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The Undesirables

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2001

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Translator's Introduction

The Undesirables was originally a one-shot paper published in Italian and French with a Spanish translation planned by the originally publishers. Its analyses of the changes in the tools and methods of exploitation and domination that have happened in recent years were significant, so I translated it into English as a pamphlet. The refusal of those who wrote these brief pieces to accept the simplistic non-analysis of those who cry perpetually over “globalization”, their insistence on recognizing the unity of exploitation throughout the world — i.e., that the exploited of the so-called first world are not privileged but simply experiencing a somewhat different intensity of exploitation — and their insistence on the recognition of the very real and significant power of the state in the functioning of exploitation and domination has allowed them to present an analysis that remains truly revolutionary — a useful tool for those who seek a rupture with the present social order. Particularly important in light of recent debates in anarchist circles is the authors’ insistence that a critique of technology that does not include class analysis is a partial critique and that class analysis without a critique of technology is equally insufficient.

I find their analyses of the particular effects of post-industrial technology quite significant, but feel that they underplay the importance of social control in the original development of the factory system itself — the idea of a liberatory use of industrial technology was always an illusion — so just as the dream of going back to a “nicer” form of capitalism is delusional, so also is that of going back to a “nicer” form of industrialism. I suspect the authors of these pieces would agree, but it is a question that they left unclear.

These texts are tools for discussion and the development of analyses among those who want to create projects aimed at the destruction of the present society with its basis in exploitation and domination, those who dream of lives and relationships built on desires freed from the domination of the market and the state. In other

words, for those who are beginning to create the new lucid and revolutionary luddism that the dream of free life demands in this world.

W.L.

The history of modern capitalism opened with a vast insurrection of workers and craftspeople who refused to manufacture shoddy goods and to have no control over the machines and production. It was 1811 in England, and the insurgents were called luddites. Their spontaneous and informal organization, which developed throughout the city and the countryside, extended to all workers without distinction by trade. They passed into history for destroying industrial machinery by beating them with sledgehammers and for the powerful conspiracy of a population that the police could not force to snitch. The “criminals” were everywhere and nowhere thanks to the complicity of unknowns. The army was not sufficient for reestablishing order: some of the rebels required the control of the unions and the blackmail of elections, others required the gallows. The machines destroyed their communities; they destroyed the machines. They wanted to decide for themselves how they would relate together. They were proud of their hands which had not yet been reduced to prostheses of capital.

In this harmful and moribund time, technology not only forces emigration and precariousness, poisons the food and air and connects the masters, their knowledge and their police; it also serves to control the poor, to standardize behavior and to repress revolt as well. Today, like yesterday, it is the center of capitalist dispossession; it reduces human ability and increases competition, uproots the poor and isolates them, spies on the restless, terrorizes the undocumented and denounces the outlaw. The integration it imposes is in reality an accumulation of ghettos.

The time has come again to attack the thousand nodes of our misery and our submission — new hammer blows for a luddism that is even more lucid and radical. Brothers and sisters, the time has come for a new anonymous and seditious solidarity without leaders or mediators. The time has come for a new conspiracy.

There are ever increasing numbers of undesirables in the world. There are too many men and women for whom this society has not provided any role except that of croaking in order to make everyone else function. Dead to the world or to themselves: this is the only way society wants them.

Jobless, they serve to goad anyone who has a job to whatever humiliations in order to tightly hold on to it. Isolated, they serve to make those who are recognized as citizens believe they have a real life in common (between the stamped documents of authority and the market benches). Immigrants, they serve to give the illusion of having roots to anyone who — being proletarian with no offspring left at home — is despised by his own children and left only with her nothingness in the workplace, in the subway and in front of the television. Undocumented, they serve to remind us that wage slavery is not the worst thing — there is forced labor and fear of control that tightens at every patrol. Expelled, they serve to blackmail all the economic refugees of capitalist genocide with the fear of a journey toward misery without return. Prisoners, they serve to threaten all those who no longer want to resign themselves to this miserable existence with the specter of punishment. Extradited as enemies of the state, they serve to make it understood that in the International of power and of exploitation there is no space for the bad example of revolt.

Poor, isolated, everywhere strangers, prisoners, outlaws, bandits: the conditions of these undesirables are increasingly common. Thus, the struggle can make itself common, on the basis of the refusal of a life that is becoming more precarious and artificial every day. Citizen or foreigner, innocent or guilty, undocumented or regularized: the distinctions of state codes don't pertain to us. Why would solidarity have to accept these social boundaries when the poor are continually tossed from one to the other?

Our solidarity is not with the misery, but with the vigor with which men and women do not put up with it.

Chapter 1. The Dream from a Parchment

Beneath the riverbed where history flows, a dream seems to have withstood the wear and tear of time and the implacable succession of generations. Look at the yellow parchment of this renaissance codex; look at these woodprints on the page that takes us back to the youth of a millennium that has scarcely ended. See the asses riding the cardinals and the usual starvelings joyously drowning in food, see the crowns trampled, see the end of the world — or better still — the world turned upside-down. Here is the dream then laid bare, the dream that speaks from an engraving made five hundred years ago: to destroy the world in order to grasp it, to steal it from god in order to make it ours and at last shape it with our own hands. The epochs have given it clothes of ever-changing styles. It was dressed as a peasant during the medieval insurrections and as a *blouson noir* during May 1968 in France, as an Italian worker during the factory occupations and as an English weaver during the times when the first industrial looms were being destroyed with hammer blows. The wish to turn the world upside down has resurfaced every time that the exploited have known how to gather the threads that tie them together, threads that are broken in every epoch and retied through different forms of exploitation. Indeed, these forms are what in some way “organize” the exploited: they are centered at different times in the factories or in the living quarters, in the urban ghettos or in front of the employment office, imposing the confrontation with similar living conditions and similar problems. Let’s stop a moment to unearth our deepest memories and sum-

without being separated from the structures of production, distribution and reproduction of capital.

In fact, the alleged hierarchy between the power of the multinationals and that of the state does not exist, because they are equally part of the single, inorganic power that is waging war on the autonomy of human beings and of life on earth.

One of the characteristics of our time is the increasingly massive migratory flow toward the western metropolises — briefly, the alternations between care taking and closing borders do not have their basis in the alleged benevolence of any government but in the attempt to manage a situation that is increasingly unmanageable while at the same time drawing profit from it. On the one hand it is not possible to hermetically seal the frontier. On the other, a small percentage of immigrants is useful — particularly if they are undocumented and therefore blackmailable — because it represents a good reservoir of cheap labor. But mass lack of documentation creates social turbulence that is barely controllable. The government must navigate between these necessities; the smooth functioning of the economy depends on it.

Thus, as the world market unifies the conditions of exploitation without eliminating competition among capitalists, in the same way a multi-state power exists that coordinates the projects of domination without canceling political and military competition between particular governments. Financial and economic agreements, laws on the flexibility of labor, the role of the unions, coordination of the military and the police, the ecological management of pollution, the repression of dissent — all this is determined at the international level. The execution of these decisions nevertheless belongs to each government, which has to make itself capable of the task. The body of this hydra is the technobureaucratic structure. The requirements of the market are not only combined with those of social control, but use the same “networks”. For example, banking, insurance, medical and police systems continually exchange their data. The omnipresence of magnetic threads brings about a generalized record of tastes, purchases, movements, habits. Everything under the eyes of increasingly widespread telecameras and among cellular phones that mimic the virtual and recorded version of human communication that is not there. Neoliberalism or not, the intervention of the state on the territory and in our lives is increasingly far-reaching

mon stories of our fathers. The factory in the haze or the sweat in the fields burnt by the sun, the torment of a colonial occupation that robs you of the fruits of the earth or the increasingly frantic rhythm of a haste that in whatever “communist” state promises a tomorrow that never comes to liberate you from exploitation. With each of these images from our past we can associate the different ways of standing together that the exploited used and, thus, the concrete bases of the various struggles that have striven to turn the world upside down and do away with exploitation.

An unrecognizable planet

If we read the history of the past thirty years carefully, we can single out a line of development, a series of modifications that have shaken the planet up. This new situation is commonly called “globalization”. It is not a matter of an event that is definitively accomplished, but of changes that are still in course — with different rhythms and peculiarities for every single country — and that leave us the space to advance a few predictions. First, however, let’s immediately avoid a commonplace about “globalization”. The tendency of capitalism to seek out markets to conquer and a work force at the lowest cost on a planetary scale has always been present; it is certainly not an innovation. The tools for doing this have changed; thanks to the development of technology, capital can realize this tendency with rhythms and consequences unthinkable up until a few years ago. Therefore there is no point of rupture between the old capitalism and the modern form, nor has there ever been a “good” capitalism developed on a prevailingly national basis to which we could return — as so many adversaries of neoliberalism believe. From 1973 — the year that conventionally marks the beginning of the “information age” — up to now, capital has not changed its nature in the least; it has not become more “vicious”. It is simply better armed, more capable of rendering the planet unrecognizable.

For convenience, we will attempt to examine this process through the processes that have happened in three geographical areas: the former colonial countries, the countries of eastern Europe that have barely ceased to be so-called communist regimes and those of the west.

The unwanted children of capital

As is well known, the old colonies did not cut off relations with the colonizers at all when they gained their independence. Rather, in most cases, after difficult beginnings, they modernized them. If the primary aim of the old colonial exploitation was to corner raw materials at low cost that could then be worked in the west, from a certain time forward entire stages of production came to be set up in poorer countries, capitalizing on the extremely low labor costs. So low as to cover the expenses of transport of the raw materials, machinery and finished products as well as the costs of financing the local regimes that are responsible for public order and the regulation of production. For many years, western capital has invaded these lands, deeply changing their social fabric. The old peasant structures have been destroyed, community relations cut off, women proletarianized in order to make space for industrialization. Just as in Europe in the 19th century, an immense quantity of labor power that was torn from the land has found itself wandering the shantytowns in search of work. In spite of its immensity, this situation was able to achieve a stability of its own for as long as the manufacturing industries could absorb a consistent part of this labor power. But at a certain point, these industries began to close one by one. Something had changed to the north: the western labor force was competitive with those in the southern part of the world again. So many industries closed, but these new proletarians remain, so many of no use to the world economy.

demolition of the barriers of time and space — the essential condition for the new form of capitalist domination — is prearranged by state structures that place territories, funds and research at its disposal. The possibility of making merchandise travel increasingly quickly, for example, comes from the development of networks of highways, the High Speed Railroad, the system of ports and airports: without these structures, organized by the state, “globalization” would not even be thinkable. Similarly, information networks are nothing other than a new utilization of old telephone cables: every innovation in this sector (communications via satellite, fiber optics, etc.) is taken care of once again by state structures. This is how the other fundamental necessity of the globalized economy is satisfied, the possibility of making data and capital travel in tiny instants. In the realm of research, of the continuous modernization of technology, the state plays a central role as well. From the nuclear to the cybernetic, from the study of new materials to genetic engineering, from electronics to telecommunications, the development of technical power is bound to the merger of the industrial and scientific apparatus with that of the military.

As we all know, from time to time capital needs to restructure itself, which is to say to change the systems, the rhythms, the qualifications and therefore the relations among workers. Often these changes are so extreme (dismissal in mass, infernal rhythms, drastic reductions in guarantees) as to put social stability in crisis and to require forced interventions of a political sort. Not only are the rages against fictitious enemies (those of “different” religions or ethnicities for example) managed in this way, but the economy succeeds in revitalizing itself: the militarization of labor, the orders for arms and the lowering of wages cause the remainder of the old industrial system to yield the maximum, while the generalized destruction makes room for a modern productive apparatus and for foreign investments. For the undesirables — the restless and superfluous exploited — the social intervention of the state becomes more efficient: extermination.

Chapter 5. A Two-Headed Hydra

There are already many among the radical democrats and the “people of the left” who attribute a purely decorative role to the state in the decisions made over our skins. In substance, a world hierarchy is outlined that sees the great financial and multinational powers at the peak and on the lower steps the individual national states that increasingly become mere aides, executors of final decisions. This leads to an illusion that is having the worst consequences. Indeed, many are trying to impose a reformist and, in some ways, nostalgic direction on the struggles that are developing throughout the planet against specific aspects of “globalization”: the defense of “good” old national capitalism and, correspondingly, the defense of the old model of state intervention in the economy. However, nobody notices that that the ultra-liberal theory so much in fashion in these times and the Keynesian model in fashion until a few years ago simply propose two different ways of organizing exploitation.

Of course, it cannot be denied that the actual state of things all of our lives is determined as a function of “global” economic necessity, but this does not mean that politics has ceased to be harmful. To think of the state as already being a fictitious entity or exclusively as the regulator of exploitation and of social conflicts is at least limited. It is a capitalist among capitalists, and among these it fulfills vital functions for all the others. Nonetheless, its bureaucracy, bound but not subordinated to the cadres of enterprise, aims above all to reproduce its own power. The state, in preparing the terrain for capital, develops its own at the same time. The progressive

To the east, the situation is no better. The so-called communist regimes have left a desert behind them. The productive apparatus — enormous and obsolete — have remained as an inheritance to the old local bureaucrats and to western capital. Thus, the children and grandchildren of those exploited by the regime — who had to suffer the Sunday sermons about “cooks in power” and proletarian internationalism — have found themselves unemployed. As we know, all industrial restructuring requires dismissal. Just as they did in the former colonies, the western countries have trimmed back the zones of economic and political influence in the territories of the deceased Warsaw Pact by transferring those parts of production which consume the greatest amount of labor power to them. But it is a drop in the sea and the mass of the poor who have been made useless to the masters remains enormous. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have thought to accelerate this process in a decisive manner in the east as they did in the south through the blackmail of debts.

It is this which causes the long march of these unwanted children of capital, these undesirables, to depart from the south and the east. But those who remain at home are no better off. The social upheavals provoked by such great and sudden changes are often channeled into ethnic and religious discourses — new and increasingly bloody wars are just around the corner. For those who choose the path of emigration as well as for those who remain behind, the only certainty is misery and dispossession. Every regret is vain.

Up until the day before yesterday

Meanwhile, what has happened in the west? Though less brutal, the changes have been parallel to those in the rest of the world. The huge industrial plants — which employed a consistent portion of the poor and determined the appearance of the city, and thus the mentality and the way of living and rebelling of the exploited, for

many years — have disappeared, in part because they were transferred into poorer countries as we have seen, and in part because it has been possible to split them up and to distribute them differently throughout the territory. Through the development of technology, the productive processes have not only been automated, but also rendered more flexible, more amenable to the intrinsic chaos of the market. At one time, capital had need of exploited depositories of knowledge and manual skills necessary for managing a segment of the productive process more or less automatically — that is to say, it needed the exploited who spent their whole life in the same factory making the same thing. This is no longer true. The skills required are increasingly low and interchangeable. There is no longer an accumulation of knowledge. One job is equal to another. The old myth of the “regular position” is replaced by the ideology of flexibility, which is to say, of precariousness and of the erosion of all guarantees: it is necessary to know how to adapt oneself to everything, even to weekly contracts, the underground economy or definitive expulsion from the productive context. These changes are common to the entire west, but have been so fast and so extreme in some areas as to render the total cost of labor competitive with that of the south and east of the world. This is how they have realized, on the one hand, that return of capital that has destabilized the economies of the poorer countries — leading to wars and mass migrations — and, on the other hand, the worsening of the material conditions of life for the western exploited.

The revolt to come

It is clear that, however violent, the change in the west is mitigated in part by the remains of the old welfare state and, above all, by the fact that a good part of the western precarious are children of the old proletarians and therefore benefit indirectly from the old guarantees through their families. However, the passing of one

remains when the party (that is the state-capitalist system) appropriates all of social life?

That is why in these pages on the undesirables, technology is talked about at the same time. A critique of technological progress that abandons the discussion of class seems to us to be just as partial as a critique of precariousness that does not confront the new forms and territories of techno-scientific dispossession.

The division into two worlds that is developing could preclude all feeling for revolt: how can one desire an *other* life when every trace of it has disappeared?

work as in everything else, they are dispossessed of that which is increasingly necessary to the functioning of the social machine: technological knowledge. Thus they are forced into a new misery, that of one who no longer desires a wealth she does not even understand. Technological separation: here is the new Great Wall of China that the exploiters have built in the name of the struggle against the Enemy (pretending that there is an enemy from far away, when on the contrary its aim is the management of work.)

Today the citadel of the party is telematic technology; its Ministry of Truth is the mass media; its dogmas, eternal for the space of one night, all have the sweet ring of uncertainty. From the multinationals to the banking system, from the nuclear industry to the military, the bases of the technobureaucracy are two: energy and information. Whoever controls these controls time and space.

Outside of the masses of technical workers without qualification, there are the possessors of highly specialized knowledge whose numbers decrease daily; but we all share in the consequences of this knowledge — first among them, the impoverishment of ideas and logic. In spite of this, the aim of the technobureaucrats and their journalists is actually to make us feel responsible for the disaster that they produce daily: the *we* that they apply to us without reprieve is an order to unity in abjectness. They invite us to discuss every fictitious problem, they grant us the right to express ourselves, after having deprived us of the means of doing so. Therefore every ideology of democratic participation (combating “exclusion” is the program of the left of capital) is only complicity in the disaster. Just like in 1984, today’s proletarians have a knowledge, memory and language separate from that of the party; it is only on the basis of this separation that they have the right and the duty to participate in the social order. The difference is that in Orwell the non-functionaries are the only one’s to have access to a past — places, objects, songs — not yet obliterated. And this because they still have social bonds, even if *in the shadow of the bombs*. But what

generation will be sufficient for making precariousness the most widespread social condition. Thus we, the children of the industrial world, will find ourselves to be increasingly useless, in the same position, in fact, as the crowds of undesirables that landed on our shores. With the passing of years and the stabilization of this situation all those movements that try to give support to circumscribed portions of the exploited (immigrants, unemployed, precarious, etc.) from the outside will lose meaning. The conditions of exploitation will be similar for all, thus opening the door to truly common struggles wide. Here at last the thread is discovered that unites us all, the exploited of a thousand lands, heirs of such different histories: capital itself has reunited the lost communities of the human species in misery. The life that is sketched out for us on the horizon will be lived commonly under the mark of precariousness. Carefully prepared by the development of exploitation, here are the modern material bases for the ancient dreams of freedom, here is the *site* of the coming revolts.

Chapter 2. Before a New Great Wall of China

The upheavals that have rendered the planet so unrecognizable show a constant: capital follows a two-fold movement. On the one hand, it dismembers every social tissue that puts up resistance to its expansion; on the other hand, it reconstructs relations between individuals according to its requirements. Every economic transformation is always a social transformation as well, since the way in which men and women are exploited modifies their way of standing together and therefore of rebelling. In this sense, profit and social control are two aims of one project of domination.

After having destroyed past communities and their forms of solidarity, capital has begun to dismantle the social unity that it created itself through the industrialization of the masses. This not only in order to outflank the workers resistance that the factory system unintentionally “organized”, but also because the capitalists experienced the necessity of having to resort to a production process in order to make money as a constriction. The enslavement of science to capital and the consequent technological transformations have allowed a new economic-social expansion. Valorization — the transformation of life into commodity — abolishes time and space to an ever greater extent with the aim of freeing itself from any fixed material basis. In this sense virtual reality (so called cyberspace, the global cybernetic web) represents its ideal condition. Once again the movement is two-fold: if valorization eliminates hostile relations in the circulation of information capital and human resources, at the same time it reconstructs social relations under the sign of the virtual (through

Chapter 4. Unity in Abjectness

In *1984* by George Orwell, a book that a half a century of totalitarianism has only confirmed, we find the description of two completely separate cultures inside the society: that of the functionaries of the party and that of the proletariat (as those excluded from the bureaucratic-socialist citadel and its ideology are described). The functionaries have completely different speech, attitudes, values and even consciousness from that of the proletariat. No communication is possible between the two classes. The proletarians do not revolt against the party simply because they don't know its nature or even its concrete localization: one cannot combat something one does not understand or even know. The functionaries systematically forget — a selective amnesia that Orwell calls “doublethink” — the lies on which they base their ideological adherence to power over time and over human beings. The specialization (rather the parcelization and the incessant repetition) of the activities is entirely at the service of the dogmas of the party, which the party presents as the infallible knowledge of historical and social totality. To accomplish this, it needs absolute control of the past with the aim of governing the future.

If one changes a few names, one will see that this class division, based on a clear cultural separation, represents the precise tendency of the society in which we live. Today the functionaries of the party are the technobureaucrats of the economic-administrative machine on which the industrial apparatus, scientific and technological research, and political, media and military power are based. The Orwellian proletarians are the exploited lightened — by capital — of those baleful illusions that were the class programs. Precarious in

gle can be separated from any other, because each manifestation of power is deeply connected to all the others. It is certainly important to close the detention centers, but to demand it from the states merely means to push them to find more efficient and less visible forms of control and repression. Besides understanding these centers as mere physical structures means to hide all those arteries that permit their existence: from the Red Cross that co-manages them to the firms that build them to the contractors for food supplies; all these *are* the temporary detention centers; all these are the murderers as well.

simulacra of human relations and electronic narcotics). All this presupposes a process that is forming a “new human” in a position to adapt itself to conditions of increasingly artificialized life. From the moment in which the economy is extended to all social relationships, incorporating the entire living process of the human species, its ultimate utopia could only be the pure circulation of value that valorizes itself: money that produces money. Correspondingly, after having extended itself to all social space, the final frontier of capital, its last territory of conquest, can only be its enemy *par excellence*: the human body. Hence, the development of bio-technology and of genetic engineering. Without going into the merit of particular aspects of this war on the living here, it is important to underscore the fundamental role of technology. By technology, we do not mean “the rational discourse on technique” in a general way, nor each mechanical extension of human capabilities. Retracing the very history of the use of the concept, it seems more accurate to define it as the application of the advanced techniques of industrial production to the mass in the moment that scientific research based itself upon the military apparatus (the 1940’s). It’s a question of that process which, beginning with the nuclear and aeronautics industries and passing through research on plastic materials, antibiotics and genetics, has arrived at electronics, informatics and cybernetics. The industrial applications of the most modern techniques proceed at the same rate as the specialized knowledge in molecular biology, chemistry, physics, etc and the ideology of progress by which they are justified. This process that began during World War 2 is inseparable from the power struggle between states, the true organizers of *industrial society*. The development of a knowledge and technics that are increasingly uncontrollable builds a wall that grows higher every day between the producer and the object he manufactures, between the machine and her ability to control it. This deprives the producer at the same time of all material autonomy and of the awareness of a possible expropriation (in order to rend the technical and productive tools from the bosses for their free and re-

ciprocal use). One finds the source of our precarious and artificial lives in this double dispossession and not in “neoliberal injustice”. If capital has diffused itself throughout the entire territory; if the expropriation of its specialized techniques is impossible (since they are unusable from a revolutionary, or even just a human, point of view); if every productive center (the Factory) to which we could oppose a central organization like a party or union has disappeared with its historical subject – then nothing remains except the proletarian weapon *par excellence*: sabotage. Nothing remains except the anonymous and generalized attack against the structures of production, information, control and repression. Only in this way can one stand against the double movement of capital, obstructing the brutal atomization of individuals and at the same time impeding the construction of the “new human” of cybernetics, before the social walls that will have to accommodate it are realized.

Chapter 3. The Name of the Assassins

From the time they first opened, a long series of revolts has characterized life at the temporary holding centers for undocumented immigrants. Foreigners awaiting expulsion are enclosed in these structures in inhuman living conditions. It is difficult to speak of these centers without taking the risk of falling into the pitiful chapter that is so much in vogue among the aid organizations – more or less governmental, it matters little – that are so expert in the utilization of blood, particularly after so many long lists of the dead killed during these revolts. We are not interested in inviting you to the commotion or the collective petitions for the closure of these jails. The death of these foreigners stands along side the murder of millions of others among the exploited, men and women who are killed by wars, by work, by the destruction of territory, by prison, or more quickly by the bullet from a cop’s gun. We no longer believe anyone who tells us that it’s a question of incidents far away or of bloody abuse: it is business as usual; all the victims of this global slaughterhouse can be laid to the account of capital and the state. As opposed to boorish pietism, to christian aperitifs composed of tears, to those who would want the immigrants out of the “gulag” as long as they remain peaceful but in jail if guilty, to those who would want a world more or less like this one but a bit more “humane”, to those who dream of a less bloody capitalism or to those who exploit these episodes in order to enlarge their revolutionary clique – in short, as opposed to anyone who preaches solidarity in oppression, we prefer to propose complicity in revolt. No strug-