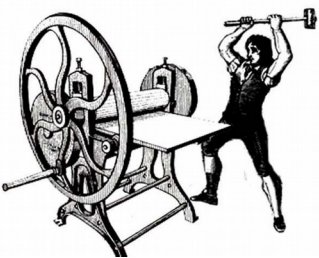


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**Self-  
management  
of misery**

**or the  
series of  
self-  
manage  
ment**

**Terra Cremada  
2012**

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A critical look at co-ops, worker-owned and collective businesses, ethical banking, the entrepreneurial spirit, competition, and “independent” contract work and the limitations of the concept and practice of self-management in the context of the totalitarian logic of capitalist society.

- [1.](#) Patriarchy and capitalism go hand in hand and therefore an anti-capitalism that proposes an overcoming of capitalism only with regard to its economic aspect—or any other partial aspect—is not a complete anti-capitalism. The same is true of racism, homophobia, etc. Capitalism has fed on all of these forms of domination in order to thus be able to thrive, and would not have been able to get this far without their help.
- [2.](#) We refer the reader to the web page of several Madrid comrades who are leading a protest movement against the child centers that are euphemistically known as Centers for the Protection of Childhood and Adolescence: <http://www.centrosdemenores.com/?Campan>, and who have targeted Triodos-Bank. We would not devote so much attention to this kind of bank if not for the fact that they have increased their customer base exponentially as a result of the occupations of the squares and plazas throughout the country.
- [3.](#) With respect to this issue, and taking into account the fact that this is a thorny question regarding which each of us has his own particular perspective, we refer the reader to the compilation of data put together by the comrades who refuse to submit to garnishments and bank account seizures: <http://guinardo.org/documents/manuales-antirepressius/>
- [4.](#) One of the most well known cases is that of Amancio Ortega, the biggest shareholder of Inditex (Zara, Massimo Dutti, Pull & Bear, Bershka, etc.). He is the perfect example of social mobility: from working for 14 years in a clothing store to being the fifth richest person in the world, according to *Forbes Magazine*. What his class origins do not reveal is that fact that, regardless of how many people can pass from one class to another, the conditions that make such relations possible will always require the existence of two well-defined classes.
- [5.](#) Boooooom!
- [6.](#) Toyotism was the manufacturing system that replaced Taylorism and Fordism in assembly line production, favoring, among other things, the identification of the workers with the interests of the enterprise.
- [7.](#) We recommend the documentaries of Joaquím Jordà, of l’Escola de Barcelona, “Numax Presenta” and “20 Years Is Nothing”, concerning the process of occupying a factory in the eighties by some of the factory’s own workers.
- [8.](#) We recommend the articles that appeared in both the *Cuadernos de Negación* and the journal *Ruptura* regarding social classes. You may find both articles at the following links: <http://gruporuptura.wordpress.com/2010/> and also at <http://cuadernosdenegacion.blogspot.com>

fact that they speak in their texts about the need for an integral response, this response is only manufactured from a mass of partial factors. We shall not address the issue here of these two projects but we would like to call attention to the most important aspect that relates to what we are discussing. No matter how carefully we search their writings, we have not found anything about the inevitable conflict with those who defend capitalism, and this is disturbing. Perhaps they do not address this issue because they think that as long as we are engaged in a creative process, one involved in the generation of a counter-power, the state will not repress us. In this case, these projects will collapse, shocked and in a state of disbelief, as soon as, within or without the confines of the law, all hell breaks loose everywhere. Perhaps they do not speak of the possible repression, and of the necessary preparation for conflict, because they have made a strategic decision not to speak of it. Perhaps they think that they should not scare away people who might be interested in their ideas with paranoid ideas about a future repression; maybe if we take a look around us we see that the repression is always inflicted where the struggle is taking place; maybe if we do not try to deceive people, when our project faces problems we will be prepared to face them.

When we are trying to find ways that are not based on capitalist assumptions or even ones that try to be contrary to capitalist assumptions, we must take into account the fact that capitalism is

totalitarian. There is no “outside” and this implies that anyone who defends it will try to prevent anything that could endanger it. Thus, the historic debate carried on in the revolutionary movement between the constructive and the destructive process cannot be prejudiced in favor of either one of these alleged opposites. Any attempt to create a new society parallel to the existing society will encounter, from the very start, the inertia of operating with exploitative and oppressive values even though they may be in an unconscious form and, later, the direct opposition of the defenders of the status quo. Any attempt to destroy the existing society, if it does not possess the basic infrastructures needed for this combat and the minimal resources to socially survive it, is doomed to failure. The necessary dialectical relation between construction and destruction must be inscribed in our revolutionary praxis if we really want to put an end to all domination. We construct by preparing ourselves for the confrontation; we fight in order to create openings for construction. Although it may seem rather obvious: we cannot live without capitalism as long as we have not put an end to it.

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Translated from the Spanish original in March 2013.

**Source:**

[http://terracremada.pimienta.org/autogesti%C3%B3\\_cas.html](http://terracremada.pimienta.org/autogesti%C3%B3_cas.html)

## Self-management of Misery or the Miseries of Self-management

In the previous issue of *Terra Cremada* we spoke of the overcoming of democracy as the overcoming of the current form of government and of the deception upon which the separation between politics, economics and life is based. Today we would like to focus on the implications of separating the economy—the way we satisfy our needs—from the other relations that nourish capitalism. A separation that implies that the capitalist system can reinvent itself while simultaneously undermining our struggle to do away with work and private property. We wrote this article not for the purpose of setting forth a serialized manual on how to overcome these biases—since we ourselves would therefore fall victim to what we are criticizing—but because we ultimately see how, in the same way that we already discussed in the critique of democracy, by not having enough words, speeches or—above all—practices that could overcome the current way of life and how we relate to one another, we can end up clinging to them and reaffirming the miseries we to which capitalism condemns us. If we call attention to this it is because we are concerned that many of the initiatives or projects that claim to be moving away from capitalism succumb to the illusion that we can live without capitalism without destroying it: we can contemplate a world without capitalism, but the latter, with its global and expansion-oriented essence, and does not allow the existence of an outside or a marginal place.

We would also like to make it clear right from the start that it is not our intention to discredit any individual or collective initiatives engaged in by those who, like ourselves, must search for a way to survive in the least painful and most passionate way possible; what we want to point out is that these escapes are not really escapes at all, but ways of existing within our misery. We do not claim to teach lessons about where our energies must end up and where they will not, but we ask ourselves why we have not yet been able to create collective and individual practices and imaginations that would impel towards the creation of really communitarian projects to provide for our needs and desires without harming other people, and without these activities serving a merely palliative purpose. We are addressing those who, like us, have decided not to settle on one fixed point towards which we must aim, but have instead opted for ways of doing things that can lead us to construct relational processes that are increasingly based on the community. We are addressing those who see that, for now, we are adjusted or adapted to the misery of having to work because of the absence of any prospect for a revolution in the near future ... or is that the actual cause of the fact that there is no perspective for revolutionary overcoming?



*We have no objection to the fact that some comrades try to live the way they want and try to make the best of the circumstances in which they find themselves. But we object when lifestyles, which can only be nothing more than adaptations to the current system, seek to present themselves as anarchist or, worse still, as a means to transform society without having to resort to revolution.*

(Errico Malatesta)

## **The market logic that pervades (almost) everything**

No, capitalism does not go on just because there are some big magnates who rule the world, no, far from it. Capitalism survives and reproduces itself because our way of relating to the world—and therefore our relations with each other as well—is almost entirely capitalist.<sup>1</sup> By this we mean that in the banality of our everyday lives we reproduce certain dynamics that make it hard for us to see and experience anything beyond the relations of domination and the commodification of human relations. Sometimes it is only because we do not have enough money for the initial capital investment that we do not become successful entrepreneurs, but there are small gestures immersed in our everyday lives that show just how much the logic of the commodity guides our decisions. The idea that capitalism is something outside us is to underestimate it and furthermore lowers our guard just when the time to fight it arrives. The logic of capitalism—individualism, private

property, speculation, domination over others, etc.—is embedded within us and makes it hard for us to relate with one another on the basis of our common needs and thus gives rise to the relation with the other on the basis of what he can do for us. It must be pointed out that this does not mean that the hegemony of capital is total—we will not be the ones to tell you about its perfection as a system. The community tendency, consubstantial with the human being, always reappears in the fracture zones of this society; we have all seen and enjoyed at one time or another the solidarity of equals, functioning without laws, giving without expecting anything in return, etc. It is the real movement that annuls and seeks to overcome the current state of affairs.

## **The mirage of alternative institutions**

Ethical banking, cooperatives, barter networks: words that echo and resound to an increasing degree in our neighborhood assemblies that form the basis for the occupations of the squares throughout Spain—the so-called 15M Movement—whenever anyone mentions possible ways to escape from capitalism. The mirage of alternative institutions can cause us to lose sight of the main problem, to bewilder us in the murky world of choosing the product that we like the most, the way we would most like to be exploited, the ethic that is always most advantageous for us whenever we participate in speculation and usury, the sauce in which we have decided we should cook whenever it does not occur

to capitalism, that is, the way that leads to the destruction of the relations that uphold it as well as those that reproduce it. And this, whether we like it or not, implies conflict, confrontation and violence.

It could be that if one hears these kinds of ideas in our circles it is because there are still those who believe that capitalism is only an unjust economic system that profits a handful of people to the detriment of the rest. This reformist version will be organized for the purpose of achieving certain institutional and legislative changes that will lead to a more equitable division of the wealth that is produced by the vast majority. The “revolutionary” version would want to overthrow the parasitic minority and organize, on that basis, the economy in a collective and egalitarian way. Both versions believe that the change is brought about by those who make the decisions and who decide how the economy is managed. Both versions are mistaken. Capitalism is not a very small group of rich people, this group exists and they are the ones with the most privileges in this social form, but they are only one part of the problem. Nor is capitalism just a way of organizing the economy despite the fact that its pillars are founded on who, how and what is produced in this society. But the form assumed by this system today has escaped from the narrow bounds of the world of labor in order to extend to the rest of the social aspects that previously maintained a certain degree of independence. Now the generation of capital is not limited to production, but efforts are underway to

make it grow endlessly on the basis of the commodification of basic resources—water, productive land, etc.; from the exploitation of the Earth, plants and the other animals; and from everything that produces the social bond—communications, feelings, knowledge, etc.

Under this state of affairs, we see that capitalism is a social relation that permeates all the aspects that affect us as human beings and which it falsely attempts to present as separate compartments: economics, politics, culture, etc. If we do not confront them in all their forms, capitalism will re-arise. If we do not see that it is not just a relation that is established between the powerful classes and the rest of us but instead that it is a relation that we reproduce among ourselves, horizontally, capitalism will return again once we have thrown the capitalists out of power. We thus see that, if what we are fighting for is a form of society that is not based on either exploitation or oppression, this will inevitably condition the way that every aspect of this society is managed. We do not need specialized institutions or specialists to assume responsibility for the economy or politics, among other things, since they form part of a whole that is life, and it is as a whole that we must address it.

The theoretical balancing acts undertaken by projects like the Integral Catalan Cooperative or Inclusive Democracy do not resolve the contradiction between the generic problem and partial solutions that we have been criticizing here. Despite the

## **That Accursed Habit of Calling Things by Their Names**<sup>8</sup>

We are workers, whether we like it or not. It is not a question of ethics, morality or politics, or because we want to cling to words that some have already abandoned. We are workers due to an objective issue: in the capitalist world we are condemned to have to pass through the circuit of labor in order to survive. We are disinherited, and the fact that you may have a car—or in some cases a piece of land—does not free us of this scourge. Whether we are looking for work or whether we are doing everything in our power to avoid it, whether we base our economy on expropriation or asking for handouts from our mothers or from the state in the form of subsidies or grants, our condition is that of being exploited. And only the destruction of work and the relations that derive from it will be able to situate us in a new context. If we say this it is not because we like to portray ourselves as victims or because we do not want to see that there are people who suffer much more than we do from capitalist relations of production and reproduction. If we say this it is because, even if at times we forget this, we can succumb to the widespread illusion that it is possible to escape from our proletarian condition and transform ourselves into people who are free from capitalist relations without having to pass through the process of an open war against capital, once we have set up our business, once we are working for ourselves. And that is false.

By saying this we do not intend to succumb to the workerist absurdity of the mythologization of the industrial subject; nothing could be more alien to our purposes. Just because we are workers does not mean that we are only workers or much less that we want to remain that way. What we are saying is that, although we may be ridden with diverse dominations, class society is still more firmly entrenched than ever.

### ***Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum***

In an era of defeat like this one, practically without any integral political reference point, for us to publish a text that is critical of the attempts engaged in by many people to create an alternative may be discouraging. It is not a question of casting aspersions on the things other people are doing, we know that, but we do not want to look the other way while, with emancipatory intentions, we might be constructing obstacles for the anti-capitalist struggle.

What is clear, then, is that we are not criticizing those who—just like us—engage in contradictory activities, but the fact that they are trying to convince people that it is possible to abolish capitalism while simultaneously avoiding any confrontation with those who defend it. The fact that everyone is trying to do what they think is necessary, what they think is advisable, which does not stop our minds from creating and building, but that no one is trying to convince everyone else that the struggle can be conducted in any other way than one that puts an end

to us to attack either private property or the privileges of those who rule over us because ... where would we prefer to deposit our money, where would we prefer to work? If we do not ask ourselves the right questions we can end up swallowing the hook and to forget the fact that what is necessary is to continue fighting against money, against work and against all oppression.

### **With high consumption**

Capitalism, in its logic of market expansion, offers markets and products for those who can afford them. The ethical, ecological, and “organic” industries that respect the environment, etc., are the result of the logical expansion of capital. If this market has appeared it is because it can generate more capital. If this market is successful it is because there are people who spend their money on it. We are not supporting any kind of special boycott of such products, but it is evident that the shift towards consumption of this kind does not lead to any meaningful transformation of the prevailing social relations. And here is the crux of the problem: how many people really believe that buying this or that product, or shopping at this or that store, is one more battleground of anti-capitalism? Or, worse yet, how many people really believe that this is the road that leads to social transformation? We can choose to eat more nutritious foods or make purchases that will not enrich the four major brands but we cannot overlook the fact that under capitalism consumption is always the reproduction of capital.

## **Ethical Banking or Esthetic Banking?**

How does a bank become ethical, or, more correctly, to what ethics does an ethical bank respond if not to an ethics of banking? And to what logic does a bank displaying such characteristics respond, if not that of speculation? Whether our money is used to speculate on macrobiotic products instead of the nuclear industry does not matter to the bank as long as both lead to profits for these financial enterprises—one need only consider the case of Triodos Bank and O’Belen.<sup>2</sup> And now, are we capable of imagining depositing our money in some safe place without it having to pass through the hands of a bank? Yes, we know that the best course of all would be to do away with money and exchange in the satisfaction of our needs but most people continue to cash their checks at the end of the month, depositing and withdrawing their pay in a bank account and cashing their wage checks, loans or welfare checks by means of this or that banking institution. To think that most of us should hide our money under the floorboards would be quite unrealistic on our part, despite the fact that it is interesting that in our neighborhoods and homes we are beginning to see our comrades who, although to begin with, know it is not very safe to leave money in the form of cash in their houses, do not think that the idea of leaving it in a bank provides any more guarantees—maybe even fewer. If we draw up a balance sheet of all the problems, contradictions and headaches associated with having money

in a bank, we could easily conclude that it would be better to keep our money away from bank speculation. The banks work with approximately 10% of the money they say they have, the rest is fictitious. We do not have to mention the case of the Argentine Playpen to understand just how safe it is to expect the money we tranquilly deposit in a bank will be returned to us when we want it: such cases are in evidence much closer to us, in the town of Aldea, just this past December. It is also important to recall the administrative sanctions and garnishments because of the increasing intensity of the low intensity repression which seeks to suffocate us economically and, therefore, insolvency is presented as one of the most effective tools in the first stages. Many of us have already seen that not having money in the bank is not just a question of ethics but of security as well.<sup>3</sup>

So what should we do with our money? Of course, most of us do not have much of a problem with hiding our meager day-to-day expense money under the floorboards of our house. But what we are worried about is where we will get the money for more extensive projects, so we might have to think about putting aside in advance a part of the money that we may really be able to earn. Whether we do so by announcing the project in our collectives and seeking economic assistance from the other members or by assuming that we cannot undertake our project unless we use credit and all that credit implies.

## **False Community of the Commodity**

*The power of money is to connect those who are unconnected, to link strangers as strangers and thus, by making everything equivalent, to put everything into circulation. The cost of money's capacity to connect everything is the superficiality of the connection, where deception is the rule.*

“The Coming Insurrection”, The Invisible Committee

Many people may speak of alternative economies, referring to economies of solidarity or barter networks, time banks and markets based on mutual favors, but all this does is to extend the tentacles of commodity logic and its foundations: the exchange of private property. For many of our comrades the basis of capitalism is money; this is not true, however. Exchange is the basis upon which the market stands and its foundation is not the creation of a relation between persons, but between persons and things: what do you possess?; what do you have to offer?; what do you want? Instead of: what do you need?; or, what can I offer you? As opposed to exchange, we propose reciprocity. While exchange takes place between isolated persons who relate to one another on the basis of what they possess—the more you have, the more you are worth—reciprocity takes place in the relation of those who have something in common. Reciprocity allows the construction of collective projects since when you give something, you do so unconditionally, without expecting anything in exchange and, in

Obviously, reality is not black and white and, since the class struggle partakes of the contradictions established by this reality, we cannot reject “self-management” in the abstract. Despite the fact that self-management is not the alternative to capitalism, it could help us to find a way to abolish capitalism, since the struggle for the collective management of the producers can make us see the concordance of our interests as exploited workers, it can help us to break out of the isolation and the individualism of “every man for himself” and, which is even more important, the experience of self-management of our own space of exploitation can permit us to become aware of that fact that this is no solution for exploitation in and of itself. It is not necessary to individually experience these processes in order to become conscious of this counterrevolutionary trap, but certainly at a collective level some people will opt for the formula of self-management as long as they do not realize that the satisfaction of the needs of all of society will not be achieved by changing the forms of those who manage it but by way of a profound transformation of the totality of social relations.

If this debate seems too abstract, let us focus on what could happen to us if we allow ourselves to be hypnotized by the term, self-management. In the summer of 2011, some of us were surprised by the announcement of the closure of the Dos de Mayo Hospital. On the first day of the demonstrations opposing its closure we were only a handful of people whose mouths watered when we first heard some

of the hospital workers talk about taking over the hospital. But just what does it mean to run a hospital under self-management? A hospital has only three ways of paying for its operations: government subsidies, private funding on the part of its partners or customers, or by way of taxes with a management of its capital by a private firm. If we study the question carefully—and in the end it seems that this is what is happening—what is meant when we hear talk of self-management by the workers is a process of privatization in which, as we have pointed out throughout this text, an enterprise that is not profitable in its classic form becomes profitable by assuming the form of a workers cooperative. In this way, the state kills two birds with one stone: on the one hand it avoids a labor conflict when it is cutting the budget, by shifting the activity of the workers towards efforts to save their jobs; and, on the other hand, it preserves the services that it once offered and avoids angering the users of the service. After a while, if it was not immediately implemented ... the co-pay will be introduced in this kind of experiment and it will not be destined for the hands of the Catalan Department of Health but for the hospital workers in the name of solidarity with a supposedly indispensable service.



provokes a feeling of participation in the project of the employer. In the final accounting, what this involves is a process parallel to the one that utilizes the democratic management advocated by the civil society movement. Thanks to collaboration with the enterprise's project—which is also the case for the Barcelona company—strikes and demands for higher wages are avoided, and deteriorating working conditions are justified by saving the project. Cooperatives or independent work, in any case, help the expansive project of the big capitalist enterprise to proceed more smoothly. What would otherwise be unthinkable, that we should be our own businesses, we end up taking it for granted.

### **The Myth of Factory Occupations and the Phantom of “Argentinitis”**

How many of us have heard arguments in favor of workers self-management based on the experience of the factory occupations in Argentina (Zanón, for example), or the occupations in the seventies and eighties in Spain (Numax<sup>7</sup>), or during the—relative—decolonization period in Algeria? The occupied factories were factories that had been abandoned by the capitalists precisely because they were not profitable. The experience of Argentina shows us that these factories were able to become profitable for the market again by becoming competitive at the price of self-exploitation and operating within the very same entrepreneurial logic that prevailed before

the factories were occupied. By calling attention to the mythological nature of these occupations of the workplace we do not intend to discredit the impulse that lies behind them: the people could keep their jobs in order to survive, a collective process was set in motion that could create a common project and, if any profits were forthcoming, they could be socialized.

In these cases, we can see that the fact that conflicts took place after these occupations, if the managers of the enterprise quit or were dismissed, it was not because of pressure from the workers but for other reasons—economic recession, economic crimes, etc. Thus, the enterprise under the control of the workers actually means that the latter are under the control of the enterprise, that is, that the logic of competition will continue to regulate production, regardless of who manages production. If self-management causes our material conditions to improve, then we may support this process. If not, all that remains to the field of critique is how to manage capital and therefore to argue that an egalitarian capitalism can exist if the latter is managed correctly. That is, if the expropriation of the capitalist is carried out in order to redirect production towards the satisfaction of needs, then it is self-management that we will defend. Otherwise, if it is a matter of going back to work, producing in the same way and selling commodities, only now without the direction of the employer, then this is self-exploitation.

some cases, without even knowing the recipient; all you know is that the recipient is a member of a community that is based on these kinds of relations. Simply expressed, what we want to point out is that if there is a market there will be a bond but community does not have to exist, and it may even hinder it.

### **Self-managed Exploitation; Autonomous Work Groups and Cooperatives**

*... depending on the requirements of the market, labour is either employed or thrown back into the street. In other words, use is made of all methods that enable an enterprise to stand up against its competitors in the market. The workers forming a co-operative in the field of production are thus faced with the contradictory necessity of governing themselves with the utmost absolutism. They are obliged to take toward themselves the role of capitalist entrepreneur – a contradiction that accounts for the usual failure of production co-operatives which either become pure capitalist enterprises or, if the workers' interests continue to predominate, end by dissolving.*

“Reform or Revolution”, Rosa Luxemburg

To set up a business and expect it to profitable is inscribed within the logic of competition. This applies whether you set up your business by yourself or if you do so with four friends, that is, whether you do so independently or you create a cooperative. If a business is not

competitive, it dies. The fraud that they tried to get us to believe in the era of capitalist reconstruction after the Second World War—in the fifties in Europe and in Spain during the democratic transition—was the announcement that, overnight, we would be able to cease to be workers in order to become entrepreneurs solely because we would have freed ourselves of the exploitation of an employer, without taking into account the fact that we would also be subject to the exploitation of the market, to competition. Capitalism—due to the fierce workers struggles of the sixties and seventies—provided an opportunity to some workers to try to escape from their class, provided that they prove that they can offer profits to the enterprise and competitiveness on the market on the basis of exploiting themselves, third persons or consumers. Over the course of this development, many were those who believed this lie that was supported by a handful of examples that helped to nourish this fiction.<sup>4</sup> It is in fact true, however, that most of those who set up their own businesses have done so in exchange not just for selling their physical labor power but also their mental health as well as that of their comrades at work and their friends and families.

Entrepreneurial logic is inserted within the mentality of the independent worker, leading him, in most cases, to hire labor when there are enough profits and to lay off employees when he no longer needs them or when their labor no longer generates profits. This is when he proffers the justification of his miseries, recalling how hard he had to struggle to build the

company—nor can we say that in many cases this was not true. What happens is the same thing as in any other business: one socializes the losses and privatizes the profits. If we do not want to be exploiters or to push ourselves to the limit then, quite simply, our business will not succeed ... among other reasons, because it will not be competitive.

### **The proletariat without enemies**

How many people are aware of the fact that we were deceived back in the eighties when they made us believe that if we set up our own businesses we would no longer be exploited by a boss? From now on I will be my own boss! And they could not have been more wrong. The fact that many people decided to go independent provoked the semblance of an absence of enemies. The independent worker could not accuse an abstract entity like the market for his misfortunes, unlike the classical worker who could accuse the person who hired and exploited him. In this absence of external responsibility, independence can only make one responsible for one's own misfortunes and leads one to fight to make oneself more desirable to the market, that is, to make oneself more competitive. Voila! The miracle of capitalism, to succeed in getting its subjects to decide to exploit themselves.

Independent work has been an indispensable tool for the development of capitalism in our societies of the last few decades. It has made available to big business a wide range of labor power that

is 100% ready to work, at the same time that it has caused the latter to assume responsibility for all the costs of management, organization and social security. The flexibility offered by an independent worker is perfectly adapted to the market's need for labor power.

What has been called the operational externalization of big business in the processes of production, distribution and/or sales of products or services has been nothing else than a cost-cutting measure on the part of the major employers. The market causes these independent workers who in the past were comrades in labor to become instead competitors who fight over the acquisition of contract work for big business; and, obviously, this rivalry means offering the most service for the lowest price, that is, the increase of profits for the capitalists.

Three-fourths of this is true of the cooperatives as well. The logic of the market imbues any enterprise that seeks to be competitive within the market—and if it does not try to be competitive it will not be able to survive—and it is the market that will decide for the enterprise whence its competitiveness and its profitability will be derived: from its workers—in this case they will be the cooperators themselves who will see their pay decrease, as they exploit themselves—from its customers—extracting profits by deceiving them or overcharging for the product—or from the increase of production—exploiting themselves even more with an increase in activity, poisoning the environment, etc.

Similarly, and not to discredit the worthy activities carried out by many comrades in the elaboration of cooperative projects, we would like to point out that we know that many of these projects work, and work well. But they do so thanks to the collective initiative that makes them work, whether in the form of a library, neighborhood centers, distribution centers.... What we are saying here—at the risk of repeating ourselves too often—is that if, in the guise of offering us a service, these projects are intended to put food on the tables of those who run them, sooner or later they will be concerned with their profitability and, thus, they will explode in their hands.<sup>5</sup> For now, many cooperatives manage to keep above the water line thanks to the unconditional support—derived from an ethical stance—of the consumers. Many of the latter can allow themselves the luxury of buying organic products, certified GMO-free, or else the cooperatives pay their workers a high wage at the cost, of course, of a higher price for the product. The fact is that we cannot compete with a business that exploits Indonesian workers by paying them a wage twenty times lower than Spanish workers get. If we want our cooperative to function in accordance with our values—and these values may include, for example, not exploiting ourselves more than we would be exploited in any other business—we will have to wager on the good will of the people who decide to buy our product for twice the price the same product costs in the regular stores ... and this is, in terms of marketing, unsustainable in the long run. If we set up, for example, a

cooperative bookstore with political materials, the project might work. However, if a bookstore like ours is set up in every neighborhood, or if the customers divide their purchases among them and undermine the viability of every bookstore, or else they remain faithful to one or two of them and therefore undermine the viability of the rest. Regardless of the specific outcome, the criteria of the market are incompatible with the ethical stance of the consumers to which these cooperatives cater. So it is clear that we appreciate the efforts and the dedication of those people who take the risk to sacrifice their time and labor in a cooperative so that a few books—or goods—or high quality food—organic—can be within the reach of the population. It could be that without this effort the dissemination of radical critique or the preservation of a kind of agricultural knowledge that is less harmful to the environment would be more difficult; but the question is how far we are willing to go to preserve the economic viability of such projects.

### **Identification with the Enterprise**

Cooperation might be a paradigm that could provide a suitable foundation for Toyotism.<sup>6</sup> In many cooperative processes what is achieved is that, thanks to the solidarity among the workers, the work—which otherwise would never be possible—is effectively undertaken. In most contemporary jobs the governability of the enterprise tends to yield responsibilities to the workers, and this