

## 1968: CRISIS AND REVIVAL OF CAPITALISM

How was the new spirit of capitalism, and the projective city from which it draws justifications in terms of justice, formed? We shall seek an answer to this question by starting out from the dynamic of the spirit of capitalism in so far as its mainspring is critique. We shall show how the opposition that capitalism had to face at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s induced a transformation in its operation and mechanisms – either through a direct response to critique aiming to appease it by acknowledging its validity; or by attempts at circumvention and transformation, in order to elude it without having answered it. In a more complex fashion, as we shall demonstrate, evading a certain type of critique often occurs at the cost of satisfying criticisms of a different kind, so that opponents find themselves disorientated, even making common cause with a capitalism they earlier claimed to be contesting. One of our objectives will also be to understand how the large-scale social mobilization that embodied critique at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s could, in the space of a few years, disappear without a major crisis at the beginning of the 1980s.

In fact, one cannot fail to be struck by the contrast between the decade 1968–78 and the decade 1985–95. The former was marked by a social movement on the offensive, extending significantly beyond the boundaries of the working class; a highly active trade unionism; ubiquitous references to social class, including in political and sociological discourse and, more generally, that of intellectuals who developed interpretations of the social world in terms of relations of force and regarded violence as ubiquitous; a distribution of value added that shifted in favour of wage-earners, who also benefited from legislation affording greater security; and, at the same time, a reduction in the quality of products and a fall in productivity gains that were attributable, at least in part, to the inability of employers, directorates and management to control labour-power.

The second period has been characterized by a social movement that expresses itself almost exclusively in the form of humanitarian aid; a disorientated trade unionism that has lost any initiative for action; a quasi-obliteration

of reference to social class (including in sociological discourse), and especially the working class, whose representation is no longer guaranteed, to the extent that some famous social analysts can seriously assert that it no longer exists; increased casualization of the condition of wage-earners; growth in income inequality and a distribution of value added that is once again favourable to capital; and a reassertion of control over labour-power, marked by a very significant reduction in disputes and strikes, a decline in absenteeism and turnover, and an improvement in the quality of manufactured goods.

Order reigns everywhere. The main objective of political action in Europe since the first crisis of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century<sup>1</sup> – the construction of a political order in which the capitalist economy could expand without encountering too much resistance or bringing too much violence in its train – seems finally to have been achieved. And this has been done without having to compromise with social classes represented at the political level, unlike the solution negotiated between the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1950s.

How could such a change have come about in such a short time-span? It is difficult to answer this question inasmuch as the period under consideration is not marked by any sharp political breaks – a change of political power in an authoritarian direction (like a military *coup d'état* with the proscription of unions and imprisonment of militants), for example, or an ultra-liberal turn (as with Thatcherism in Great Britain) – but, on the contrary, by comparative continuity. This was assured, in particular, by the arrival of the Socialists in government in 1981, which seemed to extend and entrench the May '68 movement politically. Nor can we evoke clearly defined economic events of major significance, like the Wall Street crash of 1929, for example. And the term 'crisis', used to refer to the years that followed the first oil shock, proves inapposite if, as is sometimes the case, one seeks to apply it to an entire period that was in fact marked by a massive redeployment of capitalism.

Our interpretation takes the revolt of May '68 and its sequels seriously (rather than stressing the symbolic aspects of what a number of commentators have treated as a 'psychodrama'); and we shall regard it as a major phenomenon from two contrasting angles. On the one hand, we are dealing, if not with a revolution in the sense that it did not lead to a seizure of political power, then at least with a profound crisis that imperilled the operation of capitalism and which, at all events, was interpreted as such by the bodies, national (CNPF) or international (OECD), charged with its defence. On the other hand, however, it was by recuperating some of the oppositional themes articulated during the May events that capitalism was to disarm critique, regain the initiative, and discover a new dynamism. The history of the years after 1968 offers further evidence that the relations between the economic and the social – to adopt the established categories – are not reducible to the domination of the second by the first. On the contrary, capitalism is obliged to

offer forms of engagement that are compatible with the state of the social world it is integrated into, and with the aspirations of those of its members who are able to express themselves most forcefully.

## I. THE CRITICAL YEARS

The worldwide conflicts that marked the year 1968 were the expression of a very significant rise in the level of critique directed at Western societies. Forms of capitalist organization, and the functioning of firms in particular, were the targets of the protesters and, as we shall show, this critique was not merely verbal but accompanied by actions that entailed a not insignificant disruption of production. A crude indicator of the level of critique, at least in terms of work, can be found in the statistics for the number of strike days, which averaged four million in the years 1971–75. By comparison, this number was to fall below half a million in 1992.

### The combination of the social critique and the artistic critique

An important feature of the period around 1968 is that the critique of the time developed from the four sources of indignation we identified in the Introduction. The first two sources are at the heart of what can be called the *artistic critique*, while the last two are characteristic of the *social critique*. These two types of critique (which, as we have seen, are not automatically compatible) are frequently combined in the revolutionary movements of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, especially in France. But whereas the artistic critique had hitherto played a relatively marginal role because its investigators – intellectuals and artists – were few in number and performed virtually no role in the sphere of production, it was to find itself placed at the centre of protest by the May movement. The French crisis of May had the dual character of a student revolt and a working-class revolt. The revolt by students and young intellectuals was in fact extended to *cadres* or engineers who had recently left the university system, and served as a trigger for a very widespread working-class revolt.<sup>2</sup>

The workers, mobilized against the threats posed to them – especially wage-earners in traditional sectors (mines, shipyards, the iron and steel industry) – by the restructuring and modernization of the productive apparatus undertaken in the 1960s, would speak the language of *capitalist exploitation*, 'struggle against the government of the monopolies', and the *egoism* of an 'oligarchy' that 'confiscates the fruits of progress', in the tradition of social critique.<sup>3</sup> The working-class revolt can thus be interpreted as the result of the economic policy pursued since the arrival of the Gaullists in power, and as a response to the prolonged exclusion of unskilled and semi-skilled workers from the benefits of growth, and to an unequal distribution of the costs of growth

borne by different categories.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the employers' report of 1971 on the problem of semi- and unskilled workers would recognize the exceptional character of the French situation when it came to the wage inequalities suffered by blue-collar workers.<sup>5</sup>

Students (and young wage-earners recently graduated from universities or the *grandes écoles*), who had seen their numbers increase significantly during the previous decade marked by the university explosion (the number of students enrolled in faculties virtually quintupled between 1946 and 1971, from 123,313 to 596,141),<sup>6</sup> but had simultaneously seen their conditions deteriorate and their expectations of obtaining autonomous, creative jobs diminish,<sup>7</sup> instead developed a critique of *alienation*. It adopted the main themes of the *artistic critique* (already pervasive in the United States in the hippie movement): on the one hand, the disenchantment, the inauthenticity, the 'poverty of everyday life', the dehumanization of the world under the sway of technicization and technocratization; on the other hand, the loss of autonomy,<sup>8</sup> the absence of creativity, and the different forms of oppression in the modern world. Evidence of this in the family sphere was the importance of demands aimed at emancipation from traditional forms of domestic control ('patriarchal control') – that is to say, in the first instance, women's liberation and youth emancipation. In the sphere of work and production more directly of interest to us, the dominant themes were denunciation of 'hierarchical power', paternalism, authoritarianism, compulsory work schedules, prescribed tasks, the Taylorist separation between design and execution, and, more generally, the division of labour.<sup>9</sup> Their positive counterpoint was demands for autonomy and self-management, and the promise of an unbounded liberation of human creativity.

The forms of expression of this critique were often borrowed from the repertoire of the festival, play, the 'liberation of speech', and Surrealism.<sup>10</sup> It was interpreted by commentators as 'an irruption of youth' (Edgar Morin), as the manifestation of 'a desire to live, to express oneself, to be free',<sup>11</sup> of a 'spiritual demand' (Maurice Clavel), of a 'rejection of authority' (Gérard Mendel), of contestation of the bourgeois family and, more generally, of domestic forms of subordination.

These themes, which revived the old artistic critique by translating it into an idiom inspired by Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, as well as Surrealism, were developed in the small political and artistic avant-gardes of the 1950s (one thinks in particular of *Socialisme ou barbarie* and *Internationale situationniste*),<sup>12</sup> long before exploding into broad daylight in the student revolt of May '68, which was to give them an unprecedented audience, inconceivable ten years earlier. They answered to the expectations and anxieties of new generations of students and *cadres*, and spoke to the discrepancy between their aspirations to intellectual freedom and the forms of work organization to which they had to submit in order to be integrated socially.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, we must guard against inflating the divergences between the student contestation and the forms of protest expressed in firms into an outright opposition. Themes pertaining to both critiques – the social and the artistic – were developed conjointly in the world of production, particularly by technicians, *cadres* or engineers in hi-tech industries and by the CFDT. The latter, competing with a CGT that was firmly implanted among manual workers and skilled workers, sought to mobilize both intellectual workers and semi- and unskilled workers.

In the context of firms in the 1970s, the two critiques were formulated primarily in terms of a demand for security (as regards the social critique) and a demand for autonomy (as regards the artistic critique).

In those of its aspects directly related to work at least, the critical movement in effect challenged two types of division. The first focused on power and, more particularly, the distribution of the legitimate power of judgement. Who has the right to judge whom? According to what criteria? Who is to give the orders, and who is to obey? Its point of attack was most of the tests that involve the faculty of appraisal and decision-making at work, especially making decisions for others. It was expressed in a challenge to those in command and to hierarchy and by a demand for autonomy in the tradition of the artistic critique.

The second division concerned the distribution of risks and, more specifically, of the ups and downs in life experience directly or indirectly connected with market developments. The critical movement aimed to increase the security of wage-earners and, in the first instance, of those who, possessing neither savings nor an inheritance, were highly vulnerable to the impact of changed economic circumstances or modes of consumption on the productive apparatus. In particular, it applied to tests involving time and, more especially, those that define the kind and degree of solidarity linking the present to the past and future: for example, in cases where it is agreed to make holding a certain type of post dependent on obtaining a particular educational qualification, paying on a monthly basis, calculating a pension, or defining a level of unemployment benefit. The construction of stable intertemporal links (if I possess a particular qualification, I will be entitled to some particular post; if I occupy that post for so many years, I will be entitled to a particular level of pension) must ensure people's continuity between their current condition and potential future conditions. People at work being eminently changeable (they age, their capacities diminish or, on the contrary, grow with their experience), this operation can be performed only by stabilizing identity with categorical instruments (a category by definition including a number of individuals, collectively), hence guaranteeing people an *official status* that is itself dependent on their attachment to a category. Challenging the just character of tests assumes a different meaning depending on whether we are dealing with a test of performance or statute. In the first case, 'it isn't just' signifies that the relative reward, or the ranking of status, is not aligned with relative

performance. In the second, 'it isn't just' signifies that people have not been treated in accordance with their statute (there was some special dispensation, privilege, etc.). Furthermore, we usually refer to 'justice' in the first instance and 'social justice' in the second.

The way in which tests are resolved concerning power and distribution of the capacity to deliver legitimate judgements on the one hand, security and the distribution of risks originating in the market on the other, affects the capitalist test *par excellence*: profit. Where the former is concerned, an increase in demands for autonomy, in the refusal to obey, in rebellion in all its forms, disrupts production and has repercussions on labour productivity. Where the latter is concerned, protecting wage-earners against risks originating in markets has the effect of increasing firms' vulnerability to market fluctuations and increasing labour costs.

The demands for autonomy and security, which originally derived from different sources, converged in the years after 1968 and were often embodied by the same actors. On the one hand, it was obviously in sectors where protection was best guaranteed, and where the need for averagely or highly academically qualified personnel was great, that demands for autonomy could be expressed with most vigour – that is to say, in study or research services, teaching or training, belonging to the public sector, the nationalized sector, or large hi-tech firms where the CFDT happened to be particularly well implanted. On the other hand, those who did not have a statute often backed up their demands for autonomy with equivalent demands for protection. The young graduates who, faced with what they called the 'proletarianization' of their positions, demanded more autonomous, more interesting, more creative, more responsible work, did not thereby envisage quitting the wage-earning class. They wanted more autonomy, but within the framework of large organizations that could offer them job and career guarantees.

The conjunction of these two types of critique, simultaneously aiming for more autonomy and more security, posed problems. In effect, critiques focused on the fact that judging for others is unjust, contesting the command structure, and demanding autonomy – these lead to an emphasis on individual performance (people must be as autonomous as their ability permits). Contrariwise, critiques centred on the unequal distribution of market risk, which demand a strengthening of security, incline towards tests of a statutory variety. To press these two types of demands simultaneously, and radically, can pretty rapidly lead to demanding a world without tests – without professional tests in the usual sense, at least – which has some features in common with the communist stage in Marx (which, as we know, assumed a society of abundance). In such a world, security would be guaranteed to completely autonomous producers whose appraisal by a third party would never be legitimate (as we see, for example, in the dual demand for a student wage and the abolition of examinations).

### The disruption of production

In May 1971, a meeting of employment experts from various West European countries, the United States and Japan was held in Paris under the auspices of the OECD. The rapporteur was Professor R.W. Revans, adviser to the Belgian Industry/University Foundation. This group conference was prompted by the 'phenomenon of a deterioration in workers' behaviour today', by a 'hardening of attitudes' and 'flagging motivation in industry'. The 'industrial economies ... are undergoing a revolution' that 'crosses all cultural boundaries'. Occurring simultaneously in all the OECD countries, it 'is not restricted to workers', but is also 'influencing the conceptions and reactions of *cadres*'. This 'revolution' takes the form of a 'challenge to authority'. It is prevalent, so the report informs us, 'even in nations where the Protestant ethic was expressed with the greatest moral vigour and material success' (for example, Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain or the United States, where some young people 'go so far as to prefer poverty or begging to factory work'). The crisis of capitalism was deemed especially acute in 'industrial France', which 'endlessly debates the need to construct a society "without classes, hierarchy, authority or regulations"'; and in Italy, a country where 'the effects of industrial conflicts and social malaise are constantly combined', and 'minor details of technical progress in workplaces ... provoke conflicts whose violence is out of all proportion to their causes'. In these two countries, but also in Germany, 'established authority has been demolished in an organized, deliberate manner that sometimes takes the form of outright physical violence'.<sup>14</sup>

The crisis referred to by these experts was not imaginary; their concerns were justified. The very high number of strike days provides only a limited idea of a protest movement that equally found expression in a stepping up of the level of disputes, often accompanied by violence, and also (or above all) daily guerrilla warfare in the workplace.<sup>15</sup> If interprofessional national strikes remained within legal bounds, the same was not true of strikes in individual factories, 'where recourse to illegal and even violent action was frequent', signalling a clear break with the previous period.<sup>16</sup> In their work on 123 conflicts in 1971, Claude Durand and Pierre Dubois find instances of verbal violence (threats of violence, abuse, jeering at management) in 32 per cent of cases; heavy picketing (preventing wage-earners who wanted to work from entering company premises) in 25 per cent of cases; occupations in 20 per cent of cases; physical violence against the employer, *cadres*, supervisory staff, illegal confinements, or deliberate clashes with the police in 20 per cent of cases. Resort to some form of 'significant illegality' affected one in two strikes. Participation in illegal action extended to something like a third of workers.<sup>17</sup>

Strikes and open conflicts were not the only indicators of a crisis that manifested itself in many forms in firms' everyday operations: absenteeism; turnover, reaching 'a disturbing level for [the] normal functioning' of many

firms and betokening 'an escape from the situation of work'; a 'quality of work and service' that 'increasingly suffers because of the workers' lack of interest', occasioning 'problems of delays and obstruction', and leading firms to include in their costs 'scrap and defects connected with a decline in the quality of work, the wastage of raw materials and the social costs of the climate of discontent'; 'go-slows remain as widespread as ever' and 'instances of sabotage are far from rare'; 'a working-class capacity to control output has crystallized in firms', and wage-earners are developing 'a kind of passive resistance that is expressed in a variety of forms', such as 'workers' resistance to timing, inter-professional pressures on the group not to exceed norms, concerted slowing down of the pace of work, refusal to apply the operating methods that have been laid down'. The same author, one of the most acute observers of the disruption of work in the 1970s, stresses 'the crisis of authority' and 'opposition to hierarchies' that exacerbate 'tensions inside workshops and offices' and lead to a 'risk of paralysis' in 'large production units', where 'young workers have made certain workshops ungovernable for supervisors', and 'monthly paid staff' – employees, typists, and so on – rebel against the 'work rhythms', 'harassment' and 'impoliteness of managerial staff'.<sup>18</sup>

The extension of these forms of resistance had direct and indirect consequences on production costs. On the one hand, writes Benjamin Coriat, 'difficulty in ensuring the pursuit of increases in labour productivity during this period' can at least in part be attributed to it. On the other, management sought to restore control over the workforce by 'overloading their apparatuses of supervision and control', significantly increasing control costs that were not directly productive. New categories of controllers, retouchers, repairers, etc., rapidly emerged. Thus repair workshops in manufacturing units had to review an increasing number of products for tests and various kinds of repair, even before they were delivered to the public.<sup>19</sup>

### The demands

Three sets of demands, associated with three different social groups but closely linked in commentaries, attracted particular attention from socioeconomists of work: the refusal of work by the *young*; the strikes and crisis of *semi- and unskilled workers*; finally, demands which, especially among *cadres*, express a need for autonomy, a demand for greater participation in control of the firm or, in its most radical forms, for self-management.

The refusal of work by the *young* – the 'allergy to work', as Jean Rousselet put it<sup>20</sup> – was the subject of a very large number of commentaries: the young no longer wished to work; above all, they no longer wanted to work in industry, and many of them were opting for 'marginalization'. In 1975, the recently created Centre d'études de l'emploi (CEE) devoted a notebook to what the authors called 'marginalism'.<sup>21</sup> The number of young people under the age of

twenty-five who had a marginal, occasional activity was estimated by Rousselet to be of the order of 600,000–800,000 in 1975. The fact that they were not 'integrated into an occupation and regular work was attributed not by the youth specialists questioned in the CEE investigation to a shortage of jobs, but to a form of deliberate avoidance of wage-labour, the pursuit of 'a different lifestyle', working conditions that offered greater flexibility in hours and rhythm, transient 'schemes' that made it possible to maintain 'a stance that was detached, distanced from work', to be autonomous, free, without having to put up with the authority of a boss. The authors of the CEE research justifiably observe that the 'marginal activities' cited by the 'youth specialists' surveyed are not fundamentally different, in their content, from the jobs offered to young people on the labour market (for example, unskilled jobs in the service sector). What is different is the irregular, transient character of the activities dubbed 'marginal'; and one cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between the attitudes of the young denigrated at the beginning of the 1970s as betokening a 'refusal of work', and those that were to be extolled in the second half of the 1980s in so far as they supposedly displayed a spirit of resourcefulness and flexibility in the search for 'odd jobs'.<sup>22</sup>

The beginning of the 1970s was marked by a series of serious, long strikes: among the most notable of these disputes we might mention Rhodiaca in 1967, Ferodo in 1970, Leclerc-Fougères (in the last two conflicts the management was illegally confined), Sommer-Sedan, Batignolles and Moulinex in 1971, the strikes by semi- and unskilled Renault workers at Mans and Sandouville in 1969–72, the bank strikes from 1971 to 1974, Lip in 1973, and Radiotechnique in 1974. In a number of cases, the initiative lay with *semi- and unskilled workers*,<sup>23</sup> not with skilled workers or craft workers, who had a longer and stronger record of unionization. Involved 'in the front line of social struggles' were 'immigrant workers, semi- and unskilled workers in automobile firms, unskilled workers in the electronic and textile industries, bank and insurance company employees, girocheque employees, packers at sorting centres, shop assistants in hypermarkets'.<sup>24</sup> As we shall see, the role played in these disputes by young, unqualified workers – sometimes, as in the west, newly urbanized workers – prompted numerous commentators – sociologists of work or 'employment experts' – to regard strikes by the semi- and unskilled as an indirect expression of rejection of the working conditions and forms of authority that obtained in mass production industries or in highly standardized services.

As Olivier Pastré has shown, the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s were marked in France by an acceleration in the process of rationalization and Taylorization of work, which went together with a growth in the size of firms and increased concentration of capital.<sup>25</sup> Yet whereas in the 1950s work rationalization was accompanied by significant productivity gains, the relationship was inverted in the 1970s, characterized by 'pursuit of the process of

Taylorization' and a conjoint 'collapse in productivity gains'.<sup>26</sup> To explain this paradoxical relationship, Pastré invokes the 'crisis of work' in the 1970s, whose scope he seeks to measure by means of a number of quantitative indicators – absenteeism and turnover, in particular – which increased in different but invariably significant proportions in the main industrialized countries between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. Without possessing the statistical series, the author amasses the indices of a no less significant rise in other manifestations of the crisis of work, such as obstruction, defective products, or even sabotage. As this study indicates, this phenomenon, far from affecting only assembly-line workers – something that would be insufficient to give it the requisite explanatory value, since they remained a minority despite the increase in Taylorization during the period – affected most categories of young wage-earners, including 'white-collar' staff, office employees, technicians or *cadres*.

The 'decline in the quality of work' was, according to Pastré, bound up with 'the improvement in the quality of workers that occurred at the same time'. Like many commentators on the crisis, in particular those belonging to employers' circles, Pastré regards the increase in educational levels accompanying the development of Taylorization as the main reason for the 'rejection of work': higher aspirations generated by a higher level of studies came into conflict with the generalization of work fragmented into individual operations.

The challenge to hitherto predominant forms of authority in firms, which constitutes one of the principles of the interpretation of strikes by semi- and unskilled workers, is quite explicit among *engineers and technicians*, who joined in the wave of protest at the beginning of the 1970s. A minority of *cadres* participated in the movement: it seems that they were basically young, university-educated *cadres*, still closely related to students, like young engineers in research centres or leading firms in high-tech sectors (aeronautics, electronics, etc.).<sup>27</sup> Even though they were a minority, the mere fact that they entered into open rebellion, unionized, and expressed their solidarity with blue-collar workers constituted an especially troubling sign for the management of firms. Did not the very existence of the category of *cadres*, albeit very heterogeneous in many respects, primarily mark a break with the working-class world and solidarity with the firm's design and supervision departments?

Among *cadres*, two demands were especially clear. First of all, a demand for security. It was bound up, especially among junior, self-taught *cadres*, with fear of unemployment and a loss of status following the restructurings and fusions of the mid-1960s. The expression of such fears was evident above all among CGT *cadres*, who included a majority of the highest-ranking *cadres*, promoted and self-taught.<sup>28</sup> Among graduate *cadres*, and especially young *cadres* belonging to the CFDT, the security dimension found expression predominantly in anxieties about the future, which were closely akin to the question – very important in student discourse – of 'prospects'. It was linked with fears about a devaluation of degrees as a result of the increase in the number of graduates

during the period and the theme (associated with that of the 'new working class') of the proletarianization of students and *cadres*.

The second demand advanced by engineers and *cadres*, which was much more insistent than the demand for security, concerned autonomy. Moreover, this demand was not really new, *cadres* having taken a lead over other wage-earners in demanding autonomy. The management literature of the late 1960s that we have studied already suggested some solutions, with the generalized establishment of management by objectives. What was new in the demands of the 1970s was the challenge to the hierarchical principle itself, which was particularly worrying when it involved those who embodied that principle in firms; and an extension of the demand for autonomy beyond managerial *cadres* to all the occupations using graduate personnel. In its most radical versions, the demands extended as far as laying claim to 'democratic' control over firms.

In the CFDT, the demand for self-management and democracy in firms played a key role in *cadres*' participation in the 1970s movement.<sup>29</sup> It was accompanied by a critique of traditional forms of representation ('the existence of workers' committees in workshops means that there is no longer any reason for staff representatives') and traditional trade unionism ('we cannot demand democracy in the firm if the unions themselves are not democratic').<sup>30</sup> The self-management proposals of the CFDT, wholly unacceptable to the employers, would nevertheless inspire the renewal of managerial methods some years later.

## 2. REACTIONS AND RESPONSES TO THE CRITIQUES

Initially, the employers (active members of the CNPF, directors of large firms), in collaboration with the Chaban-Delmas government, interpreted the crisis *in terms of social critique*; they sought to calm things down by negotiating benefits in terms of wages or security with union federations at the national level, without conceding anything on points which, like demands for autonomy or creativity, were bound up with the artistic critique. Management of the crisis was situated on the terrain of employers–state–unions industrial relations, where tests of strength had been gradually codified and established since the 1930s, thereby assuming the form of legitimate tests. Contrariwise, demands for which no established framework existed (self-management, power relations, respect for people's dignity, etc.) were ignored or foiled.

In a second phase, confronted with what the employers regarded as the failure of this strategy, which proved costly and did not succeed in halting the protest or reasserting control over behaviour at work by either management or unions – disruption to production did not decrease significantly – innovative fractions among the employer class adopted a new interpretation of the crisis. From this there flowed a second strategy: the crisis would be construed *in terms of the artistic critique* – as a revolt against oppressive working conditions

and traditional forms of authority. Employers would no longer anticipate a restoration of social peace from action by union federations, would stop negotiating social benefits with them, and would instead endeavour to circumvent them at a local level and in the workplace.

But the order of response to the two critiques – the social critique in the first instance, then the artistic critique – derived not only from an evolution in employers' thinking and opportunities, but also from a transformation of critique itself. In fact, at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, social critique in its most classical form, articulated by the working-class movement (for instance, the wave of adhesions to the CGT in autumn 1968), but also in Trotskyist and Maoist far-left activism, underwent a revival to the point of eclipsing the artistic critique, which had unquestionably been more in evidence during the May events. The artistic critique was to have its revenge in the second half of the 1970s, when the social critique seemed to be exhausted. This period was in fact marked by the flowering of 'new social movements'<sup>31</sup> (feminist, homosexual, ecological and anti-nuclear); by the progressive domination on the left of the ideas of its non-Communist, self-management fraction; and, throughout the 1980s, by a very harsh critique of communism, to which the analytical categories of totalitarianism were applied, without encountering the same resistance as in the 1950s or 1960s.<sup>32</sup> Given the especially strong association in France between social critique and the Communist movement, the discrediting of the latter was accompanied by a temporary but very pronounced abandonment of the economic terrain by critique. Under fire from the artistic critique, the firm was reduced to the function of oppressive institution on a par with the state, the army, the school or the family; and the anti-bureaucratic struggle for autonomy at work supplanted concerns about economic equality and the security of the most deprived. As was said at the time, 'qualitative' demands seemed more crucial, but also more revolutionary, than 'quantitative' demands, in that they attacked the very forms of capitalist accumulation.

We are now going to elaborate on the history of capitalism's two responses to the critiques of 1968 in greater detail. The first response accounts for the majority of initiatives between the Grenelle agreements and 1973, but extends beyond that date. The second response, whose effects are conspicuous above all from 1975 on, was in gestation among certain employers' groups as early as 1971 (year of the appearance of the CNPF's report on semi- and unskilled workers, which attests to an already advanced state of reflection on work organization and conditions).

#### **A first response in terms of social critique**

Characteristic of the first response was that it did not go beyond the solutions proposed by the second spirit of capitalism. It represented an attempt to

management is carried on at the upper levels of the managerial hierarchy. They are a central element in the Japanese *ringi seido* method of decision-making.<sup>72</sup>

Such a switch in strategy would not, however, have been possible without *a concomitant alteration in the critical forces themselves*, albeit for largely independent reasons. In particular, the weakening of the CGT in the second half of the 1970s, with the closure of a number of industrial sites where it was the most strongly established union – a development that was not offset by equivalent progress in new occupations in the tertiary sector – reduced the intensity of the critical pressure of ‘quantitative’ demands, to which the CGT was more committed than the CFDT. And it freed up a space for discussion of ‘qualitative demands’ at the very moment when the employers themselves began to think that their interests lay in displacing the social question on to the problem of working conditions. This switch in orientation was encouraged by the concomitant decline of the PCF, whose full extent is not conveyed by its gradual electoral erosion in favour of the PS in these years.<sup>73</sup> Simultaneously faced with a Leninist critique from the ultra-left, which accused it of revisionism, and intensified denunciation by other sections of the far left of its Stalinist past and ongoing compromises with the CPSU<sup>74</sup> – from the liquidation of the Prague Spring to the invasion of Afghanistan – the CP, torn apart by internal conflicts between the ‘orthodox’ and ‘reformers’ (at the time called ‘Eurocommunists’), wavered between incompatible positions. One day it abandoned the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in favour of a ‘union of the French people’, only to seek to maintain its revolutionary identity the next by multiplying attacks against the Socialist Party, to which it was bound in 1972 by the signature of the Common Programme, according to a political line that made ‘union’ ‘a struggle that was to benefit the PCF in its endeavour to conquer power’.<sup>75</sup> The years of the Common Programme (1972–77) were not bad for the PCF: it took advantage of the protest wave initiated by the leftists, while presenting itself as more serious and reasonable than the ‘irresponsible groupuscules’ (which also allowed it to make up for the failures and ambiguities of its strategy in May ’68).<sup>76</sup> It won new members, and retained a large part of its electorate. But the incoherence of its political positions simultaneously had the effect of disorientating numerous militants who – less well controlled than in the past and themselves sensitive to the critique of totalitarian institutions – increasingly took their distance from official Communist values, and a party that had remained Stalinist to the end.

The rupture of the Union of the Left on the initiative of the CP in 1977, attributed by the PS to the CP’s tougher stance (under the influence of Moscow, which looked kindly on Giscard d’Estaing’s presidency and did not want a left-wing victory), and by the CP to a rightist drift by the PS intended to break up the Union without taking responsibility for the rupture, would lead to defeat in the legislative elections in 1978. This defeat was to be



attributed wholly to the PCF's intransigent attitude, and to hasten its downfall. From 1980 onwards, the internal decomposition of the Party was patent.<sup>77</sup> The trade unions connected with the Union of the Left were profoundly shaken by it. Unity of action between the CGT and the CFDT was broken off in 1979 – all the more so since the CGT vigorously supported the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The CFDT then adopted a strategy of reorientation, abandoning political engagement to devote itself exclusively to union demands. The dispute between the formations of the left and the increasing popularity of self-management ideas, against a Communist Party that was in the process of scuppering itself, sanctioned a transformation of critical sensibility on work issues. At the same time, there emerged a new kind of protest grouping, prioritizing rejection of totalitarianism. Itself especially sensitive to the artistic critique of capitalism, with its demands for liberation (particularly sexual), and a 'truly' authentic existence (feminist, homosexual, anti-nuclear and ecological movements), it was going to ally with the dominant new forces on the left. The change firms were working towards, which was to lead to the creation of new, direct forms of wage-earner expression and representation (quality circles, discussion groups, etc.), thus benefited from the critique of hierarchies developed in particular by the CFDT, the works of sociologists close to the self-management movement,<sup>78</sup> and leftist experiments in direct representation aimed against both employers and established unions.

It was on the terrain of working conditions that this new politics would assert itself. The attention paid to improving working conditions, 'making work more rewarding', or flexible hours had two effects. On the one hand, it won the support of a section of wage-earners by securing personalized benefits that collective action could not offer. On the other, however, by individualizing working conditions and remuneration, it handed the initiative back to employers.<sup>79</sup>

But the principal new departure consisted in recognizing the validity of the demand for autonomy, and even making it an absolutely central value of the new industrial order. This applied not only to those who were demanding it – academically qualified engineers and *cadres* in large firms – but also to those who were not demanding it, at least not explicitly – that is to say, blue-collar workers who had conducted most of the social struggles of the previous ten years. Measures aimed at giving wage-earners greater security were replaced by measures directed towards relaxing hierarchical control and taking account of individual 'potential'. In a political reversal, autonomy was, as it were, exchanged for security. The struggle against the unions, and the concession of more autonomy and individualized benefits, were pursued with the same methods – that is, by changing work organization and altering productive processes. This affected the very structure of firms and, in particular, had the effect of dismantling organizational units (firms, plants, sections, departments) and categories of persons (occupational groups, holders of the same type of post,

social classes) – that is to say, the set of collectives on which critical bodies, particularly the unions, were based. As with the interpretation of the demand for student autonomy by Edgar Faure, autonomy was construed here in the sense both of autonomy of persons (less directly hierarchically controlled in their work) and autonomy of organizations (departments treated as independent units and autonomous profit-centres, or the development of subcontracting).<sup>80</sup> The world of work now contained only individual instances connected in a network.

*Restoring control over firms* – employers' key objective in this period – was not achieved by increasing the power of the hierarchy, the length of hierarchical lines, and the number of accounting tools or bureaucratic directives. It was secured thanks to a break with previous modes of control and an assimilation of demands for autonomy and responsibility hitherto regarded as subversive. To oversimplify, we can say that this change consisted in substituting *self-control* for *control* and, consequently, in externalizing the very high costs of control by shifting the burden from organizations on to wage-earners. A proven capacity for autonomy and responsibility constituted one of the new tests that made it possible to part simultaneously with oppositional workers and abusive petty tyrants, whom the new method of control, relying mainly on self-control, henceforth rendered redundant.

The series of changes in job organization and classification equally made it possible to render work sufficiently attractive for a young, French and educated workforce to adapt to it.

We find an inventory of the changes effected in a series of writings that attest to the intense intellectual effort undertaken by 'employer experts', and to the vast number of experiments in firms.

The 4<sup>th</sup> *Assises nationales des entreprises d'octobre 1977*, which presented in the form of index cards several hundred 'innovations' introduced over the course of the decade in firms, medium or large, marked the first large-scale public manifestation of the spirit of '68 in the world of the employers. In his preface, François Ceyrac sketched a liberal interpretation (for which Michel Crozier had paved the way as early as 1970)<sup>81</sup> of the leftist criticisms directed at both the rigidity of industrial-style planning and the hierarchical forms of the domestic world: the 'reality of firms' was 'diverse, fluid, differentiated ... refractory by its very nature to rigid, abstract organizational formulas, to pre-established schemas'; and the firm was the privileged site of 'social innovation, creative imagination, free initiative'. The two thick volumes were divided into six chapters (communication in firms, training, improvement in working conditions, reform of working hours, role of managerial staff, appraisal of social administration).

Thus, for example, in the chapter on *improvement in working conditions* we find an experiment conducted in a Rouen metallurgy firm from 1974 onwards, consisting in the abolition of assembly-line work in the assembly of electronic

terminals, in order to 'afford everyone greater autonomy'; or again, the establishment of 'assembly units' at Peugeot from 1973, accompanied by a 'modification of hierarchical structures in order to reduce the number of levels of command and enhance workshop autonomy'.<sup>82</sup> A firm making industrial fans explained how it had been able to 'restore a taste for technical progress, in an improved social climate, to a workshop that was in a bad technical condition and socially unstable', by constituting 'work groups' led by an outside consultant.

The chapter on *reform of working hours* is especially informative, indicating the strategically crucial character of hours both for winning over wage-earners and for paving the way for greater flexibility, despite union reservations. In this chapter, we find numerous experiments in variable hours, part-time work, the 'flexible week', the staggering of holidays, 'adjusted retirement', and so on. An electronics firm employing 650 people describes an experiment in 'free time and autonomous teams'; a pharmaceutical laboratory outlines an experiment in flexible hours begun in 1973; the personnel management of a large store explains how part-time work has been developed; an insurance company explains the organization of systems of 'early retirement and end-of-career leave'.<sup>83</sup>

The CNPF's 1971 report on semi- and unskilled workers had already suggested some significant alterations in the organization of work itself, but did not have so many examples of successful experimentation to hand as in 1977, and called for an 'empirical ... and experimental approach, that is to say, engaging in appraisal of the results, examining trial runs, stepping back if necessary'.<sup>84</sup>

To start off with, the report stresses the necessity of *making hours more flexible*: 'The duration of work will always have to possess a certain flexibility and in practice this is the only way of adjusting production to the market'. It is necessary to move towards 'flexible hours, that is to say, accepting certain differences for part of the workforce. ... Over and above the fact that they can facilitate recruitment, such systems of flexible hours possess the advantage of giving those who benefit from them a sense of freedom, of autonomy, which satisfies an increasingly profound desire.' In addition, the author advocates the development of part-time work, particularly for mothers.<sup>85</sup>

It then commits those in charge of firms to exerting themselves on *conditions of security*:

The emphasis of recent years on the problems of security (in connection with road traffic) and pollution will increasingly render industrial workers sensitive to the way in which these problems are resolved in the workplace. Heads of firms are therefore going to be subject to ever more intense pressures for an improvement in working conditions, security and hygiene. In fact – adds the author of this report – the solutions are so obviously conducive to good production that one sometimes wonders why such efforts were not made sooner.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, the essence of the innovations revolves around the *restructuring of work posts*. It is necessary to 'create a situation in which workers are intrinsically motivated by the work they perform', by assigning 'the worker a set of tasks adding elements of responsibility and participation. This will be the case when the functions of adjustment, control and maintenance of the material, even an improvement in methods, are added to specific tasks of execution.'

This restructuring requires '*a new conception of the role of managerial staff*, with supervisors playing not so much the role of boss as of adviser to autonomous groups, who are called on to participate in the manufacture of part of the finished product'. The main obstacles to the diffusion of this innovation will derive – so the reporter predicts – from managerial staff, whose behaviour it would be advisable to alter through 'the method of group work'. In fact, 'an evolution in methods of command is an indispensable condition for altering the image of industry'. *Cadres* could 'formulate a problem and ask the workforce for solutions'. The final phase, which is still largely hypothetical, consists in wage-earners themselves 'identifying the problems, discussing possible solutions, and then arriving at shared decisions'. To achieve such outcomes, the best thing 'is perhaps to create an entirely new climate, based upon new norms'. The best way of achieving that is to 'construct a new factory, with new employees, and a new group of *cadres* disposed to implementing new managerial systems in this virgin environment. Once the new factory has been constructed, all efforts will focus on the creation of more efficient teams of workers'.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, we find similar proposals in the *report of the 'employer's experts' of the OECD (1972)*, already referred to, with a still greater insistence upon the crisis of authority and the necessity of developing responsibility, autonomy and creativity to confront it. 'The criterion used for measuring individual success', we read in the report, 'consists less and less in technical skill, and greater emphasis is placed on a *constant ability to acquire new qualifications* and perform new tasks: thus social maturity will find expression in creative imagination and not in mastery of an age-old occupation.' 'Most of the ideas that have inspired these discussions', adds the rapporteur, 'assumed that a *more active role would be allowed workers* at all levels, whether that of the workshop or junior *cadres*, in the conception, organization and control of their work.' There follows the example of a Japanese firm that has had to struggle not against 'anarchy', but 'against its opposite – hyper-organization and rigid structures'. In order 'to create a situation where everyone is as involved as possible in their work', the firm organized 'small work groups that enjoy a high degree of autonomy and are also organized in such a way as to allow their members to improve their individual and social qualifications in their everyday work'.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, as early as 1971, on the occasion of this reflection on working conditions, most of the mechanisms whose diffusion was generalized during the second half of the 1980s were conceived, and then tested out. And this process

was accompanied, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, by an increase in both the flexibility and the role of the unions.

This strategy (and in this sense the word is inapposite)<sup>89</sup> was pursued without an overall plan and without challenging the main 'social entitlements' of the previous period head-on or outright – which might have provoked violent reactions. The deregulation of the 1980s and reduction in the security of wage-earners, more and more of whom were threatened with job insecurity, was not the result of a brutal 'deregulation',<sup>90</sup> which would have been the case had most of the measures adopted at the beginning of the 1970s simply been abrogated. Reassertion of control over firms was achieved through a multiplicity of partial or local measures – of 'innovations', in consultants' terminology – co-ordinated by means of trial and error. More generally, it was effected by manipulating a series of displacements, whose character was morphological (e.g. relocation and the development of subcontracting), organizational (just-in-time, versatility, or reduction in the length of hierarchical lines), or legal (e.g. the use of managerial staff on more flexible contracts as regards salary, the greater importance of commercial law as opposed to labour law). Among these displacements was the transition from 'social justice' to 'justice'. These multiple shifts changed the nature of the stakes, the terrain on which tests were staged, the characteristics of the persons confronting each other in them, and the forms of selection that resulted from them. In other words, it changed the character of the whole society without a *coup d'état*, revolution or commotion, without wide-ranging legislative measures, and virtually without debate – or, in retrospect at least, without a debate commensurate with the upheaval that occurred.<sup>91</sup>

The many transformations initiated during the 1970s would be co-ordinated, assimilated and labelled with a single term in the following decade: *flexibility*. In the first instance, flexibility is the possibility firms have of adapting their productive apparatus, and particularly their employment levels, to variations in demand without delay. It would equally be associated with a move towards greater autonomy in work, synonymous with more rapid adaptation on the ground to local circumstances, without awaiting orders from an inefficient bureaucracy. The term was simultaneously adopted by management and the employers, and by certain socioeconomists of work hailing from leftist traditions (like Benjamin Coriat). Abandoning their erstwhile critical stance, these socioeconomists proceed as if the necessity of 'flexibility, characterized as dynamic', as a 'new form of totalization', imposed itself as self-evident.<sup>92</sup> For a decade – that is to say, until the re-emergence of a large-scale critical movement at the end of 1995 – flexibility was pressed in a narrative that would ossify with time, conferring a simultaneously anonymous and inevitable character on the developments of the last twenty years, in accordance with an organicist or Darwinian vision of history. This process without a subject, willed by no one, was supposedly the product of a collective reflex of

adaptation in a situation whose external causes imposed themselves on agents – or, rather, on 'structures' – that were condemned to change or disappear. Oil shocks, globalization, the opening of markets, the growing strength of the newly industrializing countries, new technologies, changes in consumer habits, diversification of demand, increasing rapidity of the life-cycle of products – these had brought about an exponential increase in uncertainties of all sorts. And they condemned the ponderous, rigid industrial systems inherited from the Taylorist era, with its concentrations of workers, its smoking, polluting factory chimneys, its unions and welfare states, to inevitable decline. What disappeared from general commentaries on the evolution of society was something that seemed obvious to a number of analysts in the second half of the 1970s: the way changes in work organization and the condition of wage-labour made it possible to reverse a balance of power which was relatively unfavourable to the employers at the start of the period, and to increase control over work without a commensurate increase in supervision costs.<sup>93</sup>

Paradoxically, the consensus on flexibility was furthered by the Socialists' arrival in government and the integration of new economic experts into the state. On the one hand, these experts established a compromise between the demand for flexibility and themes derived from the left or the extreme left. On the other, they lent greater legitimacy to employers' demands by offering the backing of the most advanced sectors of economic science. Accordingly, we shall conclude this summary of capitalism's responses to the critiques of 1968 with a rapid overview of the 1980s. These years witnessed extensive implementation of the 'second response', thanks in part to the support of partisans of the artistic critique from the class of '68, who regarded the developments under way as marking a certain progress compared with the oppressive world of the 1960s.

#### The class of '68 in power: The Socialists and flexibility

There is no doubt that there was a rapid increase in labour flexibility and, correlatively, of casualization after the arrival in power of the Socialists (who had been elected on a programme that assigned a significant role to the protection of labour legislation). Abandonment of the index-linking of wages to prices – particularly of the minimum wage – and the possibility of 'catching up' at the end of the year, depending on negotiations firm by firm and the 'actual situation of the firm', were especially significant contributory factors. Paradoxically, the dismantling of collectives that developed especially under the Fabius government, after the turn of 1983, relied on legislative measures implemented during the first Socialist government by the Labour Minister Jean Auroux, with the opposite intention of 'reunifying the work community'. To take another example: the 1982 edicts aiming to restrict atypical work contracts by defining instances where they could be authorized had the effect of

conferring a kind of official recognition on them. More profoundly, the important Auroux laws of 1982–83 (a third of labour laws were rewritten in these years), aiming to strengthen the role of the unions by guaranteeing them official recognition in the workplace, had an unforeseen result, which was certainly alien to the wishes of their promoters and initially unnoticed by employers, who were very hostile to them. They favoured casualization and individualization of working conditions, by displacing negotiations to enterprise level. By giving consultative powers to works councils and making the holding of annual negotiations at enterprise level obligatory, the Auroux laws had the unintended effect of wrecking the hitherto centralized character of the industrial relations system. Between 1982 and 1986, the number of agreements reached at branch level fell by half, while the number reached at enterprise level more than doubled.<sup>94</sup> However, the unions, relatively powerful in national negotiating bodies, were often very weak locally; and this was even truer as one moves from the public or nationalized sector to large firms and, above all, small and medium-sized firms. Back in power after 1986, the right pursued the deregulatory work of the Socialists, notably with the introduction by the new Labour Minister, Philippe Séguin, of additional facilities as regards the organization of working hours and the abolition of administrative authorization of redundancy. Moreover, the effectiveness of the latter had always been more symbolic than real, given the very limited character of the obstacles the clause put in the way of redundancies.<sup>95</sup> We shall elaborate on these different issues in the next two chapters.

The support paradoxically given by the left in government to moves leading to reduced security for wage-earners, and to a drastic cut in the power of its traditional union allies, is obviously explained by the economic and social circumstances of France in the 1980s. Acknowledging that social measures were insufficient to deal with unemployment amid a continuous rise in the number of those seeking work, and having to confront the impossibility of the state itself taking people on – which would have aggravated the budget deficit – politicians gradually became accustomed to the idea that only firms could solve the problem, by creating jobs. Logically enough, not being able to force them to do this, the government listened to the demands from heads of firms, who claimed that greater flexibility would enable them to hire.<sup>96</sup> At the same time, employment difficulties restricted the bargaining power of the unions, which were less confident of mobilizing their membership bases. The reversal in the balance of forces between employers and unions was thus inscribed in the economic situation.

But this analysis neglects the role of the *new elites won over to the artistic critique* and distrustful of the old social critique, which was too closely associated with Communism in France. In actual fact, the policy of flexibility was not simply pursued in desperation, but also found numerous champions within the left-wing government.

Between 1981 and 1983, numerous left-wing or extreme-left militants, self-taught trade unionists, or, most often, statisticians, sociologists and economists trained in universities or the *grandes écoles* attained official positions in the state or public bodies: ministerial advisers, research departments answerable to the Labour Ministry, committees of experts, Commissariat au plan, advisers to mayors of large towns, laboratories linked by constantly renewed contracts to regional authorities, and so on. A significant percentage of these new experts in the socioeconomics of work had supported the CFDT's reorientation in 1978 – that is to say, the transition from an aggressive policy (notably in the maximum use of existing law to expand the field of demands), characteristic of the 1970s, to a policy that made negotiation, contractual agreements and realistic compromises its main objective. The CFDT's switch in attitude also focused on the reform of working hours, which could be submitted to local negotiation in exchange for a reduction in working time.<sup>97</sup>

Now in office, close to political power, these left-wing experts assimilated employers' demands into their culture with remarkable rapidity – in particular, demands for flexibility. To understand this conversion, in addition to the change in attitude that frequently accompanies the transition from a critical stance to a position of responsibility – often described by the actors in terms of the test of reality – we must doubtless also take account of the way themes and postures derived from the oppositional left could be reinterpreted in such a way as to conform to new managerial requirements. This was particularly true of the leftist theme of self-management. Central since the 1950s among those fractions of the extreme left most opposed to the Communist Party and statism – notably Trotskyists (with Yugoslavia as a model) – but also to the inhuman character of Taylorism, this theme had been massively adopted by the new left, the CFDT and the PSU. In the event, expectations about self-management were, at least in part, able to be reinvested at the beginning of the 1980s in flexibility, the decentralization of industrial relations, and new forms of management. Japan replaced China in the Western imaginary as a Far Eastern model of humanism; something to rely on to mitigate the inhumanity of Western industrial societies.<sup>98</sup>

But this transfer of leftist skills to management was not restricted to the research consultancies associated with defining government social policy. It also affected firms. In their formative years, the *new consultants*, who in particular established local discussion mechanisms in the second half of the 1980s, had often participated very actively in the effervescence that followed May '68. In becoming professionalized, often after very eventful careers, they invested a specific skill in their work on behalf of firms – a skill acquired not in the form of a technical apprenticeship, but through their life experience. Their professional value was now sustained by their very person, their experience in its most personal dimension – even, in the case of those for whom spiritual commitment had come to take precedence over political commitment, its most

intimate dimension.<sup>99</sup> They had become experts in the Foucauldian critique of power, the denunciation of union usurpation, and the rejection of authoritarianism in all its forms, above all that of petty tyrants. Contrariwise, they specialized in humanist exaltation of the extraordinary potential secreted in each person, if only they were given consideration and allowed to express themselves; in the supreme value of direct encounters, personal relations, particular exchanges; and in the proselytizing adoption of an attitude of openness, optimism and confidence in the face of life's ups and downs, which were invariably beneficial.

Finally, we must mention the rise of another group of experts, whose profile differed from that of the former *soixante-huitards*, but whose entry into dominant positions in administration and circles close to political power facilitated the socialists' turn in 1983–84, and the institution of the policy of competitive deflation. As Bruno Jobert and Bernard Théret observe,<sup>100</sup> the second half of the 1970s had been marked by the advent of a new politico-administrative elite, issued from the *École nationale d'administration*, the Polytechnique and ENSAE, ready to replace the old 'community of planners' around Claude Gruson, which had dominated the Plan and the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, especially its forecasting department, during the 1950s and 1960s. This group, composed of top-level economists, rooted the legitimacy of its expertise in its acknowledged authority in the international field of econometrics and microeconomics, dominated by Anglo-American academics. Starting from the mid-1980s, marked by the decline of the Plan, which was transformed into research departments with uncertain assignments, they invaded the forecasting department, profoundly altered the orientation of training at ENSAE, and acquired a preponderant influence over the budget department in the Finance Ministry. More generally, they concentrated most of the state centres of economic expertise in their hands (with the notable exception of the CERC) and, given the quasi-absence of centres of expertise independent of the state (linked, for example, to the unions, as in Germany), monopolized economic information and diagnosis. Witness, as an example of this change, the relative marginalization in terms of power and prestige of the departments within the INSEE responsible for statistical surveys, in favour of econometrics and theoretical microeconomics. The abandonment of the Keynesian policy of Prime Minister Mauroy (still marked by the influence of the 1960s planners), which followed the surge in American interest rates, capital flight and the sudden deterioration in the balance of payments in 1982, gave this group the opportunity to promote a different image of the state's economic activity. Whereas planners emphasized the state's redistributive function, and its role as arbiter between social groups, the new economic elites concurred in 'reducing public intervention as much as possible', and 'drastically reorientating its activities to make it compatible with the market'.<sup>101</sup>

### CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF CRITIQUE IN THE REVIVAL OF CAPITALISM

The history of the years following the events of May 1968 demonstrate the real but sometimes paradoxical impact of critique on capitalism.

The first response by the employers to the crisis of governability was, so to speak, traditional. It consisted in conceding benefits in terms of wages and security, agreeing to negotiate with the wage-earners' unions, using the formula of industrial relations to damp down class struggle – which also meant acknowledging its reality. In so doing, the employers were simply observing the rules of the game fixed after the great strikes of 1936, which suggested a way out of the crisis via negotiations with the unions under state pressure. Focusing mainly on the issue of economic inequalities and the security of those who live exclusively from their labour-power, this first reaction was presented as a response to the social critique and an attempt to silence it by satisfying it. It must be said that the social advances of these years were very real, and hence that critique was effective.

Even so, it is also clear that the additional costs entailed by these benefits, combined with a more difficult economic situation, prompted those in charge of firms to look for new solutions – all the more so in that the level of criticism they had to face did not seem to drop despite the concessions. They then gradually introduced a series of innovations in the organization of work, with the dual objective of meeting another series of demands and bypassing the unions, which were patently unable to channel such demands, and were often outflanked by them. The effect of these new operational methods, which took the form of a mass of micro-developments and micro-displacements, was to render many of the provisions of labour law null and void in practice, even though they had not been repealed. This process was widely encouraged by a significant number of the protesters of the era, who were especially sensitive to the themes of the artistic critique – that is to say, the everyday oppression and sterilization of each person's creative, unique powers produced by industrial, bourgeois society. The transformation in working methods was thus effected in large part to respond to their aspirations, and they themselves contributed to it, especially after the left's accession to government in the 1980s. Once again, one cannot fail to stress the fact that critique was effective.

Correlatively, however, at the level of security and wages various gains of the previous period were clawed back – not directly, but via new mechanisms that were much less supervised and protective than the old full-time, permanent contract which was the standard norm in the 1960s. Autonomy was exchanged for security, opening the way for a new spirit of capitalism extolling the virtues of mobility and adaptability, whereas the previous spirit was unquestionably more concerned with security than with liberty.

The displacements operated by capitalism allowed it to escape the constraints that had gradually been constructed in response to the social critique, and were possible without provoking large-scale resistance because they seemed to satisfy demands issuing from a different critical current.

The PCF's central position in the vanguard of French social critique no doubt also explains the incredible reduction in its vigilance over its favoured issues while the displacements were under way. The non-Communist left's insistence on the themes of the artistic critique would possibly not have been so great had it not been for the PCF's monopolization of the theme of class struggle. Those who wanted to construct a different left, and found the PCF unconvincing because of its stubborn attachment to the Soviet model, could nevertheless not really attack the Communists head-on given their strong position in the working class, and the fact that they were (or had been) their brothers in the anti-capitalist struggle.<sup>102</sup> The desire to create a different model of society and organization from that offered by the Communists thus led to mobilizing different critical forces on the left and abandoning social critique to the PCF and CGT. Social critique would thus accompany communism in its downfall, and no one (or next to no one) would agitate in the short term to revive it, out of undue fear on the right – but also no doubt on the left – of seeming to want to give a new lease of life to a party that most people wanted to be shot of. This abandonment of the social terrain by a significant component of critique, and its occupation by a movement that was deemed more archaic with every passing day, and increasingly discredited, certainly facilitated recouping on this terrain what had been conceded on the front of the artistic critique.

The fact that some successes were simultaneously achieved by the artistic critique, with the shift in the focus of protest on to questions of mores or ecological-type problems, helped to conceal the growing disaffection with the bodies on which decades of conflicts had conferred a sort of legitimate authority, for the level of contestation generally remained high. The fact that critique focused on new areas did not seem to endanger the advances made on the old front.

Thus there is another way of explaining the transformation of capitalism and the emergence of a new set of values intended to justify it besides discourses on the inexorability of adaptation to new competitive conditions. Just as likely to inform us about the springs of change is an analysis of the critiques capitalism faced – which are more or less vigorous depending on the period, more or less focused on certain themes while neglecting others, more or less internally constrained by their own history – combined with research into the solutions advanced to silence them, without formally quitting the rules of the democratic game.<sup>103</sup>

What we have observed of the role of critique in the improvement, but also the displacements and transformations, of capitalism – which are not

always conducive to greater social well-being – leads us to underscore the inadequacies of critical activity, as well as the incredible flexibility of the capitalist process. This process is capable of conforming to societies with aspirations that vary greatly over time (but also in space, though that is not our subject), and of recuperating the ideas of those who were its enemies in a previous phase.<sup>104</sup>

Thus the second spirit of capitalism, which emerged at the end of the 1930s crisis and was subject to the critique of mass communist and socialist parties, was constructed in response to critiques denouncing the egoism of private interests and the exploitation of workers. It evinced a modernist enthusiasm for integrated, planned organizations concerned with social justice. Shaped through contact with the social critique, in return it inspired the compromise between the civic values of the collective and industrial necessities that underlay the establishment of the welfare state.

By contrast, it was by opposing a social capitalism planned and supervised by the state – treated as obsolete, cramped and constraining – and leaning on the artistic critique (autonomy and creativity) that the new spirit of capitalism gradually took shape at the end of the crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, and undertook to restore the prestige of capitalism. Turning its back on the social demands that had dominated the first half of the 1970s, the new spirit was receptive to the critiques of the period that denounced the mechanization of the world (post-industrial society against industrial society) – the destruction of forms of life conducive to the fulfilment of specifically human potential and, in particular, creativity – and stressed the intolerable character of the modes of oppression which, without necessarily deriving directly from historical capitalism, had been exploited by capitalist mechanisms for organizing work.

By adapting these sets of demands to the description of a new, liberated, and even libertarian way of making profit – which was also said to allow for realization of the self and its most personal aspirations – the new spirit could be conceived in the initial stages of its formulation as transcending capitalism, thereby transcending anti-capitalism as well.

The presence within it of the themes of emancipation and the free association of creators brought together by an identical passion and united, on an equal footing, in pursuit of the same project, distinguishes it from a simple reversion to liberalism, after the parenthesis of the 'planist' constructs, whether fascism or the welfare state, derived from the crisis of the 1930s. (These 'planist' solutions had taken as their ideal state supervision of capitalism, even its incorporation into the state, with a view to progress and social justice.) In fact, the new spirit of capitalism, at least in the initial years of its formation, did not lay stress on what constituted the core of historical economic liberalism – notably the requirement of competition in a self-sufficient market between separate individuals whose actions are co-ordinated

exclusively by prices. On the contrary, it emphasized the necessity of inventing different modes of co-ordination and, to that end, of developing ways of connecting with others integrated into ordinary social relations that had hitherto been neglected by liberalism, founded upon proximity, elective affinity, mutual trust, and even a shared past of activism or rebellion.

Similarly, the relationship to the state is not that of liberalism. If the new spirit of capitalism shares an often virulent anti-statism with liberalism, this has its origins in the critique of the state developed by the ultra-left in the 1960s and 1970s. Having started out from a denunciation of the compromise between capitalism and the state ('state-monopoly capitalism'), this critique, linking up with the critique of the socialist state in the countries of 'real socialism', developed a radical critique of the state as an apparatus of domination and oppression, in so far as it possessed a 'monopoly of legitimate violence' (army, police, justice, etc.), and of the 'symbolic violence' practised by 'ideological state apparatuses' – that is to say, schools in the first instance, but also all the rapidly expanding cultural institutions. Formulated in a libertarian rhetoric, the critique of the state in the 1970s was apt not to perceive its proximity to liberalism: it was, as it were, liberal without knowing it. Thus, subscription to a violent denunciation of the state did not necessarily presuppose renouncing the benefits of the welfare state, which were regarded as so many legal entitlements. The critique of the state (like that, from a different angle, of the union bureaucracies) was one of the mediums for expressing rejection of the second spirit of capitalism and hopes, not formulated as such, of an original construct, reconciling opposites: a leftist capitalism.

The next stage of our analysis will consist in further exploring the displacements in capitalism during the second half of the 1970s and especially the 1980s, seeking to understand what has been dismantled – and how – in the course of these displacements. We aim to roll the rock of Sisyphus back up the slope once more, and revive critique, which, as we have shown, can never really claim victory. The following two chapters are therefore devoted to the socially negative effects of the transformation of capitalism over the last twenty years, in the knowledge that we are not unaware of its genuine contribution to autonomy at work and the opportunity for more people to make more of their abilities.

### Notes

1 See Peter Wagner, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline*, Routledge, London and New York 1994.

2 See Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Journal de la commune étudiante. Textes et documents, novembre 1967–juin 1968*, Seuil, Paris 1988.

3 Quoted in Philippe Bénétion and Jean Touchard, 'The Interpretations of the Crisis of May/June 1968', translated in Keith A. Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations*, Macmillan, Basingstoke and London 1993, pp. 20–47.

4 See Chris Howell, *Regulating Labor: The State and Industrial Relations Reform in Postwar France*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992, p. 61.

5 'The technical institute of wages has published a study that compares the unskilled or semi-skilled blue-collar worker with the fully qualified engineer, and tends to show that the hierarchy is decidedly more open in France than in Germany and other countries. In this study, it emerges that the wages hierarchy in Germany, England and the United States is of the order of 2.5, while in France it is of the order of 4. Moreover, in a certain number of industries, for the reference period, and sticking to Germany, which is the closest to France in its structure, the French *cadre* has a purchasing power 11 per cent greater than that of the German *cadre*, and the French blue-collar worker a purchasing power 16 per cent lower than that of the German blue-collar worker' (CNPF, *Le problème des OS*, CNPF, Paris 1971, p. 4). Similarly, Piketty shows that France is the Western country where wage inequalities were greatest in 1970, surpassing even those of the United States at the time (Thomas Piketty, *L'économie des inégalités*, La Découverte, Paris 1997, p. 19).

6 Pierre Bourdieu, Luc Boltanski and Monique de Saint Martin, 'Les stratégies de reconversion. Les classes sociales et le système d'enseignement', *Information sur les sciences sociales*, 12 (5), 1973, pp. 61–113.

7 The theme of the proletarianization of intellectual workers, introduced in 1963 by Serge Mallet (*The New Working Class*, trans. Andrée and Bob Shepherd, Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1975) and Pierre Belleville (*Une nouvelle classe ouvrière*, Julliard, Paris 1963), was associated by the student movement with inequality of opportunity to complete university studies, and especially to capitalize on degrees in the labour market depending upon social inheritance – a theme given wide echo by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's 1964 book *The Inheritors: French Students and their Relation to Culture* (trans. Richard Nice, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1979). In the discourse of the student movement, the proletarian condition intellectual workers were destined for was characterized primarily by an absence of autonomy and subjection to tasks of execution, as opposed to creative work.

8 The rejection of the 'ideology of output and progress': S. Zegel, *Les Idées de mai*, Gallimard, Paris 1968, p. 93.

9 See, among many examples, the work published in 1973 under the editorship of André Gorz, *The Division of Labour: The Labour Process and Class in Modern Capitalism* (Harvester Press, Hassocks 1976). In Gorz's preface, we read: 'the fragmentation and specialization of jobs, the divorce between intellectual and manual labour, the monopolization of science by élites, the gigantism of industrial plant and the centralization of power that results ... none of this is a necessary prerequisite for efficient production. It is necessary only for the perpetuation of capitalist domination. For capital, all organization of work must be inextricably a technique of production and a technique of dominating those who are producing, because the goal of capitalist production can only be the growth of capital itself, and this goal, alien to the workers, can be realized through them only by constraint (direct or disguised)' (p. viii).

10 See Épistémon, *Ces idées qui ont ébranlé la France*, Fayard, Paris 1968; Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings*, trans. Tom Conley, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1997; Alfred Willener, *L'image-action de la société et la politisation culturelle*, Seuil, Paris 1970.

11 Jean-Marie Domenach, quoted in Bénétion and Touchard, 'The Interpretation of the Crisis of May/June 1968'.

12 Raoul Vaneigem's book *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Left Bank Books and Rebel Press, London 1983), which was written between 1963 and 1965 and published in 1967, unquestionably contains the most concentrated version of the themes of the artistic critique.

13 With respect to the development of management forms that we have sought to bring out, the students significantly took as their foil the representation of the *cadre* predominant in the 1960s. When alluding to '*cadres*', their spokesmen inextricably refer to the holders of

'technocratic power' and supervisors in the 'major capitalist firms'; to the 'petty tyrants' who 'tyrannize' the workers, or the 'intellectual workers', 'new proletarians', compelled to perform 'fragmented tasks' (Luc Boltanski, *The Making of a Class: Cadres in French Society*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge University Press/Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Cambridge 1987, p. 219). A column by Maurice Clavel published on 12 January 1972 in *Le Nouvel Observateur* is sufficiently eloquent as to the disgust inspired by the figure of the *cadre*. 'Big Hexagon' programme on *cadres*... There were lots of *cadres* in it, young *cadres*, apprentice *cadres*. Living standards, retirement, salary scale, taxes, promotion, hierarchy, career – it had everything. This world is absolutely terrible, though the people themselves aren't to blame. ... Humour is out of the question. Things are too dismal. ... How can one avoid a kind of absolute hatred for these young elites. ... *Cadres* ... they'll be the enemy, since we definitely need one, alas! And there will be a fight.'

14 See OECD, *Les nouvelles attitudes et motivations des travailleurs*, Direction de la main-d'oeuvre et des affaires sociales, Paris 1972, pp. 11–12, 17, 18, 20, 23.

15 The wave of protest in firms at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s affected most countries in Western Europe. Readers can refer to the comparisons made by Pierre Dubois between France, Belgium, Italy, the United Kingdom and West Germany. In these five countries, the number of strikes and strikers and the number of days lost increased significantly in the period 1968–73. Much more so than previously, these strikes were often spontaneous, initiated by the rank and file even in countries like West Germany or Great Britain, where unofficial strikes are illegal. In addition, a radicalization of forms of action was observed in these countries during the period, such as occupations, expulsion of management, sequestrations, go-slows, sabotage, illegal sale of products by striking wage-earners, increased workers' control over apprenticeship, security (in Great Britain), hours, the organization of work (in Italy), and so on (Dubois, 'New Forms of Industrial Conflict', in Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, eds, *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968*, vol. 2, Holmes & Meier, New York 1978, pp. 1–34). The intensification of struggle equally, and perhaps even more enduringly and precociously, affected the United States, which saw the development of forms of open struggle (wild-cat strikes, sabotage, rejection by the rank and file of agreements negotiated by the unions, etc.) and latent struggle (absenteeism, turnover) (Gilles Margitier, 'Crise et nouvelle organisation du travail', *Travail et emploi*, no. 22, December 1984, pp. 33–44). In these years, the journal of the Association nationale des directeurs et chefs du personnel (ANDCP), *Personnel*, devoted numerous articles to the 'crisis of authority in firms', to the 'more open indiscipline', the 'refusal to carry out orders or follow instructions', the 'concerted challenge to certain disciplinary rules', to campaigns of denigration against 'supervisors, derisively dubbed "petty tyrants"', and so on.

16 One can get an idea of the variety and creativity of the forms of action that developed in the 1970s by reading the description of 183 actions recorded by Claude Durand in his study of the iron and steel dispute at Usinor-Longwy between December 1978 and August 1979: occupations, demonstrations, blocking of roads and rail tracks, disrupting trains, the mass arrival of workers at work on a day when they had been laid off, occupying the Banque de France, occupation of the telephone exchange, blocking of the works council, ransacking of the Union partronale de la métallurgie, sequestration of the manager of the Chiers factory, attack on the police station, occupation of the office of the head of personnel at Usinor, unloading of a train laden with iron ore, assaults on temporary staff, occupation of the magistrates' court, overturning lorries, cutting a gas pipeline supplying the factory, blocking the supplying of oxygen factories, creation of a radio station, 'Lorraine Coeur d'Acier', march by 120,000 demonstrators on Paris, banners on the towers of Notre-Dame, etc. (Durand, *Chômage et violence. Longwy en lutte*, Gallilée, Paris 1981). Readers will find an ethnographic description of critical attitudes in the everyday relationship to work, from go-slows to challenges to the organization of the line and supervision, in Philippe Bernoux, Dominique Motte and Jean Saglio, *Trois ateliers d'OS*, Les Éditions ouvrières, Paris 1973, esp. pp. 33–7.

17 Claude Durand and Pierre Dubois, *La Grève. Enquête sociologique*, FNSP-Armand Colin, Paris 1975, pp. 221–2.

18 Claude Durand, *Le Travail enchaîné. Organisation du travail et domination sociale*, Seuil, Paris 1978, pp. 7–8, 69–81.

19 Benjamin Coriat, *L'atelier et le chronomètre*, Christian Bourgois, Paris 1979, pp. 197, 218. See also Olivier Pastré, 'Taylorisme, productivité et crise du travail', *Travail et emploi*, no. 18, October/December 1983, pp. 43–70.

20 Jean Rousselet, *L'allergie au travail*, Seuil, Paris 1974.

21 Gabrielle Balazs and Catherine Mathey, 'Opinions sur le marginalisme: analyse d'interviews de spécialistes de la jeunesse', in Jean Rousselet et al., *Les Jeunes et l'emploi*, Cahiers du CEE no. 7, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1975.

22 The ANDCP's journal *Personnel* devoted numerous articles in 1972 to changes in youth and its refusal to 'work in industry' (the title of an article by J. Dupront, rapporteur of the Commission de l'emploi du VI<sup>e</sup> Plan). Take also these remarks by the employers: 'To genuinely unemployed people, who are not mobile or who are at any rate encountering serious problems despite a real desire to work, we must also add to some 30,000 registered young job-seekers a contingent of unregistered youth, which is often assessed at approximately 150,000. And it is a fact that attention generally focuses predominantly on this impressive mass of young people, their arms crossed and not working, it is true – but whether they are unemployed is a lot less obvious (at least if by unemployed one means someone who is actually looking for work but cannot find any)': UPRP (Union des organisations patronales de la région parisienne), *Combien de chômeurs?*, CNPF, Paris 1969, p. 10.

23 The fact that the number of strike days in the car sector – by far the most Taylorized – was in the region of 478,000 in 1971 and 330,500 in 1974, and represents between 10 and 12 per cent of all recorded strike days (compared with between 5 and 8 per cent from 1975 to 1980), is a good indication of the rebellion against fragmented work at the beginning of the 1970s. See Daniel Furjot, 'Conflits collectifs: les conditions de travail en mauvaise posture', *Travail et emploi*, no. 61, 1994, pp. 92–5.

24 Durand, *Le Travail enchaîné*, p. 7.

25 See Pastré, 'Taylorisme, productivité et crise du travail'.

26 The same phenomenon is observed in the United States in the automobile industry, where productivity rose by 4.5 per cent a year between 1960 and 1965, and by only 1.5 per cent a year from 1965 to 1970 (Emma Rothschild, 'Automation et O.S. à la General Motors', *Les Temps modernes*, nos 314–15, September/October 1974, pp. 467–86). The decline in productivity was perpetuated by a snowball effect: the reduction in productivity brought about increased Taylorization and an increase in the pace of work in order to expand output and enhance productivity as cheaply as possible, which in turn led to working-class resistance that caused productivity to drop.

27 See Renaud Dulong, 'Les cadres et le mouvement ouvrier', in *Grèves revendicatives ou grèves politiques?*, Éditions Anthropos, Paris 1971, pp. 161–326.

28 Marc Maurice and Roger Cornu, *Les Cadres en mai-juin 68 dans la région d'Aix-Marseille*, report of the Commissariat général au plan, LEST, Paris 1970.

29 We find a faithful echo of it in no. 82 of *La Revue du militant* (March/April 1969), published by the CFDT and providing an account of the five commissions that assembled 80 CFDT activists on 7 and 8 December 1968 to 'identify the experiments practised in May–June'. The first reported on the 'establishment of strike committees and commissions'; in some firms, these were not simply deliberative structures (an example: at the Clermont hospital the permanent action committee was the decision-making body, the staff having decided to run some of the hospital's services). The second commission cited the case of firms where 'the workers took charge of the instrument of production. In these instances, production was carried out whatever people's position in the hierarchy, whether the hierarchy was "in on it" or replaced by the workers



(the case of Pechiney: Lacq), who then proceeded to establish a much more streamlined structure, whose role was predominantly technical and where the allocation of responsibilities was very flexible: collective decisions wherever possible, decision taken by the relevant party when it was a matter of urgency. In this framework, a spirit of initiative allowed for expression of the ingenuity of workers, who managed to solve problems the engineers had considered insoluble.' 'An initial observation' – writes the rapporteur of the third commission – is that 'taking power in firms is possible: the outside, the context can be a stimulant, but the essential lies in the firm and depends on us.' The members of the fourth commission state that in two cases out of six they demanded powers (Rhône-Poulenc, Centre hospitalier of Nantes). They 'demonstrated workers' managerial capacity in limited technical spheres', and the possibility of 'constructing an experiment in a non-hierarchical organization of work'. Finally, the rapporteur of the fifth commission reports demands aimed at 'a certain power over the organization of work and training'. See CFDT, 'Pour la démocratie dans l'entreprise. Mai-juin 68, des expériences, des documents, des faits', *La Revue du militant*, no. 82, March/April 1969.

30 Ibid.

31 The expression was coined to underscore the fact that what was involved was not 'class' movements and, in particular, to signal their differences from the model of social movement represented by the workers' movement at the time. The student movement was regarded as the precursor of this type of grouping partially transcending class differences, even though it found itself discredited as 'petit-bourgeois' – that is to say, reabsorbed into the conceptual categories of class struggle. Furthermore, this specific characteristic of the student movement was one of the reasons advanced to explain the incomprehension of the events of 1968 displayed by the CGT and PCF. Since the students did not constitute a 'class', they could not in any serious sense be at the forefront of the challenge to capitalist society.

32 François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*, trans. Deborah Furet, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1999, p. 494. The 'new philosophers' (André Glucksmann, *La Cuisinière et le mangeur d'hommes*, Seuil, Paris 1975; Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Barbarism with a Human Face*, trans. George Holoch, Harper & Row, New York 1979) signal the turn from anti-capitalist *gauchisme* to the critique of communism. Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *Mai 1968. L'héritage impossible* (La Découverte, Paris 1998) devotes a whole chapter – a very critical one – to the 'new philosophy', and makes it one of the key turning-points in the permeation of the ideas of 1968.

33 See Michelle Durand, 'La grève: conflit structurel, système de relations industrielles ou facteur de changement social', *Sociologie du travail*, no. 3, July/September 1979, pp. 274–96.

34 André Barjonet (*La CGT*, Seuil, Paris 1968), who, after twenty years as secretary of the CGT's Centre d'études économiques et sociales, resigned in 1968, thus recounts how the CGT reduced the vast protest movement that shook the country to a set of traditional demands, to the great relief of the employers. 'On 20 May, in a speech to the Renault workers, George Séguy vigorously asserted the strictly trade-union character of the strike. A request for contact ensued from the president of the CNPF, M. Huvelin, who wanted to know whether this speech was a snare or whether the CGT really was only pursuing economic goals, and who made it known that, were that to be the case, negotiations could begin.' The CGT and PCF, in not pressing at any stage for rioting or for the ousting of the Gaullist government (for which Raymond Aron congratulated them in *Le Figaro* on 4 June 1968), demonstrated that they were the government's best allies when it came to maintaining order. Furthermore, by agreeing to elections they had no hope of winning, they likewise accepted recourse to established means of conflict resolution and an uninnovative end to the crisis.

35 See Jean Bunel and Jean Saglio, 'La redéfinition de la politique sociale du patronat français', *Droit social*, no. 12, December 1980, pp. 489–98.

36 See Dubois, 'New Forms of Industrial Conflict'.

37 A declaration by the president of Alfa Romeo, published in *Il Giorno* on 11 May 1970, sufficiently conveys the state of mind of European employers at the time: 'Wages are not the

real problem, and Italian industry can absorb the increases. But on condition that work can be organized and that production proceeds. Italy has accomplished its economic miracle because it has worked with creativity and enthusiasm. But today a spirit of continual rebellion, of making things worse to achieve one's ends, of reckless agitation seems to prevail' (quoted in Yves Bénot, *L'autre Italie, 1968–1976*, Maspero, Paris 1977, p. 113).

38 Howell, *Regulating Labor*, p. 85.

39 In the 1970s, a strengthening of 'responsible' trade unions was very widely regarded as one way to combat the risk of anarchy created by the excesses of democracy and egalitarianism in developed countries. See, for example, the 1975 report of the Trilateral Commission (Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki, *The Governability of Democracies*, Mimeo, The Trilateral Commission, 1975), which argued that the governability of a society at a national level depends on the extent to which it is effectively governed at the subnational, regional, local, administrative and industrial levels. In the modern state, for example, the existence of strong bosses at the head of trade unions is often regarded as a threat to the power of the state. Today, however, to have responsible union leaders with real authority over their members is not so much a challenge to the authority of political leaders as a prerequisite for the exercise of that authority (p. 7).

40 Thus, we read in the already cited 1972 OECD report, '[i]n France ... the agreements concluded following collective negotiations have been widely ignored in many cases and have been very vulnerable to attack from young activists': *Les nouvelles attitudes et motivations des travailleurs*, p. 20.

41 François Ceyrac was the manager on the employers' side of the social policy known as the 'corporatist policy'. The employers' conversion to negotiations was recent (Bunel and Saglio, 'La redéfinition de la politique sociale du patronat français'), and those in charge of firms were very concerned to maintain their autonomy, traditionally looking unfavourably on any delegation of power to the CNPF that might commit them to national or sectoral agreements, as well as on state legislation regarded as a fetter upon their freedom as employers. Although it was advocated from the beginning of the 1960s by the Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants, the switch to a strategy of negotiation occurred between 1965 and 1968, in all likelihood with the accession of François Ceyrac to the social vice-presidency of the CNPF at the end of 1967. Prior to the May events, this orientation was to be confirmed, and the rebellion seemed to vindicate the new leadership team, marked by Ceyrac's accession to the presidency of the CNPF in 1972. Although no CNPF leader ever said that he was negotiating 'because, faced with heightened social struggle, he considered it the only way of maintaining a capitalist form of development', employers' discourse in these years strongly suggests that this was the case (Durand and Dubois, *La Grève*, p. 180).

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., pp. 187 f.

44 'The most expensive reforms (continuous professional training, monthly payment, profit-sharing) derived from initiatives by employers and government in the absence of genuine union pressure. They were part of the logic of the economic policy followed. The other reforms, which did not directly pertain to this logic (SMIC or the index-linked minimum wage, pensions), had less financial impact. ... Here are some examples of cost. Continuous professional training: in 1972, the year it was implemented, around 1.5 billion; starting from 1976, more than 4 billion a year. Monthly payment: approximate overall cost between 5 and 8 billion, essentially distributed over four years from 1970 to 1973. Profit-sharing: provision for profit-sharing for 1968 (year of implementation) 0.7 billion; for 1973, more than 2 billion. SMIC: incidence of the more rapid raising of SMIC (relative to the average hourly wage) in 1971, 0.1 billion; in 1972, 0.26 billion. Pensions: cost of the December 1971 law, 1.9 billion over four years' (ibid., p. 189).

45 See Annette Jobert, 'Vers un nouveau style de relations professionnelles?', *Droit social*, nos 9–10, September/October 1974, pp. 397–410.

46 Durand and Dubois, *La Grève*, p. 183.

47 In offering statutory – i.e. lasting – guarantees that were not revisable depending upon economic performance, whether local or general, these agreements helped to shelter wage-earners from the vagaries due to market uncertainty, which were transferred on to other actors (managers of firms, shareholders, potentially the state, by means of incentives and subsidies). The definition of a statute tends to diminish the number, intensity and unpredictable character of the tests confronting workers. Take, for example, the case of monthly payment. In the mid-1960s, depending on the estimates, between approximately 7 and 11 per cent of blue-collar workers in processing industries were paid monthly. But access to monthly-paid status was invariably subject to foremen's judgement, and had the effect of provoking hostility towards those who enjoyed it, separating them from their peer group, whose working conditions they continued to share. For this reason it was sometimes the case that workers who had been selected by the management refused monthly payment. The generalization of monthly-paid status and legislation providing for the conditions of access to this category mean that it is no longer possible to hold out the promise of changed status in everyday work tests so readily (see Jean Buel, *La Mensualisation. Une réforme tranquille?*, Les Éditions ouvrières, Paris 1973, pp. 60–63).

48 Francis Chateauraynaud, *La Faute professionnelle. Une sociologie des conflits de responsabilité*, Métailié, Paris 1991, pp. 166–7.

49 In view of the fact that the division between profits and wages in value added is a fairly stable ratio (around 1/3 – 2/3), one cannot but register the extent of the alteration of this rate in France during the 1970s: the share of wages (including social expenses), which was 66.4 per cent in 1970s, rose continuously to reach 71.8 per cent in 1981, the share accruing to capital being its complement measured by the gross surplus of exploitation. More than 5 per cent of national income was redistributed from capital to labour between 1970 and 1982 (Piketty, *L'économie des inégalités*).

50 'According to it [meritocracy], there is only one criterion of success and society is essentially based on a certain hierarchy. In our societies today, a benchmark model flourishes that allows a minority to accumulate all the advantages: power, money, interesting work, the lifestyle offering the most freedom. ... The meritocratic temptation in fact exists in all societies. It nevertheless takes more acute forms in our country and is in profound contradiction with the aspiration to equality. ... We are forgetting one of the major axes of socialism: collective advancement' (Jacques Delors, *Changer*, Stock, Paris 1975, pp. 138–9).

51 See Adriano Sofri, 'Sur les conseils de délégués: autonomie ouvrière, conseils de délégués et syndicats en 1969–1970', *Les Temps modernes*, no. 335, June 1974, pp. 2194–2223; Bénot, *L'autre Italie*, pp. 162–6; and G. Santilli, 'L'évolution des relations industrielles chez Fiat, 1969–1985', *Travail et emploi*, no. 31, March 1987, pp. 27–36.

52 'Ambroise Roux thought that Charles Piaget [the trade-union leader in the Lip dispute] was going to be prosecuted and convicted for theft, and that one could not support his intrigues if the idea was to avoid him gaining ground' (Henri Weber, *Le parti des patrons. Le CNPF 1946–1986*, Seuil, Paris 1987, p. 211). The Lip workers' struggle to save their firm, placed in liquidation in 1973, which would last three years, will remain the symbolic dispute of the turn of 1974. It represents one of the rare examples of self-management in France, for in 1973 the wage-earners decided to restart a production line for watches, market them, and pay themselves on an egalitarian basis. Enjoying very wide support among anti-capitalist associations and personalities, and highly favourable public opinion, the struggle embodied the attempt by wage-earners to defend their firms and jobs before such closures came to be regarded in the 1980s – including by their victims – as the inevitable result of economic determinism. The history of the Lip workers is recounted in Gaston Bordet and Claude Neuschwander, *Lip 20 ans après*, Syros, Paris 1993.

53 Weber, *Le parti des patrons*, p. 226.

54 Quoted in Alfred Willener, Catherine Gadjos and Georges Benguigui, *Les Cadres en mouvement*, Éditions de l'Épi, Paris 1969, pp. 15–16.

55 Employers' profit-sharing initiatives began before 1968. The first edict dates from 1959 and a second was issued in August 1967. But the movement continued after 1968 (February 1970: law on shareholding at Renault; December 1970: law on share options in limited companies; January 1973: law on shareholding in banks and SNIAS; December 1973: law on shareholding and profit-sharing [decrees in April and May 1974]).

56 See Durand and Dubois, *La Grève*, p. 365.

57 This is the thesis defended, notably, by Olivier Pastré ('Taylorisme, productivité et crise du travail') and certain Regulationists. In retrospect, it seems to us that these interpretations, offered at the moment of the crisis, conflate different causes that are valid for different groups. The rebellion of unskilled and semi-skilled workers cannot be attributed to a rise in their level of education. On the contrary, in France as in Italy, the second half of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s correspond to a period of rapid industrialization and an increase in unskilled jobs, which employers met by calling on workers of rural origin, newly urbanized workers, foreign workers, migrants from the south into the industries of northern Italy, and so on. As Charles Sabel puts it, these peasant workers had a very low educational level. They possessed neither work experience nor political or trade-union experience. They were not rebels against Taylorism, but aspired to a decent standard of living and wanted to be treated in a way that did not offend their dignity, their 'social honour'. According to this interpretation, the rebellions of unskilled and semi-skilled workers at the beginning of the 1970s were essentially the result either of a rise in the cost of living such that it no longer seemed possible to live decently, or of poor treatment by employers or petty tyrants impugning the social honour of the migrants. This would explain the fact that the major strikes by unskilled and semi-skilled workers often began with a local, apparently minor 'incident' – an insult, a personal confrontation in the workshop, and so on (Sabel, *Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982, pp. 132–3). By contrast, the interpretation in terms of rising educational level is certainly valid for young *cadres*.

58 See Alain Ehrenberg, *Le Culte de la performance*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris 1991.

59 A limited number of disputes – 7 per cent in 1971, for example – had working conditions as their main *official* demand (Michelle Durand and Yvette Harff, 'Panorama statistique des grèves', *Sociologie du travail*, no. 4, 1973), whereas a study of strikes at the beginning of the 1970s carried out by Durand and Dubois in 1975 (*La Grève*) shows that in 62 per cent of cases, union activists acknowledged that demands for wage increases were bound up with frustration at hierarchical relations and dissatisfaction over working conditions (Pierre Dubois, Claude Durand and Sabine Erbès-Séguin, 'The Contradiction of French Trade Unionism', in Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, eds, *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968*, vol. 1, Holmes & Meier, New York 1978, pp. 53–100).

60 Jean-Marie Clerc cites the following report written in 1971 by the regional directors of labour: 'To begin with, this discontent is expressed by demands over wages or related issues, demands that are poorly formulated, imprecise, and which in reality invariably express deeper dissatisfaction, sometimes of an unconscious kind, bound up with the conditions for performing work (repetitive tasks, uninteresting work, work rhythm, hours, resentment of hierarchy ...). This discontent often manifests itself in workshops employing numerous young people, of unskilled or semi-skilled grade, but also sometimes in workshops containing a large number of young professionals: too high a proportion of youth precludes any hope of promotion and makes the burden of everyday constraints impact more heavily. The expression of this discontent is sudden' (quoted in Clerc, 'Les conflits sociaux en France en 1970 and 1971', *Droit social*, no. 1, January 1973, pp. 19–26).

61 At the end of 1973, several study groups on improving working conditions were set up by the Labour Ministry. A brief on the technical, economic and financial aspects of the changes that might be introduced was given to the sociologist Jean-Daniel Reynaud. On 4 October, a bill for the improvement of working conditions was adopted by the National Assembly. It provided

for an expansion in the remit of the works council with the creation in firms of more than 300 wage-earners of a committee charged with studying these questions. Finally, at the national level an agency for the improvement of working conditions was created (Guy Caire, 'La France est-elle encore à l'heure de Lip?', *Droit social*, no. 11, November 1973, pp. 522-9). It seems that the creation of ANACT played a predominantly promotional role, at least at the outset. Thus, in the report of the National Assembly on the 1976 finance law, we read that 'nearly two years after its creation, the Agency has not really got off the ground' - something the report's authors excuse by reference to the very modest character of its means.

62 See Bruno Jobert and Bernard Théret, 'France: La consécration républicaine du néo-libéralisme', in Jobert, ed., *Le tournant néo-libéral en Europe*, J. Harmattan, Paris 1994.

63 Clerc, 'Les conflits sociaux en France en 1970 et 1971'.

64 Pastré, 'Taylorisme, productivité et crise du travail', pp. 66-9.

65 In the Trilateral Commission report we have already cited, we find expressed the fear that an increase in the rate of immigration into Europe will lead to similar racial problems to those experienced by the United States in the period. According to Crozier *et al.*, prioritizing problems of work and work organization was the only way to reduce the new tensions affecting post-industrial society, which would otherwise risk fuelling irresponsible blackmail and new inflationary pressures. It was simultaneously necessary to restore the status and dignity of manual labour. This would help resolve the increasingly acute problem of immigrant workers in Western Europe, which would otherwise become the equivalent to the problem of racial minorities in the USA (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, *The Governability of Democracies*, p. 38).

66 CNPF, *Le problème des OS*, pp. 3, 11.

67 Quoted in Weber, *Le Parti des patrons*, p. 233.

68 See *ibid.*, pp. 232-7.

69 Howell, *Regulating Labor*, p. 116.

70 Yvon Chotard, quoted in Bunel and Saglio, 'La redéfinition de la politique sociale du patronat français'.

71 Holly Sklar, ed., *Trilateralism: The Trilateral Commission and Elite Planning for World Management*, South End Press, Boston 1980, p. 73; Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, p. 7.

72 Benjamin C. Roberts, Hideaki Okamoto and George C. Lodge, 'Collective Bargaining and Employee Participation in Western Europe, North America and Japan', Trilateral task force on industrial relations (1979), in Trilateral Commission, *Task Force Reports: 15-19*, New York University Press, New York 1981, p. 231.

73 Until 1978, the PCF's electoral position remained good, despite a gradual erosion in the Parisian region, while the PS made regular advances (thus the cantonal elections of 1976 marked a reversal in the balance of electoral forces between the PCF and the PS, with the Communist Party losing its rank as the principal formation of the left for the first time since the war). But over the next five years, the PCF lost half its voters, dropping below the 10 per cent mark in 1986.

74 Well-documented, reliable information on the terror that reigned in the communist countries was available from the end of the 1940s. But it required a denunciation - and a very partial one at that - from within the system, Khrushchev's 1956 Report, for French Communists to recognize the *personal crimes* of Stalin, without thereby acknowledging the criminal character of the Soviet regime. Restoring some vigour to the Marxist-Leninist ideal, the 1960s saw the proliferation of other communist models (Trotskyism, Maoism, Castroism, Titoism), but this was already a sign of the declining hold of communist structures on French critique (see Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*). As for the second half of the 1970s, it was marked by the appearance in 1974 of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, which had a print run of over a million in France.

75 Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste français*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1995, p. 353.

76 Initially very critical of the student demonstrations (Georges Marchais attacked these 'pseudo-revolutionaries', 'sons of the bourgeoisie', in *L'Humanité*, 3 May 1968), from 17 May

the PCF was to adopt a strategy that seemed to point in the direction of taking political power. While condemning ultra-leftism and those features of the May movement that were deemed unacceptable because they led to a liberation regarded by the Communists as unacceptable 'disorder', the PCF rapidly abandoned the purely negative attitude it had initially adopted. Through the CGT, it initiated or followed the strike movement (six million strikers by 20 May, ten million a week later), demanded a 'change of political regime', and set up 'committees for a popular government of democratic union' that were to organize the base with a view to a potential assumption of power. But this strategy was not carried through to a conclusion: Communist action was self-limiting out of a fear of civil war after de Gaulle's journey to Germany, by warnings from the Soviets, who were content with Gaullist positions in foreign policy, and by a constant fear throughout the crisis of seeing the movement escape their control. But having engaged in an explicit strategy of taking power without giving itself the means, if only by sketching out its realization, the PCF proved its comparative impotence in the course of this test, despite its size and seeming strength. Henceforth, *it no longer inspired fear*, or at least not as much as it had done in the past. In the eyes of the most enlightened among the employers, it would even appear in some circumstances as a perfectly acceptable ally for confronting the danger of the moment: ultra-leftist agitation.

77 In her 1987 book on Communist intellectuals between 1956 and 1985, Jeanine Verdès-Leroux deems the decline of the PCF irreversible, and maintains that it 'became blindingly obvious at least from the spring of 1978', for the disintegration of the organization, which was clear then, was to be translated at the electoral level - as was evident in 1981. By reference to opinion polls from the beginning of the 1980s, she shows that the discredit of the party, particularly among the young, stemmed above all from its relationship with the USSR, especially shocking at the moment of the invasion of Afghanistan; but also from its lack of internal democracy and, more profoundly, from 'its being cut off from the evolution of society', 'an absence of analyses and proposals to confront the problems that developed at the beginning of the 1980s': 'The degeneration of the party was thus inscribed in the narrowness, provincialism and limits of Communist intellectual culture.' But Verdès-Leroux also shows that in the same period these criticisms were widely shared by a number of intellectuals who were still members of the Party, whom she questioned, and who no longer 'believed' in the principles on which the adhesion of their elders was based: the 'working class' (become a 'myth'); Marxism, of which activists had a poor knowledge; the USSR, 'a paradise that had turned into a nightmare'; the leadership, formerly venerated but increasingly discredited and scorned, with their head, secretary-general Georges Marchais, at the top of the list (*Le Réveil des somnambules. Le parti communiste, les intellectuels et la culture (1956-1985)*, Fayard-Minuit, Paris 1987, pp. 11-31). Hence the PCF imploded from within. But the effects of the collapse of a critical instance which, as a result of the fear it inspired in its glory days, offered an effective incentive to capitalism to social reforms, would all find expression on the outside, on the living conditions of wage-earners in general, whether or not they were 'on the left'.

78 Thus, for example, in 1977-78 the Centre de sociologie des organisations, with financing from CORDES (i.e. from the Plan), conducted a study of 'the functioning of work collectives' that aimed to understand the operational logic of communitarian work groups whose 'purpose has certainly been to survive and produce, but whose most profound results have also aimed at the search for new human relations in the community' ('monastic communities of mental and manual labour', village communities of land-clearers and artisans in the America of the pioneers, but also in Israel's kibbutzim and mochavim, Chinese communes, self-managed farms in Algeria, workers' production co-operatives in the industrial societies created under socialism, and self-managed firms in Yugoslavia). The report relied in particular on an investigation of twenty-one 'organizations where experiments in self-management had developed: four production co-operatives, five experimental health institutions, four artisanal firms in arts and crafts, two experiments in improving living conditions and semi-autonomous teams in a metallurgical factory and

an insurance company in the public sector, and so on (Marie-Odile Marty, Rosa Nehmy, Renaud Sainsaulieu and Pierre-Eric Tixier, *Les Fonctionnements collectifs de travail*, 3 vols, mimeo, CSO, Paris 1978). The second volume of this important report (signed by Rosa Nehmy) was devoted to 'project organizations'. It developed 'the notion of project in the organization', in its functional but also 'socio-affective' dimensions, and by this token constitutes an important document in what might be called the 'archaeology' of the projective. In the third volume ('From the Experimental to the Durable'), Sainsaulieu and Tixier ponder how these experiments might contribute to the management of large firms in their efforts at creativity and imagination, in order to meet a new 'craving for community' in modern firms.

79 We can see it, for example, in the case of flexible or 'tailor-made' hours. It is undeniable that they have advantages for wage-earners and, in particular, for women with families. Presented, legitimately, as a common-sense reform (why demand that all the members of the workforce in a firm are present at the same time on the premises, when it is enough that they are there for a limited period of the day and certain hours of the week?), flexible hours were the subject of experiments encouraged by the Labour Ministry as early as 1972 (a bill was discussed in 1973 in the Conseil économique et social). From 42 in 1972, the number of firms experimenting with flexible hours rose to 400 in 1974; according to some estimates, it reached 20,000 in 1980. These measures put the trade unions in an awkward position, since they could not oppose a change that was favoured by numerous wage-earners outright, even though they sensed the risks of a dismantling of labour regulations in the legalization of flexible hours. In fact, the question of the length of the working day and week was central in the formation of labour law. Yet flexible hours were to allow a transfer of working hours from one day to the next and one week to the next (working, for example, thirty-six hours one week and forty-four hours the following week). In addition to the problem posed by harmonization with the 1946 law on the obligation to pay overtime, the transfer of working hours opens the way to 'flexibility' – that is to say, to the transfer of the constraint deriving from market uncertainties onto wage-earners. For, as Philippe Lamour and Jacques de Chalendar justly remark, 'the employer can also have an interest, in order to finish some important piece of work, in his employees working forty-four hours one week, even if it means them coming in for only thirty-six hours the following week – and this without paying the four additional hours at a higher rate in the first week. How to know who is behind these forty-four hours? The employee, for personal reasons, or the employer, in the interests of the firm? Is it a question of a surplus hour or a genuine hour of overtime? This is not always easy to untangle, above all in the small and medium-sized firms where the risks of pressure are not inconsiderable' (*Prendre le temps de vivre. Travail, vacances et retraite à la carte*, Seuil, Paris 1974, pp. 42–3).

80 We might inquire whether the employers' conversion to autonomy was not aided by the example afforded after a few years by the blueprint law on higher education presented by Edgar Faure in autumn 1968. This law (which adopted numerous themes developed during the crisis months, and had benefited from the work of committees set up by students and some professors) aimed to introduce greater autonomy into universities, understood both as an autonomy of persons (students with respect to teachers, assistant lecturers with respect to professors), and as an autonomy of units: competing universities, divided into faculties with committees with representation for students, assistant lecturers and professors, themselves broken up into teaching and research units. This new organization, which had made more conservative professors shudder, in fact proved to be an excellent device for integrating, channelling and sapping the energy of the protesters.

81 Michel Crozier – and he was unquestionably the first to do so – had sensed that the anti-institutional critiques developed by the May movement, once detached from their revolutionary references, could pave the way for a more liberal society, making much greater room for the market than in the past. This is why, while opposing the egalitarian tendencies of the movement, he approved of the critique of the *grandes écoles* in such a fashion as to break down the barriers to the formation of a large, unified skills market. See Crozier, *La Société bloquée*, Seuil, Paris 1970.

82 CNPF, *L'amélioration des conditions de vie dans l'entreprise*, 2 vols, Paris 1977, pp. 327, 329.

83 Ibid.

84 CNPF, *Le problème des OS*, p. 25.

85 Ibid., p. 14.

86 Ibid., p. 16.

87 Ibid., pp. 20, 22, 24, 21.

88 OECD, *Les nouvelles attitudes et motivations des travailleurs*, pp. 23, 25, 32.

89 Obviously, the employers are not a single actor and the managers of firms do not universally subscribe to the slogans launched by the employers' organizations. To speak of a strategy – in the sense of a planned project – on the part of the CNPF during these years is excessive, which does not mean that the transformations of the 1970s can be turned into the automatic result of some process without a subject. As Chris Howell remarks, the CNPF and other employers' bodies (for example, the Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants), if they did not orchestrate the employers' response to the crisis, at least played a very significant role: on the one hand, by putting pressure on the state, and on the other by playing the role of laboratory for deliberation and innovation in the invention, and especially the diffusion – via conferences, seminars, symposia – of new managerial forms and practices (Howell, *Regulating Labor*, p. 115). The same could be said of a body like the OECD. Employers' associations can in this sense be assimilated to 'clubs' (Bernd Marin, 'Qu'est-ce que le patronat? Enjeux théoriques et résultats empiriques', *Sociologie du travail*, no. 4, 1988, pp. 515–44). As Marin further remarks, it remains the case that although the employers' associations have no problems with membership (they contain almost all the members of a sector), they have the utmost difficulty co-ordinating the action of their members: 'whatever is advantageous for the *totality* of businessmen in one sector (high price levels, good professional training of skilled blue-collar workers and technicians, for example), each of the firms taken *individually* has an interest in undermining it (and in lowering prices, not contributing to the training of apprentices, etc.)'.

90 See François Gaudu, 'Les notions d'emploi en droit', *Droit social*, no. 6, June 1996, pp. 569–76.

91 This is to indicate how unrealistic it would be to seek to make a distinction between the characteristics of the 'context' and the properties of the 'actors', in the manner of an evolutionistic and neo-Darwinian theory of change, and especially economic change, wherein 'actors' 'react' to 'contextual constraints' and succeed, or fail, in 'adapting' to them. On the contrary, it is the way in which interacting actors construct their identity according to the strategies they deploy that tends to alter and continually redefine the contextual constraints, in such a way that the action constitutes the context as much as it is inflected by it. For a critique of economic change conceived as a process of adaptation guided by the defence of vital interests and neo-Darwinian analogies, popularized by Richard Nelson and Sidney Winter (*An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1982), see the excellent introduction by Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin to the collective volume they published recently on the historical alternatives to mass production, *World of Possibilities: Flexibility and Mass Production in Western Civilization* (Cambridge University Press and Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Cambridge and Paris 1997).

92 Chateauraynaud, *La faute professionnelle*, pp. 149–52.

93 In retrospect, we can in fact assign different functions to the emphasis laid on flexibility in the mid-1980s. The first, and most conspicuous, was to make it possible for firms to confront market uncertainties by modulating their wage costs in accordance with short-term demand. For that, it was necessary to lift restrictions on hiring, redundancy, working hours, the nature and especially length of work contracts, access to temporary work, and so on. But flexibility also incorporates a social policy that tends towards tightening of supervision over wage-earners.

94 See Howell, *Regulating Labor*.

95 Administrative authorization of redundancies was established by law in 1975. Prior to its abrogation in 1986, however, it was granted in 90 per cent of cases. If, immediately after the repeal of the law at the end of 1986 and beginning of 1987, economic redundancies rose by 17 and 19 per cent, the figures thereafter returned to their earlier level (François Guérout, 'Faut-il rétablir l'autorisation de licenciement?', *Alternatives économiques*, no. 140, September 1996).

96 Nevertheless, being highly conscious of the paradox of a left-wing government supporting measures in favour of flexibility, the government wanted an agreement between employers and unions. The negotiations broke down in 1984. While present at them, the CGT had never been enthusiastic, but the other unions (CFDT, FO, CFTC and CGC) had agreed to discussions and had ended up with a protocol with the employers, although they could not sign it as a result of rumbling discontent within their respective apparatuses. This failure was widely interpreted in the press as the sign of the unions' inability to 'adapt to modernity', and reinforced their crisis of representation (Raymond Soubie, 'Après les négociations sur la flexibilité', *Droit social*, no. 3, March 1985, pp. 221-7). For its part, the government had to start all over again, now obliged to proceed openly. But it found itself in a more legitimate position to do so, given media dismay at the failure of the negotiations.

97 One can only be struck after the event by the similarity between the positions expressed in two texts published the same year - 1986 - which both had the defence of jobs as their main argument: the first signed by Yvon Gattaz, representative of the CNPF; the second by Edmond Maire of the CFDT. As one might expect, Gattaz criticizes the 'rigidity, regulation and irreversibility of established benefits', which 'block' employment. He demands an increase in flexibility and, more precisely, the possibility of 'modulating workforces', making redundancies freely, developing 'wage flexibility', in such a way as 'to take account of individual merit and reward the qualities of those who put their skills and their energy in the service of the firm', against the 'egalitarianism that has been extolled for so long', and 'social envy', the 'flexibility of working conditions' and 'hours', and 'flexibility in the minimum number of employees required to establish works councils' (Gattaz, 'L'emploi, l'emploi, l'emploi', *La Revue des entreprises*, no. 477, March 1986, pp. 15-18). While criticizing the 'liberal policy of the employers', Maire wonders how to improve the profitability of firms, whose main handicap consists - he says - 'in an archaic, centralized management, which squanders the potentialities of wage-earners and ossifies their qualifications'. What he proposes by way of remedy can readily enough be reinterpreted in terms of flexibility: 'To give our firms the quality, flexibility, and capacity to adapt and innovate they urgently require, we must perfect forms of organization of work that are flexible and enhance skills, of types of management which call on the active participation of wage-earners in firms and public services. And the necessary adaptations in social benefits must be defined contractually.... The reduction of working hours will then assume its full meaning' ('Le chômage peut être vaincu', *Le Monde*, 20 August 1986).

98 In order to resolve the problem of the rejection of work by young people, the ANDCP thus undertook to look for models elsewhere. The journal devoted an issue to 'Japanese Management' and, in particular, to the way in which firms in Japan accommodated the young (no. 149, February 1972). The Association even sent a mission to Yugoslavia to study self-management there, which gave rise to a special issue of the journal (no. 156, November/December 1972). Far from being negative, the account of this mission noted numerous positive features of self-management - features that were to be exploited when, after the turn of 1974, the question of 'self-management' was taken seriously in French firms. Thus, we learn that 'self-management is concerned with human beings, whom it regards as the only factor in collective progress'; that 'self-management is a system in which orders are to be avoided and instead people are to be persuaded'; and that 'this point is particularly important when we know the problems of supervision in some firms in France, which has not yet realized that it is no longer a matter of ordering (in the literal sense of the term), but of inducing collaborators to participate by obtaining their consensus'. Other 'positive points' noted were 'information within the firm, the

linchpin of self-management', and the 'creation of work units, which has made it possible to restore work to a more human scale. In fact, the work unit is a small firm with its own trading account, existing autonomously of management'

99 See Paolo Virno, *Opportunisme, cynisme et peur*, Éditions de l'Éclat, Combas 1991. Thus, Virno has shown how Italian capitalism reintegrated and set to work the skills acquired by the young protesters of the 1970s in militant or ludic activities, pertaining to 'the invention of new lifestyles' or the 'counter-culture'. The same thing occurred in France. Thus, for example, artistic directors in light-music record companies, one of whose tasks consists in spotting and selecting new talent that may please the public, are often renegades into capitalist organizations from the marginal worlds they frequented in their youth (Antoine Hennion, *La Passion musicale*, Métailié, Paris 1995).

100 Jobert and Théret, 'France'.

101 Ibid., p. 45.

102 As Furet (*The Passing of an Illusion*) observes, the condemnation of anti-Communism on the left, which continues beyond the Soviet collapse, is what survives of this party's sway over critique in France.

103 It must nevertheless be reckoned that supporters of the 'inexorable movement' were not altogether wrong inasmuch as the search for social innovations, intended to resolve the problems facing capitalism - as a result particularly, but not exclusively, of critique - actually results in the invention of new, more profitable mechanisms. Once these are discovered, especially if they do not clash with ordinary morality, it is virtually impossible without legislating to avoid them spreading, for those in charge of firms know that they are obliged to adopt them if their competitors adopt them.

104 As Marshall Berman emphasizes, commenting on Marx in the work that he has devoted to the critical experience of modernity from Goethe to the 1970s new left, one of the basic contradictions of the bourgeoisie, inasmuch as its fate is associated with that of capitalism, is to mean to serve the party of order while constantly, and without qualms, shattering the concrete conditions of existence so as to ensure the survival of the accumulation process, going so far as to reappropriate the most radical critiques, in some cases transforming them into commodity products (*All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, Verso, London 1983, esp. pp. 98-114).