As discussed above, in recent decades and particularly during the early 1970s, capitalism underwent an acute crisis. Understanding the essential constitutive layers of this crisis is a complex task. The period saw intense transformations at the economic, social, political and ideological levels, changes that, taken together, had powerful repercussions on the ideals, the subjectivity and the values that constitute the class-that-lives-from-labour. Among its many consequences, this structural crisis led to the implementation of a broad process of restructuring of capital in order to recover its productive cycle, which, as we will see further on, strongly affected the world of work. Although the structural crisis had deeper causes, the capitalist response sought to confront it at a purely superficial, phenomenological level, i.e. without transforming the fundamental pillars of

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1. A full treatment of the crisis of the world of work cannot be undertaken here, given the complexity of the issue. Apart from the structural crisis of capital and the response of neoliberalism and capital’s productive restructuring mentioned above, we can highlight the collapse of Eastern Europe after 1989, the impacts this had on political parties and trade-unions, and also the crisis of social democracy and its repercussions for the working class. It is also important to remember that the crisis of the labour-movement is particular and unique in accordance with the specific conditions in each country and depending on different political, economic and social contexts. On the more general conditioning factors of the crisis in the world of work, see Appendix 1 to the first edition, entitled ‘The Crisis of the Labour-Movement and Centrality of Labour Today’. In the chapter on the UK, I present an outline of the constitutive elements of the crisis in the world of work in that country.
the mode of capitalist production. For the forces of order, it was a case of restructur- ing the pattern of production of Taylorism and Fordism, in an attempt to re-establish previous levels of accumulation, especially those achieved post-1945, with the use of new and old mechanisms of accumulation.

Since previous struggles between capital and labour, which reached their climax in the 1960s, had not resulted in the establishment of a hegemonic project of labour against capital, it fell upon the latter – once the boldest alternatives proffered by the world of work had been derailed – to offer a response to the crisis. With its attention on the phenomenal sphere, capital’s response was to reorganise the reproductive cycle while preserving the essential foundations. It was in precisely this context that an alteration to the pattern of accumulation (and not to the mode of production) began that sought to confer greater dynamism on a productive process displaying clear signs of exhaustion. From Taylorist and Fordist production standards, a transition was made towards new flexibilised forms of accumulation.

The limits of Taylorism/Fordism and of the social-democratic compromise

Taylorism/Fordism can be roughly described as the dominant expression of a productive system and its respective labour-process present in large industry for most of the twentieth century, particularly from the 1920s. It was based on the mass-production of commodities and was structured upon a homogenised and profoundly verticalised production-system. In the Taylorist and Fordist automobile-industry, a great deal of the production necessary for making the vehicles was performed internally, with only occasional recourse to external providers of car-parts. It was also necessary for the workers’ operations to be streamlined as much as possible, avoiding ‘waste’ in production, reducing the time and increasing the rhythm of work, in such a way as to intensify the forms of exploitation.

This productive pattern was based on piecemeal and fragmented labour, on the fragmentation of tasks to reduce the activities to a repetitive series of actions the sum of which resulted in the collective labour that produced the vehicles. Along with the de-skilling of the worker, this process of disanthropomorphisation of labour and its transformation into an appendage of machine-tools intensified capital’s ability to extract surplus-labour. In addition to the surplus-value extracted extensively, by lengthening the working day and obtaining an absolute increase, it was increasingly extracted intensively, given the relative dimension of surplus-value. The real subsumption of labour to capital belonging to the age of machinery was consolidated.