

suicide or revolution

(April 28 2011)



Tuesday, 26th April 2011, saw yet another suicide of a man working for France Telecom, this time by self-immolation in the parking lot of the France Telecom offices in Mérignac near Bordeaux. The picture above shows the exact place Rémi L. set fire to himself - beneath what was architecturally designed to look like a cross. The glories of sacrifice. Ironically part of the guy's most recent job requirement was to assess stress levels within the company and their remedy. Some remedy!

Since 2008 France Telecom has had 60 suicides, each year more than the previous one. Such a public and particularly horrible form of suicide was perhaps intended to shock France Telecom's impervious wall of indifference into finally listening'. But the only way hierarchies listen' is when people express themselves more along the lines of the uprising in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia in response to the self-immolation of someone far lower in the hierarchy than this France Telecom cadre. In response to the crisis-driven accelerated accumulation of capital and its concomitant stress levels for those at its receiving end, how else should we react? Since we're all getting burnt, the only sane response is to burn them back - not go out in a self-inflicted blaze of gory glory. But this guy was a cadre, in a middle management position, and his fellow workers merely improvised a rather passive demonstration of moral outrage yesterday in the car park where he killed himself, making it clear, however, that top management were definitely not welcome.

Management have been rehearsing and performing their show of concern for several years

now, but behind this facade, they are clearly caught up in the logic of reification which they are structurally incapable of opposing. All they can do is put in place the psychologists and social workers and stress assessors and all the other professional reformists of daily life who are also structurally incapable of getting to the root of the matter - unless they subvert their prescribed roles of course. In this case, one of them has fallen victim to what he was trying to cure. Under suicide capitalism, the increasingly intensified logic of commodification of everybody and everything not only drives those at the bottom into mass depression and the world further into the abyss of environmental disaster, but also effects the individualist careerists who try to rise above the whirlpool - the cadres.

In French, the word *cadre* roughly means "management"; it's a word that Debord and Sanguinetti used in Thesis 36 of their book "The Real Split in the International" (see: <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/sistime.html>) (about the only useful analysis in it) to critique a mentality more complex than the dictionary definition. It's worth looking a bit at what they said:

Quote:

"Today, the cadres are the metamorphosis of the urban petty bourgeoisie of independent producers that has become salaried. These cadres are themselves very diversified as well, but the real stratum of upper cadres, which constitutes the model and the illusory goal for the others, is in fact held to the bourgeoisie by a thousand links, and integrates itself into that class more often than not. The vast majority of cadres are made up of middle and small cadres, whose real interests are even less separate from those of the proletariat than were the real interests of the petit bourgeoisie - for the cadre never possesses his [sic] instrument of work. But their social conceptions and promotional reveries are firmly attached to the values and perspectives of the modern bourgeoisie. Their economic function is essentially bound up with the tertiary sector, with the service sector, and particularly with the properly spectacular branch of sales, the maintenance and praise of commodities, counting among these commodity labor itself. The image of the lifestyle and the tastes that society expressly fabricates for them, its model sons, greatly influences the sectors of poor white-collar workers or petit bourgeois who aspire toward their reconversion as cadres, and is not without effect on a part of the current middle bourgeoisie... The cadre, always uncertain and always deceived, is at the center of modern false consciousness and social alienation. Contrary to the bourgeois, the worker, the serf and the feudal lord, the cadre always feels out of place. He always aspires to more than he is and can be. He pretends and, at the same time, he doubts. He is the man of malaise, never sure of himself, but hiding it. He is the absolutely dependent man, who believes that he must demand freedom itself, idealized in its semi-abundant consumption. He is ambitious and constantly turned towards his future -

a miserable future, in any case - while he even doubts that he is occupying his current position as well...."

If the goal of the commodity-spectacle is to make each individual its accomplice by the whole of his or her life and aspirations, then the commodity-spectacle in its irredemably destructive phase can only incite those who believe in it, or in its reform, to become accomplices in their own self-destruction. Caught in an unreformable self-destructive logic, they find themselves increasingly bashing themselves against the brickwall of an unreformable capitalism whose only perspective is the accelerating death and destruction of everything just as long as the economy survives.

The following was written a year ago about other suicides - specifically those in the Montpellier area (in South West France). Some of it is clearly out of date - indicative of how the world has begun to move on since the suicide by self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in December 2010:

Anaesthetising consciousness:

The Science of Suicide

On Wednesday 7th April 2010 Roselyne Bachelot, Sarkozy's Minister of "Health" [*no longer the case she's now Minister of Solidarity and Social Cohesion - well, it beats "Ministry of Truth"*], attended the funeral - at St.Pierre Cathedral in the centre of Montpellier - of a young anaesthetist, her well-rehearsed grim-face prepared for the cameras. The anaesthetist was one of the latest in a long line of well-publicised suicides that have provided the media with endless copy & endless images of concerned outrage - and the government with an opportunity to present themselves as good humanitarians. The guy had topped himself after a particularly vicious bit of harassment by his boss, the director of the organization of hospitals for the city (CHU) (who'd been appointed by one of Bachelot's predecessors under Chirac) who'd not only verbally abused the anaesthetist but had fined the guy and 2 other medical assistants 14,500 euros for their incompetence in an operation that went wrong (the patient died). The director had been suspended the day before the funeral for "moral harassment". Bachelot said of the suspension, "*It's the least we could expect*".

The least she could expect from this PR offensive was to lessen the memory of the swine fever vaccine scandal, through which she'd subsidised the pharmaceutical industry to the tune of billions of euros, and by which she'd hoped to intensify social control by experimenting with the emotions, ideas and bodies of the population (now, as never before, the world is science's

laboratory and we are its guinea pigs). But more importantly, she was launching a charm offensive (an oxymoron in the case of Bachelot - more like "offensive charm") on the eve of the privatization of some parts of the French medical system, an intensification of capital accumulation which will certainly increase the chances of suicide both amongst highly-stressed medical workers and amongst highly-stressed impatient patients.

A few days later, it was announced that the upper management of France Telecom, where there have been 35 well-publicised suicides of, for the most part, middle management, were to be examined in front of a tribunal, to see if they too could be charged with "moral harassment". The radical trade union Sud France welcomed this sideshow trial, whilst therapists complained of the psychological "fragilisation" caused by the high-pressure culture of work intimidation. In this instance, the world of work and the repressions arising from the invasion of the economy into all spheres of existence could be defined as the "hard cop" of daily life, whereas the false critiques of this misery - trade unionism and psychology could be seen as the "soft cops". Certainly since World War II, capitalism in "the West" has always played the hard cop and the soft cop at the same time. But never before in the last 65 years has the hard cop been so brutal, and the soft cop so yearned for. Desperation unarmed makes proletarians hope to be rescued by Trade Union bureaucrats or shrinks in order to avoid the immensely difficult task of confronting, bit by bit, the totality of their alienation. Society has to provide the miserable with the illusion of hope provided by experts because without such hope they'd either slit their own throats or confront the material bases of their misery. In fact, disappointment with such forms of external hope, without struggling to affirm yourself against the objective bases of your misery, is often the reason why people crack and give up the ghost.

Everywhere the spectacle of a reformist solution to the inevitable bi-products of intensified work miseries - depression and stress - has to be presented by the State as part of its ideology that the worst effects of misery can be dealt with. The powers-that-be will punish the guilty (though not themselves of course) and provide the unhappy with psychologists and other nice cops of this fundamentally nasty society. Everywhere the miserable normality of repressed "life", whose only exit is global class struggle, revolution and individual self-affirmation against external authority, has to be presented as something that can be ameliorated. The most responsible of course - the high-up defenders of the State and the market system, the ones doing the most "moral harassment" in the name of economics and government - can thus seem like saviours, good Christians providing the flock with hope and sustenance.

But even if there are increasing amounts who aren't taken in, far too many of them, feeling fearful or indifferent, remain passive in face of the cons - and passivity inevitably leads to feeling semi-suicidal.

Whilst the anaesthetist grabbed the headlines, the following horrors were met with what seems like a conspiracy of silence:

In the 6 months up until the beginning of March, there have been 3 suicides in just one building in Montpellier (south west France) of the internationally prestigious science organisation CIRAD (International Centre of Agricultural Research for Development...of surplus value and its utterly ruinous effects in particularly the "third world" but also, obviously, elsewhere).

There are approximately 75 - 80 scientific research workers in this specific building amongst many on the Montpellier site. CIRAD is a particularly obnoxious enterprise: amongst other things, CIRAD is involved in research into, and development of, the scarily all-pervasive GMOs, (though these particular research workers weren't involved in that). The 3 people worked for different research teams, but all in the same building: these deaths represent some 4% of the workforce in this building - considerably higher than the suicides at France Telecom or Renault, but the comparison is a bit dubious in some ways, since we're only talking about one building here, and we very much doubt if this has been replicated in other buildings on the Montpellier site (we don't know). Nevertheless, these suicides received no publicity (or at least so little that we never saw them) and it is only by chance that we have heard of them. After the last suicide the head of the team of the woman who died called everyone in to a therapeutic' post-trauma meeting, where, by sheer oversight, they forgot to mention the fact that the woman had had a blazing row with her manager during the day before the night she decided that enough was enough. Now, of course, a row with a manager does not necessarily lead to suicide, otherwise, 100s of 1000s of people would be overdosing or jumping off cliffs every single day in France and everywhere, but it can be the final straw in a world with seemingly no exit, a world which systematically isolates and humiliates people without end.

However, it should also be pointed out that scientific workers identify with their alienated labour far more so than, say, building workers or cleaners. This labour often involves horrendous professional shit with far more horrific consequences than most of the more obviously proletarianised salaried labour (e.g. GMOs) . Yet, for them the work is their identity, and if they have little else outside of this, for the most part , crap intellectual work then when that goes wrong, as it increasingly does nowadays, then it's like their whole self falls apart. Science workers who passively accept their daily fate and daily work obliterate all sense of self in submission to an ideology of objectivity that's simply the ideology of their masters. Experiment in pursuit of improving commodities and commodity society is the opposite of the dialectical so-called "science" of class struggle, the trial and error based on making new mistakes and correcting old ones, based on constantly testing reality, of which bourgeois science is simply a

deformed parody. And the belief in the progressive civilising nature of this so-called objectivity compensates for the tortuous feeling of being an indifferent nothing (and it's not for nothing that the young research worker who told us this is often ill and more exhausted than many other workers, though an unavoidable exhaustion is the lot of almost all proletarians nowadays). Subjectivity is considered the enemy of science, but in eradicating their desires and point of view they are thus pushed to a nothingness that reacts by seeking the false exit of resorting to suicide (not that this is the kind of thing they would have even begun to articulate in their suicide notes, of which we know nothing).

There is virtually no solidarity amongst these CIRAD workers (like the increasingly stressed cadres at Renault and France Telecom, who are dropping like flies). Many find their wages frozen and yet think they can do nothing about it. A hierarchy of teams are pitted against teams for resources and a corporatist identity with your own team prevails. A worker unable to use the single ventilator in his lab because it has to be shared, is forbidden - in the nicest possible way - to use a lab desk and ventilator in another team's lab even though it's hardly ever used: each team jealously guards its privileges and superior finances - its competitive separation - from the team lower in the hierarchy. And if you don't belong to a team you're really treated with, at best, indifference, but more often as the lowest of the low. As elsewhere, top management can spend 10s of 1000s on meals for potential financiers or for logo changes, but for 3 scraps of photocopy paper, they'll hassle the manager, who'll hassle the secretary, who'll hassle the librarian, who'll hassle the caretaker until it all falls onto the guy at the bottom who just needs to make some photocopies without the weight of the accumulated snowball of stress rolling down from on high. Some of these stresses have no direct capitalist logic to them: another pair of workers in a lab with just one ventilator are meant to mix dangerous chemicals, and take it in turns to use the ventilator so as not to breathe in the toxic fumes. If they complain, they're told either not to work half the time - though they'll still be paid - or to work by an open window. This is not much of an option in winter - it's certainly been as cold as London this winter, and sometimes colder (this increasing uniformity of the weather is part of the Maastricht Treaty: the State, with its natural allies God and commodity-induced climate change, have decided that differences in the weather provide an unfair competitive edge between different regions of capital accumulation and so must be eliminated in the rush to harmonisation', to equivalence). The fact that they decide to work the half time that they are breathing in toxic fumes when they needn't do so (and yet still would be able to collect their salary) says a helluva lot about the masochistic absence of a minimum of critique and refusal amongst those who apparently have a privileged position in the hierarchy of proletarianised middle class work. They like their work so much they're willing to make themselves sick with it. "Science Macht Frei". And this time, no need for bullets or cattle trucks: gas yourself because it's all do-it-yourself nowadays - the autonomy of the submissive individual, their complicity in what kills them, saves Capital a lot of

bother, which is bad for its image. Suicides are not good for capital's image either - but they're better than concentration camps, which are a form of death all too obviously organised by the State, and less capitalistically logical. Suicide is so much cleaner and cheaper, even if it has to be taboo: it's the individual who is responsible - just another "free choice" in the buzzword of Thatcherite ideology and its monstrous off-shoots; the system under which we work and consume is of course, blameless. No, the belief that you can be what you want to be, the etiquette of self-determination, that you are in control, increasingly accepted in this increasingly individualist age, reduces choice to just surviving or suicide.

But it's hard to feel sorry for some of these sad suicidal people, particularly the cadres (low to middle management) at Renault or France Telecom (it's certainly not just cadres at these companies that have committed "the ultimate in self-criticism", but there have been quite a few cadres that everyone is meant to pity when they hear the news on the telly, a hard thing to do when you've known so many people with so much more integrity than these cadres who've been constantly drawn to the edge). Though we don't know if GMO researchers have non-genetically modified their wrists or throats, we don't give a toss if such obviously compromised cadres commit suicide or not. Many of them have a position in the hierarchical division of labour that involves thinking up and acting out ways of shitting on those below them in the hierarchy, all the worse when it's done, like the madness of research and development of GMOs, in the name of benevolently feeding the starving: a kind of Christian Science missionary position that fucks those it claims to be liberating (GMOs destroy biodiversity, weaken the immune system, encourage the proliferation of carcinogenic pesticides and reduce human fertility). No leftist humanist concern for the plight of some of these cadres can hide the brutality of the function and result of their lucrative work. And you don't have to be an embittered misanthrope to feel indifferent to the suicides of these particular workers (not that all of them fit this category *by any means* of course - but quite a few do). Some would say this is harsh. But who ever gave a toss about the guy who shot Che Guevara committing suicide a bit later? Or the guy who killed Harvey Milk topping himself a few years after (this is regardless of what you might think about these 2 politicians)? Or some nasty paedophile doing himself in because of the shame? And the results of these people's nasty actions are certainly not as bad as that of those who develop GMOs (this is not some cynical provocation for provocation's sake: we seriously believe this). And meanwhile, every 3 days there's a suicide in French prisons that never gets even 1% of the publicity that Renault or France Telecom get (an anti-prison demo in Paris on Sunday March 28th, partly provoked by increasing prison suicides, saw half the demonstrators - 110 people - arrested in response to one person igniting a rescue flare, something that happens on virtually every demo and is considered part of the fun of it).

Renault's and France Telecom's responses to the bad publicity of the suicides in their

companies was of course to make life so less stressful for the cadres who feel like ending it all (but never ending all their reified existence) - those damage-limitation PR exercises and pop psychological pep-talks make the professional workers feel so much better about life of course. Far far better than being provided with a massage or a free fuck for an hour before work, which of course would not have reduced the number of suicides at all. Why? Because such a “solution” , even if some inventive brainstorming session amongst these companies ' highly-paid think-tanks had come up with such an outrageous suggestion, would have been very bad PR in this PC age, and that's what matters. The prohibitive cost, of course, would not have been a consideration. Because of course, providing a massage and/or fuck would have cost considerably less, since no-one would have been interested in it - whereas the uptake on the exhilarating offer of a chance of lying down on some shrink's couch or being given a lecture by some Dr.Strangelove on “How to stop worrying and love the bombshell of your work” has been enormous.

This massage/free fuck idea is obviously a whimsical fancy, not a serious suggestion. As ironically implied, for capitalist enterprises to offer such a form of prostitution is a bourgeois wet dream which would cost a great deal more than the everyday prostitution of lesser paid proletarians. Since today's stress-related misery is partly produced by cost-cutting for those lower down in the hierarchy, even within capitalist terms this idea would be utopian. And we are certainly not advocating such a reformist solution' to ever-increasing stress: such a solution', maybe advocated by a Reichian therapist, would clearly leave the miserable reified, emotionally bereft, relations produced by alienated labour intact. But then the intellectual objectivity' imposed as part of the bourgeois scientific role, guarantees such emotional repression; anger, warmth, love and all the other passions are to be kept down, at best strictly for the week-ends, utterly separate from the cold analytical workweek, which is the central, utterly head-dominated, passion of most scientists. Developing the struggle to unify daily life with analysis and the emotions is not helpful for researching the development of commodities.

The old slogan from the post-68 epoch - “*Suicide or Revolution*” - has gained a new poignancy, and is truer today than it ever was. Capitalism in its environmental destruction and its invasion of every aspect of life that was formerly free of its control (even down to genetic manipulation) is making life and the world destroy itself. But less and less people understand that, let alone understand the daily choices they make as being inextricably linked up with the two sides of these choices.

“Suicide or Revolution” = “Submission accepted or Testing out the boundaries in asserting your needs and desires” = “Obedience to the hierarchical logic of the commodity system or Revolt against what crushes you, against separation, against hierarchical organisational identity,

against the totality of what relegates individuals to the increasingly fragile margins of existence". You either decide to give up the ghost and let go or hang on and get a better grip on these margins in the struggle for community and communication: Resignation and Suicide or Revolution and Class Struggle.

Written in April 2010.

The following too, written in 2005 largely in response to the virtual absence of significant class struggle in the UK during the 15 years after the Poll Tax movement of 1990, is also relevant in this context, even if it repeats a bit of the above and was written at a far more abstract (perhaps excessively so) level:

Suicide is painless

Not surprisingly, there's mass depression - at least in those parts of the world where social contestation has been pushed to the extreme margins, a semi-suicidal gripping onto the edge of life that is driving millions, probably billions, to bad restless nights and tired tiring days. Everywhere people feel defeated - often at the simplest level (in their friendships, for example). Admitting defeat is not necessarily the same as resignation. Admitting defeat is not necessarily the same as accepting defeat as an inevitability. Accepting defeat doesn't help: in fact, it can only help intensify suicidal and/or psychotically murderous feelings. Admitting defeat, however, should mean a recognition of what has happened, a recognition of reality which is a necessary basis for any consideration of a future attack on this brutal money terrorist reality.

We waver between the semi-suicidal exhaustion that defeat brings and the dream of some future total revolt. Hasn't it always been the case for the survivors (the vast majority)? - after Spartacus, after the Paris Commune, after Kronstadt.? Probably not, for the most part, in the case of the Commune and Spartacus: the will to self-destruction is borne not just out of the impotence but out of a profound sense of isolation following defeat, a sense arising not merely from the feeling that destroying hierarchical power is an impossibility but above all from the lack of a communal consciousness that alienation is social (the rise of Stalin, however, was accompanied by a big increase in suicides, particularly amongst those who had placed their faith in the Bolsheviks).

Why be so morbid? Surely one cannot hope to inspire revolt if one talks about these desperate feelings. And yet not acknowledging them, and trying to uncover their material bases in the

all-pervasive alienation of the Economy and its images makes people even more isolated in these feelings. These feelings are everywhere not admitted in the rulers' overwhelming show of the possibility of happiness exclusively within the production and consumption of this society; these feelings are everywhere considered to be solely your fault, an aberration.

In the mid-1960s a revolutionary of that time said, "*The will to live is a political decision*". We can see now that the project of destroying political social relations, the only political decision ever worth making, was effectively defeated - at least in the immediate epoch - in the mid-to-late 80s. Which is why the victory of political decisions over the will to live has never been so great - just look at the whole post-9/11 world. The intensification of political-economic power and of hierarchy at every level of life (in your relationships also, dear reader), in every part of the world has reduced the will to live to the will to survival. And mere survival makes death seem like a release, the freedom ' of nothingness, the end to pain. In the end, the will to mere survival makes suicide seem a possibility.

Nowadays the etiquette is not to admit defeat and to sneer at those who readily admit to being defeated (for the moment). Isn't this a bit like the way Christianity, after Spartacus, turned the crucifix, and the reality of defeat, into a symbol of defiance, but not the reality. The American comedian Lenny Bruce said that if Christ had existed today, everyone would be walking around with little electric chairs round their neck. Nowadays almost everyone hides their defeat beneath an ideology of defiance every bit as perverse as wearing an electric chair round your neck. This basic self-pride undoubtedly expresses a real desire to subvert daily life in some way but unless people recognise how far defeated they are, and the history of this defeat, this real desire can only be symbolic, as symbolic as an electric chair round your neck. Or an @narchist T-shirt.

What are we getting at here? It's no use pretending we're taking charge of even a little bit of our lives, or at least of the struggle to transform our lives, if all we're doing is hiding from ourselves how much we have been forced to repress and how much insanity we are having to put up with. This goes as much for those who consider themselves revolutionary as for anyone else. The inability to attack the present, the only time revolt and revolutions are ever made, makes some people, whose significance is mainly in their heads, adopt a timeless theory borrowed from the specialists of the past which they hope one day the working class will realise the eternal truth of. But all the clichés about creating a global human community beyond the economy etc. can't hide an essential retreat into an almost transcendental abstraction as cosily safe, and as dogmatic, as hope in its religious forms. To really re-discover the revolutionary energy of the past one must first despair of this world. One must face the enormity of the results of defeat and the history of why past struggles were defeated. The path to the end of alienation follows the straight and narrow path of alienation itself.

PS: A Guardian article on the France Telecom suicide 2 days ago (pubd. Wednesday 27 April 2011) :

France Telecom worker kills himself in office car park

A France Telecom-Orange worker has died after setting himself alight outside his office, the latest in a wave of suicides at the company. The 57-year-old married father of four, described as a sociable member of staff, set himself on fire in the car park of a site at Merignac, near Bordeaux, after arriving for a morning shift.

He had worked for the company for 30 years, most recently at a call centre dealing with company accounts, and was a trade union member who monitored safety and work conditions. Paramedics could do nothing to save him.

François Deschamps, of the CFE-CGC Unsa union, suggested the man had struggled with being made to frequently change jobs. "Those enforced changes meant he had to sell his house. He had written to the management on several occasions and in my understanding had no reply," Deschamps told AFP. "I saw him two or three weeks ago. I did not feel like he was on the verge of suicide."

France Telecom is Europe's third largest mobile phone operator and biggest provider of broadband internet services. But in recent years it has become synonymous with death and despair in what management called a "suicide contagion effect".

At least 23 of its employees killed themselves last year, and there were more than 30 reported suicides in 2008 and 2009, as well as many more attempts.

Among those who were found dead at their homes, some had left notes explicitly linking their suicide to their jobs. Unions complained of a climate of bullying, extreme pressure, poor management methods and restructuring cuts that forced people to repeatedly change jobs.

A 28-year-old worker who was found dead in his garage in Besançon in the east of France in August 2009 had left a note that talked of his girlfriend, but also mentioned how he felt "helpless" and "angry" over issues at work. A French prosecutor said it was impossible to formally establish a link between France Telecom and the suicide, but workers held a protest march over his death.

A month earlier, a 52-year-old employee killed himself in Marseille, leaving a note blaming "overwork" and "management by terror". He wrote: "I am committing suicide because of my

work at France Telecom. That's the only reason.”

Other deaths included that of a 51-year-old who threw himself off a bridge in the Alps after being moved from a back-office job to one in a call centre.

Staff said the climate had worsened since privatisation. Some staff complained of divorce, family breakdown and being forced to sell homes due to random job changes.

Last October an official report found that the plan, begun in 2006, to slim down the company and scrap 22,000 jobs in three months was behind the feeling of distress among staff.

In recent months, the company has increased the presence of psychological support workers and pledged to reduce workplace stress and staff difficulties.

Its former head, Didier Lombard, who had warned of a “spiral of death” stood down last year and was replaced by his deputy as a sign that management was taking the crisis seriously. Lombard had been criticised by unions for his poor choice of language in describing a “suicide trend” at France Telecom.

The former state-owned monopoly was privatised in 1997, although the French government remained the biggest shareholder.

Under government pressure, the company was ordered to put in place measures to monitor and counsel staff thought to be suicidal, and at one point froze 500 employee transfers that were part of restructuring plans.

This was originally put up on [Libcom Blog](#), and was followed by, amongst other things, the following comments:

Jef costello:

Interesting Samotnaf, the word cadre also means frame so there is a direct reference to the hierarchical function. I think in part the desperation of the managers comes from the realisation that they must continually satisfy capitalism or be punished and the realisation that the demands are ever-increasing and there comes a point where either they can no longer imagine that they are part of a team and realise that they are opposed to their colleagues' or that they realise that they simply cannot get any more blood from these particular stones. I can imagine in scientific research this must be especially intense as productivity targets related to research are a nonsensical concept. It brings to mind the ridiculous hunger strike' proposed by some CRS units when threatened with redundancies. You could almost hear in their every complaint “Why are

we being fired? We beat up the arabs, we beat up the youth, we beat up the students, we beat up the unionists, we beat up marchers, strikers and demonstrators and now we are not getting our reward!" They never did openly discuss (that I saw) the irony of using tactics such as hunger strikes and sick-outs.

I'm going to add a couple of tags to this post if I can, there are also a couple of bits I wrote about suicides in France.

<http://libcom.org/news/24th-suicide-18-months-france-telecom-29092009>

<http://libcom.org/news/france-another-suicide-renault-worker-28092007>

<http://libcom.org/news/france-suicides-amongst-auto-workers-02072007>

<http://libcom.org/news/france-first-suicide-new-youth-prison-05022008>

Me (Samotnaf):

Hadn't seen those articles you put up sometime ago: good to add the links (I'd forgotten about the guy who hanged himself in the factory: very much a public statement, almost as horrifically "masochistic aggressive" as the self-immolation on Tuesday).

Quote:

I can imagine in scientific research this must be especially intense as productivity targets related to research are a nonsensical concept.

But it's not clear that CIRAD were piling on the pressure because of "productivity targets" as (as was said) some of the attitudes just didn't make capitalist sense, but were just about petty, but nasty, cost-cutting (not having enough ventilation) which could, and probably, through sickness, *did*, actually reduce "productivity" - which in most research is unquantifiable anyway, as you say. In fact, "suicide capitalism" is not a "rational" form of capitalism like Keynesian capitalism was. And although I talk about capitalism being "unreformable", I say this in relation to the current epoch: I think that if there's a massive uprising considerably bigger than the ones at the end of WWI, one that seriously threatened the world of hierarchical power, capitalism could, if allowed to, reform itself temporarily into a form of ecological Keynesianism.

Ed:

Just another quick note: while I was looking for France Telecom and suicide articles on libcom, as well as finding this article about [24 suicides at FT in 18 months](#), I also found [this one](#) about two suicide attempts in a month a Polish Telecom..

I had no idea that life/work in the telecoms industry was so miserable..

Steven:

Ed wrote:

Just another quick note: while I was looking for France Telecom and suicide articles on libcom, as well as finding this article about **24 suicides at FT in 18 months**, I also found **this one** about two suicide attempts in a month a Polish Telecom.. I had no idea that life/work in the telecoms industry was so miserable.. 😞

I'm not wanting to defend France Telecom here, but actually 24 suicides in 18 months is exactly what you would expect statistically.

France has 11,000 suicides per year, out of a population of 60 million. FT employs 100,000 people in France, of which you would expect 18 per year to commit suicide if they did so at the average national rate.

Now, of course it is clear in these cases that many of the suicides are directly related to people's work. Rather than be an indictment of France Telecom of the telecoms industry I think what this does help do is highlight the role of work in suicides more generally - the number of suicides each year is huge, but these are never included death at or related to work statistics, when it is clear they are related.

Me:

Steven:

Quote:

France has 11,000 suicides per year, out of a population of 60 million. FT employs 100,000 people in France, of which you would expect 18 per year to commit suicide if they did so at the average national rate.

I presume those 11,000 weren't just workers but included those who hadn't yet entered the world of full- time work (teenagers, students, etc.), the unemployed, pensioners, desperate housewives, desperate househusbands, etc. So the amount of full-time workers committing suicide would be considerably less, no? Plus the majority of those committing suicide in France

Telecom are cadres, who are a minority of the workforce. The statistics don't say much at all, unless I've misunderstood something. *Lies, damned lies and cold abstractions from real miserable contradictions* (as Samuel Johnson never said).

Jeff Costello:

That was the exact argument used by France Telecom (which I think I mentioned when I wrote it up). You could also argue that the highest risks group for suicide (males 18-25) is more highly represented in any workplace (not that any of the suicides mentioned were in that group iirc).

The connection of work to suicide is pretty strong (in one of the Renault cases the family succeeded in having it classified as a workplace death iirc) several of the Renault cases (2 out of 3 I think) committed suicide at work and mentioned work in their suicide notes.

Me:

On Wednesday a work inspector for the Ministry of Work committed suicide within the Ministry premises - apparently he was, according to colleagues, "an untiring defender of the sans papiers (undocumented) and of the unemployed" and a militant trade unionist. In another Ministry, the Ministry of the Environment, there were 17 suicides last year, though only 2 so far this year (is this big reduction part of the Tunisia Effect?); and last year, there were 39 cases of suicide for every 100,000 teachers, over twice the France Telecom rate (though it's a bit spurious to make the comparison as the France Telecom suicides were primarily amongst the cadres, a minority of the workforce)....

Martin H:

I think the fact that these suicides are concentrated among cadres shows how this system has nothing to offer even those who it co-opts. Would I be right in thinking that the cadre is akin to a middle manager or senior professional, the guy you talk about is akin to HR. I think we'll see more of this sort of thing, TBH, these sort of roles are all under stress. Tie it in with fees, graduate unemployment and the high cost of living, the choices for people aiming to get into this sort of job become ever more restricted and personally stressful, to the point that any given individual would be better off failing to get the job.

Regards,

Me:

martinh - yes, I'd say middle management/senior professional, though you could say that the cadre mentality is the dominant mentality/aspiration of most people most of the time (though,

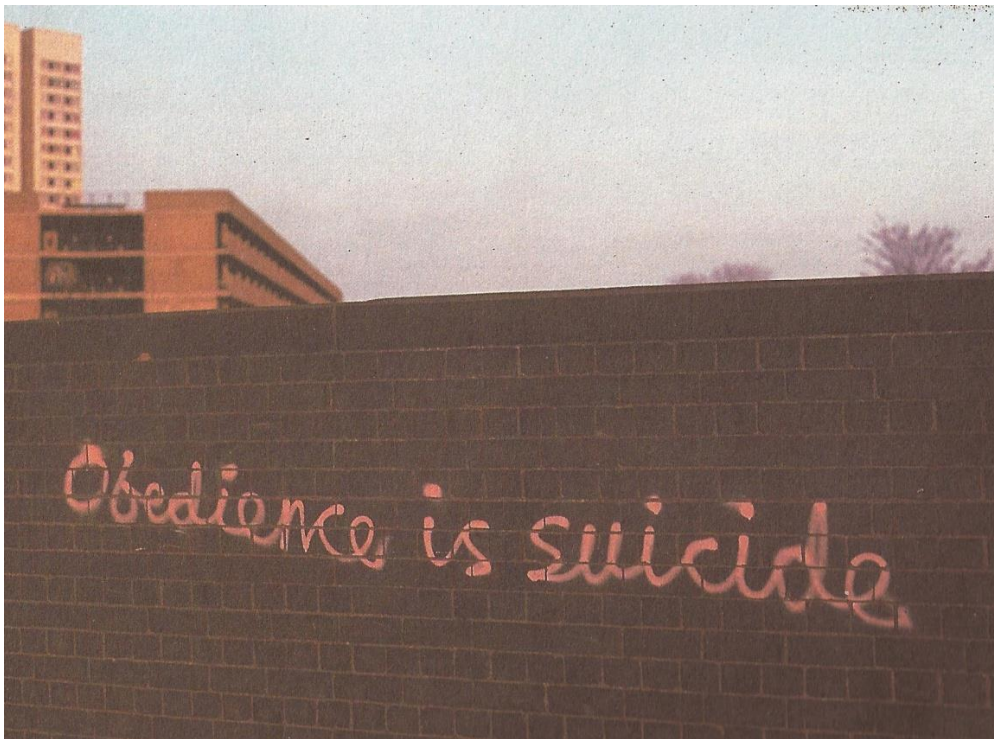
given the crisis-driven attacks this illusion is tending to crumble). You could also check out this:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GD78w28QwE&feature=related>

(about 3 minutes 10 seconds in, and then you have to go on to part 4). It's badly reproduced here on youtube, and it's from 1982, but I quite like its content despite its dull monotone narrative.

Also check out Chris Shutes here: <http://libcom.org/library/on-the-poverty-of-berkeley-life-and-the-marginal-stratum-of-american-society-in-general-chris-shutes-1983> (chapter 2: 1001 ways to avoid confronting the fact that you are a worker).

I should add that there are often more suicides amongst other sections of the population (eg teachers), but the cadres get the most publicity, surprise surprise



graffiti, mid-1970s

