**PROMETHEUS: PRODUCTION CHAIN (ED)**

In Greek myth Prometheus steals fire from the Gods and was then punished in perpetuity by Zeus, tied to a rock, his liver pecked by a bird, then restored overnight to be pecked again and again. For Karl Marx he is a heroic figure, both allowing humans to develop productive forces by transforming nature with the use of fire, and also a ‘saint’ for freedom. At the same time in *Das Kapital*, Prometheus represents the proletariat chained to capital and its machinery. ‘Chained’ ironically rather than tied because of the very technological development fire has enabled, and repeated endlessly in the modern clothing industry that exists as a globalized production chain, constantly being outsourced to lower cost locations with power in the hands of large retailers in the richer parts of the world. They command a downward hierarchy of contractors and sub-contractors with the dangers of death and injury by fire and burn-out increased all the way down the chain to those who make the clothes.

PROMETHEUS: PRODUCTION CHAIN (ED)

The ambivalent nature of the myth of Prometheus was normal for the ancient Greeks so that in one version by Hesiod for workers of the time the freedom given by the gift of fire is accompanied by Pandora’s box which, when opened, released all sorts of evils into the world. This version has been taken up by anti-industrialisation ideologists for whom Prometheus is the enemy. Such a crude reading loses the real ambivalence which is that the promise of productive plenty is compromised by capitalist social relations whereby producers from colonial Peru to modern day Bangladesh are literally chained inside their workshops and factories. In the modern world technological development has made for highly sophisticated production processes, yet which co-exist with and are co-dependent on ultra-exploitative working conditions especially in the making of clothes. Here workers are not just chained in **under lock and key**, but like Prometheus and his liver, they are exhausted each working day but with no choice but to keep themselves alive for the next.

It was in just such conditions that Chun Tae-il, a textile worker cried out in the agony of his self-immolated death, “**WE ARE NOT MACHINES**.” That was 1970 Korea. Over a hundred years ago, workers in England and the USA must have felt the same. In Korea it was young women workers he spoke for, working a minimum of 14 hours a day in unventilated spaces full of dust where they could not stand up, and it is they who have been the real creators of Asian economic miracles from yarn spinners in early 20th century Japan, to the rippers and seamstresses of Korea’s clothing industry in the latter part of the 20th century. The symbiotic relation between capital accumulation and patriarchy has never been clearer. They were its ‘*Industrial Warriors’* on the ‘*Export Front’* in the gung-ho language of its authoritarian governments, but were abused and their health damaged in this ‘war’, subject to early **Burn-Out**

The Chonggye Garment Union was created in Soul’s Peace Market after Chun tae-il’s death, but little changed, as was shown a few years later at the Dong-Il textile factory in Incheon where women workers outnumbered men Five to One. In 1972 they elected a woman union leader, and immediately faced hostility from management and men in the government-controlled union. In the next election in 1976 women were prevented from voting and in turn they went on hunger strike and were promptly confronted by riot police. When they started to undress believing they could not then be touched, they were dragged away. Several were imprisoned, many injured. Such brutality tells clearly just how important they were to the accumulation of the capital needed for a ‘miracle’ to take place.

The accumulated capital which the work of those super-exploited young Korean women created was invested either in new more hi-tech, capital-intensive production, or usedto **outsource** the labour intensive end of the garment industry to new low-waged areas of the world, so that women exploited in Bangladesh or Honduras are likely to be working in South Korean owned and managed clothing factories under similar conditions to the 1970s Pyounghwa Market. In Bangladesh in 2010, just days before yet one more fatal factory fire, a worker was shot dead by the police for protesting at conditions in a South Korean owned factory. In Honduras burn-out is such that only 6.3% of women have worked longer than 10 years in such factories.