

THE STATUS OF THE POLITICAL IN CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

# KLARTEXT!

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## **Statement**

Precarity is the condition of being unable to predict one's fate or having some degree of predictability on which to build social relations and feelings of affection. The diffusion of intermittent work and the attacks on the welfare state have resulted in a widespread diffusion of existential and social precarity across Europe – affecting increasing numbers of the population even in the wealthy countries of Northern Europe. This is precarity: being unable to plan one's time, being a worker on call where your life, pay and time are completely subject to external forces. And, of course, since you have a sub-standard contract, you won't have full social citizenship.

Mayday is all about fighting precarity: claiming social rights for the multitudes of flex, net, temp workers who have become indispensable in neoliberal production. Neoliberalist accumulation is postindustrial – it's service-, information-, and knowledge-based. So wherever there are neoliberal chains of production in the five continents, there are going to be precarious producers – peripheral in terms of rights, but central in terms of the financial value created.

Two ideal-types of toilers have emerged: ChainWorkers (employees in malls, shopping centres, hypermarkets, and in the myriad of jobs of logistics and selling in the metropolis) and what we call BrainWorkers (cultural and knowledge workers; cognitive labourers; programmers). The latter tend to be temps or freelancers possessing individual market value, but no collective force to bargain for their rights. The important thing is establishing solidarity between the two groupings. That is where media activism comes into play – by supporting strikes, picket lines, sabotage, boycotts on the part of taylorized service and retail workers, and at the same time agitating university researchers, cultural temps, and other workers in information industries and advanced services.

Precarity has to do with one's position in the labor market. Previously, employees were either blue-collars and white-collars, so to speak. Now there has been a transition to a more unstable social configuration based on service, knowledge, and affective labor. In old marxist terms, this social class exists *ex se* but not yet *per se*. What we see is that creative workers do not perceive themselves as workers anymore. The reversal of the New Economy's dubious fortunes exposed the myth that talented people would be protected forever from market fluctuations.

In Germany, France, Spain, and Italy we see massive amounts of people protesting against welfare cuts and European monetarism. The challenge is to merge the egalitarian, libertarian, antiracist, and transgender traits of social activism together to create new radical identities, which alone can bring sisters and brothers together on a eurowide scale and network them into a new political project capable of opposing Bushism. This is the task at hand while social conflict is spiralling all over Europe.

What we need to do is to find ways of social representation that are different from the ones traditionally practiced by communists, social democrats and labour unionists. Because if Seattle and Genoa have really marked a transition to a new kind of politics – participatory politics, or biopolitics if you like, in which the old distinctions between political work, union work and cultural work are dissolved – then that world of the left is over for good.