

Hypothesis for a Charter of knowledge-workers rights

When knowledge, information and culture become commodities, then knowledge workers are doomed to sink into disownment, weakness and occupational blackmailing.

Italy has declared war on intelligence. This concept was launched in France in the recent past: Intelligence has been sacrificed on the altar of market economy and of the most short-sighted, feeble private interest.

What kind of future can have a country in which culture and knowledge have become mere territories to be colonized, fenced and branded? A country where art is on sale, that relies on “foundations”; a provincial country that worships Facebook. We cannot help but be scared: such a simplification of the discourse might well have the aim of destroying any kind of social relationship and individual free expression.

How much space can such a society leave to the production and spreading of knowledge? And how can we possibly repossess this space and effectively enjoy rights that belong to us aimed at an economic, social and personal development?

Making a whole generation precarious; cutting the funds to research and education, to theatres, museums, public cultural institutions, cinema, publishing and journalistic cooperatives: all this is no doubt aimed at the flattening and the distortion of contents, messages and the educational and cultural offer. On the whole, the outcomes of such a strategy are disastrous: information, education and culture are progressively losing their role and meaning; consequently the capability of individuals to form their own idea about the world, facts and existence is deeply undermined. Collective action becomes weak, flimsy. Particularism and the insatiable goals of private profit in ever more narrow and privileged sections of society are slowly prevailing on the common interest and the importance of the public sphere.

The tragic situation described above is worsened by a global economic crisis: we are fully aware that it represents the perfect opportunity to impose even more drastic measures of regulation upon cognitive work. In a country at war with intelligence, the crisis has brought about devastating selective procedures that further undermine the already disadvantageous position in which cognitive work is relegated: it makes it synonymous with mediocrity, social fear and aphasia. Paradoxically, one of the main causes of this crisis lies in the failed recognition of the economic and social value of most cognitive work.

We are the knowledge workers of information and media, of the publishing world and of the cultural industry; of school, university and research; of show business, education, design and communication; we are determined to not simply suffer your crisis; we want to stem this drift and reverse the trend of this tendency. That's why we will join and pursue together our common objectives.

We firmly assert the contents of this Chart and will submit it to all those who share our condition.

- 1) We assert our right to being intelligent, that is to say the right to knowledge and an education completely independent from the aims imposed by the market and the current production schemes. Just like water or the air we breathe, knowledge is a *common good* - both universal and individual; it is the collective engine able to produce welfare and progress for the greatest number of people: it is not a commodity to be sold or bought on the market of the “owners”, on the basis of the profit and the social control that capital can impose.
- 2) Both within and outside the workplace, we thus claim the right to a recognition and respect of our skills, independence, competences, professionalism and material and spiritual needs.
- 3) The main problem for knowledge workers is the lack of the chance to choose and set themselves against various forms of blackmailing; that's why we also assert our right to self-determination. Which implies the assertion of the right to a guaranteed fixed income. Knowledge work, by its very nature, is mostly not defeasible, even if technologic development wishes it to become such. On the

contrary, it is basically flexible and discontinuous. We want an appropriate income also during our non-working periods. We ask for a guaranteed wage in moments of unemployment. We are not only talking about benefits and social security cushions; we want a secured fixed income.

- 4) We still assert the fixing of a minimum hourly wage for our work, be it occasional or not. The hourly wage must be established according to the real cost of living and its possible future variations.
- 5) We demand the possibility to choose the kind of contract we want to stipulate for our work. We thus firmly oppose those unilaterally imposed by companies, which in the past few years has spread to the point of becoming the only natural possibility of employment.
- 6) We want to regain possession of both our work and our time. As any type of contract imposing exclusivity (partial or total) limits our intellectual capacity, we must take action in order to obtain a supplementary remuneration.
- 7) We want freedom of expression, communication, and learning. Cognitive autonomy is not negotiable. The prostitution of brains is not in the least better than that of bodies. Because knowledge is a *common good* belonging to the individual and to the whole collectivity, the benefits of knowledge must be socially shared in a perspective of peer-to-peer circulation.
- 8) We claim our right to a free-access to education, updating, personal and cultural growth opportunities without having to pay for them.
- 9) No matter the steadiness or the subordination of our working conditions, we also assert the basic rights inherent in the social status: social safety cushions, sick leave, maternity leave, paid holidays, paid parental leave, gratuity and a fair and settled pension at the end of our working cycle.
- 10) We have seen how economic resources are always available when it's about saving banks and holding companies. We have seen how, notwithstanding the new system of precarious, "flexible" and discontinuous work, overall productivity and wealth have increased, precisely by virtue of the cooperation and the innovative power of the *General Intellect*. What is needed, now, is an even distribution of the fruits of the social adjustment that's already taking place. We here and now determine to name this distribution (wages) together with all its consistent rights, "common welfare". What we claim is precisely this: the *common welfare*.

We firmly believe that the majority of knowledge workers will no longer passively accept the forms of control that the existing productive process wields over education and learning; they will no longer accept its proprietary and hierarchical boundaries and its uncertainty; they will reject the precariousness and the exploitation brought about by the supremacy of contemporary capitalism over our lives and bodies. The limits posed to freedom and democracy are growing palpable, anachronistic and unbearable.

Knowledge workers, together with the whole precarious multitude that shapes the current labour market, can become the driving force of a new culture, of fresh democratic undertakings based on cooperation, sharing and socialization. They have to claim the free circulation of knowledge, which implies the assertion of a new society no longer based on needs, but on peace and the respect of the natural balance; on the free and joyful cooperation between individuals; on the potentials of machines and on human creativity turned to the service of the collectivity.