Letter about robbery

Rami Syrianos

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Comrade Rami Syrianos — arrested in Thessaloniki on January 31 after a robbery at a public auction — released his first open letter.

Without a doubt, we are living through yet another period marked by the readjustment of this world's living conditions. Capitalism's gleaming shop window has been shattered to reveal what lies behind: a process of putrefaction and decadence. Democratic hopes and capitalist promises are quickly slipping away alongside the fictitious prosperity (through loans) of capitalism's decades-old golden age. The "promised land"—complete with private swimming pool, two cars, and four televisions—has suddenly disappeared, replaced by a gray desert of depression, desperation, insecurity, and fear. Domination, showing suitable flexibility, is withdrawing toward a new kind of digitally programmed totalitarianism—entrenching among new police units, biometric databases, and an even newer, more elastic batch of "antiterrorist" laws—all in an attempt to steel itself against the enemy within, which is threatening the ever-so-fragile social peace. The "invisible" forced social labour camp has become a maximum-security prison, while the social cohesion built up over years is again changing the rules on which it was based and questioning access to wealth and consumption; questioning the promises and hopes of social ascent and recognition; questioning the role of wage-labour as a means to satisfy needs and desires, as a ticket to fulfilment in a world of consumerist dreams and sensations.

Work is not simply and exclusively an economic process that makes human activity marketable. Due to its totalitarian character, it imposes itself as a generalized universal condition that creates and shapes relationships and consciousness. By giving work a new meaning—transforming it into the means of attaining social ascent and fulfilling capitalist promises of participation in consumption—Power has reinvented and re-established its prevailing discourse in the minds of its subjects, spreading and amplifying it, and now consolidating it among all social classes. Empty rhetoric about "businessmen who made fortunes on their own," about achieving social recognition through bank loans, but also about fulfilment through consumption, found fertile soil in attentive ears for the cultivation of a cannibal consciousness whose supreme value is the ruthless pursuit—even over dead bodies—of prestige, power, and wealth. The old working class has become a bunch of petty-bourgeois proprietors who identify their own interests with those of the system, since apart from their chains (now made of plastic and in the form of loans) they also have their comforts and social status to lose. Under the terms of the generalized consensus now taking shape, the traditional repressive forces are "withdrawing"

to the rearguard (although they are still developing in secret) and a campaign of decay and isolation is being launched, spearheaded by prefabricated lifestyle models, access to centres of entertainment, social recognition, and consumerist happiness. Social peace is guaranteed by satisfying the new collective desires of a society that, hungry to consume products and images, has abandoned itself to an orgiastic existence stripped of all meaning. This is an era in which existential poverty is becoming the most extreme, isolation and concern only for one's own skin are rooting themselves into people's consciences, and life is gradually losing all significance—caged by work hours, televised "reality shows," standardized entertainment outlets, and images of fictitious happiness. However, this party has an expiration date. The time has come to add up the bill, and it will have to be paid, plus commission.

New social conditions are being reshaped to make the step from the internalization of control (which was possible because of access to power and consumer goods) to the internalization of obedience through fear, insecurity, unstable work hours, unemployment, and images of entire areas occupied by mercenary police. Using the international financial crisis as a pretext, an attempt of unprecedented scale is being made to redistribute wealth toward the highest social strata and simultaneously restructure the entire assemblage of social relations. The fictitious image of affluence is being smashed to pieces, just like the hopes that accompanied it, and in its place looms the vision of an inexorable future. Fear and uncertainty are replacing the promises that have been the driving force of the social machinery, sinking their roots into the minds of subjects who were just recently quite content, but who are now watching the disintegration of their "earthly paradise" made from loans, watching as they are touched by the fate to which they themselves—untroubled by all the blood spilled on their road to progress and happiness—once condemned people who live on the margins of capitalism. Wage-labour, the cornerstone of widespread social change, has been demystified and stripped of its "the way to get ahead and be happy" veneer. Thus, its true face—its nature—is now plainly revealed: a coerced, exploitative process of producing inequality. Under these conditions, with the piecemeal demolition of traditional mechanisms of consensus that previously functioned according to plan, with social cohesion becoming more and more fragile, Domination is espousing a hostile discourse. It is declaring a permanent state of emergency and fortifying itself behind flexible new "antiterrorist" laws, biological databases, surveillance systems, and thousands of new contract police/urban mercenaries ready to impose a new totalitarianism.

The revival of insurrectionary practices around the world, the reappearance of metropolitan guerilla warfare, the combative marches and riots everywhere, the revolts in the Arab world, the growing distrust of the role of regime intermediary being played by the Left, and the return to more radical forms of struggle: All these things remind us that the commitment to revolutionary change has neither been lost nor forgotten. Rather, it is entering the arena once again, more urgent and vital than ever. The criminal prosecution, imprisonment, and murder of those who struggle are not the results of an attack launched by Domination. They constitute its defensive efforts, undertaken to address the cracks expanding throughout its foundation, while people lose faith in the idea of its omnipotence more and more each day.

On January 31, while I was making my getaway after carrying out a robbery at the vehicle auction organized by the Public Asset Management Agency AE (which conducts a wide range of different auctions and is responsible for the liquidation of cars, motorcycles, and many other assets seized by the pigs or by customs), I was surrounded and arrested by uniformed pigs from the DIAS squad. They brought me to Thessaloniki Police Headquarters, where I was stripped

down to my underwear, handcuffed behind my back, and made to stand facing a wall for about seven hours while various undercovers and other pigs joined the parade to get a look at me. I continually refused to say anything other than that I am an anarchist, and I also refused to have my fingerprints and photograph taken.

They later brought me to my home, which they searched for five hours before we returned to Police Headquarters. Once back there, a dozen pigs surrounded me and their chief attempted to begin a process of interrogation and humiliation of my principles in the style of a "friendly chat," during which I heard grotesques such as: "We're the real revolutionaries and you're just a loser," "We're against the banks" (!), "While you refuse to help yourself, the other one has already squealed," etc. As we can see, some clichés never die. The only thing I told them time and time again was that I am a revolutionary anarchist and that they are nothing more than Power's thugs—lackey enforcers of the law without minds of their own, who humiliate, torture, and murder in exchange for a salary. When morning came, after getting in touch with my lawyer I found out that—because of a phone number written on a slip of paper I tragically forgot I had on me—they had arrested another person I knew from the anti-authoritarian milieu, and the mass media had printed photos of both of us. They then brought us to court, making a shocking spectacle out of the whole thing like always. They dressed us in white bulletproof vests, with panic-stricken pigs in balaclavas looking like something out of a scene from a cheap Hollywood action flick. The only thing I told the hearing judge was that I did what I did as an anarchist in the context of the rejection of work, and that the other person being charged had nothing to do with the case. They ruled that I was to be placed in pretrial detention, while the other comrade was released because dozens of witnesses testified that he was working at the self-managed Polytechnic cafeteria at the exact time of the robbery.

Robbing the Public Asset Management Agency AE re-possessors was an honourable expression of my refusal to submit to the oppressive, empty reality imposed by chopping space and time into pieces; imposed by work hours and predetermined paths; imposed by the coercive "you must" ordered by bosses in response to the alienated "I want" expressed by their subordinates; imposed by a production process that turns people into living spare parts for the machinery of consumption of images and products. Rejecting the role of victim of the exploitation applied by little and big bosses alike, as well as the role of sacrificial lamb or collaborator with exploitation itself; sickened as much by the submissive work ethic of the "poor but honest" as by the overambitious arrogance of the "successful careerist"; perceiving the entire complex of social relations as an alienated result of capitalist production, I decided to shift into individual action, throwing myself into the polymorphic revolutionary anarchist process, part of which is the rejection of work. The rejection of work can't just be a thoughtless choice divorced from a more generalized rupture with hierarchy, and obviously said rejection isn't necessarily defined by its method (a robbery, for instance). Robbery and burglary can easily degenerate into a job, with fixed hours and everything else that entails: the same arrogance as the rich, the participation in consumerism, the fragmentation of time according to "work hours," and the development of a (criminal) professional identity. Robbery, kidnapping, individual or collective expropriation of goods, sabotage, attacks on economic targets, collective living experiences, and free street markets are all methods that give meaning to the complete rejection of the world of work, production, and consumption, but only if they increase awareness that leads to support for a wider revolutionary struggle for individual and collective liberation.

As a part of this polymorphic movement, I now find myself imprisoned in the dungeons of Ioannina, paying the price for my principled decisions. The only thing I regret is not doing more outside these walls.

Not a single step backward.

—***Rami Syrianos,*** *Ioannina Penitentiary Center, April 2011*

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