

**FORDISM AND POST-FORDISM.** The term *Fordism* was coined in the thirties by the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci and by the Belgian socialist Henri de Man. They referred to an interpretation of the writings of the cars-maker Henri Ford, in which they understood the premises of a major shift in the capitalist civilization. In the sixties, this term was rediscovered by the "operaist" Italian Marxism (Panzieri, Tronti, Negri) and then by the French Regulation School (Aglietta, Boyer, Coriat, Lipietz), as a name for the model of economic development *actually* set-up in advanced capitalist countries after World War II.

In his works, Henri Ford insisted on two major points. First, he heralded the industrial paradigm that he had implemented in his factory. He had not only developed the principles of "Scientific Management" first proposed by F. Taylor : a systematization, by the Office of Methods, of "the one best way" to perform each elementary productive act a sharp division between these elementary works, a specialization of each job in one standardized work. To these Taylorian principles, H. Ford added a search for automation through an ever deeper mechanization.

But the other side of "Ford's Fordism" was a search for higher wages ("5 dollars/day). The reasons he advanced were double. High wages were a reward for discipline and stability of the work-force in a rational firm. But it would also (should this practice be generalized) provide the necessary outlets for mass production. In both cases, the working class was invited to benefit of its own submission to management authority within the firm. Gramsci insisted on the "microcorporatist" aspect of this compromise (in each firm). Henri de Man insisted on the possibility of a "macrocorporation", at the level of society.

At the time, the Great Depression was raging. Fascists, social democrats and communists were criticizing the "anarchy of capitalist market" (or, as Karl Polanyi said) "the domination of self regulating market over society". Macrocorporatism was on the agenda of all these anti-liberal tendencies. In fact, Henri de Man finished as a fascist. But after World War II, the "social democratic" solution and the "American Way of Life" became hegemonic in the West under the rule of the Rooseveltian liberation armies.

Through the New Deal in the USA, the Front Populaire in France, the Beveridge Report in Great Britain, the successes of social-democracy in Scandinavia, macrocorporatism was stabilized by the formalization of the Fordist compromise between management and Unions, under the auspices of the State. Social legislation was rigidified, Welfare State extended, collective bargaining generalized. This compromise resulted in a twenty years boom of productivity, investments and purchasing power.

Fordism is thus a kind of "hierarchical holism". Society secures for anyone's participation to the collective work, and shares the benefits between everyone. But this "Society" is organized by private or civil "managers" building the world according to their "Science". In this respect, Fordism is connected to "Modernity" as a bureaucratic style in governance and as a rationalist style in urbanism.

But (contrary to stalinism or fascism), the glory of fordism is not in its collective achievements but in a general access to mass private consumption. Thus, Fordism paved the way to the "affluent society", a form of generalized individualism controlled by advertisement and regulation.

In the seventies, the economic crisis of Fordism proceeded both from its "taylorian" aspect and from its "regulated aspect. Taylorian principle proved less efficient with new information technologies, and the internationalization of economy put the state regulation at bay. Hence, in the eighties, the search for a "Post-Fordism".

Post-Fordism was first looked at as an inversion of Fordism : craft specialization instead of taylorism and mass production, flexibility instead of rigid regulation. This is the "Flexible Specialization" (Piore & Sabel) conception of Post-Fordism, which inspires a part of the new left in anglo-saxon world, and the "post-modernist" styles and ideologies. But it is strongly criticized as giving up the rigid rights that labour had conquered under Fordism.

On the European Continent, it is emphasized that "specialized skills" imply rigidity of the wage contract, and that "flexibility" fosters deskilling. Thus, there exist opposite ways out of the crisis of Fordism, several "Post-Fordisms". History is still open at the end of XXth century, but the more "flexible" capitalisms (US, USA) seem to be industrially dominated by the more "organized" and "skilled" ones (Japan, Germany).

## READINGS

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