Toward a Civilization of Work*

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Abstract: The debate on "the end of work," which has developed during recent years and which has produced a series of excellent books and papers, is not entirely scientific because it deals, to a large extent, with our representation of the future. The diminishing size of the work week, maybe the impossibility of full employment, the individualization of life projects as much as protracted education years and longer post-retirement period are indicators of a basic cultural and social change; nevertheless, none of them is by itself sufficient to characterize it. What they suggest is that a societal type is born, in which work occupies a smaller and smaller part of individual life as a consequence of a rapidly growing labour productivity and in which central values are no longer defined by participation to collective goals but by self-realization or even by consumption in all its forms. Some people go as far as considering our work-oriented civilization as a short intermediary period between societies, in which the main task was to work out their own reproduction, and future societies, in which mass consumption and shows play a central role and are considered as central values by people who consider their "job" only as a way of getting money to buy leisure-time activities.

This type of representation, which is mentioned here in a very rapid and superficial way, is supported by observable facts but is based on interpretations which are far from being demonstrated. It is then necessary to act in a similar way and to introduce different facts and interpretations to defend a different view of social evolution. This is the reason why I decided to give my paper a title which is not provocative but which challenges directly the idea that we are leaving a civilization of work. This paper's title is: Toward a civilization of work.

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Resumé: Le débat sur "la fin du travail," qui s'est développé au cours des dernières années et a donné lieu à une série d'excellents livres et articles, n'est pas complètement scientifique car il à voir, dans une large mesure, avec notre représentation de l'avenir. La semaine de travail, qui va en s'amenuisant, l'impossibilité peut-être du plein emploi, l'individualisation des projets de vie tout comme l'allongement des années de formation et du temps de retraite sont autant d'indicateurs d'un changement culturel et social de base, mais aucun de ces indicateurs ne peut à lui seul caractériser ce changement. Ce qu'ils suggèrent est qu'un type sociétal est né, dans lequel le travail occupe une part de plus en plus faible dans la vie de l'individu, conséquence de la croissance toujours plus grande de la productivité dans le travail et dans laquelle les valeurs centrales ne sont plus définies par la participation à des buts collectifs mais par la réalisation de soi ou même par la consommation sous toutes ses formes. Certains vont même jusqu'a considérer notre civilisation tournée vers le travail comme une courte période intermédiaire entre des sociétés dont la tâche principale était de se reproduire elles-mêmes et des sociétés dans lesquelles la consommation de masse et les spectacles joueront un rôle central et seront même considérés comme des valeurs centrales par ceux qui ne voient dans leur emploi qu'une façon de gagner de l'argent afin d'acheter des activités de loisir.

Ce type de représentation, décrit ici très rapidement et superficiellement, s'appuie sur des faits observables mais donne lieu à des interprétations qui sont loin d'être démontrées. Il faut donc introduire, de façon parallèle, d'autres interprétations qui défendent une vision différente de l'évolution sociale. C'est la raison pour laquelle j'ai décidé de donner à ce texte un titre, qui n'est pas provocateur mais qui combat directement l'idée que nous sortons d'une civilisation du travail. Je l'ai intitulé : Vers une civilisation du travail.

Work on the Increase

The main reason for my objection to the idea of the "end of work" is that it opposes a society of work to a society which could be called a society of leisure, whereas our experience for the last twenty five years has been quite different i.e. the society of production has declined and been taken over by the society of the market or, to use the classical terms, the decline in industrial society in favour of capitalist society. It is no longer production but trade which has been predominant over the past few decades, at least in appearance, since today we are at last beginning to realise that technological changes and innovations have played a role at least as important as the much vaunted globalization. There are always two ways of defining an economic society: the first is formulated in terms of forces of production and the social relations of production. This is the point of view adopted when we speak about industrial society or the class struggle. The other approach focusses on the historical mode of modernisation or economic change. This is how we differentiate societies regulated and transformed by the market, from others whose development is engineered by a national or foreign State, and yet others, directed by a foreign middle class whose actions are backed by a relationship of domination, in particular colonial. It is important to distinguish between industrial society and the capitalist mode of industrialisation. These two are often confused and the expressions: "industrial society" and "capitalist society" have often been considered synonymous. In the same way, there is

often an amalgamation between "working-class movement" and "socialism," whereas the former refers to an actor in the structural conflict of industrial society and the latter to an anti-capitalist model of development and industrialisation. In the post-war period we have been so used to living in an industrial society and even to analysing it as such in opposition to ideologies which refused to recognise the fact of industrialisation, the importance of working methods and organisation in businesses, that we are surprised to find ourselves in a situation in which the opening up of markets has effects which are more visible than the development of modes of production. However we only have to look a little further back in time to understand that by returning to a society which is more capitalistic than industrial, we are closer to 1900 than to 1950. The present theme of globalization is very similar to the analysis made at the beginning of the century, in particular by Hilferding, of the triumph of financial capitalism, and today's crises and crashes have the same effect on us as those of the end of the 19th century had on our great-grandparents. From this observation I draw the conclusion, which I consider important, that we are today the victims, as we were some time ago, of a purely capitalistic vision of society, whereas in the post-war decades, and perhaps already in the 1920's, we accepted a purely industrial vision of society — a society which was however just as capitalistic as the societies of 1900 and 1990 were or are industrial or post-industrial.

It is capitalist society which is really at the opposite end of the scale from the society of work and production rather than the leisure or consumer society, or the society of personal freedom. But capitalist society has already been used with so many different meanings that it has to be briefly defined before we can use it here. What we mean by capitalist is an economy in which the market rejects any form of external regulation, in particular of a political or a religious nature, and endeavours on the other hand to use all the other components of social life — especially "human resources" — for its own ends. Capitalistic development is one of the most important aspects of the disappearance of the central political power, the rising autonomy of social sub-systems, a tendency which many, from Weber onwards, consider to be the core characteristic of modernity. What can be referred to as the European — and in particular, the British, — illusion has been to believe that there is no other possible mode of development than that so well analysed by Polanyi. In fact, the autonomy and the central power of the market have not predominated. They are much less important in those countries which linked the idea of the nation with that of modernity; this is particularly true in instances where there is a link between anti-colonial liberation and economic growth.

The reason why industrial society became so widespread in the post-war period is that at this point most of the world had set up and put into practice integrated plans for national development, in which economic, social and

national objectives were so closely associated that the capitalist spirit, that is the autonomy and predominance of the market economy, was either strictly controlled, or even destroyed as in the communist and in some nationalist countries. There is no doubt that as of the nineteen seventies, the global models run by States along interventionist, planning or incentive lines ran out of steam and we witnessed a rapid opening up of world markets accelerated both by the emergence of new industrial countries and by new communication technologies. But we cannot say that we had moved from an industrial society to a market society since the two terms do not belong to the same category. We should say that societies whose industrial aspect had the upper hand over the capital aspects have been succeeded by societies where the capitalistic elements predominated over the industrial. Hence we can say that this historical phase is in its turn drawing to a close and we are reverting once again to societies defined in terms of modes of production. This explains the success of the analyses pioneered by Robert Reich and Manuel Castells and the acute realisation — in Europe in particular, but also in Japan — that the United State's main advantage over them is their command of the new technologies which were invented and developed over there. Those who think we have moved from societies of production to societies of consumerism do not usually realise that what they call consumerism is in fact capitalism. Even those who decry the reign of consumer goods — usually with less originality than Marx did last century — should look behind the world of objects for the social relations of domination which enable the capitalist system to impose the logic of the market upon other sectors of social life. Even if the term that I am going to use only applies to some of the defenders of the idea of the end of work, it does seem to me possible to say that this theme belongs primarily to capitalist ideology and to its endeavour to destroy the autonomy of the majority of the spheres of social life, and in particular of production.

This shift from industrial society to capitalistic society, from Saint Simon, Taylor or Ford to those who sing the praises of globalization, is probably short-lived and we are already seeing a return not to industrial society, but to a new mode of production, the information society. This observation should not lead us to an over simple idea of a succession of contrasting phases, alternating periods during which society perceives itself first as a society of production and rationalisation followed by those in which the ideas of trade, market and financial capital assume a central position. We should return here to Polanyi's classical analysis. In most cases, and certainly in European modernisation, which was the earliest and had the most spectacular results in economic terms, it was the capitalist method which won the day. Social, political, religious or cultural control of the economy was either destroyed or drastically reduced and a country like Great Britain achieved lasting world pre-eminence through the vigour of its economic choices and the deliberate

destruction of all forms of social and political control of these choices. But extreme dissociation of the economy from society leads to the rise of violence and serious social crises, because it seems to be contradictory that the economy, or system of means, should prevail over the political which determines the ends. The history of industrial societies has generally been one of abrupt and total change — as was the case recently when Poland became a market economy on 1st January 1990 — followed by a slow and difficult reconstruction of social policies and policies associating economic and social objectives.

If we apply this reasoning to the present period, one might think that we have just experienced a period of capitalist rupture during which a considerable number of forms of political and social control of the economy were destroyed, many of which had fallen into disuse or even become dysfunctional, and that after this transition which was as violent as it was necessary, we are attempting, as we did at the end of the XIXth century, especially in Great Britain and in Germany, to reconstruct social policies and at the same time to give priority once more to problems of production rather that those of trade. The idea of the end of work which is usually indicative of a non-capitalist or even anti-capitalist approach, could well be one of the late manifestations of the triumph of the capitalistic spirit over the industrial spirit, whereas in almost all spheres of social life we are already seeing a return to references to work and production. The social sciences of work, which dominated in the post-war period, then declined to such an extent that they only dealt with problems of employment, are re-emerging with a fresh interest in the problems of production, businesses and work, in particular thanks to the economists who have better survived the apparent collapse of the idea of industrial society than the sociologists.

The trade unions, for their part, after first having developed a form of *market unionism* prior to World War One, gradually granted central importance to labour problems, to the point of taking a close interest in the methods of organisation of labour, both in Weimar Germany and in the United States at the same period as well as in Lenin's Soviet Union. These same unions who had criticised the post-war methods of production, thereafter only talked of employment problems, but are now also beginning to take an interest once again in the labour aspects of the new forms of production.

If we adopt this analytical model, the theme of the end of work appears in a very different light from that in which it is generally depicted.

A second analysis should also lead to a questioning of the idea of the end of work. Here the issue is the changing nature of economic development. In the first phase economic development depended primarily on the accumulation of capital and of labour; this was the period of large-scale migrations from agriculture to industry; it was also the period of growth rates which were frequently high. The idea of work was often amalgamated with the direct

activities of production and often even with direct physical effort. In the plans for post-war reconstruction in Europe there was an exaltation of productive labour, of heavy industry, and even of the white heat of creation, which recalled Eisenstein's depictions of the Soviet Union under the first five-year plans. We then learned that endogenous economic development, self-sustaining growth, pre-supposed the intervention of indirect factors of production, of training in the means of communication, of a public administration with an efficient means of recruiting elites to positions of authority. In this period, we learnt to call work what had previously been referred to by other terms. Even if teachers were opposed to defining their activity as a resource for employment and production we have long considered education as a factor of production, and this idea has developed constantly with the result that today many people consider knowledge as the main factor in growth. This in no way has the end result of reducing intellectual production to short term utilitarian aims, but on the contrary of recognising the central importance and therefore the necessary autonomy of the production of knowledge. Everybody knows that this cannot be submitted to the criteria of immediate utility but that its role in growth and economic modernisation is so great that it must be respected and protected. The period when teaching and research were considered costs is over; they are now considered a form of investment. The difference between productive and non-productive sectors is disappearing, as is the distinction between political and economic activities which characterised pre-industrial societies, or between the citizen and the worker. More specifically, the almost total separation between the public administration and private firms has to a large extent disappeared, and, when it does still exist, it is considered as rather a heavy legacy from the past.

More recently, the idea of *sustainable growth* has either been added to, or has replaced that of *self-sustaining growth*. To the direct and indirect factors of production has been added the prevention of major risks, whether they concern the environment or social organisation itself which is becoming increasingly vulnerable as it changes more rapidly and is more complex. Many activities which used to appear external to the sphere of production are now part of it. This is even true for voluntary activities whose social function is recognised, like help with school work, humanitarian intervention and of course the campaigns against ecological disasters. All these activities could be considered as external to the sphere of work and of production; now they are part of it. We see that the world of production and, consequently, the idea of work extends beyond the payroll and it is conceivable that increasingly the bearing and rearing of a child will be considered a form of work, as also caring for elderly parents. Any activity may be considered work in so far as it leads to sustainable growth. The sphere of leisure on the other hand is declining rather than growing because consumption is largely determined by

marketing and beyond that by the practice of certain sports, which are also becoming professional. Viewing sporting events on television is now incorporated into the sphere of the market via the ways in which television channels are financed.

It is usual, even commonplace, to deplore the marketing of tastes and feelings but this reaction, whether or not it be justified, should not conceal what is more important, that is that an increasing number of activities appear as necessary for the functioning of the economics of society. There is no longer a distinction between amateurs and professionals. The professionalisation of new activities and their social regulation is a more important phenomenon than the emergence of new forms of leisure activities. It is undeniable that the proportion of the population involved in directly productive activities is falling, whether it be agriculture, industry or transport and while we have long been aware of the fall of employment in agriculture in the past ten years we have barely begun to understand that highly mechanised and robotised forms of industry means less employment particularly in unskilled jobs. If we are no longer receptive to the spillover thesis formulated in particular by Alfred Sauvy, that is to say the shift of labour from the primary to the secondary sector, then from the secondary sector to the tertiary, this is primarily because the definition of these sectors has become a source of confusion more than anything else and especially because the activities required for *sustainable growth* are to a large extent dependent on public intervention — not necessarily by the state — to be recognised as work and therefore organised. The spillover from old activities to new activities is less and less susceptible to analysis in purely economic terms. But there is no reason why the recycling of manpower, caring for dependent old people or the protection of the environment should not be considered as work, equivalent to the use of machine tools, or teaching. It is even surprising that this extension of work is not considered obvious.

As I briefly indicated, work requires an increasing level of qualification partly because of new production technologies and also because the relocation of the least skilled forms of production in the old industrial countries has wiped out many unskilled jobs. Unemployment affects these least skilled and least educated workers the most severely. The pyramid of skills has changed shape and now increasingly resembles a cylinder and will shortly change again to an upside-down cone shape. This gives work an increasingly important place in individual lives, since skilled and particularly professional work calls for a higher degree of cognitive and emotional investment. The doctor, the computer analyst, the researcher or the television star are so intensely involved in their work that they often become "workaholics." Should we talk about the end of work when a rapidly increasing number of men and women fulfill interesting and motivating functions? Should we talk about the end of work

when those who are deprived of jobs by unemployment feel they have had their personality undermined and destroyed?

Beyond these simple observations, it can be stated that our system of production will make less use of the increase in the productivity of labour which causes job losses and more use of the rise in productivity of capital, i.e. of activities which create more production and jobs with a lower input of capital. These activities with high capital productivity are primarily of two types. The first, which is the most important, is that of the *information industries*. Those who invent programmes, who make calculations, as well as the epigraphists who note down ancient inscriptions, usually mobilise very little capital. In the United States, the creation of new high-tech jobs has always been greater than the creation of unskilled jobs in the tertiary sector, as Robert Solow forcefully reminds us.

But the other category of high capital productivity is effectively linked to personal services, including those which are classified in the informal economy because they are not part of the system of taxation and social welfare. It is partly the development of these simple activities which prevents the high unemployment in the South of Italy or Spain from having consequences which these countries could not deal with. This also explains why Latin-American immigrants to the United States are important creators of employment, even if this only amounts to washing windscreens, selling ice-cream or running dry-cleaners. It is not the idea of work which should be questioned, but rather one sort of image which is increasingly dated of industrial production. It is true that in European countries, as in others, mines, steel production, mass production lines employ less and less workers and also that the image of work as drudgery is further and further from reality. But to speak of the transformation of work is very different from stating that work is coming to an end.

These three sets of remarks and arguments seem to me to justify the expression, which appears provocative, that I have chosen as the title to this article. It is not true that the automatisation of industrial production tasks leads to a massive decrease in jobs, the spread of unemployment and the need to refocus the existence of the majority of the population on their non-working lives.

The Loss of Jobs

But these arguments have little impact on those who see unemployment spreading in their country or remaining at a high level and many firms relocating part of their activities to countries with low salaries, or who see the conditions of work deteriorating with a rapid increase in short-term contracts, or unsolicited part-time work and the widespread development of all forms of insecurity.

The positive image of work seems to be replaced by the very negative theme of flexibility which reduces work to a commodity and seems to remove all control of professional and personal life from the workers. This painful awareness is justified. While the sphere of work is being extended, unemployment and job insecurity are increasing well beyond the official figures. The European Union statisticians have put forward much higher figures for unemployment. It is probably true that in a country like France, as many as one quarter or one third of the active population able to work have no job. In this same country, it is estimated that 12 or 13 million people do not have a steady job and comparable proportions can be seen in the United States or in Great Britain.

The idea of work ceasing to exist is primarily the projection by those who do not have a job or who feel the threat of job loss, of the feeling which is widespread that there will no longer be enough work for everyone, that there will never be a return to full employment and that work which has become a rare commodity will have to be shared out, rationed, like food in periods of scarcity. This fear of the lack of employment, and therefore of the collapse of the social welfare system which is based on employment is so strong that one can certainly not attribute it to an error of judgement. It corresponds to a real deterioration in the situation of wage earners.

This corresponds to the victory of capitalist society over industrial society. Only a very small proportion of capital movements corresponds to the international trade in goods and services. For years we have seen European countries reduced to a low growth rate, although companies had considerable resources which they preferred to commit to financial circuits where they frequently got windfalls rather than investing in activities in their sector because the future was unpredictable or because of the lower financial return on industrial investment, or even because of the administrative and social complications resulting from highly regulated productive activities. It is not enough here to challenge the behaviour of companies; one has to take an overall view of the situation which is not favourable to job-creating investment.

In many countries setting up businesses is difficult and the recruitment of elites, for example in France, trains company directors, who run large-scale public or private organisations rather than entrepreneurs who have to contend both with the low level of venture capital and the complexity and the cost of administrative margins. The mix of financial speculation and administrative interventionism which characterises many European countries is not conducive to job creation. The large scale financial crises which have taken place in Japan over the last ten years explain the fall in production and employment in this country in 1998 and crises as dramatic as that in Mexico in 1982 and in 1994 have obviously had negative effects on employment and salaries.

We are also beginning to realise that the share of wage earners in national income has fallen very considerably (by almost 10 points in Germany and France). It should be added, at a time when we are talking about the sharing of work that, despite a steep overall rise in productivity, the average number of hours worked has fallen very little in the past two decades, even in places where there has been a slight fall in the legal number of hours worked. The connection which seemed strong between the rise in productivity, the fall in the number of hours worked and the rise in standard of living has been severed. Wage earners, who represent the great majority of the active population have gained less than others from the rise in productivity which, on the other hand, has increased unemployment in the classical industrial sectors. Robert Castel has even suggested there has been a decline in the "wage earning society." More and more individuals receive payments for services which are no longer linked to production but to the market. At the top, we have the *golden boys* of all sorts who receive very high payments as long as they earn a lot of money for their companies. At the base, we see a rise in the number of people without jobs and those in the informal sector, working in the black economy, dependent on welfare payments or who live in poverty. It really is the society defined by belonging to work organisations and by the connection between production and earnings which is undergoing a serious crisis in the face of the triumph of the specifically capitalist logic over the industrial logic and more generally speaking the logic of production as I have already suggested. This fall in wage earning employment is more visible in situations where widespread vulnerability is replaced by total unemployment. Denis Olivennes, in an article which caused quite a stir, said that France and other countries had "chosen unemployment," that is had concentrated the crisis in employment on certain categories. The protection of the public sector wage earner, that — at least partial — of adult male wage earners and early retirement arrangements have concentrated unemployment primarily on women and even more on young people whose unemployment rates have reached such high levels that we see the growth of geographical areas in which young people with a professional activity, usually with low skills, are distinctly in a minority. Recent visits to working class suburbs in Lyon, like the Minguettes in Venissieux or the Mas du Taureau district in Vaulx-en-Velin revealed to me societies wholly defined by the lack of work, just as others were for long characterised by the length of working hours and exploitation.

This is why the idea of exploitation has now been replaced by that of exclusion. Those who are the victims rarely use this term which seems to them to rank them outside society and consequently prevent them from finding work again and participating in other social activities. The fact is that everywhere, even in situations where the lack of employment is most concentrated on specific categories, a sizeable proportion of the unemployed are

part of the active population. But public opinion is more sensitive to, and rightly so, the rise in numbers of long-term unemployed and to the fact that retraining benefits, while they do help people to survive, are decreasingly successful at helping people back into the social circuit. It is as if our society no longer has enough work to go around and the accusations made against those who have several jobs at once, those who do a lot of overtime or those who do a paid job while drawing a civil or military pension at the same time, only apply to a relatively limited number of people as everyone knows. There is no longer enough work to go around: this is the prevailing belief, which is so widespread that strikes which have taken place in protected sectors have nevertheless been supported by a public opinion which backs strikers who in other circumstances would have been criticised as being privileged or at least as defending the status quo.

This description has been and still is one of the main sources of the campaign for a shorter working week, often referred to as work sharing, an expression which further reinforces the idea that the issue is one of sharing an insufficient amount of work. This idea is however much more sophisticated than what has been referred to as the social measures for fighting unemployment, which consist in concealing unemployment by the creation of training schemes which do not usually lead to any vocational training, by the extension of the categories considered unsuitable for employment, a technique which has been used extensively in the Netherlands, or by pressure for part-time employment. It happens that the vision behind the French 35 hours' law, as it is called, which may well be the model for Spain and Italy, and which has already had precedents in some sectors of the German economy as a result of collective bargaining, is much more positive than is usually realised. The idea is not to create a shorter working week for the same individual salary which would raise the costs of production and might increase unemployment through loss of competitivity. Quite the reverse — the idea is to transfer the public funds, which go to help businesses and to compensate the unemployed, to the creation of jobs which, at least at the outset, are highly subsidised by the State. An initiative of this type is possible when the cost of an unemployed person is almost as high as that of a semi-skilled worker. The transfer of public funds towards the creation of employment makes the latter relatively cheap and even has the advantage for the public accounts of transforming subsidies into incomes from which contributions are deducted, which improves the Social Security accounts. This measure was badly received in many quarters because it once again has recourse to the law whereas decentralised negotiations would have been a much better approach. But these pertinent criticisms are directed to France's traditional incapacity in 1936, 1968 and in 1997 to organise collective bargaining and therefore cannot affect the idea of sharing work. The latter has both a positive and a negative aspect. The

positive aspect is to assert the importance of working for personal identity; the negative aspect is that it reinforces the idea that there is not enough work to go around and that, in reality, wage earners should make sacrifices to enable the unemployed to have access to an activity. This idea is correct, because the financing of the decrease in the length of the legal working week is not entirely ensured by the State; it also presupposes stability of salaries despite the rapid rise in productivity. It is therefore inevitable that this measure, which is the bearer of a very positive message, in particular because it enhances the idea of work as opposed to that of subsidies and welfare payments, be interpreted by many as the confirmation of the most widespread fear: there is not enough work to go around, a fear which has even become worse: there will be less and less work, an expression which does not imply the positive expectation of a society of leisure, but on the contrary the negative expectation of a lack of work which will imply for the majority of wage earners and unemployed, the deterioration and collapse of the social welfare system which is based on contributions from employers and wage earners.

Work and the Subject

This analysis of the law on sharing out work demonstrates the central importance of the present references to the positive role of work in the formation of the personality, that is to say in an individual's capacity to attribute a meaning to these situations and to transform them into personal experiences. But we can only tackle this extremely important theme after having recognised the deterioration of what could be called the cultural model of industrial society which focussed not on work but, instead, on production, rationalisation and profit. The protagonists were considered much less important than the methods of production. The spirit of enterprise, that is to say assuming the capital risk, methods of rationalisation, and on the other hand, the growing contradictions of the so-called capitalist system, were the founding principles of industrial culture. The key concepts refer to saving, investment, effort, energy, forecasting which are all linked — sometimes very closely — with the idea of work; but, contrary to the description that we have today of industrial society, the concept of work did not occupy a central place because industrial thinking is both scientistic and naturalistic, as was the philosophy of the Enlightenment which preceded it. The idea of progress clearly indicates that social changes are dependent upon an ever-increasing control of nature and these changes are defined in objective terms of technological creation, standard of living or social mobility. The worker himself is only a central figure in industrial society as an agent of production or an exploited proletarian. Whether an appeal be made for the workers of the world to unite at international level, or for progressive endeavours to rationalise work and

discover the *one best way*, work and even the relation of the worker to his job are definitely not central, are even scarcely present in the ideas, discussions and conflicts of an industrial society which has defined itself in economic terms and secondarily in technical or political terms, but practically never in terms of work and its meaning for workers.

It is not an accident if what is known as the sociology of labour and which was to begin with industrial sociology appeared fairly late, whereas from the beginning of European industrialisation, from Marx to Durkheim and Weber, thinking about industrial society was so dominant that sociology could be defined as a critical analysis of industrial society. We had to wait for the 1930's and the first research carried out by F. Roethlisberg at Western Electric, then, at the end of the second world war, for the considerable body of surveys and analyses carried out in Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, Italy and in France and above all the important work of Georges Friedmann, for the theme of work to come into the foreground. By writing and publishing *Problèmes humains du machinisme industriel* (1948), *Où va le travail humain?* (1953) and *Le travail en miettes* (1956), Friedmann made an important contribution to the development of thinking about work; the work of psychologists and ergonomists also provided material. Today we are so concerned by the reality of unemployment and therefore by problems of employment that we too frequently feel ourselves remote from the body of work and discussions which developed mainly between 1945 and 1970 and which was organised around the idea of work. Two themes in particular were explored. The first concerned the links between technical development and professional development and focussed on forms of mass production and in particular on work on assembly lines or at fixed rates and on the psychological effects of this type of constraint. The studies devoted to the behaviour of workers were even more interesting. Whereas the idea of the class struggle had been linked to an economic analysis of the contradictions of capitalism, we saw the emergence of the idea of a "working-class consciousness" to interpret the large-scale workers' conflicts and especially the link between class consciousness and the clash between the professional autonomy of the skilled workers and industrial rationalisation directly linked to the employers' interests, and the increase in profit. This shift in perspective is extremely important since it substitutes an analysis focussed on the actor for one which focussed on the system. As recently as the beginning of the century, Maurice Halbwachs, for example, a pupil of Durkheim's, explained the behaviour of workers, and in particular their patterns of consumption, well analysed by German studies on budgets, by the fact that the workers were delegated by society to relations with matter and were therefore marginalised in relation to the networks of trade which constituted the centre of social life. This argument is obviously totally different from that which states that: workers are endeavouring to

achieve control over their own activity, with a certain amount of autonomy and for this very reason, enter into conflict with the so-called scientific methods of organisation of work directed by a very employer-orientated conception which is nicely summed up in the phrase: wage-earners, we are not asking you to think; there are people who are paid to do that. Whence the central and even perhaps excessive importance granted to assembly line production which was never the predominant form of manufacture but which symbolised the loss of autonomy, the dehumanisation which Charlie Chaplin and René Clair showed in their films. Whence also the more global image of a mechanised, inhuman world as portrayed by Murnau or Fritz Lang.

While it is true that industrial society imagined itself in terms of production and profit, it is only at the end of its history and further still at the point of entry into post-industrial society that the idea of work has assumed central importance. In the first instance, to deplore alienation in work; more recently to stress the growing importance of knowledge in economic growth. In both cases attention is focussed on work and the worker, on work therefore as action and no longer on the industrial or the capitalist system.

It is paradoxical that there should be so much discussion about the end of work at a moment when there is a greater recognition than in the past of the importance of work in the creation of an autonomous and responsible protagonist. This shift in perspective goes even further and becomes one of the main factors in the present changes in sociological analysis. The image which controls our representation of social life is that of an individual or a category caught in a stranglehold between a globalized economic system which seems to be out of reach and a form of neo-communitarianism obsessed by ideas of purity and homogeneity. We wonder how this individual or this group can possible accede to a degree of autonomy while at the mercy of two sets of principles so diametrically opposed to the autonomy of the social actor. Manipulated by markets and a society of production, consumerism and mass communication or, on the contrary, controlled by a communitarian power which forbids any specificity and further still any individualism, the actor seems doomed to disappear, social life being reduced to the clash between economic and political forces on one hand, and cultural identities on the other. In this situation the sociologist can go no further than exposing these two conflicting and complementary forces of domination and repression.

This fundamentally hopeless conclusion is however too extreme and even mistaken because it takes no account of the initiatives which the actor takes to create a space of autonomy and therefore to set himself up as a free and responsible subject. On the one hand, the secularist mind set has always stood up to theocratic domination in religious societies. This secularism has made it possible to safe-guard values and beliefs separately from their social expression in the form of laws and customs whose claim to be the direct and

obligatory expression of these beliefs has thus been rejected. On the other hand, and this is more directly relevant to us here, social actor's answer to the logic of the market and competitivity is that work is a means for self-construction as a free actor, and as a subject. Everywhere today there is a conflict between production, which has to be increasingly flexible, and work which is becoming more professional, that is which requires autonomy and continuity and which wishes to freely or contractually define the way it is carried out. Although we are still at the think-tank stage rather than actually constructing new social policies, it is clear that the most important social problem today is to reconcile the unpredictability and discontinuity of economic situations with the need of human actors for predictability and continuity in particular in the sphere of economic life.

It is in the experience of work that individuals, workers or not, students, the unemployed or the retired can and must defend themselves against the constraints of the market. It is very difficult and perhaps impossible for an individual to live as a subject of his own existence if he does not succeed in separating his work from the economic system, if he does not have a degree of control over his work just when neither he nor the government of his country have sufficient control over the economic system in its entirety.

Those who think that it is through searching for pleasure that they escape the power of the economy as well as of communitarian fundamentalism are not wrong as long as they are protected from these powers by their professionality on one hand and their capacity to resist communitarian pressure on the other. Work can provide a simple protection by means of which an individual has an individual space without necessarily using it as a base for resisting these powers, particularly when the latter are restricted by liberal institutions. But, in any event, it is easier for the person who has the professional and economic backing of his work to satisfy his personal tastes.

We hesitate here to join in the numerous opinions which link unemployment with the social and psychological disorganisation of young people without jobs. But it is impossible to discuss the idea of work ceasing to exist as a form of liberation without first pointing out that the lack of work leads to withdrawal into primary groups, neighbourhood groups, ethnic groups and, as a result, exposes individuals to the pressure of communitarianism which may be a gang, a sect, a territory or, in other cases, may lead to quite different forms of work which are marginal, occasional or delinquent. It is true that amongst young people with few qualifications, identification with work is rare. Many young people do not feel very committed to somewhat uninteresting work from which all they expect is the means to survive. We all have experience of this type of attitude which is all the more widespread given that the lure of consumerism is growing all the time whereas that of work or of production continue to have none for most people. But it would

be more exact here to say that the forms of non-identification with work have changed rather than to state that they have increased. For a long time, work was a necessity for the majority who made of it a duty and which some even considered their misfortune. These conceptions have disappeared or are restricted to the recognition of an economic necessity which is moreover more limited than in the past and which can be satisfied by temporary or part-time work. On the other hand, I have already said that the professionalisation of work has spread and with it the ability of providing a broader meaning to the experience of work.

There is nothing original in saying that work is often a grind; one might think that this used to be the case more frequently when it only ensured survival and that it is much easier for many people today if they have a job to combine personal identification with tastes and activities outside work.

Conclusion

It is difficult to go any further in this discussion without returning to base and making as clear as possible the cultural orientations which determine the positions adopted here at least as much as the observable facts. A position which most people find acceptable is that our society individualises, that any reference to non-social principles, to the general interest and to duty is rapidly losing in importance. In so far as work, along with the family or school, have traditionally been viewed as the norm, work being represented as a social duty, there is little doubt that one can speak of the end of a social ethic of work. But, I insist, this is comparable to the decline of the social function of the family and to the educational system's opposition to an in-depth rethinking of its functions which cannot be postponed much longer. Individuals no longer feel that they serve society and work is no longer positively defined as a social obligation. But what these changes indicate is that there is no doubt that a debate is beginning whereas many believe that it is ending. In this society in which individualism is gaining ground despite threats both from the pressure of the market and from communitarianism, what is the place of work? Is it nothing more than the bearer of an outdated social ethic? Has it become a form of submission to the imperatives of the market and is it no longer capable of defending the professional autonomy of workers who are already under heavy attack from the scientific organisation of work over the past century and who appear to be submerged by the globalisation of the economy, the externalisation and relocation of many of their activities by companies, and by the rapid transformation of professions and skills?

However, I am not convinced by this reasoning. The pressure of the market implies dependency, vulnerability and the resistance of both individuals and societies which can only lead to a catastrophe. Has the XXth century already

been forgotten because we entered the XXIst in 1989? The XXth century began in 1914, after several decades of the triumph of industrial and financial capitalism, that is to say after a marked separation between economy and society. And the XXth century, from which we are emerging, was dominated by the return not of societies but of political ideologies whether they be based on scientistic rationalism, on racism or on nationalist or religious fundamentalism. A century later there is nothing artificial about wondering whether we are going to enter a century of totalitarianism and chaos once again after twenty or forty years of giving in to the perverse charms of a financial capital under the new name of globalization. What is new is that we no longer believe that national political institutions can prevent this separation between the economy and society and that we do not yet believe that the European or world institutions can fulfill this function in the place of the national institutions which have lost control of the situation. An appeal to the actor as a person who is threatened by this process and by the glorification of collective identities is the only force which can stand up to this extremely painful experience in societies. And while it is true that this individual can flee society, demanding of work only the resources enabling him to do so, he can only escape the threat if he asserts himself socially as a principle to which society must submit. This individual becomes a subject in the first instance by asserting himself as a worker, as a creator. The era in which one observed a confrontation between the unleashing of market forces and withdrawals into identity is over. In many parts of the world and in the international organisations themselves the need for a new social control of economic forces is increasingly recognised. Just as it would be naive to believe that the law can stop the market, it does remain the case that pressure from the grassroots demonstrates to governments and to the markets themselves that a balance has to be re-established between the volatility of the markets and the continuity necessary to individual lives. We are not going to see the rise of a new social democracy but as national States lose the control of the major economic policies, their task is becoming increasingly social. Political powers are confronted with three major tasks: in the first instance ensuring technological modernisation, secondly avoiding abrupt changes in society, and finally, deciding on the distribution of incomes. In these three spheres, it is in terms of work that the political discussion is beginning to take shape. Technological innovation pre-supposes sound vocational training and the support of banks for new companies. The prevention of major social risks consists primarily in ensuring that each local, national or continental society is enabled to control change at its level. This is what workers are demanding and their demands cannot be mistaken for corporatist conservatism. Finally, can the present distinction between incomes and qualifications continue, if one believes in the need to build an information society, therefore one in which high-tech

activities play a central role? We are already seeing that the alliance between new technologies and the campaign against social exclusion gives renewed vigour to political will and brings us back to a society which is once again willing and capable of choosing a fair relationship between creative work and the place of workers in the distribution of incomes and in the formation of political programmes.

To conclude, it must be admitted that we have left behind us a society of production based on the grand project of controlling nature, but this is not a reason for giving into the idea that our society is a set of markets and that social actors are merely consumers whose behaviour is determined by the masses. On the contrary, after a phase of specifically capitalist development, we are now witnessing the re-birth of a society of production which is no longer based on industry but on information, in which technology plays a much greater role than in any society in the past, and in which, as a result, the problems of work, far from becoming secondary, are becoming more directly central than in industrial society. There are two complementary reasons for this. The first is that the reign of the market implies increasing inequalities and the rise of exclusion and unemployment, because it is in the first instance the rejection of unemployment which has become the main political force. The second is that an ever-increasing proportion of the members of the post-industrial society are active participants in this information and communication society — a society which is so active and so much bigger that the frontier between work and play or education is not always clear cut. This means that references to work, knowledge, production and competivity are ubiquitous. It is for these reasons that, after a period of capitalist transition, that may have given us to believe that the problems of work and of production were no longer capable of structuring social life, we are now entering a new work culture.