems 'where the gravest threat to democracy and human welfare lies'.²⁰ The report warned of the dangers of complacency, which arises from an identification of existing institutions with the 'spirit of democracy'. Thus anti-communism alone is not sufficient, it is necessary in the first instance to reform American institutions to give democracy the 'right to grow' (20-1), so as 'to rid ourselves of treason without jeopardising freedom' (28). The report stressed the importance of national defence and the dangers of isolationism, but it was scathing in its critique of the democratic pretensions of existing US institutions. It expressed anxiety about the inadequacy of a political system which tended to express special interests rather than reflecting the will of the people; it emphasised the importance of achieving high and stable levels of income and employment at home and abroad; it stressed the need for a 'more complete understanding of human behaviour' to determine the causes of industrial conflict; it reported an 'unusual degree of dissatisfaction' with the failure of the education system to offer equality of opportunity and to

¹⁹The final report listed 35 books and 43 articles as products of the project. The programme is best known from its theoretical summation, Clark Kerr et al., *Industrialism and Industrial Man*, Heinemann, London, 1962. The original proposal was for a programme entitled 'Labor Relations and Economic Development', which sought to understand 'the position of the working class in a variety of societies' to assist 'the development of an effective American world-wide strategy'. The full story is chronicled in James L. Cochrane, *Industrialism and Industrial Man Revisited*, Ford Foundation, New York, 1979, which reprints the original proposal (pp. 61-73). Cochrane's work was the product of a belated twinge of conscience, Cochrane seeking to establish whether Kerr's structural-functionalism had prevailed over the institutionalist tradition on its intellectual merits, or on the crest of a wave of Fordist \$\$\$\$\$. (Institutionalism had been associated with a naive faith in the democratic potential of trades unionism, which had so disastrously informed the first phase of the US reconstruction effort in the Europe and Japan, and which the Ford Foundation, the ICFTU the CIA and Industrial Sociology took it upon themselves to remedy.) Fortunately Cochrane's research entirely vindicated the integrity of Sociology, even the British Marxist John H. Goldthorpe's criticism of Kerr being interpreted as a 'form of flattery' (Cochrane, p. 134).

²⁰H. Rowan Gaither Jr., *Report of the Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Programme*, Ford Foundation, Detroit, 1949, p. 14.

develop ‘individual purpose, character and values’; it warned of the dangers of ‘inadequate emotional adjustment’ to ‘vast and rapid changes ... with resulting political, economic and social unrest’ (44–6). But despite this chronicle of inequality, discontent, conflict and dislocation in the heartland, the report was clear that the defects of American capitalism and democracy were only superficial, and could be remedied with a programme of reform, guided by a comprehensive and ambitious programme of development of the human sciences, of which the ‘industrial society’ project, dominated by Kerr and Dunlop, was the most important and influential result.

We don’t need to go over the familiar theory of industrial society, except to note that it defined an altogether more humanistic and optimistic Fordist project, which it was expected would sell better on world markets than Henry Ford’s earlier offer of hard work and puritanical self-discipline. Kerr’s was not a picture of industrial society as it is, even in the United States, but an ‘ideal-type’ of industrial society, in which a happy, multi-skilled, well-educated, individualistic, achievement-oriented, socially, occupationally and geographically mobile, culturally homogeneous, psychologically healthy workforce constantly adapted to rapid technical and social change, resolving its conflicts peacefully through the appropriate channels of conflict resolution, and in particular an appropriate industrial relations system. Although for Kerr the development of such a functionally integrated society was ultimately inevitable, there were many barriers to be removed along the way, and the primary task of the Sociologist was to show how to remove them. While Ford’s Sociology Department taught the New Man to behave in ways which accorded with the will of God and human nature, Kerr’s Sociology Department taught the Newer Man (no - he didn’t have any women either) to behave in ways which accorded with the will of Our Ford and the spirit of industrialism. Whether he (and his wife and two kids) liked it or not was irrelevant. Once he recognised its inevitability, he would accept it.

2 Strange Bedfellows: Ford and Keynes

It was one thing to draw up a blueprint of the new Fordist utopia. It was quite another to implement it. The Sociologists and the Department of Labour, the CIA, the AFL/CIO, the WCFTU, and any number of initials and acronyms could all do their bit, but the restructuring of industrial and political relations depended on the ability of the capitalist system to of-

fer secure employment, rising wages and adequate welfare benefits, none of which it had been able consistently to deliver in the past. Nor was it clear how such benefits could be delivered in the future, for there was a variety of diagnoses of the past limitations of capitalism, and a variety of panaceas for its reform.

In the immediate post-war period the predominant diagnosis and panacea was one or another variant of Keynesian-welfarism. However, in the United States Keynesian-welfarism was associated with the New Dealers, and it was the New Dealers who bore the brunt of the blame for the post-war resurgence of class struggle in the US and the advance of the Left in Europe and Japan, so that within a couple of years there was little to distinguish between Keynesian-welfarism and Communism. In Britain there was a Keynesian-welfarist strand in the Labour Party, but the primary emphasis of the latter was productivist. Welfare reforms were confined within the limits of production, while Keynesian measures were used to check inflationary pressure. The defeat of the Labour government in 1951 brought in a Tory administration which was certainly not committed to Keynesian full employment policies. As is well known, until the late 1950s Keynesian policies were used exclusively to contain inflation, not to sustain full employment by deficit financing. The common argument that the mere commitment to full employment provided the confidence which made Keynesian measures unnecessary is unconvincing, since no government of the period committed itself unequivocally to full employment.²¹

The framework of post-war reconstruction was by no means Keynesian. From 1947 it was unequivocally, both in theory and in practice, based on the rapid liberalisation of international trade and payments, culminating in the restoration of general currency convertibility in 1958. It was this liberalisation, not Keynesianism, which fuelled the post-war boom. The post-war boom made possible, and in turn reinforced, a 'post-war settlement' between

²¹Throughout the post-war period there has been a gulf between Keynesian rhetoric and Keynesian practice. The first post-war example of Keynesian expansionist rhetoric was the US Defence Department's argument at the beginning of the 1950s that rearmament would be costless in mobilising otherwise idle resources. The acid test of Keynesianism was whether a government was prepared to pursue full employment policies, even at the cost of rising inflation. This choice was first clearly made by Harold Macmillan, who overruled Thorneycroft's proposed cuts in public expenditure in 1957, and sought alternative means of combatting inflation. On the whole question of Keynesianism and the State see Simon Clarke, *Keynesianism, Monetarism and the Crisis of the State*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1988, paperback due 1990. On the liberal framework of post-war reconstruction see Peter Burnham, *The Political Economy of Post-War Reconstruction*, Macmillan, London, 1990.

capital and organised labour which permitted, and in turn encouraged, the generalisation of Fordist production methods. This post-war settlement included a greater or lesser growth of the welfare apparatus, whether publicly or privately funded, with the primary emphasis on contributory benefits for the best-paid and most secure sections of the working class, and markedly inferior provision for those without the necessary qualifying contribution record.

Far from being the progenitor of the post-war boom, the growth of the Keynesianism Welfare State was a symptom of the re-emergence of the crisis tendencies of accumulation from the end of the 1950s, marked by accumulating economic and social problems: inflation, unemployment, pauperism, urban decay, racism, an upsurge of class struggles. As we know, far from resolving these problems, Keynesian solutions only tended to intensify them. The rapid growth of state expenditure imposed a growing unproductive drain on profits. Expansionary policies fuelled inflationary pressures. Growing state intervention encouraged popular political mobilisation and politicised economic decision-making. In short the relationship between Fordism and Keynesianism was about as close and stable as we can imagine the relationship between Ford and Keynes would have been!

The divorce between Fordism and Keynesian-welfarism was particularly traumatic for the armies of Fordist Socio-Therapists, particularly when the New Woman, Our Thatcher, revealed the Emperor's nakedness by declaring IN PUBLIC that there is no such thing as Society. In revenge the neo-Gramscians of the Communist Party of Great Britain hatched a fiendish plot. They launched a glossy magazine for the sole purpose of discrediting this apostle of the tried and tested small-town values of Fordism by acclaiming her the herald of a new post-Fordist dawn. Unfortunately the joke was too subtle for the majority of the CP's members who, reinforced by a reserve army of Sociologists, decided that they had to take up the post-Fordist banner.

So What the Ford is Fordism?

The post-war period now extends back almost fifty years. The idea that the whole period can be characterised as 'Fordist', in any sense other than that Fordism is simply fully developed capitalism, is absurd, and can only be based on the most profound ignorance. There were certainly very considerable changes in the 1980s, and in particular a decisive and fundamental

shift in the balance of class forces on a world scale. But there were also very considerable changes in the 1940s, the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s. Changes so rapid, indeed, that developments which Huxley imagined would take 600 years to come about have already been realised.

However, we cannot finally dismiss the analytical usefulness of the category of 'Fordism' without considering one last argument. It may be that all the different institutional variants of Fordism which can be observed from one period to another, and from one country to another, represent more or less successful, and more or less complete, attempts to realise the One-True Fordism. In that case Fordism would constitute the 'ideal-type', the Fordist utopia, as attested by the most sophisticated Sociologists, while the world would be littered with its deformed offspring: blocked Fordism, peripheral Fordism, global Fordism, flawed Fordism . . .²² Finally, the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s might then be qualitatively distinct from previous crises in being the crisis not of this or that inadequate variant of Fordism, but as being the crisis of Fordist production itself.²³

While this kind of analysis is fashionable in today's Sociology Departments, it has to be said that it is the most insufferable nonsense. It has the merit of taking account of the variety of institutional frameworks within which modern methods of capitalist production have been developed, and may even account for these differences by relating them to differences in the institutional forms of class relations, reflecting different class structures and differences in the balance of class forces.²⁴ However, to explain these variants as failed versions of one ideal-type implies that the latter is in some way

²²This was precisely Clarke Kerr's approach, distinguishing the universal 'logic of industrialism' from the imperfections of its implementation determined by historical residues and by the character of the 'industrialising elite'.

²³Thus reproducing the hoary old stories about the 'post-industrial society'. I am aware of only two coherent explanations for such a crisis of Fordist production. One, often associated with the 'law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall', refers to the technological exhaustion of the possibilities of surplus value production. The other is much less coherent, but refers to the collapse of the market for Fordist industry. Since I am not aware of any evidence to support either of these hypotheses I will not consider the issue further. Indeed, since we are still experiencing the longest sustained Fordist boom in history it would seem implausible to argue that there is any kind of a crisis of capitalist *production*, although it is clear that there is a serious crisis of capitalist *accumulation and reproduction*.

²⁴Although it can get no nearer an explanation of these variations than to offer the familiar eclectic combination of a technologistic structural-functionalism, which defines the ideal type, and a voluntaristic reference to 'politics' or 'class struggle', which explains the variants.

more real or more fundamental than the former. In other words it implies that there is an unambiguous answer to Henry Ford's problem, that there is an institutional, cultural, psycho-physiological and what-have-you framework within which his dream of a stable, prosperous, secure and harmonious capitalism can be realised. The implication is that the failure to realise this dream is nothing to do with the inherently contradictory and crisis-ridden character of the capitalist mode of production, which even compelled Our Ford himself to turn the Sociology Department into the Service Department, and to call in Pinkerton's exorcists to teach the workers what was good for them. The failure to realise the dream is to be explained instead by the pig-headedness, short-sightedness, corruption, prejudice, ignorance and folly of those in power, and of those who have had the power to obstruct its realisation. The lesson of the last three quarters of a century is that none of the myriad variants of Fordism can overcome the contradictory and crisis-ridden tendencies of capitalist accumulation which underlie the permanent necessity of class struggle.

This is not by any means to deny that the 1980s has been a decade of crisis, nor that the capitalist response to that crisis has shown a remarkable 'flexibility', not least in so rapidly abandoning its humanistic mask. But the crisis has not been a crisis of Fordism, it has been a crisis in the reproduction of capitalist class relations. The absence of a politically effective alternative has meant that it has at no time threatened to be a terminal crisis of capitalism, but it has nevertheless dictated the profound restructuring of the forces and relations of capitalist production on a world scale. This restructuring has by no means involved the unambiguous advance of the capitalist class at the expense of the working class, but a restructuring of relations within and between classes from which some strata and some class fractions have benefitted and others have lost out. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find that there are significant sections of the population for whom the crisis of the 1980s has offered new opportunities, and that these sections would like to sanctify their good fortune by proclaiming themselves the spearhead of New Times.²⁵

²⁵Despite his rather eccentric theoretical analysis, partly derived from Aglietta, Palloix (op. cit.) offers an exemplary analysis of the crisis and restructuring of capitalist class relations, bringing out clearly the significance of, and relation between, the changing forms of capitalist control of reproduction, the 'tertiarisation' of the economy, and the restructuring of production. Palloix and Aglietta have no illusions about 'the illusions spread by bourgeois ideologists in the supposedly liberating character of the new types of work organisation' (Aglietta, op. cit., p. 112), insisting that 'neo-Fordism' is no more than 'an adaptation of Taylorism and Fordism to new conditions of struggle in production'

(Palloix, p. 63).