

Various Authors

Articles from “Machete” #5

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Against the Logic of Work: a revolutionary manifesto intended to be taken lightly

1. Among the Undead

Today, very few people truly live. Very few people experience the vitality of their becoming in the present moment. Very few people reach out to grasp the energy of their desire in order to create that becoming . . .

Instead, they work.

2. Sleepwalking

I may dream of a world through which unique beings gracefully wend their way, every move, every passage through the streets, the gardens, the wilds, a dance, a game, a voyage in an endless adventure. But this daydream itself is belied by reality as my wandering mind is shocked back into my lurching body just in time to avoid crashing into some other distracted sleepwalker. Such a graceless, joyless world, this world of work. Not the world of a dance or an elegant game or a voyage into the unknown, but of bouncing atoms and grinding gears and lock-step marches toward death. Not lives created joyfully in complicity and conflict, with spontaneous intent, but survival acted out habitually, in roles already set, where somnambulists thoughtlessly fall into place, gears in a machine whose purpose eludes them.

But all that really matters is that it works . . .

that *you* work . . .

that *I* work . . .

3. My Revolution

And so my revolution — any anarchist revolution — any revolution that intends to take back life here and now — requires the destruction of work . . . *immediately!*

4. Revolutionary Work?!?

No revolution to date has managed to eradicate work, because even the revolutionaries most hostile to work have failed to imagine a revolution free from its logic. . . . *Working* against work, their efforts are doomed. So it is necessary to know what work is and how its logic operates.

5. The Work Ethic

“Those who do not work shall not eat.” This hellish christian motto sums up the work ethic perfectly. Small-minded and small-hearted, pathetic and miserly, it is the feeble morality of the shopkeeper frightened of the clever thief or daring robber. It is the threat of the police — the slave driver’s whip of our times. . . . And it is easy to reject this self-serving ethic of grasping, narrow-minded bigots. Far more difficult is seeing through to work’s logic, beyond the bigots, to their masters. . . .

6. Undercover Slavery

The logic of work remains hidden, veiled, operating undercover, because it functions through alienated activity. When you and I act out of habit, without thinking for ourselves, repeating the same banal motions, we are sleepwalkers, somnambulists. . . . When you and I sell our activity for a cause we do not know, we are slaves. . . . somnambulant slaves. . . . zombies. . . . This is alienation, where the aims, the goals, the products of our activities are strangers to us. And this is why the logic of work remains well-hidden, operating undercover through the judgments of the work ethic.

7. A Limited Attack

And perhaps this is also why the enemies of work have mostly just attacked the work ethic. In this limited attack, all that is opposed to work is leisure, the time of idleness, of inconsequential activity. The battle is then merely quantitative — a reduction of work-hours, an increase in leisure time — a withering away of work, perhaps even to zerowork. . . . but still within the framework of the world of work and its logic.

8. The Logic of Work

The logic of work can be summed up in this way: All activity of consequence must have a goal, an end. And so every activity is to be judged and valued in terms of its end product. This product takes precedence over the creative process, causing the non-existent future to dominate the present. Immediate satisfaction in the joy of creating has no value, only success or failure count . . . and counting is what value's all about. Winners or losers, but not a free creator in the lot. It should come as no surprise that in the world of this logic, efficiency is valued for itself. Regardless of the end, what works most efficiently to bring it about successfully is what counts . . . penny by penny . . . dollar by dollar . . . And this is why *you* have to work . . . This is why *I* have to work . . . Or be counted among the worthless . . . the zeroes in society's accounting book.

9. The Theft of Life

Always aimed toward ends, final goals, products, life in the present disappears. The aimless, end-less becoming of each unique individual is sacrificed to the goal of production and social reproduction. The flux of interweaving relationships is dammed up and channeled into roles which are nothing more than gears in the social machine. This is alienation, the theft of my activity, the theft of your activity, the theft of my life and of your life. Not even the products we make are ours. Not even the successes are ours. Only the failures, above all, the failure to live . . .

10. Revolution in the Logic of Work

Within work's logic, revolution is a task with an aim . . . a goal . . . to produce the perfectly functioning society. It has a beginning and an end. It succeeds or fails, is won or lost. But always . . . it comes to an end. Within this logic, there is only revolutionary work or revolutionary idleness. Anti-work revolutionaries can embrace the task of activists or militants, defeating themselves from the beginning by working for the end of work . . . Or they can idly wait for an abstract History or an equally abstract "objective" or "essential" revolutionary subject to make the revolution in their place . . . Once again defeating themselves . . . choosing to let their lives slip through their hands waiting for their savior to appear. Failing to escape the logic of work, every revolution to date has failed . . . even the ones

that were victorious . . . *especially* the ones that were victorious. They have failed from the beginning, because within the logic of winners and losers, of success and failure, the revolution has already ceased, because the past has fixed the future, guaranteeing the defeat. And so with their victory these revolutions ended and the “liberated” people . . . went back to work . . .

11. Breaking with the Logic of Work

So why not break completely with the logic of work? Why not conceive of activity that is of consequence, not because of its end product, but because of what it is here and now? Why not embrace *resolute playfulness*? To conceive of revolution in this way is to conceive of it in a way that is fundamentally different, absolutely other than the ways that it has generally been conceived by revolutionaries . . . Revolution not as a task, but as a form of play, as a game, but only in the broadest sense . . . As an exploration, an experiment . . . with no beginning and no end . . . Rather an endless opening out into new explorations, new experiments, new adventures. A kind of alchemy or magic of continual transformation . . . Putting our lives at stake in each moment for the sheer joy of living . . . Here there can be no failure . . . Here there can be no defeat . . . because there is no aim, no goal, no end . . . just the ongoing adventure of conflict and complicity, destruction and creation, that is life lived to the full.

Warning

This past September 24, in the United States, thousands of men and women went to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to protest against the G20 summit, which was devoted to giving new rules to an economic system whose devastation is visible to everyone. Along with truncheons, fire-hoses and rubber bullets, the government presided over by the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize winner used “the Scream”, that is, LRAD — the sonic cannon for dispersing crowds used up to now only in war operations — against the demonstrators,

Has the message gotten through?

In Genoa Italy, in July 2001, hundreds of thousands of women and men converged from all corners of the planet to protest against the Earth’s Masters, each demonstrating their rage in the face of a social organization based on profit and privilege in their own way. The reaction of the state, the Italian state in this instance, was unforgettable: indiscriminate butchery. The demonstrators were beaten bloody in the streets and tortured in the barracks. One of them was shot down on the street in front of the whole world. This past October 7, the Italian justice system absolved the police chief and others responsible for the bloodbath. Two days later, on October 9, the same Italian justice system sentenced ten demonstrators to punishments ranging from six to fifteen years in prison. The state’s lackey’s who break bones and heads are kindly protected; free individuals who break windows are harshly punished.

Has the message gotten through?

This past October 8, in Athens, Greece, the newly elected leftist government ordered a huge raid in the Exarchia neighborhood, which led to the detention of more than eighty people. Exarchia was the initial hotbed of the generalized uprising that broke out last December following the murder of a young student by the police. For some weeks, fires of rage burned throughout Greece, heating up many spirits chilled by the social winter. The first thought of the new leftist government has been to strike at the heart of revolt, launching four hundred officers against it.

Has the message gotten through?

Yes, it has gotten through. Pittsburgh is like Fallujah, Genoa is on the way to Abu Ghraib, Athens is near to Gaza. There is no elsewhere in the one-way world of authority and merchandise. In less than a month, the state sent out its warning several times, clear and unequivocal: *order must reign undisturbed; whoever dares to challenge it will be suppressed without mercy.*

During the Vietnam war, one of the favorite slogans of the anti-militarist movement was *Bring the War Home*. Besides being a parody of the more pacifistic “Bring the boys home”, it also had a precise meaning: the war overseas had divided the country to the point that the moment had come to trigger off a war at home. Today, the institutions have brought the war home. The streets are filling with soldiers, divided between patrols and road blocks.

If we don't want to remain victims or become accomplices of this war of extermination of every form of freedom, the only thing left to us is to take up the challenge.

Abandoning forever the days of politics in order to begin the days of rage

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Personal communication with the translator