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WORK IS A FOUR-LETTERED WORD

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"Work to me is a void, and I begrudge every precious minute of my time that it takes." - tobacco worker

"... as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague." - Karl Marx

The alarm clock is ringing. You wake up. It's Monday morning. You get up. You wash and dress. Hurry up! Got to get to work mustn't be late. Another day of work to get through. Another week of work ahead. Wish it was Sunday.

Odd, isn't it? Most of us spend a lot of our lives working but don't get much enjoyment or satisfaction out of it. We just look forward to the end of the day, the end of the woek and the money in our pay packets. Time spent at work is so much time wasted. It's not really living but just a way of earning a living. And we're going to carry on doing it until we're too old or too ill to work anymore.

Of course, work is not always like this for everyone all of the time. You can get quite absorbed in some work, it's quite interesting. Some people have jobs which place challenging demands on their minds and bodies and which seem worthwhile doing. But even then, work is frequently frustrating. All too often you're not allowed enough time to do a job properly, or you haven't got the right tools and equipment to do it well, or you're forced to debase your skills and standards by making rubbish.

"Well, that's just life", you may say. "That's the way things are. Can't really do anything about it. Work has got to be done. No way round it. Anyway, work is hard enough to come by these days".

Work is a strange thing. We want to get some when we haven't got any but we'd rather not have it when we've got it. We accept that work is necessary for life to go on but it's a part of life we don't like. We like living but we don't like work which is part of living.

But surely, there must be comething wrong if we experience our work as a burden, as something forced upon us? Aron't we supposed to enjoy life, all of it, and not just the time when we're not at work? And why not? Why not change things so that work becomes a blessing rather then a curse? It can be done and we, workers of all kinds, can do it. We can make our work worth living. We can make our lives worth working. We can turn working into living. Work need not be a four-lettered word.

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MAN MAKES HIMSELF THROUGH WORK

"You badly want - indeed desperately need - something you regard with distaste." - unemployed miner

"... labour is a process going on between man and nature, a process in which man, through his own activity, initiates, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and nature. ... By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature." - Karl Marx .

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Birds fly, fish swim and people work. Nothing is more natural for human beings than to work. If there is such a thing as human nature then it's in our nature to work. This activity which now appears so unnatural, so alien to our nature, is in fact what distinguishes us from other animals: it is our essential nature. So if we have come to experience work as not living, as not part of us, then we have lost our own human nature. Incredible as this may sound, we human beings have in some mysterious way become separated, become <u>alienated</u> from our own natural life.

Perhaps you question the claim that the most natural activity for people is to work? But think about it. Look back through history and examine how the human species has developed into what it is now. We know that our remote ancestors, who lived millions of years ago, were apes rather like the chimpanzees and orangoutangs alive today. Just like these modern apes our ancestors lived off whatever they happened to find around them, ready-made nature. They ate nuts, berries, fruits, roots and sometimes they caught small animals and ate them raw. The apemen of the past didn't work, didn't produce the food they needed to survive. They just took what they found and left it at that.

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But gradually, over a very long period of time, our ancestors started to make and use tools to help them obtain their food. First of all it was just sticks and stones that they came across. These were used to knock fruit off trees, dig up roots, knock down animals and for defence against beasts of prey. Apeman had started to produce his means of life instead of simply finding them. Later on, another step forward was taken when our ancestors began to make their tools by sharpening sticks and shaping stones to render them more effective in use.

Thus it was that primitive man began the long struggle to control and subordinate nature in order to meet his needs. As man struggled with natural forces so his knowledge of those forces started to grow. His ideas about the world and his outlook upon it began to change. At this early stage of human development knowledge appeared in the form of magic and religion. Obviously, this type of knowledge was crude and limited. Nonetheless it was out of those primitive beginnings that modern science and technology eventually emerged. What is more, as the methods by which men produced their means of life changed so did their relations with each other. The type of work done and the tools used in doing it determine the relationships formed between people. The pattern of family organisation and the body of customs which grew up did so in accordance with the demands and restrictions imposed upon people by their methods of production. Social relationships changed and developed in response to changes and developments in the struggle to produce food, shelter and clothing.

This is the way man has lived ever tince these distant times by working. With the continuous development of our tools and machinery our power over nature has steadily increased. Bound up with this development of the forces of production has been the growth of human knowledge and the growth in size and complexity of human communities from a few dozen, to tens of millions of people.

So man made himself through work. Man conquered nature through work. But now man finds himself opposed to, alienated from his work. We have changed curselves and changed the world but now we feel:

> "I, a stranger and afraid, In a world I never made."

WE ARE ALIENATED FROM THE PRODUCTS OF OUR WORK

"It's a funny feeling riding along in something you really hated when it was a shell on the line." car production worker

"... the object which labour produces - labour's product - confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer." - Karl Marx

In primitive tribal societies people produced directly to satisfy their own needs. Each family or group of related families made their own simple tools and used these to work on their natural surroundings. Both the means of production and the resulting products were shared in common. There was no privately-owned property. Everyone possessed both nature and the products made from it. Furthermore, the amount of material goods produced was just sufficient to meet the tribe's immediate needs. There were no surplus products left over.

But as the forces of production developed, this bare subsistence situation changed. As production became more efficient a surplus of goods was created. Thus it was that exchange of goods, trade, began between tribes and later on within tribes. In this way the division of labour began to emerge in human societies. Some people began to specialize in making weapons, say, and others specialized in weaving cloth. Even so, most production was still for the personal consumption of its producers. Exchange of produce was of little importance at first and took place by means of direct barter. A common measure of the value of products, money, was yet to appear.

Not all tribes progressed in improving the forces of production at the same rate. In those societies where production increased more quickly the population would also grow more quickly because the chances of people surviving childhood and reproducing themselves were greater. Such a society needed an ever-increasing tribal territory to provide the natural resources to support its growing population. Sconer or later the tribe found itself clashing with a neighbouring society over claims to tribal territories. The usual outcome of such conflict was that the economically more advanced society. This was inevitable because the more advanced society would almost certainly have the larger population and the more developed means of making war, i.e. weapons.

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Thus, it was with slavery, brought about by conquest, that human societies first became divided into rulers and ruled, exploiters and exploited. Society became divided into two <u>classes</u>: the slaveowners who owned and controlled the principal means of production, i.e. the slaves themselves, and the slaves who possessed nothing, not even their own bodies.

Obviously it is only worth owning a slave if he or she is capable of producing a quantity of goods greater than what is necessary to feed, shelter and clothe the slave himself or herself. Otherwise the master of the slave reaps no benefit. It follows that slavery is only possible when the forces of production have reached a certain stage of development.

The slave is alienated from his own life in every possible way. The products he or she make belong exclusively to the master and not the slave. The slave does not work for himself but his master. Slaves are not allowed to form stable family relationships but breed at the direction of the slave owner. They are not even regarded as members of human society but as goods which can be bought and sold or even killed at the whim of the master. Slaves are completely deprived of their humanity.

Slaves are well sware of their exploited position. In fact, it seems to them that they are totally dispossessed of the products of their labour when in reality some of these are returned to them by the slave owner in order to keep the slaves alive and working. Slaves will not work very hard because, naturally enough, they resant being enslaved. Thus they are not very productive and only produce a small surplus in excess of their own subsistence needs.

With the rise of slavary, and the division of society into exploiting classes and exploited classes, the vast majority of people lose possession of and control over the products of their work. They beccme alienated from the goods they produce. Since products are but natural materials worked upon by people this also means a loss of control over, an alienation from nature itself. Man is no longer free to make use of his natural environment as he wishes. A division has arisen between man and his natural habitat. Man no longer exercises direct control over his material sources of life. He is alienated from nature. So it has been ever since, right through the era of slave societies (e.g. the Roman Empire). the era of feudal societies (e.g. medieval England) and now in capitalist societies (e.g. contemporary Britain). The producer no longer possesses the products of his labour.

We modern workers are much more productive than slaves and that is the reason why our material standard of life is higher. But our position in society is not so different from that of slaves in ancient Egypt and classical Rome. That is why people sometimes talk about "wage slavery". For we workers do not own and control the means of production, i.e. raw materials, machines, factories, shops and offices. In order to produce, and thus live, we have no choice but to sell our ability to work, our labour power, to someone who does own the means of production: the capitalist. And in Britain today only about ten per cent of the population consist of capitalists together with the administrators and managers who serve them. The other ninety per cent are workers of one sort or another.

When we work we don't receive the products of our labour. We don't even receive a share of those products. Instead we are paid money wages or salaries (both are the same thing). "So what", you may say. "I receive payments in money for the work I do and I can use this money to buy the goods and services I need". True, but what is not so obvious is that we are not paid in full for what we produce. The capitalist pays us less than the value of the goods and services we produce. He then sells them at a price equal to their full value and pockets the difference, the profit, for himself. While we appear to receive a full week's wages for a full week's work, in reality we do not. On average, in Britain at the present time the wages and salaries of workers are equal to about sixty per cent of their produce. Or to put it another way; you work about three days a week for yourself and two days a week for the capitalists.

This is hardly a revelation to most of us. Many workers have a shrewd suspicion that they are being swindled by their bosses and this is one reason why we are not very enthusiastic about work. Part of the value of our efforts is taken away from us. But it is not only that. What we produce, be it goods or services, is not of much direct use to us anyway. If, for example, we manufacture nuts and bolts we might be able to make use of a few but more would not satisfy our personal needs. No, the objective of modern work is not to obtain the things we personally make but to obtain money. Thus, for the most part our products are not things that we personally desire but just a means to the end of obtaining money, that universal commodity with which you can buy anything. It is the same with the capitalist. He is only interested in products in so far as they can be sold for money at a profit. In modern capitalist society the products of our individual labours are of little use or interest to us. The objective of our labour is not to make a product but to "make money". So it is that we are alienated from our products, and thus from nature, and alienated to money, to the cash nexus. Money becomes the be all and end all of everything. As one factory worker put it: "What is it that keeps me here? Money and again money - nothing else!" What a far cry from man in tribal society who directly produced what he needed, when he needed it, for his own consumption and satisfaction. But what catisfaction is there in receiving notes and coins? None, except the hope of retrieving what you have expended of yourself at work. But some of the produce of your labour has already been taken by another, the capitalist. Your money wages can never buy back the equivalent value of the whole of your produce. The more you work, the more you lose and the more of you the capitalist gains.

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WE ARE ALIENATED FROM OUR WORKING LIVES

"The point about this place is that the work destroys you. It destroys you physically and mentally." assembly line worker

"... labour is <u>external</u> to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind." - Karl Marx

Not only do we not possess the products of our labour but the actual activity of working is frequently found to be unpleasant. Many of us find our jobs "coul-destroying". This is partly the result of the extreme degree to which the division of labour has been carried under capitalism. As we have seen, the division of labour first arose in tribal society and it is true that it has led to a massive increase in human productivity.

But with the introduction of machine production under capitalism the division of labour has reached its ultimate limit. Many workers are condemned to performing one simple, repetitive operation for the whole of their working time; for example, bolting two components together or checking a form. This may place demands on the worker's physical strength but in a onesided way. His or her body has to go through the same repeated motions all the time. Far from exercising the body this can deform it and produce all manner of aches and illnesses. As for the mind, this is hardly utilised at all. Most work places few demands on our human intelligence. We're often told, "You're paid to work, not think."

Many jobs require only that the worker becomes a piece of a machine. "They treat the labour as machinery here" as one worker puts it. Another says, "My work comes to me in a completely automatic way, in the gestures of an automation." And they are right. Capitalist production is based on sophisticated machinery. Human skills are no longer embodied in people but in machines. Instead of being the director, the controller of production the worker is reduced to the status of a servant to the machine. He or she becomes a "machine minder", and the second second be that machine a canning machine, a computer, or whatever. The worker himself becomes a tool, a means of production rather than the agent of production. Capitalism turns human beings into 1. 1. 1. A. A. A. mechanical devices.

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We do not feel free at work because we lose our humanity at work. ATT THE ME We have to become things instead of persons. It is not we who decide what we will make but the capitalist; not we who decide how we will make it but the capitalist; not we who decide when we will work but the capitalist. At work we become strangers to ourselves. We have to give up being a person and become a machine. We have to surrender our humanity to the needs of capitalist production. The machines are the masters and we are their servants. Living men and women are dominated by dead matter.

WE ARE ALIENATED FROM OUR HUMAN RELATIONS

"My employer never looks at me, he sees the £ s. d. I represent. For him I am manpower, not a man." textile worker

"... one man is alienated from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature." - Karl Marx

In tribal society people had close personal relations with each other. People co-operated in gathering food and hunting game. Later, when exchange began this was immediate and personal as well. The producers of goods and services made direct personal deals with each other. Both parties to the exchange could see how they benefited from each other's work and thus had a real, human relationship.

Now, under capitalism, this is no longer the case. We do not directly exchange goods and services with each other. Rather, products are sold for money and bought with money. Human relationships now present themselves in the form of money relationships. What we can obtain to satisfy our needs does not depend on what we produce or who we know but on how much money we have. If I have money anything can be mine but if I have no money nothing is mine.

Since it is through money that we relate to each other and not through personal relationships we are set apart from each other. For example, take a car production worker and a civil servant. The car worker produces vehicles but is paid in money. The civil servant produces a service, say halping to administer the National Health Service, but is paid in money. Both workers depend on each other because the civil servant needs transportation and the car worker needs medical attention. But to them it often doesn't appear to be like this. In fact, they do exchange their respective products, not directly, but indirectly through the medium of money.

That is why they don't usually see themselves as having any relations or interests in common. When the civil servant puts in for a pay rise the car worker often sees it as unjustified. "What do they do anyway", he may say. "Just push pieces of paper around. What's the use of that?" Yet the car worker does benefit. He makes use of the health services and you can't have a service which caters for millions of people without organisation and administration, without paperwork. On the other hand the civil servant frequently feels the same about the car worker's wage claims. "Always demanding more, going on strike. Never satisfied. They'll ruin the country". And yet the civil servant makes use of and needs the cars and buses produced by the car worker. Precisely because we are separated from one another under capitalism, precisely because we have money relationships instead of human relationships, it is easy for us to think the worse of each other because we don't really know each other. Instead of one human community we have a series of separate communities which do not see themselves as having any interests in common. Our alienation from each other renders us powerless, enables the tiny minority of capitalists to keep us apart and enslaved to their capital.

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WE ARE ALIENATED FROM OUR OWN HUMAN NATURE

"Sometimes I ask myself: 'Where are we going? What does all this add up to?" - shop steward

"... alienated labour estranges the species from man. It changes fro him the life of the species into a means of individual life." - Karl Marx

Unlike other animals, we human beings have the ability to determine our own nature, to consciously decide what we will do and what we will become. Our behaviour is not determined by blind instincts but by consciously-held purposes. We are able to deliberately choose one course of action or another. But in class society this ability to determine our own destiny has been taken from us. History has played a cruel trick. We are thwarted from exercising our nature as free creative beings. We have lost our humanity.

Our loss of control over nature is apparent in environmental pollution. Capitalist production is ravaging and wasting natural resources, polluting seas and rivers, killing off wild life and poisening the atmosphere. Nature, the source of our material needs, is being turned against us. What is more, the human species itself is being decimated by poverty and hunger. Although the productive forces at our disposal are vastly more powerful than ever before the number of people in the world who are starving rises every year. Even in a comparatively wealthy country such as Britain the number of homeless and the number of people only able to afford an unhealthy diet is rising. In the midst of plentythere is want.

Once, work provided satisfaction and fulfilment in itself. Man had the satisfaction of a job well done and a need well met. Now this is largely lost to us. More and more jobs are being deskilled. What were formerly human powers are being transferred to machines. Increasingly we have to adapt our lives to the demands of the machines. Unlike people, machines do not tire and can work around the clock. Thus shift work is becoming more widespread as the rule of the machine advances. The stifling of our creative powers by capitalist industry can be seen in the fact that millions of us are prescribed tranquillizers and other drugs so as to deaden us to the stresses and strains of alienated labour.

The unsatisfactory nature of our relations with each other can clearly be seen. Acts of vandalism and violence are on the increase. The family is in decay. Relationships between husband and wife, parents and children are often ones of conflict rather than harmony. Boredom and loneliness are the lot of millions of people. Psychotherapy, encounter groups and mystical religion are just a few of the forms the desperate search for real human companionship takes. The failure to find it results in us turning to the illusory comforts of drink and drugs. Man is a social animal and thus needs the community of his fellow beings if he is to fully realise his nature. But under capitalism relations between people have taken on the form of relations between things, between commodities which are bought and sold with money.

Now, instead of our life as animals, our need for food, shelter and clothing being the mere basis upon which our life as human beings arises and develops, our collective social life has become a mere means of perpetuating our animal life. In our struggle to control nature so as to satisfy our needs we have turned nature against ourselves. The frontiers of science and technology are as much devoted to perfecting weapons of global extermination as they are to the improvement of the conditions of human life. Work is no longer an end in itself but simply a means to the end of keeping alive. Our life in human society is experienced not so much as the enjoyment of human community but as the distasteful but necessary way in which the life of the isolated individual is assured.

The human nature of man is to collectively act on the world, change it and, in so doing, change ourselves. It is this dynamic process that uniquely distinguishes us from other animals. But we have lost control over this natural life process and it has gained mastery over us. This means nothing less than that we human beings have become separated, alienated from our own human nature. We have literally become dehumanized. And what hope is there for a species which has become separated from its own nature? Like the bird that lost its ability to fly, the doda, we are surely doomed to extinction unless we can recover our <u>human</u> nature. This is what we have to do; reappropriate, get back our truly human nature as men and women who produce not as aleves but freely, to satisfy real human needs.

ALIENATION IS A GENERAL FEATURE OF LIFE UNDER CAPITALISM

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"Can't buy me love, love/Money can't buy me love." -The Beatles

"Assume man to be man and his relationship to the world to be a human one: then you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust etc." - Karl Marx Since it is the work we do that makes us what we are, and since work under capitalism makes us feel apart from ourselves and the world, alienation permoates all aspects of modern life.

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As an example let us consider sex. It is often said that we live in a sexually liberated age, that just about everyone can achieve sexual fulfilment today. But is this really so? Surely, if we had found sexual satisfaction we would not be so obsessed with sex as we are? Look at advertising. Many advertisements for goods and services make use of a sexual appeal. They suggest that we will have an exciting love affair if we drink their vodka; they suggest that beautiful women will flock to us if we smoke their cigars; they suggest handsome men will be ours if we use their deodorant, and so on. It's not really vodka, cigars and deodorant that are being sold but sex, How can this be? Sexuality is a characteristic of living men and women and not of dead material goods. How can we be persuaded to buy something that we already possess? This can only happen if we have lost, been deprived of what was ours, We are alienated from our own sexuality, part of our own human nature and this is part of our general alienation from the real life of our species.

The flood of pornographic magazines, books and films testify to the fact that there is sexual alienation. By buying these things in vast quantities we desperately try to regain our lost sexuality. The image of sex gods and goddesses who allegedly have attained complete sexual fulfilment are held up for us to strive after. Consider this statement by the hard porn film queen, Linda Lovelace: "I live for sex, will never get enough of it and will continue to try every day to tune my physical being to finer and finer perfection." How revealing is this confession! She 'lives for sex'. Her whole life has become subjugated to just one aspect of life. She 'will never get enough of it' - even though her whole life is devoted to it! Like the miser who devotes his whole life to accumulating money but is never satisfied however much he has, she will never be satisfied however much sex she has. Finally she talks about 'tuning her physical being'. But surely we tune musical instruments and car engines, not human bodies? She treats her body like a machine because it has become a machine, a fucking machine.

Far from living in an age of sexual liberation we live in an age of sexual oppression. Sexuality has become something that is bought and sold, a commodity. What we really want is human love of which sexual activity is a part. But in a society that turns relations between people into relations between things, all we are offered is a relation between bodies as opposed to a relation between persons.

Sexuality is just one example of alienation under capitalism. There are many others. Think about them.

THE CONQUEST OF ALIENATION

"The only strike I am interested in is the one that aims at putting everything in new hands, to reorganize, redesign everything with man and his need for meaning at the very centre, and the work that can't be enjoyed, that sucks a man's juices and turns him sour before his time, chucked out, abolished." - clerical worker

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"The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves." - Karl Marx

We have seen that alienation, the experience of being separated from life in the midst of life, arises out of our loss of our natural products and our loss of control over the means of production. So if we are to conquer our alienation, become truly human again, we must regain possession of and control over our work and its results. It's we workers who must decide what is to be produced and how it is to be produced. But under capitalism these decisions, this power is the exclusive monopoly of a tiny minority of capitalists.

The capitalist class will not surrender this power voluntarily They will not freely give up their positions of power because although they too are alienated they at least benefit by reaping vast profits, great amounts of that all powerful symbol into which the life activity of we workers has been alienated - money. The capitalist class will never voluntarily give up exploiting the working class. They may throw us a few sops like "nationalizing" industries, placing them in the owmership of their capitalist state, and then telling us these industries are ours. Recently, they have been talking about introducing "industrial perticipation", giving workers a few token seats on boards of directors, trying to con us into believing that we have some control over production.

No, there is only one way we can repossess ourselves and the world we have made and that is by taking matters into our own hands, by revolting, by making <u>revolution</u>. Only when we, the working class, rise up and throw out our capitalist masters will we become truly human beings again. No one else will do this for us. A people can only free themselves. What is more, it will not be easy. The capitalists will use against us all the means of oppression they have at their disposal - the police the courts, the armed forces, the mass media, etc. Any such working class revolt must be long and hard. But the prize is great - we have a whole world to win back, we have ourselves to win back.

THE LIBERATION OF MAN

"I believe in the motto 'Life is what you make it', and that motto leads me to socialism." - building worker

"<u>Communism</u> is the <u>positive</u> abolition of <u>private</u> <u>property</u>, of human <u>self-alienation</u>, and thus, the real <u>appropriation</u> of human nature, through and for man. It is therefore the return of man himself as a <u>social</u>, that is, really human, being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development." - Karl Marx

There is only one way forward for us workers, one way out of alienation and that is the way of smashing capitalism and building <u>Socialism</u> - a state of society where the means of production are commonly owned and controlled, where one class does not exploit another and where production, work, is for human needs and not capitalist profits. Of course, all of this has nothing to do with the phoney "socialism" pedalled by the Labour Party. They are now the main prop of capitalism and thus an enemy of the working class.

What we mean by socialism is the sort of social system they are building in China and Albania. In those countries the workers and peasants are rapidly conquering alienation. For example, on the communes and in the factories of China it is increasingly the people as a whole who decide what and how they produce. They can even determine what taxes they pay, within limits, to the central government. It will be a long time before alienation is completely overcome in China and Albania but that is the direction in which things are heading.

We have these examples of China and Albania before us. In countries which were poor and backward the working masses made revolution and are now building socialism and in so doing are defeating alienation. If they can do it in such adverse conditions so can workers in Britain. We have every reason to begin acting for ourselves now. British capitalism is once again in depression. Unemployment is rising and living standards are falling. Increasing numbers of us are denied work altogether and those of us in work are receiving less and less of the value of our products. The sooner we abolish capitalism, the better for us.

But we will not rid ourselves of the alienation of capitalism by wishful thinking, by daydreaming. We must act and act together in an organised and concerted way. Wo must create a revolutionary party dedicated to the destruction of capitalism and the construction of socialism. It's up to us and others like us to join together in this great task. So if you agree with what has been said here get in contact with us. We need you and you need us, if we are to change the world, change it in such a way that the ringing of the alarm clock on Monday morning does not mark the beginning of another week of drudgery and boredom, another week in an alienated life. .

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DOWN WITH ALIENATION: SMASH CAPITALISM AND BUILD SOCIALISM: You ask me what the word alienation means: from birth you start dying in order to live through a master

who sells you out; start consigning what you have-power, love, hatredso that you may obtain sex, wine, heartbreak.

It means you are beside yourself but you think that you are just your own self, because the wind undermines you, and you yield.

You may resist, but a day seems a century, which consumes you, what you give away does not return from where it leaves.

Waiting is another life,

but there isn't another time: you are time that disappears, and that which remains is not you.

