

Hegemony and Wage Labour in the UK

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Abstract:

This thesis seeks to determine the relationship between wage labour as a social relation and hegemony (broadly conceived) as a system of asymmetrical power relations. It argues that wage labour is a 'hegemonic structure' fundamental to capitalist social relations and for this reason is crucial to accounts of hegemony in a number of ways. The dissertation articulates this thesis from two 'directions', that build from engagements with two different theoretical fields: hitherto studies of hegemony on the one hand and theories of the capitalist wage labour process on the other.

Firstly it attempts to construct an account of hegemony that coherently includes wage labour by speaking to what I perceive to be a lacuna in the field of study: a sustained engagement with wage labour as a crucial component of capitalist societies and a fortiori any hegemony – or hegemonic situation – that occurs within them. This gap in the field betrays a lack of history in accounts of modern power in (capitalist) societies but also a general neglect of economic logics and their specificity.

Secondly, and from the reverse 'direction' of argument, the project aims to contribute to an account of wage labour within capitalist social relations by bringing the categories taken from the analysis of hegemony (coercion, consent, organic intellectuals, sedimentation, etc.) to bear on the analysis of the labour process itself, and also by situating the wage labour process within (the wider) mechanisms of hegemony (that operate at larger scales of social relations). The thesis uses the UK as the context through which the arguments are expounded.

The thesis concludes with a selection of possible directions for future research, based on the ground established in the foregoing chapters.

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Declaration:

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

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Introduction

This thesis argues that wage labour is a 'hegemonic structure' fundamental to capitalist social relations and for this reason is crucial to accounts of hegemony in a number of ways. The dissertation articulates this argument from two 'directions', building from engagements with two different theoretical fields: hitherto studies of hegemony on the one hand and theories of the capitalist wage labour process on the other. The thesis' original contribution lies both in its critique of existing scholarship on hegemony and in its integration of two genres of political/social theory that are rarely in conversation.

Firstly it attempts to construct an account of hegemony that coherently includes wage labour by speaking to what I perceive to be a lacuna in the field of study: a sustained engagement with wage labour as a crucial component of capitalist societies and *a fortiori* any hegemony – or hegemonic situation – that occurs within them. In brief, if to study hegemony is to study the given (multi-faceted) mechanisms of coercion and consent in a particular historical conjuncture, then to study capitalist hegemony requires us to study wage labour as in some way imbricated within these mechanisms. My thesis argues that wage labour relations are often touched on – or glossed – in prominent work on hegemony, and yet are relatively poorly theorised, or side-lined, in favour of wider cultural or political phenomena. I particularly identify this as a problematic lacuna in the work of theorists such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Stuart Hall. Not only is this gap identified, but I make the argument that to not include wage labour within accounts of hegemony is to ignore a fundamental aspect of the history (and present) of capitalist societies such as the UK: the history of the establishment of wage labour, also known as 'primitive accumulation'. This history is identified as a 'foundational coercion' that, I argue, must be recognised by accounts of hegemony if these accounts aspire to be adequate to the analysis of power and domination in modern societies.

By building and integrating an account of wage labour into an analysis of hegemony, my project thus argues that this allows for a more comprehensive interpretation not of hegemony in the abstract (which I understand to be a more or less impossible, or incoherent, concept), but of concrete hegemonic situations – or 'case studies', as it were. This makes the project both an intervention into the *method* of analysing hegemony/ies

(and the history of these methods), and also a kind of toolkit with which to potentially bring to bear upon other, given hegemonic situations, both from other histories but also in the future.

Secondly, and from the reverse ‘direction’ of argument, the project aims to contribute to an account of wage labour within capitalist social relations by bringing the categories taken from the analysis of hegemony (coercion, consent, organic intellectuals, sedimentation and others) to bear on the analysis of the labour process itself, and also by situating the wage labour process within (the wider) mechanisms of hegemony (that operate at larger scales of social relations). The labour process theory tradition reveals key insights into how the labour process within capitalist society functions – including the power relations at play – but has thus far remained at a relative distance from the concepts and vocabulary of the field of hegemony studies.¹ This gap is particularly remarkable – as I argue in depth in chapter three – as the categories of hegemony map onto workplace relations in revealing ways, uncovering the (hegemonic) politics of work right down to physical workspace arrangements and managerial techniques. In this sense, my dissertation is considering the ‘micro-physics’, interpersonal frictions and power relations of waged work – the ‘politics of work’ in a broad sense² – and applying a political analysis drawn from the tradition of hegemony studies.

Precursors and parallel approaches

The original synthesis of theoretical traditions and questions that my project seeks to enact is yet to be explored extensively, but nonetheless there is inevitable overlap with a number of previous bodies of work. For example, there are parallels to the way in which Foucault, in the *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures (2008), builds an account of governmentality – taking the emergence of neoliberalism as his object of inquiry. In these lectures – particularly lecture nine – Foucault discusses how American neoliberal governmentality was built, in part, via the re-definition of (waged) work as an investment (human capital). The waged worker comes to be seen as ‘a machine that produces an earnings stream’, a being endowed with

¹ Notable exceptions – such as Michael Burawoy – are noted in the course of the thesis.

² In the same sense that ‘the personal is political’ is usually meant.

what Foucault names ‘capital-ability’ (2008, p. 225). By effecting this ‘epistemological transformation’ with regards to waged work, neoliberal thinkers such as Schultz, Becker and Mincer helped build – over numerous decades – a new kind of governmentality that would come to shape labour market (and workplace) governance across the globe (something that is touched on in my final chapter’s treatment of ‘employability’). This picture of the construction of a governmentality (and wage labour’s position within it) is mirrored in my dissertation, via the conceptual apparatus taken from Gramsci and his descendants. Where Foucault, in that text, focuses on the *epistemological* shifts necessary for new forms of practice and governance – encapsulated in the very term *govern-mentality* – a Gramscian approach leads me to discuss *both* the discursive frames – or forms of common sense – that inform a given hegemony, but *also* the coercive, often violent practices that attend and ground it (and in particular the social relations around wage labour). In short, we might say that the Gramscian approach to ‘systemic power’ that I deploy here thinks the regulation of bodies and discourses of consent *together* regarding waged labour – thus bringing together objects and methods of inquiry that Foucault also deploys, but in separate texts and not always in conjunction with the problematic of wage labour.³

My approach has also been gestured towards in less academic but nonetheless important interventions, such as Srnicek and Williams’ *Inventing the Future* (2015). In that text, the authors succinctly map the emergence of neoliberal hegemony and then pivot towards possible counter-hegemonic strategies for a post-neoliberal world.⁴ At the centre of their argument lies wage labour as a fragile social relation ripe for the unpicking within the game of hegemonic politics – with Laclau, Mouffe and Gramsci acting as key reference points. Their account, in that text, of wage labour’s position within capitalist, hegemonic relations is brief – more of a platform from which to spring than a thorough historical-theoretical

³ For instance, *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is a key text for the analysis of the emergence of wage labour and the violent regulation that attends it, but its focus does not stay with wage labour – moving instead onto the broader shifts in forms of power from the *Ancien Régime* to the modern period. In the course of this dissertation I utilise Foucault’s various investigations in conversation with my Gramscian lens and my engagements with Marx, as others have done productively before (e.g. Read, 2003).

⁴ *Inventing the Future* was posted by Verso Books to the Labour Party’s shadow cabinet on its release. In subsequent years it became a reference point for one of Labour’s more influential papers on changing ownership structures (Labour Party, 2017).

investigation; this is in part due to the explicit intention to be a utopian, positive piece of work above all else.

In *The Problem With Work* (2011), a text that exerts considerable influence upon Srnicek and Williams' writing, Kathi Weeks also identifies in work (broadly conceived) a site of hegemonic contestation that has a long and instructive history for those interested in theorising hegemony and counterhegemonic practice. Weeks' theoretical apparatus builds off a synthesis of Weber and Marx, which is then plugged into feminist debates on the structural relationships between waged work and the gendered, unpaid domestic work largely carried out by women. Weeks' text uses a Gramscian vocabulary, and even briefly engages with Gramscian debates (e.g. Perry Anderson's interventions), but her focus is not on building an extensive, coherent account of hegemony per se, nor an account of the relationship between hegemony and waged work; this relationship is briefly glossed but never theorised in depth (ibid., p. 37 – 77). I build on Weeks' account by integrating a more detailed account of the emergence of wage labour as a dominant and fundamental social relation within capitalist hegemonies, whilst also trying to provide a more nuanced picture of what hegemony is in the first place; this entails engaging in the debates around hegemony that neither Weeks, nor Srnicek and Williams had the space nor intent to focus on in their texts.⁵

My approach also differs from others', such as Cristophe Dejours et al.'s recent critique of work that relies on phenomenology and a descendent form of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, largely shorn of its Marxian foundations (Dejours et al., 2018). In that text, the authors discuss meaning-making (or lack of it) at work, justice and autonomy and the 'dynamics of recognition' in the waged workplace. By contrast, studying wage labour through the lens of hegemony does not entail, for example, positing conceptions of justice and evaluating the object of inquiry according to them. Rather, studying hegemony entails considering how conceptions of justice *function* or are *used* in given relations of coercion and consent (broadly conceived) in modern capitalist societies. It is less concerned with

⁵ Since *Inventing the Future*, and once the writing of my dissertation was largely completed, Alex Williams has produced an extensive attempt at integrating a theory of hegemony with theories of social complexity (Williams, 2020).

moral or ethical critique and more concerned with and how and why social relations operate in a certain way; it is less an immanent critique of ideology and/or a form of reason, and more an articulation of the map – or plan – of forces and actors in a given, capitalist setup.

Bringing wage labour back into the conversation

Wage labour has been investigated countless times – particularly in the wake of Marx’s foundational writings on the matter. The wage relation is, in Marxian accounts, the mask of exploitation – a semblance of equal exchange that smooths over the extraction of more value from the labourer than they receive (Marx, 1991; Macherey, 2015). As it is the source of the majority of all other commodities – as well as being itself determined by the commodity form – waged labour has unsurprisingly been analysed and re-analysed by Marxist scholars, tracing its changing nature across the many decades since Marx’s own time. Whole schools of thought – often in active antagonism with each other – have been created in the intervening decades: from the value form school to the Italian *operaismo* strain (Postone, 1993; Kurz, 2016; Tronti, 2019; Negri, 1988).

What is interesting about (re)starting the analysis of wage labour from as part of the study of hegemony is the particular (or absent) place that it occupies in the field of hegemony scholarship since Gramsci’s foundational writings. Despite still holding a Marxian image of how society functions – Gramsci wrote nothing – to my knowledge – on the labour theory of value. In the same manner that Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse explored other terrains and methods by which to uncover capitalism’s inner workings, Gramsci developed his own vocabulary in order to compliment – or run alongside – Marx’s critique of political economy and the value form. As Harry Cleaver summarises: ‘For the most part [the authors named above] accepted a more or less orthodox Marxist analysis of the economy and focused their attention elsewhere’ (Cleaver, 2017, p. 43). Instead of re-stating the ‘economic’ critique of wage labour, the commodity form etc., Gramsci was more interested in how contemporary, conjunctural, forms of wage labour were arranging modern life; in how the Fordist factory system created new forms of subaltern subjects; in the new forms of common sense (*senso commune*) that were emergent with (and helped to sediment) this new form of work; and in

the ways in which consent was produced to maintain the wages system. This departure from the critique of political economy allowed him to ask a whole set of questions that had largely not been posed within Marxism hitherto. Whilst Cleaver sees this lack of engagement with traditional Marxian analysis as an indictment of Gramsci's approach, I therefore see it as a creative expansion of the wider project of mapping power within capitalism – in and beyond the terrain upon which its economic logic plays out.

Gramsci's theoretical descendants in the following decades – as I will show – largely abandoned his fascination with the world of wage labour entirely, focusing rather on broader questions of the political and cultural dynamics of hegemony, or else on questions of international hegemony or statecraft. Whilst retaining their important innovations and developments of Gramsci's nascent but fragmentary writings within the field, part of my original contribution is to bring wage labour back into the conversation.

Waged work amongst other activities

Needless to say, wage labour is not the only form that work takes, neither historically nor today in advanced capitalist societies. It is essential to distinguish waged work from other forms of activity with which it is often conflated. For example, in her influential *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt distinguishes (in a Aristotelian fashion) between Action, Work and Labour as distinct forms of human activity, none of which need be waged, whilst each has in theory the possibility of being so (Arendt, 1998). Today, writers on waged labour – and its changing nature – still find these distinctions useful.⁶ Even if we scope into a historically-specific period – the social relations particular to capitalist societies – waged work is still one amongst many forms mediated by the commodity form. Marcel Van Der Linden makes an important point when he writes that:

In truth, there is a large class of people within capitalist society, whose labor power is commodified in many *different* ways. That is why I refer to the class as a whole as the *subaltern workers*. They make up a variegated group, including chattel slaves,

⁶ See, for example, Guy Standing's use of the 'work' and 'labour' distinction in (Standing, 2011; 2014).

share-croppers, small artisans and wage earners. It is the historical dynamics of this “multitude” that I think labor historians should try to understand. (Van Der Linden, 2008, p. 32. Emphasis in the original)

Other forms of commodification of human activity – such as slavery – have long powered capitalist societies alongside wage labourers, both physically – sometimes in the very same workplace, but also contemporaneously, across different continents, within the same supply chains (Gopal, 2019; Ramdin, 2017). We also shouldn’t forget or ignore the fact that slavery still exists to this day (Kara, 2017).

Aside from slavery, we should note that even in the present day – when it seems that the march of commodification continues apace everywhere – waged work is far from dominant at the global scale. Those working for wages and salaries exist alongside vast ‘informal economies’, involving labour that produces things for sale, but that is usually carried out for ‘piece rates’, normally not regulated (or known) by the state and often under conditions of self-employment (Benanav, 2014). In most low-income countries today, the majority of non-agricultural employment is informal: in Mexico and Egypt, more than 50 percent is informal; in Vietnam and Uganda, more than 60 percent is (Benanav, 2014, p. 22-3).⁷ In this dissertation, when I am dealing with wage labour, I am limiting myself to what Van Der Linden calls ‘*autonomous* commodification, in which the carrier of labour power is also its [legal] possessor’ (Van Der Linden, 2008, p. 20). Of course, as I will underline, beyond formal possession, the ‘free’ wage labourer certainly cannot be accurately described as autonomous in any meaningful sense; coercion, consent and the power relations intimately linked with selling one’s time for a wage all complicate the picture greatly.

By focusing exclusively on wage labour, this dissertation also does not focus on *non-commodified* kinds of work that are essential to the functioning of capitalist social relations, namely the reproductive work that goes on predominantly in the domestic space that tends to be highly gendered and naturalised (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2016; Firestone 2015).

⁷ Benanav is using data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Groningen Growth and Development Centre (GGDC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization Corporate Statistical Database (FAOSTAT).

Indeed, the very fact that wage labour is perhaps the most *obviously manifest and recognised* form of labour is a significant social, political and economic fact; invisibilising certain forms of activity establishes certain power relations, subject positions and even economic relations of dependency (ibid.). As Federici points out, the gendered division of labour – between the traditional, and persistent, male breadwinner versus female housekeeper/carer – disciplines both partners in the relationship, although in different ways. By maintaining housework essentially as a ‘labour of love’ (i.e. by not paying a wage for it), socioeconomic systems ideologically discipline women into carrying out the work of maintaining the domestic sphere (thereby spatially and economically constraining them). ‘[A]t the same time, [waged work] has also disciplined the male worker, by making “his” woman dependent on his work and his wage’ – thus placing the pressure of another’s survival on his shoulders (Federici, 2012, p. 17). In the same way that this dissertation aims to complement Kathi Weeks’ – and others’ – account of the matrix between hegemonic power and work relations, I understand the field of social reproduction theory to be an essential component to any picture of hegemony that, while not present in this thesis, can dovetail productively with the approach I construct within it.

The wage is still the issue

Despite these caveats – and as this thesis will underline – wage labour is a unique social relation, since ‘we are talking here not merely of one particular...set of goods among others but the *dominant* orientation of working activity’ that mediates and situates all others (Dejours et al., 2018). Over thirty two million people in the UK are employed in some capacity,⁸ and eighty five percent of that number are employed by someone else (as opposed to being self-employed) for a wage (ONS, 2020a; ONS 2018). It is still mainly via wage labour that people have access – indirectly or directly – to the items that they require for survival and for their enjoyment, commodities that they must exchange portions of their earned wage or salary for. Even the socially reproductive labour alluded to above is increasingly carried out for a wage – including the expanding care sector, taking up a larger and larger proportion of nations’ GDP (Hester and Srnicek, 2018).

⁸ This was written before the Covid-19 crisis and so these figures will have changed, given the rise in unemployment and the uncertain future of the various government policies in this area.

Those groups that are not actualising the wage relation in the UK in their daily lives – for example students, the ‘unemployed’ or retirees – nonetheless have some fundamental relationship with it. Students are – after the 1997 introduction of tuition fees – utilising loans that must one day be paid off via the accumulation of wages and thus are in the most part effectively utilising forward payments on future wage labour; to be a student is, at least in part, to be a proto-wage labourer. The ‘unemployed’ is a category created upon the establishment of wage labour as a dominant features of modern capitalism (Benanav, 2014).⁹ To be of adult age and to have to survive without waged work – for a variety of reasons including disability or lack of job opportunities – requires various means-tests, including the disciplining of this demographic into *looking for* waged work; to be unemployed is to be constantly on the cusp of work (with very little material support). Finally, retirees either survive through saved pensions accrued through wage labour, inherited wealth from previous generations’ labours or state pensions and services that are (at least in part) funded by taxation on wage incomes at the national scale; to survive as a retiree requires (enough) past, waged work to have been carried out by someone.¹⁰

Wage labour is not a concept befitting of an early epoch then – like a fish in water, unable to breathe anywhere else (to paraphrase Foucault on Marx. Foucault, 2001, p. 285). Nor has it been entirely superseded as a concept yet by new notions of contemporary work (e.g. in Wark, 2020).

Hegemony is still the issue

⁹ The very definition of unemployed persons as *still within the national workforce* identifies this close relationship to the wage relation: unemployment is a disposition towards (achieving) employment (Benanav, 2014, p. 16-7). In the UK, as across other capitalist economies, the official statistics authorities utilise this definition (e.g. ONS, 2020).

¹⁰ That is to not to even mention the sheer amount of waged care work that will be required to look after our ageing population in the decades to come (ONS 2018a).

Just as wage labour has remained relevant to the study of power and capitalism at various scales, so too have we witnessed a revival of interest in hegemony as a revealing and widely-used descriptive concept for national and international politics. This is most obviously exemplified in post-financial crash (2007/8) political events culminating in forms of populism across the political spectrum. For example, in the second decade of this century (and still ongoing), Podemos in Spain, and to a lesser extent Syriza in Greece, quite explicitly actualised a Gramscian-Laclauian strategy in their respective countries (Iglesias, 2015). Alongside Pablo Iglesias, another Podemos leader, Iñigo Errejón – who has now established a new party Más País separate from Podemos – was greatly influenced by Laclau and Mouffe during the writing of his doctoral thesis on Latin American politics (Errejón, 2014). He has since worked closely with Chantal Mouffe, co-authoring *Podemos: In the name of the people* in 2016 as well as corresponding articles that theorise the emergence and fortunes of Laclau-inspired political parties (Errejón and Mouffe, 2016, 2016a; Anderson, 2017).

Alongside these (counter-)hegemonic projects directly or indirectly influenced by a Gramscian political analysis, we have also witnessed a rise of the far-right – and far-right populism – across Europe and the globe (Yilmaz, 2012; Traverso 2019; Fekete 2017; Trilling, 2013). The impressive performances of Front National (now Rassemblement national), La Lega (Nord), Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and the 2016 Leave campaign here in the UK in recent years have all demonstrated the efficacy of utilising populist tropes and mechanisms that Laclau and Mouffe (and others) had identified many years before (and which I discuss in Chapter Two).

This return of politics particularly relevant to a Gramscian – that is to say, hegemony – lens has been matched by a relative renaissance in Gramsci scholarship in the twenty-first century. Theorists such as Marcus Green, Kate Crehan, Peter Thomas and Peter Ives have each contributed to new understandings of Gramsci’s account of hegemony; to some extent, each have taken a thread from Gramsci’s conceptual apparatus and run with it down productive avenues. As Chapter One of this dissertation shows, this new scholarship has recovered Gramsci from decades of dominant – but misleading – readings that treated the

Prison Notebooks as a coded version of a more orthodox Marxism with a few added extras.¹¹

Together, the persistent significance of the wage labour relationship in people's everyday lives, the mutations and actualisations of hegemonic strategies on the (inter)national stage and the renaissance of Gramscian theoretical work give my thesis a fertile context within which to contribute.

The structure and argument of the thesis

The argument of the thesis is structured as follows. The first two chapters establish what hegemony is by engaging with the strengths, incoherences and innovations of the rich field of scholarship on the topic. The first chapter introduces some of Antonio Gramsci's key concepts in order that they can be deployed in later chapters in connection with my chosen problematic of wage labour's position within hegemonies in contemporary capitalism. As the overall purpose of this project is to provide an analysis of wage labour through the lens of hegemony, I do not undertake the reconstruction of Gramsci's carceral project in all of its facets (and with all of its arguments). The concepts discussed do not exhaust Gramsci's theoretical apparatus but are simply a selected set of analytical tools that make (partial) sense of a complex political picture, or hegemony. I engage with debates around the meaning and coherence of Gramsci's theory of hegemony – including Perry Anderson's early, and oft-cited, critique of Gramsci's position as well as the more recent revival of Gramscian work in the twenty-first century. Gramscian scholarship has developed considerably in recent decades, and the philological and philosophical work of those such as Ives, Thomas, Crehan and Green have done much to rethink Gramsci's *Notebooks*. Coercion and consent should not be understood, I argue, as belonging to particular institutions (e.g. coercion to the police, or consent to the news media), but rather as strategies of power that constitute a 'dual perspective' – the proportions of which vary historically and geographically.

¹¹ The twentieth century exceptions to this kind of dominant reading are those platformed in this dissertation: Laclau, Mouffe, Buci-Glucksmann, Hall, and so on.

In the final part of the chapter I turn to Gramsci's writings on wage labour itself as an introduction of the topic in the dissertation. As is often Gramsci's method, he approaches wage labour in a conjunctural manner (as Hall and others replicate later). Gramsci was fascinated by the 'Americanism' and 'Fordism' of the early twentieth century – particularly what kind of common sense (*senso comune*) around work these were installing, what type of subaltern human beings they were creating, and most pertinently, what mechanisms of coercion and consent were involved in this cultural and technological ensemble. I replicate the kind of analysis shown by Gramsci here in later chapters (Three and Four). Overall, this initial chapter establishes the coordinates of hegemony that Gramsci's work provides, which are further fleshed out via differing Gramscian methodologies in the following chapter and then finally deployed in later sections of the thesis in a particular context (New Labour's project in the UK).

Chapter two draws out some of the most significant innovations within Gramscism in order to complete the consolidation of a coherent and nuanced approach to hegemony that I began in the previous chapter where I considered Gramsci's work itself. I draw attention to divergent strands within the study of hegemony, focusing on the work of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Stuart Hall in particular, as well as more recent interventions and critiques from Bob Jessop, Andrew Gamble and Jonathon Joseph amongst others. A dividing line is drawn between approaches that focus heavily on discourse and ideology, as well as the analysis and criticisms of those approaches that tend to put weight on institutional and/or economic critique. I deploy criticisms of each of these positions in turn, identifying problems and/or lacuna in their accounts of hegemony. Sometimes these 'gaps' are acknowledged by the thinkers in question, other times the lacunas are theorised away, as it were.

The lack of (or weak) engagement with 'the economic', taken in the broadest sense of exchange relations, is particularly significant, I argue, as it precludes a rigorous engagement with wage labour and its potential position within a given hegemony. In this sense, the arguments I make in this chapter are pivotal to my overall argument and purpose: articulating a theory of hegemony and wage labour together. Conversely, my criticism of the more state-, political economy- and institutional-focused approaches to hegemony revolves

around their deficient accounts of populism and of the discursive and cultural elements that interact with the structural aspects that they see as fundamental; these deficiencies are most obviously expressed when the authors in question gesture towards ‘populism’ and the politics of discourse - often borrowing similar language to that of Hall and Laclau – but fall short of providing any account of them, thus begging questions.

Despite the apparent incommensurability between these strands, I show that it is possible to adopt a framework where the key insights of each can be accommodated and utilised in combination. This framework is adapted from Jonathan Joseph’s (2002) distinction between ‘hegemonic projects’ and ‘hegemonic structures’ combined with Laclau’s categories of ‘sedimentation’ and ‘reactivation’. These categories are used to make a productive distinction between elements of hegemonies that, whilst remaining the product of human activity, are relatively-intransigent and slow to change – that I term ‘structures’ – and other phenomena that make more sense interpreted as shorter-term elements of hegemony (within much shorter historical timeframes) – that I term ‘projects’. This distinction is then used to guide later chapters of the thesis.

Having proposed the hypothesis that hegemony is constituted by a co-determination of sedimented social ‘structures’ and particular hegemonic ‘projects’, the final two chapters seek to deploy this framework in the context of wage labour. In the third chapter I focus on the nature of wage labour itself, understood as a key *structure* relevant to the discussion of hegemony that I have developed so far. Primarily, I demonstrate the central position of wage labour as a sedimented social relation (structure) within capitalism, and thus I also demonstrate its fundamentality to any given hegemonies within capitalist society or ‘mode of production’ (to use Marx’s language). Drawing on important lessons from chapter two regarding the debates around the ‘economic’, this chapter maintains the possibility of analysing wage labour without treating the ‘economic’ in abstraction, as a ‘sphere’ or ‘realm’ distinct from ‘politics’: production is always political. Equally, however, I endeavour to not do away with the critique of political economy and the particular form of power (effects) that we can reveal via said critique: economic logics exist, but not in abstraction from power relations. My task in that chapter is also to continue to bring together the literature on hegemony with the labour process theory introduced in Chapter Two; this

entails trying to bring together concepts from these traditions in new and original ways. For instance, where and in what sense, can we identify the two sides of hegemony in relation to wage labour at the scale of the social system as well as that of the workplace? How do some of Gramsci's notions, e.g. of the 'subaltern' dovetail with the concrete practices of wage labour on the shop floor?

I make the argument that wage labour is a hegemonic structure – or structural social relation – by substantiating various claims with historical and critical research. Firstly, wage labour is shown to be fundamental to societies we class as capitalist, and this fundamentality has been guaranteed by the historical and continual separation of people from the means to their subsistence (so-called 'primitive accumulation'). I understand this situation as a kind of 'foundational coercion' that persists throughout the history of capitalism, and importantly throughout the ebbs and flows of various hegemonic projects. Secondly, I argue that the mechanisms of hegemony – that is, of coercion and consent – occur not just at a wide social or political scale, but also *within* workplaces, in order to secure control over wage labourers and guarantee the realisation of labour in the labour process. Hegemony in the workplace, I argue, is a response to the indeterminacy inherent in the purchase and use of labour power. Finally, drawing on Gramsci's notion of the subaltern, I argue that both the 'macro' and 'micro' physics of hegemonic power create a specific kind of ideal subaltern subject: the interchangeable and productive subject.

The fourth and final chapter develops the notion of 'hegemonic project' that compliments that of 'hegemonic structure', taking New Labour as a case study with which to unpack what a hegemonic project entails in a concrete instance. I take New Labour to mean the project within the UK Labour Party approximately spanning from the mid-1990s until the 2010 election loss (although of course elements of New Labour both predate this timespan and have outlasted it). By being a relatively hegemonic project within the Labour Party itself – i.e. by being able to give a certain discursive coherence to the Party – New Labour is particularly suited as a case study of sorts, in which I can deploy some of the theoretical armature I have developed in previous chapters.

Whilst new phenomena that are characteristic to New Labour are addressed – e.g. employability and workfare – these are related to the categories of hegemony and the insights of labour process theory that are developed in previous chapters. Here I also attempt to bring to bear the conceptual apparatus that I have built in the previous chapters, including my interpretations of Gramsci’s categories, the structure/project and sedimentation/reactivation concepts and the analysis of (ongoing) primitive accumulation. The objective of this work is twofold (and is consonant with the aims of the overall project): to produce a new understanding of New Labour as a hegemonic project in a particular relation to wage labour on the one hand, and to understand the changing nature of actually existing wage labour relations as they were modified and/or maintained in the New Labour hegemonic period. This entails, firstly, going to the language of New Labour, to reveal the world conception and *senso comune* its project attempted to establish. Secondly, it entails understanding how New Labour’s hegemonic project related to, transformed and shaped wage labour (*qua* hegemonic structure of capitalism) via its governance of the labour market.

Through this structure, the thesis provides an original intervention into theoretical debates by confronting existing scholarship with the problematic neglect of wage labour therein, and working through how a theory of hegemony could be developed to rectify this. Further, this chosen problem allows for an exploratory approach that integrates labour process theory into an original communication between theoretical fields that is deployed toward an analysis of New Labour on these terms.

Chapter One

Gramsci, Hegemony and Wage Labour

This chapter interprets some of Gramsci's key concepts in order that they can be deployed in later chapters in connection with my chosen problematic of wage labour's position within hegemonies in capitalist societies. The overall purpose of this dissertation is to coherently integrate an analysis of wage labour within a concept of hegemony - and towards this purpose it draws upon Gramsci (and his descendants) as a pivotal figure within the field. As such, it does not undertake to reconstruct Gramsci's carceral project in all of its facets, its sub-textual play or develop the precise manner in which he inherited his concepts (for this, see Thomas, 2009). Equally, the concepts discussed here do not exhaust Gramsci's theoretical apparatus but are simply a selected set of analytical tools that make (partial) sense of a complex political picture, or hegemonic situation. This chapter establishes these coordinates of hegemony that Gramsci's work provides, which are further fleshed out via differing Gramscian methodologies in the next chapter and then finally deployed in later chapters of the thesis in a particular context (the UK).

The nature of Gramsci's work – consisting primarily of his *Notebooks* – has proven incredibly fertile for interpretation and reinterpretation across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As such, it will become apparent that each of the following concepts is more or less contested within the scholarship. While I avoid treating the *Notebooks* as a quasi-rhizomatic text (Jablonka, 1998) with which I can take unlimited liberty in applying its terms to whichever phenomena I wish, I do understand them to be a flexible toolbox of concepts that have relative validity across different historical periods within modern capitalist societies – and not simply as confined to a response to 'specific questions posed in a particular juncture' – e.g. post-revolutionary Russia, or inter-war Italy and so on (as does Thomas, 2009, p. 46). Instead of aiming to do 'justice' to Gramsci's texts in their fullness, in this thesis I am explicitly instrumentalising his apparatus of concepts in the effort to understand how hegemony works in modern, capitalist societies and a specific socio-political object (wage labour) within these societies. It will become apparent that while Gramsci's writings on hegemony are useful for understanding hegemony (and *a fortiori*

wage labour within hegemonic relations), his theorising remains dynamically ‘open’ and therefore needs to be augmented and updated in various ways in order that a comprehensive analysis can be arrived at (this is carried out in the succeeding chapters).

In this chapter I navigate and interpret certain concepts of the *Notebooks* with the assistance of some of Gramsci’s closest readers in the attempt to give the most cogent account of the fundamentals of hegemony and how each of these elements relate to one another and to the processes of hegemony overall. I begin by looking at the ways in which Gramsci describes hegemony and how this has been interpreted by his readers. I then consider three of Gramsci’s concepts that are integrated into his fragments of a theory of hegemony: ‘subalterneity’, ‘*senso comune*’ and the ‘social function of being an intellectual’. I conclude the chapter by interpreting Gramsci’s notes on the position of wage labour within capitalist societies – a theme that subsequent Gramscian scholarship on the composition of hegemony will consistently return to.

1. Hegemony as coercion and consent

Before Gramsci, the term hegemony has a long history (Anderson, 2017). The modern usage has its roots in the ancient Greek noun *hēgemonía* – which designates leadership of an alliance of city-states for a common military end (ibid., p. 1). It coexisted and was sometimes contrasted with *arkhē* meaning rule in a more general sense (ibid., p. 1-5). Despite a millennia-long ‘peripeteia’, involving centuries of relative dormancy, it retained the significance of leadership when it was reactivated as a term (*gegemoniya*) frequently used in pre-revolutionary Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this context, hegemony meant the leadership of the working class in ‘uniting all oppressed sectors of the population as allies under its guidance’ against the *Ancien Régime* (ibid., p. 14). Key figures such as Lenin and Plekhanov, for example, urged the working class to reach out to the peasantry in order to forge something like a revolutionary front against both Tsarism and the bourgeoisie (Anderson, 1976, p. 15; Ives, 2004, p. 64). The Russian working class, Plekhanov argued, could and should play an ‘independent, leading role in the struggle against absolutism’ (Plekhanov, 1956 cited Anderson, 1976, p. 15).

Decades after the Russian Revolution, Gramsci contributed to the term's meaning in significant ways. Firstly, he maintains the notion of hegemony as leadership, but he expands it so that it not *only* applies to the leadership of the working class over other subordinated social groups, but *also* to the mechanisms of control exercised by dominant groups within a stabilised capitalist economy (Gramsci, 1971; Anderson, 1976, p. 20; 2017, p. 19; Showstack-Sassoon, 1980, p. 110; Thomas, 2009, p. 221). Secondly, at various points in the *Notebooks*, Gramsci describes these mechanisms of control in terms of consent (continuous with the leadership etymology) but *also* in terms of coercion. He thus adopts the 'dual perspective' (*doppia prospettiva*) that cognises the 'two fundamental levels' that correspond to 'Machiavelli's Centaur – half animal and half-human'. 'They are the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilisation' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 169-70).

The precise relationship between the two poles of the duality – coercion and consent – is the subject of much debate within Gramsci scholarship. In his influential essay from 1976, for instance, Anderson uses a number of quotations to try to demonstrate that Gramsci never quite squares the circle regarding the 'proper' relationship between these two 'levels'. Firstly, Anderson points to various moments in the *Notebooks*, such as the one already referred to, where consent and hegemony appear to be synonymous – while coercion is excluded from its definition (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57, 169-70; Anderson, 1976, p. 21-2, 26). In fact, Anderson believes that Gramsci establishes two columns of antithetical pairs (Anderson, 1976, p. 21):

Force	Consent
Domination	Hegemony
Violence	Civilisation

These apparently antinomic terms in turn relate to particular 'sites' of hegemony in Gramsci according to Anderson: civil society, 'that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private"' on the one hand, and the state or 'political society' which exercises 'direct domination' and "'juridical" government' on the other (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). Anderson thus 'summarises' as follows (Anderson, 1976, p. 22):

Hegemony	Domination
=	=
Consent	Coercion
=	=
Civil Society	State

In this formulation, civil society is the terrain for the achievement of consent while the state retains a 'monopoly on violence'.¹² This model, Anderson argues, is 'the most important for the ulterior destiny of [Gramsci's] work' (Anderson, 1976, p. 26; see also Femia, 1981, p. 24-5). Anderson then believes that Gramsci falls prey to a number of 'slippages' between his terms – most evidently when he appears to dissolve the opposition between coercion and consent under one heading in apparently yet another formulation of hegemony: 'The State (in its integral meaning)' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 239). Here, consent and coercion are exercised through an expanded concept of the state, as *united*, particular moments of its functioning. The state is now the 'apparatus of hegemony' – performing *both* the function of achieving consent and of exercising force (Anderson, 1976, p. 25). These differing formulations – hegemony as consent versus hegemony as statehood (a synthetic unity of coercion and consent) – Anderson believes, 'cannot be reconciled' without contradiction (1976, p. 25).

Kate Crehan has argued, contrary to Anderson's line, that Gramsci's multiple definitions do not betray a confusion, but rather a particular sensitivity to the different modes in which power works in different contexts (Crehan, 2002, p. 101-2). The makeup of the hegemonic compound coercion/consent can have different stresses at different historical and political junctures. Thus, as Showstack-Sassoon agrees, Gramsci's methodological distinction within the 'dual' concept of hegemony is more 'of emphasis than of essence' (Showstack-Sassoon, 1980, p. 113). Rather than being a 'precisely bounded theoretical concept,' therefore, 'hegemony for Gramsci simply names the problem', or question, as to the particular composition of power relations in a given situation (Crehan, 2002, p. 105). Crehan points to

¹² As Thomas (2009, p. 168) points out, this dichotomy is consonant with the 'accepted usage in the modern social sciences, or at least those currents influenced by Weber's famous definition of the state as holder of a monopoly of violence in a geographically delimited area'.

various examples from the *Notebooks* to illustrate the shifting nature of Gramsci's concept – this time to demonstrate its analytical flexibility, rather than, as Anderson see it, its incoherence. Relating hegemony to intellectuals and the state for example, Gramsci writes:

The functions [of intellectuals] are precisely organisational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. These comprise:

1. The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group [...]
2. The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively [...] (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12)

Consent is here aligned with hegemony just as coercion is aligned with the state – implying Gramsci's 'first model' that Anderson identifies. 'Elsewhere, however, Gramsci does not oppose civil society/hegemony and the state/coercion in this way' (Crehan, 2002, p. 102). For example, in another note he writes that:

the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules (Gramsci, 1971, p. 244)

This time, the state is not simply a coercive (dominance) apparatus but also a technology of consent.

Unlike Anderson, however, for whom the 'integral state' idea represents a symptom of theoretical confusion, Crehan sees the integral state as key to understanding Gramsci's different formulations of hegemony, as it indexes a duality rather than opposition. For instance, attacking economism (the idea that society is determined solely, or even primarily, by economic activity), Gramsci writes:

The ideas of the Free Trade movement are based on a theoretical error whose practical origin is not hard to identify; *they are based on a distinction between political society and civil society which is made into and presented as an organic one, whereas in fact it is merely methodological...* But since *in actual reality civil society and State are one and the same*, it must be made clear that *laissez-faire* too is a form of State 'regulation'. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 159-160, my emphasis)

The point is not that the machinery of the state (taken on a narrow definition of law, police, military etc., or what Gramsci calls 'political society') is actual in all aspects of civil life (i.e. to posit a kind of totalitarianism). Instead of reducing everything to a restricted, classical notion of the state, Gramsci goes in the opposite direction and expands the 'state' in order to accommodate the complex power relations that traverse society.¹³ He is concerned with governance and not just with government. Thus, to adopt the 'integral' perspective is to treat social, political, legal, economic and cultural divisions as only apparent, somewhat arbitrary, methodological at best, and not fundamental; to think 'integrally' is to cognise the ways in which governmental and non-governmental forces interact and support one another, how juridical processes coercively support processes that are carried out in 'private' domains, and importantly how consent is used to justify coercion and, vice versa, how coercive functions are used to achieve consent within capitalist social relations. After all, to put it another way, the forces of coercion and consent are not, in actuality, restricted to public/private, political/economic, or political/civil divides. Gramsci is thus refusing to (ontologically) divide up power formations into different, bounded 'spheres', while also acknowledging that methodologically this can be expedient. In this sense, Bob Jessop writes:

Provided one interprets such definitions [of coercion and consent] in relation to the exercise of [integral] state power (rather than as an attempt to establish the

¹³ With this concept of the state we can perhaps say that Gramsci is 'working towards radically new concepts in an old vocabulary, designed for other purposes and times' (Anderson, 1976, p. 6). As Foucault would do later, in the appropriately new vocabulary of 'biopower' and 'disciplinary power', Gramsci is not satisfied with the boundaries established by classical political theory – hence the force and reach of his 'dual perspective': it knows no 'organic' bounds to hegemony.

boundaries of the state apparatus itself), Gramsci's supposed inconsistencies and/or antinomies do not seem very significant. (Jessop, 1982, p. 147)

Perhaps the most innovative reading of Gramsci's theoretical output in recent decades is Peter Thomas' *The Gramscian Moment* (2009). While Crehan understands Gramsci's hegemony to denote a dynamic oscillation between poles of emphasis within an integrated perspective, Thomas argues that the concept is fully dialectical (Thomas, 2009, p. 163; see also Showstack-Sassoon, 1980, p. 112). It is a fallacy, Thomas argues, to counterpose coercion and consent in Gramsci as Anderson does, for this establishes an insurmountable and yet spurious gulf (ibid., p. 162-3). To demonstrate his argument, Thomas points to the following passage from the *Notebooks* that states: 'a class is dominant in two ways, that is, it is "leading" and "dominant". It leads the allied classes, and dominates over the adversarial classes' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 57). Thomas concludes:

Leadership-hegemony and domination are therefore conceived less as qualitatively distinct from one another, than as strategically differentiated forms of a unitary political power: hegemony is the form of political power exercised over those classes in close proximity to the leading group, while domination is exerted over those opposing it. (Thomas, 2009, p. 163)

These two forms, leadership and domination (or consent and coercion) form what Gramsci calls the 'proper relationship' of power in the West, wherein force and consent 'counterbalance each other' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 238). Furthermore, the two aspects of hegemony are, for Thomas, co-determining – each acting as the condition of possibility for the other (and therefore are in dialectical relation). A class' ability to lead other groups relies upon its ability to coordinate domination against the opponents of such an alliance, and, vice versa, the capacity to exercise such coercion relies upon achieving the consent of those you intend to lead (Thomas, 2009, p. 163). Gramsci gives specific examples of this intimate relationship between coercion and consent in various notes. Regarding the ideal conditions for new legislative (that is, coercive) measures, he writes:

The maximum of legislative [coercive] capacity can be inferred when a perfect formulation of directives is matched by a perfect arrangement of the organisms of execution and verification, and by a *perfect preparation of the “spontaneous” consent of the masses who must “live” those directives modifying their own habits, their own will, their own convictions to conform to those directives and with the objectives which they propose to achieve.* (Gramsci, 1971, p. 266, my emphasis)

To maximise the efficacy of coercive forces, the ground must be prepared through the modifications of people’s habits, wills and convictions so as to achieve their active, or passive, consent. Consent is in this case the ground of coercion. Thus, hegemony is a power relation composed of two broad functions that mutually reinforce one another. The two aspects of the centaur are not counterposed, necessitating that we come down on the side of one or the other – coercion or consent – but instead constitute an ‘identity-distinction’ between two moments within the same process (Thomas, 2009, p. 167).¹⁴

A few things can be taken from these accounts regarding Gramsci’s notion of hegemony. Firstly, whether understood dialectically (Thomas) or as a polar duality (Crehan), the makeup of a hegemony in any given situation ‘can only be discovered through careful empirical analysis’ and not from an abstracted formula that might be placed in antinomic relation to other expressions written at different times (Crehan, 2002, p. 105). In other words, one must analyse the ‘relations of force’ – to use another of Gramsci’s terms; broadly speaking: which are the forces that produce consent, and which are the forces of coercion at play? What are the ‘fixed proportions’ of each here? The strength of this reading of Gramsci’s position is that by understanding hegemony as a methodological concept – a kind of ‘empty’ dual perspective, as it were – we can utilise it to make sense of a variety of historical conjunctures, even those far removed from Gramsci’s own, wherein different (yet still modern, capitalist) conditions obtain. Secondly, following Gramsci’s notion of the ‘integral state’, we can note the mistaken attempt to try and ‘locate’ hegemony in any one social institution of geographic space. Rather:

¹⁴ After all, to utilise the metaphor once more, a centaur is one integrated, but divided, organism and not necessarily one in ‘opposition’ with itself.

Just as political society and civil society are not conceived in a spatial but a functional sense, so hegemony is conceived as a practice ‘traversing’ the boundaries between them. (Thomas, 2009, p. 194)

With this ‘integral’ significance of hegemony as an overarching, guiding context, I shall now move to delineate a ‘subset’ of components that Gramsci uses to explain the nature of hegemonic functioning: ‘subaltern groups’, *senso comune* and the ‘social function of being an intellectual’. Each of these three phenomena relate to hegemonic processes in particular ways. ‘Subaltern groups’ and *senso comune* are both the effects and objects of hegemonic mechanisms while intellectuals and intellectual functions facilitate said mechanisms in one integral way or another.

2. ‘Subaltern groups’ and the ‘subaltern’ condition

As with various other terms in Gramsci’s *Notebooks*, there is much confusion and dogmatism as to the meaning of ‘subaltern’. In his recent, ground-breaking essay on the concept, Marcus Green writes,

there is a widespread misconception throughout the literature that [Gramsci] developed the phrase ‘subaltern social groups’ in his prison notebooks as a codeword or euphemism for the word ‘proletariat’. (Green, 2011a, p. 387; see also Haug, 2000)

The common (mis)understanding posits the idea that Gramsci used ‘subaltern’ instead of ‘proletariat’ as a camouflage in order to avoid the fascist prison censor’s eye – anxious that any hint of overtly Marxist or anti-fascist material might mean the revocation of his liberty to write (*ibid.*). In a 1987 interview for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak re-presented the ‘camouflage thesis’ and alluded to the ways in which ‘subaltern’ had been innovatively ‘transformed’ beyond Gramsci’s use in subsequent interpreters’ work:

I like the word ‘subaltern’ for one reason. It is truly situational. ‘Subaltern’ began as a description of a certain rank in the military. The word was used under censorship by

Gramsci: he called Marxism ‘monism’, and was obliged to call the proletariat ‘subaltern’. That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn’t fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor. (Spivak, 1990, p.141, cited in Green, 2011a, p. 390)¹⁵

Green’s careful philological work has shown that this assumption is false for at least two important reasons. Firstly, and most broadly, Gramsci was relatively unfazed by the prison censor’s gaze when it came to Marxism for long periods of his incarceration:

In his early notes, composed in the period from 1929 to mid-1932, Gramsci openly referred to Marx and Marxism literally hundreds of times, and he composed several notes specifically on the philosophy of praxis. In fact, in the first part of Notebook 7 (1930-31), he translated 66 pages of Marx’s writings into Italian. During this period, he camouflaged only the names of individuals associated with the Soviet Union, such as Lenin, Trotsky, and Bukharin. (Green, 2011a, 389)

When Gramsci switched to using ‘the philosophy of praxis’ – often seen as a sign of camouflaging – roughly after 1932, this predominantly represented both his own development of Marxism and the distance he was placing between himself and the ‘philosophy of spirit’ found in Benedetto Croce and some Hegelians (Thomas, 2015; Haug, 2000; Green, 2011a, 389). It was not a camouflage for a merely orthodox Marxism.

Secondly, and more specifically, the contexts of Gramsci’s actual use of the term ‘subaltern’ simply don’t justify its identification with the proletariat.¹⁶ While his first use of the term, in Notebook 3, §14, remains at a general, theoretical level, his second deployment, in Notebook 3, §18 (reused four years later in Notebook 25, §4), is related to the situations of

¹⁵ Crehan (2016, p. 14) points to Lloyd (1993, p. 126), Rogall (1998, p.2), and Beverley (1999, p. 2) as other exponents of this view. Anderson too invokes the ‘codeword’ explanation as one the reasons for Gramsci’s supposed inconsistency (Anderson, 1976, p. 6).

¹⁶ Green reckons that a key reason why so many commentators have misinterpreted Gramsci in this regard is due to their using the *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971) with its arbitrary headings, and not the critical editions of the *Notebooks* (Green, 2011a, p. 391-2).

a plurality of subordinated social groups: e.g. ‘slaves of antiquity’, ‘medieval proletarians’ and ‘women in Roman history’ (Gramsci, 1996, p. 25).¹⁷ If the censorship/camouflage thesis were true, Green argues, ‘it makes no sense as to why Gramsci used ‘subaltern’ and ‘proletariat’ together in the same notes and in two separate periods of his work’ (Green, 2011a, p. 392).

In truth, Gramsci does not provide us with a precise definition of subaltern groups and the meaning, as with hegemony, is only ‘ascertained by extrapolating from the ways in which he used the term in specific contexts’ (ibid., p. 393). Certainly, we should not regard subaltern groups as homogenous: as Joseph Buttigieg reminds us, this is ‘precisely why [Gramsci] always refers to them in the plural’ (Buttigieg, 2013, p. 36). Nor should we put undue emphasis on the loaded term ‘subaltern *classes*’, as Gramsci used this term interchangeably with ‘subaltern groups’ in over thirty individual notes across three years (Green, 2011a, p. 393). Crehan believes that despite this lack of an abstracted definition, Gramsci’s concept of the subaltern is best interpreted in the register of inequality (Crehan, 2016, p. 3, 15). On this reading, the subaltern are those who are not equal. We might refine Crehan’s formulation to say, in line with Gramsci’s plural examples just noted, that to be subaltern is to be on the opposite side of an asymmetrical or unequal *power* relationship. What relates subaltern groups under the label is not necessarily economic inequality, for example, but the particular limitations upon the capacity to act that economic inequality and other logics of power impose upon them. ‘[S]ubalternity’, Green writes, ‘is not merely limited to class relations; subalterneity is constituted through exclusion, domination, and marginality in their various forms’ (Green, 2011a, p. 388). Within modern, capitalist societies, the proletariat’s capacities are diminished in different respects, with different qualities and by different means than those pertaining to women, or people of colour for example – who in turn have their own unique subaltern existence. Equally, some subaltern groups have acquired a greater level of political organisation than others, and some may have come into existence more recently (Green, 2011, p. 76).

¹⁷ Gramsci even refers to Engels occupying a ‘subaltern position in relation to Marx!’ (Gramsci, 1996, p. 139; Ives, 2004, p. 78).

By indexing a subordinate subject position within a power relationship, subalterneity is directly related to the integral state, i.e. the processes of hegemony. The appropriate research questions we must ask of subaltern groups are: by what means of coercion and consent are subaltern groups maintained in their particular position? In other words, how is subalterneity sustained here? Subalterneity, as with hegemony, is thus another 'empty' methodological category, the specific content of which varies according to the particular hegemonic relations that are actual in the context in question. Wage labour – the topic of this thesis – involves a complex, intersectional subalterneity that Gramsci only touched on briefly (discussed later in this chapter) but which lies at the heart of capitalist social relations. A (neo-) Gramscian approach to wage labour will therefore supply an inventory of this subalterneity as it manifests (and has emerged) in a specific conjuncture.

3. *Senso Comune* and *Buon Senso*

Senso comune, as commentators have noted, 'is one of the most difficult terms in Gramsci's vocabulary to translate into English' (Thomas, 2009, p. 16 n.61). In English the term 'common sense' generally indicates something like a reliable capacity to navigate certain situations, an intrinsic store of valuable knowledge that can be applied broadly (Crehan, 2016, p. 43). Or, as the *OED* has it: 'good sound practical sense; combined tact and readiness in dealing with the everyday affairs of life; general sagacity'. The Italian usage, by contrast, 'places a much stronger emphasis upon those elements that are "common" or average (Thomas, 2009, p. 16 n.61). There is not nearly as strong a positive connotation with the Italian term as there is with the English – the former implies merely a basic and shared conception of reality, while the latter implies a reliable one.¹⁸

Therefore, when Gramsci uses the (Italian) term he is signifying 'the assemblage of truisms accepted within a particular social world' (Crehan, 2016, p. 43; Gramsci, 1971, p. 326). These facts and narratives appear to subjects as 'spontaneously' arrived at, or self-evident in experience. This pool of knowledge, as Crehan eloquently puts it, 'provides a heterogeneous

¹⁸ In fact, it is this slippage between these meanings that is perhaps one 'source of common sense's pervasive force: no person with this assumed basic human faculty could deny the truth of common sense facts' (Crehan, 2016, p. 45).

bundle of assumed certainties that structure the basic landscapes within which individuals are socialised' (Crehan, 2016, p. 43), assuring their 'integration into an existing system of cultural reference and meaning' (Thomas, 2009, p. 16, n.61).

Gramsci links *senso comune* to philosophy and to language through the notion of a 'conception of the world' (*concezione del mondo*). For Gramsci, 'all men are philosophers' precisely because of the "spontaneous philosophy" which is proper to everybody' (1971, p. 323). This spontaneous philosophy (simply the capacity to have a worldview) is contained in:

1. Language itself, which is a totality of determine notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content.
2. "*Senso comune*" and "good sense" [*buon senso*] (ibid.)

In contrast to philosophy, which aims at intellectual rigor and coherence, *senso comune* is defined as an incoherent world conception:¹⁹

Senso comune takes countless different forms. Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and [inconsistent].²⁰ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 419)

In their essay on the topic, Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea list various examples to illustrate the common forms this incoherence might take today:

Many people intuitively favour 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' conception of justice - while at the same time believing that Muslim Sharia Law is a barbarous form of law. Some who depend on benefits to survive believe all the other claimants are 'scroungers'. Some who hold that unbridled competition driven by self-interest is the

¹⁹ At one point, in Notebook 8, Gramsci calls *senso comune* 'the "philosophy for non-philosophers"' (Gramsci, 2007, p. 333).

²⁰ Crehan notes that *inconseguente* is more accurately translated as 'inconsistent' rather than 'inconsequential' here, 2016, p. 46 n.3.

only way to succeed also believe 'we should love our neighbours as ourselves'. (Hall and O'Shea, 2013, p. 10)

Further, while philosophy is often characterised by Gramsci as existing on the 'level' of 'awareness and criticism', *senso comune* is, by contrast, associated with mechanism and external determination from one's social milieu. Indeed, Gramsci believes that *senso comune* is an inescapable entry point into the conscious world for subjects (1971, p. 323). It is 'a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment, i.e. by one of the many social groups in which everyone is automatically involved' (ibid.). The direct origins of a particular *senso comune* can be as varied as the discourse of a local parish priest, the 'little old woman who has inherited the lore of the witches' or simply the habitual sayings of a parent, for example (ibid.). *Senso comune* therefore in some way represents the individual's socialisation: a common sense worldview is evidence of the 'acritical absorption' of a basic level of knowledge (Gramsci, 2007, p. 333). '[W]e are all conformists of some conformism or other' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 324).

Part of the continuing strength, persistence and sedimentation of *senso comune* is due to its seemingly spontaneous and/or self-evident nature; we *feel* like certain beliefs and facts are either the product of our own intellect or that they are so self-evidently true that they do not require questioning. Despite these deceptive appearances however, Gramsci stresses that all conceptions of the world, all spontaneous 'grammars' that we use to describe the world, are nevertheless *deeply* historically determined and heterogeneous; *senso comune* is no exception. '[I]t must be stressed that "pure" spontaneity does not exist in history...In the "most spontaneous" movement it is simply the case that the element of "conscious leadership" cannot be checked, have left no reliable document', or in other words: the historical determinants of an apparent 'spontaneity' have been left out of the account (Gramsci, 1971, p. 196).²¹ The question, therefore, is of uncovering:

²¹ Gramsci's words here recall Spinoza's reflections on freedom in his *Ethics*: 'men believe that they are free, precisely because they are conscious of their volitions and desires; yet concerning the causes that have determined them to desire and will they do not think, not even dream about, because they are ignorant of them' (Spinoza, 2002, p. 239).

[O]f what historical type is the conformism, the mass humanity to which one belongs? [...] Moreover common sense is a collective noun, like religion: there is not just one common sense, for that too is a product of history and a part of the historical process [*un divenire storico*] (Gramsci, 1971, p. 324-326)

Upon inspection, *senso comune* is found to be historically informed by ‘prejudices from all past phases of history’ (ibid., p. 323). This might include international, national and/or local beliefs or even ‘principles of a more advanced science’ that pass through a series of filters and modifications before it becomes ‘spontaneous’ to one’s ‘personality’, to use Gramsci’s term (ibid.). For example, Hall and O’Shea write, ‘[m]any common-sense moral judgements – for example about sexuality – have a Judeo-Christian lineage, though we do not know where in the Bible they are to be found’ (Hall and O’Shea, 2013, p. 10). Our ‘spontaneous’ *senso comune* is thus inflected with social and political histories, the archaeological uncovering of which is the first task of a critical self-consciousness:

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 324)

The social aspect of *senso comune*, as in the case of all worldviews, must also be stressed. When ‘acquiring one’s conception of the world one always belongs to a particular [social] grouping’ (ibid.). At points, Gramsci seems to determine that *senso comune* is the expression of subaltern groups, claiming that it should be seen as present ‘in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is’ (1971, p. 419). This leads Peter Ives to go further and understand *senso comune* to be the distinctive mark of subaltern groups:

One of the central aspects that makes all these social groups subaltern is that they lack a coherent philosophy or world-view from which to understand and interpret the world...Subalternity and domination are not only physical domination, power and control over the use of resources. They are constituted by the inability to

develop a coherent world-view, a 'spontaneous' philosophy that actually relates to your own life and place in society. (Ives, 2004, p. 79)

Ives here indexes an important way in which common sense functions as part of the achievement of consent integral to hegemony. Subjects do not need to actively consent to an existing power formation in which they are in a subaltern position: they can 'passively' consent by failing to adequately understand their own subordination, and thereby, in practice, accepting the given 'common sense'. As Crehan puts it:

Hegemony...does not require that those who are ruled, the subalterns, see their subjugation as justified, only that they see it as a fixed and unchangeable reality it would be futile to oppose. (Crehan, 2016, p. 52)

An uncritical and unquestioning adherence to common sense may not establish a hegemony, but it does *maintain* it, by preventing those in subaltern positions from establishing a coherent picture of the power formations in which they are implicated, thereby limiting their capacity to act, resist and transform these relations. It should be added that this is not to say that subaltern groups *do not have* world conceptions, or any understanding of how the world works:

Gramsci certainly never denied that subaltern peoples had their own conceptions of the world, he just sees these as inherently fragmentary, incoherent and contradictory, and as lacking the kind of clear, rigorous insight into how local environments of oppression are located within larger economic and political realities. (Crehan, 2002, p. 87)

Ultimately, however, while the concept of *senso comune* may be integral to what it is to be a subaltern within a particular power relationship, we should be careful to not identify it as a property *exclusive* to subjugated or marginalised groups (as Ives seems to imply). 'Every social stratum has its own "common sense"' Gramsci writes (Gramsci, 1992, p. 173). Indeed, it is not the case that those non-subaltern groups – those who more or less benefit from a particular set of hegemonic relations – necessarily have the privilege of a coherent

worldview. We can certainly find common, incoherent world conceptions expressed from all quarters of society, even if subject positions within a hegemony are vastly different. Crehan appears to agree, by implication: While identifying the task of the analyst of *senso comune*, she writes:

We need to look at how the different elements are disseminated. What is it that makes them so self-evident, and self-evident to whom? *Whose common sense (men's, women's, poor people's, the better off, the more educated, the less educated, the old, the young, particular religious groups, and so on) are they?* (Crehan, 2016, p. 58, my emphasis)

Therefore, while subalterneity *is* often accompanied and sustained by incoherent world conceptions (facilitating a passive consent), *senso comune* should be considered as a general concept that denotes the 'comfortable, predictable certainties that provide all of us with much of our basic mental furniture' (ibid.). *Senso comune* is not geographically or demographically specific, but can be actual in every domain in which 'composite' and self-contradictory subjects (i.e. everyone) exist. It is, as Liguori puts it, a 'basic common denominator' (Liguori, 2009, p. 124).

Despite, as we have seen, holding a decidedly unromantic and critical position towards *senso comune*, Gramsci argues that each set of *senso comune* 'facts' includes within it some 'good sense' in embryo – what he calls 'the healthy nucleus that exists in *senso comune*' (1971, p. 328).²² Good sense, which is more akin to the English 'common sense', signifies a more accurate and penetrating worldview hidden in amongst the fragments of everyday *senso comune*. This worldview might correctly identify an injustice in the world (e.g. tax avoidance), a particular mechanism of politics ('the system is rigged') or class divide ('they are only out for themselves'), albeit in a more or less general and non-scientific way (Hall and O'Shea, 2013, p. 10).

²² Crehan (2016, p. 48) calls them 'nuggets of good sense'.

This has implications for political practice. Gramsci argues that if one wants to bring about a new, more coherent, popular worldview, one *has* to start with this utopian and critical nucleus of ‘good sense’, and therefore with the transformation *senso comune* in general. He asks: ‘Is it possible that a “formally” new conception can present itself in a guise other than the crude, unsophisticated version of the populace?’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 342-3). Thus, far from being disregarded as nonsense or as regrettable stupidity, ‘common sense is a site of political struggle’ (Hall and O’Shea, 2013, p. 10) whereby the good sense enclosed within needs to be ‘made more unitary and coherent’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328). Only in this way, for Gramsci, can a ‘new common sense and with it a new culture’ emerge (ibid., p. 424) – unforeseeable in advance, except for the ‘rough and jagged’ beginnings perceptible today (ibid., p. 343). Therefore, the task of emerging from the ‘self-incurred minority’ of *senso comune* (and therefore also of overcoming subalterneity as a condition), requires critical, coherent and corrective world conceptions (what Gramsci calls ‘philosophy’, and we might call ‘theory’) that work on and with the ‘good sense’ within *senso comune* (Green, 2011a, p. 388; Crehan, 2016, p. 55). With this relationship between philosophy, everyday, lived *senso comune* and the hegemonic politics that it sustains, we can begin to see how

[a]t the heart of [Gramsci’s] approach is a concern with the complex passage from lived experience, itself always mediated by the existing explanations of that experience, to political narratives and political movements capable of bringing about radical change (Crehan, 2016, p.4)

To partially foreshadow later chapters, there is a multi-layered and conflicted *senso comune* regarding wage labour in our society, which retains relative consistency as it pervades different social groups – from the proletariat to policy makers. Using Gramsci’s method for analysis (the compiling an ‘inventory’ of the conformisms to which “we” belong) my project will uncover the particular world conceptions at play in the garnering of consent and the justifications for coercion. A crucial *senso comune* for this study will be the “work ethic” (unpacked in chapter four).

4. Intellectuals, organisations and functions

The topic of intellectuals was of primary importance for Gramsci. He begins his *Prison Notebooks* on 8th February 1929 with a numbered plan of what he sets out to achieve. Amongst the sixteen topics identified, number two reads: 'Formation of Italian intellectual groups: development, attitudes' (Gramsci, 2011, p. 99). This theme survives the reduction of topics he announces to his sister-in-law Tatiana in November 1930: 'I've concentrated on three or four main subjects, one of these being the cosmopolitan role played by Italian intellectuals until the eighteenth century' (Gramsci 1979, p. 184), and is included in a new 'groupings of subjects' at the beginning of the eighth notebook at around the same date (Gramsci, 2007, p. 233). We should note – as one translator does – that Gramsci rarely considers intellectuals as isolated phenomena, but rather uses the word as a 'heading' under which potential separate essays or monographs could be gathered (Buttigieg, in Gramsci, 2007, pp. viii – xi). Gramsci considers the intellectual to be a concept that is related to many phenomena, not least to the state – with which it is explicitly linked in the same letter to Tatiana mentioned above. In a slightly later correspondence (September 1931), after grappling with the subject in various ways, Gramsci declares: 'The plans I've made concerning Italian intellectuals cover a very wide field...In any case, my concept of the intellectual is much broader than the usual concept of "the great intellectuals"' (1979, p. 204).

This expanded concept of the intellectual is expressed in the form of a distinction:

All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9)

Consider the first part of this sentence: why are all men intellectuals?

[N]on-intellectuals do not exist...There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a "philosopher", an artist, a man of taste, he

participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. (ibid.)

Everybody is an intellectual because we, in our everyday activity, sustain a 'conception of the world' (morally, aesthetically and in practical action). This is consonant with the proposition already noted above that 'all men are "philosophers"' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 322).

Having established the definition of intellectual activity as such (the production of 'particular conceptions of the world') Gramsci claims that the question as to the *function* of this production should, in the final instance, take precedence:

Can one find a unitary criterion to characterise equally all the diverse and disparate activities of intellectuals and to distinguish these at the same time and in an essential way from the activities of other social groupings? *The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations.* (Gramsci, 1971, p. 8, my emphasis)

This passage is significant for at least two reasons. Firstly we need to note Gramsci's "functionalism". Because everyone is an intellect of one form or another (*homo faber* and *homo sapiens* are inseparable), what distinguishes certain individuals and social groups is not their specific activity but the intellectual *function* that they play in society. We cannot, for example, define the proletarian by her specific job-related activity, but rather by the fact that she is performing that work in a specific social relation with specific effects. Similarly, an intellectual will have a specific occupation but their definition comes from their functional position within a complex of social relations. It is important to state that "function" can have two different senses, which can be broadly explained with recourse to Aristotle's schema of four causes. Something can *be* a function in terms of a means-end schema: this is the description of *what* something does in order to have some effect and

how it does it – how something operates in its activity, i.e. the nature of its *functioning*. This is to describe something in terms of its ‘efficient causation’. Alternatively, something can *have* a function, or a reason for its existence, in terms of its place within a larger, purposeful whole, e.g. the function of a steering wheel is to safely guide the car of which it is a part. This is to describe something in terms of its ‘final causation’ or purpose.

This distinction must be kept in mind when we talk of the social function of intellectuals. The *functioning* (what/how) of an intellectual function is having an ‘active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser [and] “permanent persuader”’ within the ensemble of social relations (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10). At another point, Gramsci describes the social function as ‘precisely organisational and connective’ (1971, p. 12). Through this organising activity, this permanent persuasion, intellectuals shape the widespread ‘foundation of a new and integral conception of the world’ (ibid.). The *purpose* of these activities is the achievement or maintenance of a political and social situation, specifically a hegemonic or counter-hegemonic context.²³ ‘One can conclude that the process of diffusion of new conceptions takes place for political (that is, in the last analysis, social) reasons’ (Gramsci, 1999, p. 338-9). Specifically, to recall a previously quoted passage, Intellectual functions are the

dominant group’s “deputies” exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. These comprise:

- 1) The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life [...]
- 2) The apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively [...] (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12).

²³ Recall that Gramsci’s picture of hegemony is applicable to either capitalist or (post-capitalist) proletarian hegemonies, and has consequences for emergent counter-hegemonies as well as currently existing hegemonies (though these will differ according to the purposes of the hegemony in question).

Intellectuals can therefore ‘embody’ either (and both) of the two poles of hegemony – coercion and consent, or the “spheres” of the political and the social/civil (as Gramsci sometimes names them in analysis). For example, intellectuals can help sediment a new world conception or *senso comune* amongst a population, e.g. “there is no such thing as society, only individuals”, or they can write new laws with which to coercively re-shape the social space, e.g. construct new immigration laws. Evidently, ‘[t]his way of posing the problem has as a result a considerable extension of the concept of intellectual, but it is the only way which enables one to reach a concrete approximation of reality’ (ibid.).²⁴ This extension also entails that a hypothetically unlimited amount of occupations can facilitate the embodiment of these ‘social functions’; one can be a graphic designer, a scientist, or a politician, or even one of ‘the creators of the various sciences, philosophy, art, etc.’ (ibid., p. 13). While everyone is technically an intellectual – and indeed this capacity is precisely the ground of our everyday, *senso comune* worldviews – some people embody particular intellectual functions that are integral to modern hegemonic processes.

Secondly, I argue that this functionalism within Gramsci’s *Notebooks* entails that we should not limit our analysis of said intellectual functions to individuals alone. While it is true that Gramsci devotes many notes to the investigation of the formation of groups of Italian intellectuals and/or the contents of specific intellectuals’ theoretical or literary works, at various points he emphasises institutions and organisations:

It would be interesting to study concretely the forms of cultural organisation which keep the ideological world in movement within a given country, and to examine how they function in practice...The education system, at all levels, and the Church, are the two biggest cultural organizations in every country, in terms of the number of people they employ. Then there are newspapers, magazines and the book trade and private

²⁴ Gramsci’s ‘realism’ here is both a blunt analysis of the social actors within hegemonic processes and a refutation of the idea of intellectuals as “independent”, autonomous, endowed with a character of their own’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 8). Gramsci calls the group of intellectuals who believe this of themselves ‘traditional’ (see for example, Martin, 1998, p. 46).

educational institutions, either those which are complementary to the state system, or cultural institutions like the Popular Universities.²⁵ (Gramsci, 1999, p. 342)

It is clear Gramsci was deeply fascinated with '*everything* which influences or is able to influence public opinion, directly or indirectly' (Gramsci, 1999, p. 380-1, my emphasis). Branching out from a mere sociology of individual intellectuals who play certain hegemonic functions (and thus 'extending' the concept of the intellectual even further), Gramsci recognises the prominence of institutions and organisations that play functional, intellectual roles within a 'hegemonic apparatus'.²⁶ This, recent commentators have declared, 'can be regarded as Gramsci's genuinely "new" addition to the concept of hegemony' (Thomas, 2013, p. 27; Bollinger and Koivisto, 2009). Gramsci singles out four institutions in particular that perform these intellectual functions: journalism, educational systems, political organisations and the Church.

❖ Journalism.

A study of how the ideological structure of a dominant class is actually organised: namely the material organisation aimed at maintaining, defending and developing the theoretical or ideological 'front'.²⁷ Its most prominent and dynamic part is the press in general: publishing houses (which have an implicit and explicit programme and are attached to a particular tendency), political newspapers, periodicals of every kind, specific, literary, philological, popular, etc., various periodicals down to parish bulletins. (Gramsci, 1999, p. 380)

Gramsci himself had first-hand knowledge of the influence and function that periodicals could have in social and political movements, being himself a journalist

²⁵ Ideology here is to be understood simply as 'a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328).

²⁶ A hegemonic apparatus is the material form of a hegemony constituted by 'a historically specific system of institutions and practices (e.g. religion, education, the family, language)' (Egan, 2016, p. 437)

²⁷ Note here that 'theoretical' and 'ideological' simply denote different explanatory world conceptions, i.e. they are on the spectrum between *senso comune* and philosophy and take various forms: a newspaper, a flyer, a textbook, a research paper.

prior to incarceration. *Ordine Nuovo* – the weekly newspaper that Gramsci edited that supported and reported on the workers' councils in the 1920s in Italy, was obviously itself a political, 'proto-hegemonic' practice. *Ordine Nuovo* was not only intended as a straightforward political intervention however; its creators consciously 'worked to develop certain forms of new intellectualism and to determine its new concepts' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9-10). It was an attempt to create new intellectuals out of wage labourers by giving them critical insight into their subaltern condition (by providing explanatory world conceptions (good sense), political language, etc.).

- ❖ Modern education. Education is perhaps the most obvious institution wherein individuals' world conceptions, including *senso comune*, 'good sense' and/or philosophy, are formed. Gramsci writes: 'school is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10). Indeed, education is so integral to the production of worldviews – and therefore broadly to the functioning of hegemony – that in one passage Gramsci argues that the level and importance of education in modern capitalist societies might be the criteria by which the strength of a nation's intellectual functions can be judged (Gramsci, 1999, p. 305). He also sees the emerging centrality of modern education as symptomatic of the general explosion of intellectual functions in the historical period of modernity:

The enormous development of activity and organisation of education in the broad sense in the societies that emerged from the medieval world is an index of the importance assumed in the modern world by intellectual functions and categories. (ibid.)

- ❖ Political organisations.

One should stress the importance and significance which, in the modern world, political parties have in the elaboration and diffusion of conceptions of the world, because essentially what they do is to work out the ethics and the

politics corresponding to these conceptions and act as it were as their historical 'laboratory' (Gramsci, 1999, p. 335)

Channelling Machiavelli via Marx-Lenin, Gramsci at one point seems to consider the political party to be the 'modern Prince' (Gramsci, 2007, p. 247; Showstack-Sassoon, 1980). However, Gramsci immediately qualifies this assertion by saying that the political party is merely the 'first cell in which there come together germs of a collective will' (Gramsci, *ibid.*). In a recent essay, Thomas argues convincingly that the concept of the modern Prince is much more dynamic in the *Notebooks* than it may seem (Thomas, 2013). Set in their 'philological and historical context', Gramsci's remarks on the modern Prince are not a love letter to the party-form, but rather a criticism of Stalinist 'bureaucratic centralism', an emphasis on subaltern struggles and the necessity of new forms of leadership in anti-fascist struggle (Thomas, 2013, p. 32). Far from simply indexing the already-established political parties of his day then, Gramsci is actually trying to articulate a new strategic-organisational form for a counter-hegemonic project. Gramsci's Prince, Thomas argues, should be understood as a 'novel institutional process of social transformation' brought about by the activation and enrichment of subaltern struggles, a 'new type of political culture that would be capable of valorising constituent power as the basis for a new social organisation' (*ibid.*). Intellectual functions are crucial here: the modern Prince is not an individual but an 'organism; a complex element of society...' and a collective 'preacher and organiser of intellectual and moral reform' (Gramsci, 2007, p. 247, 249).

- ❖ The Church. Gramsci draws various important lessons from the functioning of the Church in the *Notebooks* (some of which are detailed further in the conclusion to this chapter). Here we can note how for Gramsci the Church is primarily emblematic of a political, intellectual institution that has achieved homogeneity and unity in terms of shared conceptions of the world:

The strength of religions, and of the Catholic Church in particular, has lain, and still lies, in the fact that they feel very strongly the need for the doctrinal

unity of the whole mass of the faithful and strive to ensure that the higher intellectual stratum does not get separated from the lower. The Roman Church has always been the most vigorous in the struggle to prevent the 'official' formation of two religions, one for the "intellectuals" and the other for the "simple souls". (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328)

Maintaining as unified a world conception amongst its members as possible is the intellectual function of the church; Gramsci effectively takes this as a model for intellectual functions in general: 'This problem is that of preserving the ideological unity of the entire social bloc which that of ideology serves to cement and unify' (ibid.).²⁸

In summary, Gramsci's integration of institutional analysis and organisational analysis into his picture of hegemony means that it makes sense to talk about *social intellectual functions* rather than the social functions of (individual) intellectuals. He untethers intellectual activity from individuals: an institution like a university (with complex organisational dynamics) or a political party can play an intellectual function; it can be an individual like Croce, or a newspaper (which, like a political party, is a 'complex organism' that includes many people contributing in different roles). Approaching the topic of intellectuals with the functionalism that Gramsci himself employs thereby allows us to establish a continuity of analysis between individual actors and organisations that 'embody' these functions differently. For Gramsci what matters most are the purposes and effects of these functions: the mechanisms of power that they facilitate.

Despite this analysis of functions rather than their particular embodiment, Gramscian scholarship has nevertheless consistently fallen into the habit of implicitly considering intellectuals solely as individuals. For instance, Crehan's most recent work devotes large sections to analysing the extent to which Adam Smith was an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense (Crehan, 2016: pp. 80 -116). This can reinforce the reductive view that it is primarily individuals who provide the intellectual architecture in modern hegemonies –

²⁸ See note above regarding the meaning of 'ideology' here.

which, as we've seen, Gramsci's work is not limited to. Zygmunt Bauman commits the same fallacy when he characterizes intellectuals as belonging to one of two groups: legislators or interpreters, and collapses Gramsci's work under the former label (Bauman, 1987). Christine Buci-Glucksmann's reading comes closest to my own, by schematizing Gramsci's notes on the topic into a table titled 'Stratification of Intellectual Functions' (1980: 34). She lists and ranks the various functions involved in intellectual production via Gramsci's military metaphors: 'higher officers who make plans', 'intermediate personnel', 'subaltern officers' and so on. Buci-Glucksmann decides to call some of these individuals 'intellectuals proper' and some 'semi-intellectuals': these somewhat clunky definitions indicate precisely the problems involved in the attempt to stitch intellectual functions to individual subjects alone. Rather than isolating individuals for tagging with 'more or less intellectual' labels, it makes sense to consider organisations as intellectual, collective functions – 'organisms' as Gramsci would say – that forge conceptions of the world through internal divisions of labour.

Gramsci's work on intellectual functions must be seen as progress in the attempt to map, or give flesh to, the hegemonic relations within a given societal context: exactly what is effected, who is involved and how are the levers of coercion and consent commanded? A given hegemony is an admixture of coercive and consent-achieving processes, these processes are facilitated by a 'hegemonic apparatus' that includes individual intellectuals as well as organisations and institutions. As with *senso comune* and the condition of subalterneity, where the first step to overcoming one's own "self-incurred minority", in consciousness and in practice, is to "know thyself" with regards to one's own history and one's position within power relations, Gramsci's preoccupation with intellectuals is a call for all those in the 'business' of world conceptions to recognise their positional function in the wider hegemonic situation. Gramsci started documenting these functions in the context of post-Risorgimento Italy and post-Revolution France; in this thesis I will employ the same approach within the context of a given hegemony (or 'hegemonic project', as we shall see) and the position of wage labour within it. What social intellectual functions (and functionaries) are involved in the establishment of a particular *senso comune* around wage labour and surrounding phenomena? Answering this question will entail, as we shall see, deploying Gramsci's concepts in a conjunctural setting, analysing different actors and

organisations, such as economists, welfare experts and news media organisations so as to understand their particular, organisational, hegemonic pressures of coercion and consent.

5. Counter-hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a new 'coherent' politics

I have discussed the ways in which Gramsci outlined the functioning of hegemony in modern capitalist society. Specifically, I have focused on how three core aspects of Gramsci's theory dovetail with hegemonic processes of consent and coercion: the 'subaltern' condition, the importance of *senso comune* and finally the ways in which intellectual functions are integral to hegemony. But, as Femia notes, hegemony 'was not just a tool of historical and social analysis' for Gramsci – it was 'also a guiding concept for political practice' (Femia, 1981, p. 50). Therefore, in order to understand Gramsci's account, we must consider his reflections on what it means to forge a new, different set of hegemonic relations and what the appropriate strategy is in order to achieve such an end. Grasping Gramsci's strategy for transformation – for counter-hegemony – teaches us much about that which he was seeking to dismantle. Here I will draw once again on Gramsci's concept of the modern Prince – this time in regards to its 'utopian' functionality – and on Gramsci's 'philosophy of praxis' with its emphasis on 'coherence'.

Recognising that the hegemony commanded and maintained by leading groups within capitalist societies is inherently unstable – the hegemonic relations of coercion and consent have to constantly be reasserted day by day via the interlinked hegemonic apparatus – Gramsci always kept the project of its possible dissolution and replacement by a new, 'proletarian' hegemonic formation in mind throughout his prison writings (Thomas, 2009, p. 222). But Gramsci's revolutionary strategy does not simply consist of the substitution of one social group "in" power for another – i.e. simply a change of "driver" that would leave the machine's operation unchanged. Rather, Gramsci conceives of a new hegemony as the product of the radical transformation of all the elements of currently existing hegemonic processes of coercion and consent. Specifically, regarding the elements discussed in this chapter, we can identify that a new hegemony would, as a minimum, consist of a new relationship between intellectual functions and the population, facilitating the end of subalterneity and a new *senso comune*.

5.1 'War of Position' as strategy

To bring these changes about, Gramsci argues that a strategy modelled on a 'war of position' is needed. In contrast to a 'war of movement', which consists of quick, momentary and often violent offensives against opposing forces in a limited time and space, a war of position consists of a protracted siege-like onslaught that necessitates coordination of all types of forces (political, economic, cultural) with long-term aims (Gramsci, 2007, p. 109; Egan, 2016, p. 441). Gramsci takes his terms from the military doctrine of his day and he regularly utilises this analogy to make his points (Anderson, 1976, p. 61; Egan, 2016). The nature of modern, Western bourgeois states, with their interlocked 'trench-systems' of civil and political "societies", means that an one-dimensional assault on a particular edifice of the system (e.g. a revolutionary attempt to "take power" by storming government buildings) will be ineffective and will not penetrate beyond the 'outer perimeter' of the hegemonic formation as a whole (Gramsci, 1971, p. 235). As such, an attritional war of position fought on all fronts is more or less the only game in town and revolutionary forces have to adapt accordingly: 'one cannot choose the war one wants' (ibid. p. 235).²⁹

Regarding the requisite infrastructure of a war of position, Gramsci writes:

A war of position is not, in reality, constituted simply by the actual trenches, but by the whole organisational and industrial system of the territory which lies to the rear of the army in the field. (1971, p. 234)

That is to say, long-term defensive and offensive political strategies within modern bourgeois states require a sturdy and reliable system of institutions and actors working in conjunction: for a subaltern revolutionary movement this requires a nascent hegemonic apparatus to rival and eventually replace the current one.

²⁹ Crucially, a war of position does not replace a war of manoeuvre but instead works in strategic conjunction with it. While a war of manoeuvre (e.g. a strike, a riot, a military coup) is sometimes necessary for the achievement of an advanced position in the overall war of position, these quick "assaults" must be chosen carefully, 'concentrated at a particular spot' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 234). In other words, the 'war of manoeuvre must be considered as reduced to more of a tactical than a strategic function' (1971, p. 235).

The decisive transition in this element of Gramsci's research was the attempt to conceive of the formation of an alternative network of proletarian hegemonic apparatuses, one that would not be dedicated to reinforcing the current organization of society and its inequalities but which would rather open the way towards the abolition of exploitative and oppressive social relations. (Thomas, 2013, p. 28)

That means new organs of journalism, political parties, educational institutions, trade unions, activist groups, community councils and other, unforeseeable organisational forms that have not (and perhaps could not) develop within existing, modern capitalist hegemony.

5.2 The Modern Prince as 'Concrete Phantasy'

The collective name for the coordinated counter-hegemonic forces that utilise the correct mixture of manoeuvre and positioning is the 'modern Prince'. As already argued above, this is not identical with political parties, nor, as it is in Machiavelli, a "sovereign" individual, but is rather a collective 'organism' of different forces that attempt to build a 'collective will' through intellectual and moral reform (Gramsci, 1971, p. 125, 129). But by what means *is* this collective will coordinated? Gramsci argues that such an ensemble, if it is to found 'new States or new national and social structures' must be both 'rational' (here meaning realistic) *and* utopian (1971, p. 125). Machiavelli's *The Prince* was, according to Gramsci, a "live" work, in which political ideology and political science are fused in the dramatic form of a "myth" (ibid.). Gramsci's modern Prince follows this formula, conceived as a non-existent (single) entity that functions to arouse and organise a 'dispersed and shattered [subaltern] people' (ibid., p. 126). Gramsci is here drawing on Georges Sorel's political analysis of myths versus utopias (ibid.). For Sorel a utopia is

an intellectual product; it is the work of theorists who, after observing and discussing the facts, seek to establish a model to which they can compare existing societies in order to estimate the amount of good and evil they contain (Sorel, 1999, p. 29)

A utopia is a cold exercise of (traditional) intellectual activity that for Sorel can only lead to patchwork 'reform' (ibid.). A myth, on the other hand, 'deeply' moves the 'masses', being identical with their 'convictions' and 'sentiments', which can lead people to the smashing of the 'existing state of things' (ibid., p. 27, 29). Gramsci sees the modern Prince as facilitating a synthesis of Sorel's antithetical constructions. He calls for the creation of a 'concrete phantasy', that is, a utopian vision based on a realist analysis of the hegemonic situation that is also harmonious with the convictions, needs and interests of the population (and thus capable of arousing popular support) (Gramsci, 1971, p. 126). This concrete phantasy is directive, purposeful, but also tethered to worldly, secular goals.

In men's consciences, the Prince takes the place of the divinity or the categorical imperative, and becomes the basis for a modern laicism and for a complete laicisation of all aspects of life and of all customary relationships. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 133)

Suturing religious devotion to everyday laity via (Kantian) philosophy, Gramsci posits that the modern Prince will have succeeded once it has become a secular God, a quasi-universal, rational principle, or in other words: once the organised struggle for a new hegemony has become the directive *telos* of common, everyday life. Such a situation, where a rival and counter-hegemonic project is *immanent* to common sense, and no longer the preserve of a group of radical intellectuals, is a situation of 'coherence', the concept of which lies at the core of Gramsci's account of hegemony which will be relevant my own as my dissertation progresses.

5.3 Coherent hegemony: philosophy becomes practice under the rubric of 'the philosophy of praxis'

"The philosophy of praxis" is Gramsci's name for a future coherence between theory and practice, between philosophy and *senso comune* and between corresponding social groups previously divided within modern, capitalist hegemonies. He describes this philosophy, which represents his particular brand of Marxism, as the 'absolute secularisation and earthliness of thought' (1971, p. 465), which marks the ambitious attempt to think through

what the identity of philosophy, history, economics, culture and political practice means (i.e. what does the radical immanence of these mean?). For my limited purposes here, I am going to utilise Gramsci's crucial notion of 'coherence' – a word that can be considered 'one of the "keywords" of the conceptual architecture of the *Prison Notebooks*' (Thomas, 2009, p. 364).

Speaking of the identity between theory and practice, Gramsci writes:

If the problem of producing the identity of theory and praxis is posed, it is posed in this sense: to construct, on the basis of a determinate practice, *a theory that, coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the same practice, may accelerate the historical process taking place, rendering practice more homogeneous, coherent, efficient in all of its elements, strengthening it to the maximum*; or, given a certain theoretical position, to organise the indispensable practical element for setting it to work. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 364-5, my emphasis)

Coherence is a 'synthetic' concept in the *Notebooks* – traversing the philosophical and the political, the conceptual and the practical – and is recognised as crucial to understanding Gramsci's positive project by his more recent interpreters (Thomas, 2009, p. 364; Crehan, 2002, p. 113). By the term, Gramsci does not only mean logical coherence, or the coherence within a discourse between its various elements or between its premises and conclusions (although sometimes he does use the term in this way, e.g. 1971, p. 347, 349; 1995, p. 172). Rather, as Thomas notes, Gramsci expanded the meaning of the term to include the *historical efficacy* of a given world conception (Thomas, 2009, p. 369).

The alternative concept of coherence in Gramsci draws upon the first strictly "logical" meaning, insofar as it too demands conclusions that are consistent with their premises, according to non-contradictory deductive logic. It goes beyond a solely conceptual definition, however, in terms of how it thinks the temporal relations between such premises or determinations, on the one hand, and conclusions or determined states, on the other. *Rather than a merely "formal" relation of correspondence between the pre-determined co-ordinates of a logically*

consistent system or theoretical structure, it implies a substantive integration of socially and politically determined practical and theoretical “moments” in their historical evolution. (ibid., p. 370, my emphasis)

To be fully coherent, then, is to validate one’s conceptual premises – one’s “spontaneous” philosophy’ – in life, with practical action. Gramsci poses the problem of bridging the gap between these two “zones” in a rhetorical passage that precisely posits the idea that world conceptions are lived and acted:

[I]s it not frequently the case that there is a contradiction between one’s intellectual choice and one’s conduct? Which therefore would be the real conception of the world: that logically affirmed as an intellectual choice? or that which emerges from the real activity of each man, which is implicit in his mode of action? (1971, p. 326)

In his example, which is for him emblematic of life within a capitalist hegemony, our intellectual life is incoherent with our practical one; the premises of our intellectual and moral lives are often not met with correspondence in the realm of practice. To be coherent is thus to unite these separate domains. Put another way, coherence is the name for the *strategic* unity between world conceptions and their actualisation; it is the making effective of our ‘intellectual choices’.

Ultimately, Gramsci sees this coherence in the light of the eleventh of Marx’s *Theses* (Marx, 1974, p. 423).³⁰ That is to say, the moment of coherence between genuinely Marxist theory and practice is the moment wherein the world is changed (and not merely interpreted) (Thomas, 2009, p. 366). Therefore, in order to be coherent with *Gramsci’s* theory, we need to translate this ideal of ‘coherence’ concretely into actually existing formations of hegemonic and nascent counter-hegemonic forces, i.e. re-integrate this notion of coherence

³⁰ ‘The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it’. The influence of Marx’s text deeply inflects the whole of the *Notebooks* in fact. Peter Thomas claims: ‘All of the philosophical discussions in the *Prison Notebooks* need to be read with these theses in mind; it would not be an exaggeration to regard Gramsci’s entire carceral project, in all of its dimensions (that is, not only philosophical, but also political and cultural), as an extended meditation upon the significance of this, one of the shortest texts in the Western philosophical tradition’ (Thomas, 2015, p. 103).

back into a concrete, Gramscian strategy of counter-hegemony. This necessarily entails that the relationship between the hegemonic apparatus (and *a fortiori* the intellectual functions therein) on the one hand, and the (subaltern) population on the other, must be transformed.

5.4 Coherence in concepts and in practice, between the intellect and what is common

We get an intimation of what a coherent relationship between intellectual functions and subalterns might require and entail in, for example, passages where Gramsci criticizes existing educational systems. In contrast to the 'Popular Universities' of the period, here he outlines what the social function of intellectuals would be in a coherent political system.

In any case one could only have had cultural stability and an organic quality of thought if there had existed the same unity between the intellectuals and the simple as there should be between theory and practice. That is, if the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals of those masses, and if they had worked out and made coherent the principles and the problems raised by the masses in their practical activity, thus constituting a cultural and social bloc. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 330)

Intellectuals (and institutions that embody social intellectual functions such as think tanks, universities and newspapers) must achieve *coherence* between their organisational and conceptual capacities and the *senso comune* of the population. This does not mean a reduction of one to the other – where e.g. newspapers simply 'repeat the common beliefs of the people', or alternatively where the average person must, for example, become a master of formal logic. Rather, this entails a reform on both sides of the equation.³¹ As we have seen, it requires a reform of *senso comune* – working on the good sense that lies in unclear, embryonic form. But at the same time an intellectual function must never forget

³¹ Regarding publishing, Gramsci coins the term 'integral journalism' for coherence in that area (Gramsci, 1999, p. 383).

to remain in contact with the “simple” and indeed find in this contact the source of the problems it sets out to study and resolve...Only by this contact does a philosophy become “historical”, purify itself of intellectualistic elements of an individual character and become “life”. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 330)

A new synthesis between philosophy (here acting as a synonym for a coherent and rigorous worldview) and the ‘common’ – or rather, an *immanence* between them – whereby common sense is coherent and non-contradictory and, on the other hand, philosophy is quite literally *common* is here indicated. Indeed, by pursuing this relationship of coherence, philosophy/theory can become actualised in history, and crucially, its worldview can become *lived* in action. In fact, as Thomas notes, the ability to become actualised as coherent in practice becomes for Gramsci a criterion for a successful philosophy as such (Thomas, 2009, p 376).

The more a philosophy is able to exert its influence upon the *senso comune* that constitutes its ‘social basis’, rendering it more coherent, the more fully it becomes *genuinely philosophical*, that is, an ‘historical fact’ rather than merely individual elaboration. (ibid., my emphasis)

Judged by its historical efficacy, philosophy becomes closer to strategy – in keeping with its ‘secularisation’ away from metaphysical pretensions. On a similar note, Gramsci writes:

Creating a new culture does not only mean making one’s own individual ‘original’ discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means to diffuse critically already discovered truths, to ‘socialise’ them, as it were, and even to make them become the basis of vital actions, an element of co-ordination and intellectual and moral order. For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in a unitary way about the contemporary real is a ‘philosophical’ fact far more important and ‘original’ than the discovery [*ritrovamento*] by some philosophical ‘genius’ of a new truth that remains the property of small groups of intellectuals. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 325)

The production, sedimentation and maintenance of coherent world conceptions – i.e. the establishment of cultural unity – means improving and refining popular conceptions of the world; achieving this is now the criteria for a ‘successful’ philosophy.

With this goal in mind, Gramsci sees some informative similarities and distinctions with the contemporaneous Catholic Church:

The relationship between *senso comune* and the upper level of philosophy is assured by “politics”, just as it is politics that assures the relationship between the Catholicism of the intellectuals and that of the simple...That the Church has to face up to a problem of the “simple” means precisely that there has been a split in the community of the faithful. This split cannot be healed by raising the simple to the level of the intellectuals...but only by imposing an iron discipline on the intellectuals so that they do not exceed certain limits of differentiation and so render the split catastrophic and irreparable. In the past such divisions in the community of the faithful were healed by strong mass movements which led to, or were absorbed in, the creation of new religious orders on strong personalities (St. Dominic, St. Francis). (Gramsci, 1971, p. 331)

In order to maintain unity between the intellectual leaders and the average believer, the Church, according to Gramsci, limited the intellectual capacities of some of its members in an attempt to maintain a continuity between its followers. The “simple” were not expected to raise their understanding of doctrine, but rather those advanced minds within the Church were expected to “toe the line” for the sake of the strength to be found in homogeneity. In contrast:

The position of the philosophy of praxis is the antithesis of the Catholic. The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the “simple” in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather lead them to a higher conception of life. If it affirms the need for contact between intellectuals and simple it is not in order to restrict scientific activity and preserve unity at the low level of the masses, but *precisely to construct an intellectual-moral bloc which can make politically possible the*

intellectual progress of the mass and not only of small intellectual groups. (Gramsci, 1971, 332-3, my emphasis)

The production, sedimentation and maintenance of coherent world conceptions – i.e. the establishment of a *coherent* cultural ‘bloc’ – means *improving* and *refining* common conceptions of the world. Gramsci’s conception of an anti-capitalist, moral-social bloc is, in comparison to the Church’s reactionary method, Promethean in its ambition: subaltern groups cannot remain at the level of incoherent and fragmentary knowledge and intellectual functions cannot start from (nor remain at) any other premises other than the common, subaltern condition.

Gramsci also draws from this analysis of the Church’s function a practical strategy with which to replace *senso comune* and ‘old conceptions’ that exist in current popular mentality; that is, he uses the hegemonic strategy of the Church as a strategy for a possible counter-hegemony. For example, in light of the manner in which the Church constantly maintains its shape through intellectual homogenisation, Gramsci argues that this new, hypothetical (counter-) ‘cultural movement’ should:

1. Never tire of repeating its own arguments (though offering literary variation in form): repetition is the best didactic means for working on the popular mentality.
2. Work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever-growing strata of the populace, in other words, to give a personality to the amorphous mass element. This means working to produce elites of intellectuals of a new type which arise directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them to become, as it were, the whalebone in the corset. (Gramsci, 1999, p. 340)

5.5 Coherence with economic relations

Finally, while intellectual and moral reform is essential to the winning of a war of position, Gramsci acknowledges that societal change, the displacement of one form of hegemony for another, also requires intervention into economic relations. He asks:

Can there be a cultural reform, and can the position of the depressed strata of society be improved culturally, without a previous economic reform and change in their position in the social and economic fields? Intellectual and moral reform has to be linked with a programme of economic reform. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 133)

This link between the economic and the intellectual, reflecting that between coercion and consent as we've seen, is one of co-dependency (and not necessarily a predominance of one over the other). 'Indeed the programme of economic reform is precisely the concrete form in which every intellectual and moral reform presents itself' (ibid.). Changing the intellectual and moral climate, which means reforming the *senso comune* of a time and place, lays the ground for ('presents' its success as) a reform of economic relations that concretely improves the lot of subaltern groups. Equally, so the implication goes, a change in economic position can help facilitate a reform in intellectual/cultural and moral sentiment.

We should thus consider economics – and its critique – as part of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis. But, we should note,

Gramsci goes beyond orthodox historical materialism [and much economics] to give a rich material and cultural account of historical specificity of economic laws and the complexities of the crisis tendencies and crises that shape capitalism's transformation. (Jessop and Sum, 2006, p. 352)

In consonance with his 'integral' approach to hegemony, detailed above, Gramsci considers markets to always be 'determinate markets' (*mercato determinato*) (Gramsci, 1971, p. 410).³² That is to say, markets are never autonomous zones of economic exchange, but are actually 'a determined relation of social forces in a determined structure of the productive apparatus, this relationship being guaranteed (that is rendered permanent) by a determined political, moral and juridical superstructure' (ibid.). Intellectuals have a key role in 'determining' markets, as they legitimate and justify particular market conditions that are

³² This concept Gramsci adapted and transformed from Riccardo (Jessop and Sum 2006; Thomas, 2009)

necessary for a particular 'determinate market' to exist (Gramsci, 1971, p. 6). Ultimately, within capitalist modernity economic relations, intellectual functions and cultural apparatuses are all co-determining and co-dependent: forming more or less cohesive 'historical blocs' that have their own contextual characteristics.³³

In order to overcome capitalist hegemony, Gramsci envisages that the future *coherence* between intellectual and moral reform, economic relations and everyday life will have to be expressed in a new common sense and a new set of social relations wherein subalterneity is no longer produced (divisions within economic and other power relations have been transformed). The practice of freedom will be the actualisation of the principle of and/or desire for freedom, structural, enacted equality will reflect the ethical expression of equality, and so on. Equally, the economic system would be one which *coheres* with the intellectual and moral facets of the post-capitalist bloc, suggesting mass-intellectuality, a democratic and an equal system of determining markets.

What that society will actually look like we cannot foretell beyond the relatively small, strategic steps available to us in whatever juncture we find ourselves in; to attempt to map it comprehensively would be to produce a 'cold' utopia that Machiavelli (and Gramsci) urge against. Instead, Gramsci's philosophy of coherence proposes a strategy of coordination for a rival hegemonic apparatus, complete with an ideal 'concrete phantasy' with which to guide, provoke and arouse a formerly disparate set of individuals and organisations towards a more emancipated and equal society that is *coherent* with emancipatory principles. In this positive vein, while Gramsci insists that a new world image must be constructed out of the material that is the *senso comune* of the currently existing populace, in the same breath he will claim that:

³³ 'Concept of "historical bloc", i.e....(structure and superstructure)' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 137). Here Gramsci is developing Marx's model of 'base and superstructure' along the lines of the 'integral state' that, as we have seen, Gramsci developed in his notebooks. Power is not concentrated in one location (e.g. the state conceived narrowly), but neither is the economic without political effects; they are one bloc. We can see neoliberalism, for example, as a historical bloc composed of moral codes of, e.g., entrepreneurialism, intellectual functions such as think tanks, economic strategies such as privatisation, as well as the basic economic relations of capitalism such as private property.

The historian, with the benefit of all necessary perspective, manages to establish and to understand the fact that the beginnings of a new world, rough and jagged though they always are, are better than the passing away of the old world in its death-throes and the swan-song that it produces. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 343)

Thus, while the descriptions of hegemonic processes found within Gramsci's *Notebooks* are predominantly descriptive analyses into the nature of modern capitalist societies, they also can be taken as footholds by which we can begin to envisage less contradictory, coercive and unequal political systems – emerging, as they must, out of the failings and inconsistencies of the past and present.

5.6 Hegemony and wage labour: Gramsci on wage labour in capitalist society

I conclude this chapter by discussing Gramsci's notes on 'Americanism and Fordism' (1971, p. 279). These notes are particularly relevant in two ways: first, they are the only extended writings of Gramsci's that deal with wage labour and surrounding phenomena directly, which makes them crucial to any study aiming to understand the relationship between concepts of hegemony and wage labour. Second, the notes are a useful case study wherein Gramsci brings together the elements of hegemony that have been the subject of this chapter in one analysis; here Gramsci turns his theoretical apparatus onto the world of work, where he makes the provocative assertion that hegemony is 'born in the factory' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 185).³⁴ In this sense, my dissertation is pursuing a similar purpose, albeit with the augmentation of the wealth of scholarship that descended from Gramsci's *Notebooks*.

In these notes, Gramsci is diagnosing a new 'historical bloc' – his term for, broadly speaking, a more or less coherent compound of economic, cultural and political facets – that was emerging in his time (1971, p. 137); he calls this historical bloc 'Americanism and Fordism'. 'Americanism' reflects Gramsci's awareness of the growing international hegemony of the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century, in particular the potential for its

³⁴ De Felice (1972) believes Gramsci's remarks on Fordism are the key to the *Prison Notebooks*.

system of industrial production, and its correlate consumption habits, to become integrated with (or imposed upon) other national systems.³⁵ 'Fordism' characterises the 'ultra-modern form of production and of working methods' that come with this new historical bloc (ibid., p. 280-1). Gramsci was one of the first to interpret the significance of this emergent political-economic compound through the categories of hegemony.

In his analysis of this new form of production and work, Gramsci theorises the birth pangs of successive forms of capitalist modernity:

The history of industrialism has always been a continuing struggle...against the element of "animality" in man. It has been an uninterrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugating natural (i.e. animal and primitive) instincts to new, more complex and rigid norms and habits of order, exactitude and precision.
(Gramsci, 1971, p. 298)

Fordism brings its own forms of brutal coercion to workers: the production line, the rhythms of work that it prescribes and the disciplinary techniques it requires.³⁶ In this regard, Gramsci discusses Taylorism: a 'scientific' technique for the management of workers that emerged alongside, and became inseparable from, Fordist production methods.³⁷ He characterises Taylorism as the mechanisation of 'physical gesture; the memory of the trade, reduced to simple gestures repeated at an intense rhythm'. It is a technique of power that "'nestles" in the muscular and nervous centres' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 309).³⁸ Taylorism brought

³⁵ In this regard Gramsci notes America's relative 'youth' (as a colonised nation) compared to the 'richness and complexity' of Europe's history and tradition (Gramsci, 1971, p. 281). European nations' histories of 'sedimentations' and 'fossilisation' of practices and, for example, the traditional (aristocratic) political-economic roles for intellectuals, do not provide fertile ground for rapid change. The US, on the other hand 'does not have "great historical and cultural traditions"' and has succeeded in 'making the whole life of the nation revolve around production' (ibid., p. 285).

³⁶ Gramsci notes that Fordism is only 'the most recent phase of a long process which began with industrialism itself'. Fordism/Taylorism is, however, 'more intense than preceding phases, and manifests itself in more brutal forms' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 302).

³⁷ Taylorism is named after F.W. Taylor and is a method expressed in his *Scientific Management* (1947) amongst other texts. Taylor believed that under his method of organising/control, 'the initiative of the workmen – that is, their hard work, their good will, their ingenuity – is obtained practically with absolute regularity' (1947, p. 39). I discuss Taylorism further in chapters three and four.

³⁸ In this sense, Gramsci is noting what will be more fully fleshed out by Foucault in his work on disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977).

with it intellectuals organic to its functioning, typified by the white-collared manager who would time workers' every move as well as the management expert whose function was the development of the Taylorist paradigm in firms (Gramsci, 1971, p. 302; Nelson, 1980).

Gramsci notes that Taylorism inside the workplace is supplemented by the attempt to regulate life beyond its boundaries; that it is to say, Fordist capitalism changed the relationship that subalterns had to power and, ultimately, to themselves. He refers to the enquiries conducted by Ford and other industrialists – that is to say, organic Fordist intellectuals – into 'the workers' private lives and the inspection services created by some firms to control the "morality" of their workers' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 302). This control, Gramsci argues, extends to the prohibition of alcohol and a deep interest on the part of business in the sexual lives of workers (ibid., p. 296-7). 'One should not be misled', Gramsci warns, into thinking that these prohibitions and regulations are of a purely religious nature. 'The truth is that the new type of man demanded by the rationalisation of production and work cannot be developed until the sexual instinct has been largely regulated and until it too has been rationalised' (Gramsci, p. 297). These seemingly novel techniques of power at work within the emerging Fordist paradigm are consonant with what Michel Foucault, in his various writings on 'biopolitics', would call techniques of 'biopower'; a consonance that a number of writers have noted (Righi, 2011; Esposito 2012). In a crucial passage on the dovetailing that exists between biopolitics and industrial production, which mirrors Gramsci's own notes, Foucault writes:

Bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. But this was not all it required; it also needed the growth of both these factors, their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern...[These techniques] acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both [institutions

and techniques of power], guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony. (Foucault, 1998, p. 140-1)

As in Foucault's discourse on the subject decades later, Gramsci writes that the industrial interventions at the level of workers' health and reproduction, which for him typified the emerging Fordist paradigm, marked the intersection of capitalist production and the processes of life itself:

[These] initiatives simply have the purpose of preserving, outside of work, a certain psycho-social equilibrium which prevents the physio-logical collapse of the worker, exhausted by the new method of production. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 303)

The transformation of working life was not, according to Gramsci, merely an external, coercive, imposition however, and he asserts that 'adaptation to the new methods of production and work cannot take place simply through social compulsion' (ibid, p. 310). 'Coercion', therefore, 'has...to be ingeniously combined with persuasion and consent' (ibid.). This is why Fordism is characterised by Gramsci as a form of 'psycho-social transformation' as well as a transformation of coercive and intrusive practices (ibid., p. 312). That is to say, alongside, and in combination with, the coercion of discipline, the population tends to acquire 'the habits and customs necessary for the new systems of living and working' (ibid., p. 299). These habits and conventions are either forced upon them – as in the case of Ford's inspections of the everyday lives of his workers – or they are consented to ('internalised' in Gramsci's words) more actively by, for example, being legitimated via ethical discourse, afforded the status of *senso comune* (ibid., p. 303).

For example, Gramsci mentions how the notion of 'virtue' has been impressed upon workers as a 'more or less permanent habit' that they are 'compelled to practice' (ibid., p. 300). Gramsci suggests this ideological 'persuasion' of being a virtuous worker often takes on a 'puritanical' Christian form, suggesting possible parallels with Weber's famous thesis concerning the fundamentality of the 'Protestant work ethic' to capitalism (ibid., p. 299).³⁹

³⁹ A more detailed consideration of the 'work ethic' will be carried out in chapter four.

These 'virtues' of capitalist industry, Gramsci writes, insert 'themselves into traditional puritanism and [present] themselves as a renaissance of the pioneer morality and as the "true" America' (ibid., p. 304).

Consent to the new form of production is also achieved economically in Fordism via higher wages and a higher standard of life afforded to workers. High wages 'is the instrument used to select and maintain in stability a skilled labour force suited to the system of production and work' (ibid., p. 303). The raising of living standards loosens the coercive strings that come with being subaltern, but Gramsci is quick to note that these economic benefits accrue mainly to a 'labour aristocracy' and not to the average working, 'rationalised' animal (ibid., p. 311).

Through these broad mechanisms – which are both disciplining and consent-inducing at the same time – the worker-subjects of Fordist capitalism take on a new subaltern character: that of the mechanically productive, healthy subject. In this way, the new, hegemonic (Fordist) system of wage labour had its own 'concrete phantasy' integral to the project: a 'psycho-physical' nexus of a new type of subaltern, which would be at the core of what Gramsci terms 'ultra-production' (ibid., p. 303).

Gramsci's own judgement remains ambiguous about the desirability of this new epoch of working practices coming into existence. He asks the question whether Fordism 'can and should be generalised, or whether, on the other hand, we are not dealing with a malignant phenomenon which must be fought against through trade-union action and through legislation?' (ibid., p. 312). This follows Lenin's own ambiguity about Taylorism/Fordism as a capitalist practice. Before the Russian Revolution, Lenin was highly critical of its practice. In 1913 he writes:

[Taylorism's] purpose is to squeeze out of the worker three times more labour during a working day of the same length as before; all the worker's strength is unmercifully roused, every bit of nervous and muscle energy is drained from the slave labourer at three times the speed...Advances in the sphere of technology and

science in capitalist society are but advances in the extortion of sweat (Lenin, 1963, pp. 594-5).

However, in 1918 Lenin modified his views in the context of post-revolutionary Russia, writing in the magazine *Pravda* that:

We should try out every scientific and progressive suggestion of the Taylor system The Russian is a poor worker in comparison with the advanced nations, and this could not be otherwise under the regime of the Czar and other remnants of feudalism. The last word of capitalism in this respect, the Taylor System, as well as all progressive measures of capitalism, combine the refined cruelty of bourgeois exploitation and a number of most valuable scientific attainments in the analysis of mechanical motions during work, in dismissing superfluous and useless motions, in determining the most correct methods of work, the best systems of accounting and control, etc. (Lenin, 1965, p. xxii)

Taylorism is indeed a capitalist tool or coercion, but, Lenin writes, if “properly controlled and intelligently applied by the working people themselves” it could become a crucial foundation of socialism (Lenin, 1971, p. 417). Following Lenin’s shift in judgement, Trotsky’s own vision of Taylorised Communism, as it were, was called the ‘militarisation of the working class’, whereby Soviet workers would be placed under strict disciplinary power with the aim of maximum productivity – with strict penalties for those who failed to comply. Interestingly, Gramsci comments that Trotsky’s ‘preoccupations were correct,’ that ‘the principle of coercion, direct or indirect, in the ordering of production and work’ is sound but that ‘the practical solutions were profoundly mistaken’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 301).

At stake here is the question of the core of capitalist hegemony and its practices. Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci attempt to distinguish between industrial production methods and capitalism; industrialism can, they argue, be understood alternatively as a socialist or communist enterprise.⁴⁰ The coercion and adaptation of the worker to Fordist production is

⁴⁰ An attempted distinction that lies at the base of the subsequent Soviet economy.

therefore implicitly taken as at least *potentially* consonant with a post-, or non-capitalist hegemony (in Gramsci's writings), and is *actually* seen as consonant (in the case of Lenin and Trotsky when they were implementing such practices).

But the separability of industrial production, in the form of Fordism/Taylorism, from capitalist social relations is very much open to question and has important consequences. Indeed, the identification of industrialism with socialism risks expressing an ideology that Kathi Weeks names 'socialist modernisation', which (unwittingly or not) leaves the 'brutal' social practices of industrial capitalism unchanged, even if the relations of ownership, or wealth distribution are altered (Weeks, 2011, p. 92). Dyer-Witheford goes as far as to argue that 'Leninism should be understood as a Marxism highly adapted – indeed, fatally overadapted – to a particular moment of capitalist development...with its Taylorist division of labor, industrial mechanization, and emphasis on "mass organisation"' (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, p. 6-7). State (industrial) socialism 'thus became [in the 20th century] a competitor with, but not an alternative to, capitalism' (ibid., p.7).⁴¹ As my account of wage labour will implicitly show, wage labour is a fundamental part of hegemonies within capitalist societies – part of the logic and circuit of capital – and this throws the idea of a 'communist wage system' into question.

5.7 Taking Gramsci forward

In the current chapter I have interpreted some of the core elements of Gramsci's account of hegemony, based on a thorough reading of his work and the debates within Gramscian scholarship. The concepts I've selected are certainly not exhaustive, but they do point us in the direction of achieving an integrated account of the nature of coercive and consensual power, the reach of which spans from everyday life through to macro-scale processes of leadership and domination. The social and political concepts of 'subalterneity', '*senso comune*', 'coherence' and the 'functionality' of intellectuals are key, I will argue in the following chapters, to understanding hegemonic projects in the UK and the position of wage labour within them.

⁴¹ The criticism of Leninist/Stalinist forms of Marxism with regard to the adoption of Fordist/Taylorist practices is found in a number of useful texts (See, e.g., Brinton, 1975; Smith, 1983)

It is with Gramsci's broad, conceptual coordinates in place that the next chapter seeks to sharpen and flesh out a Gramscian methodology, via debates between different directions that Gramsci's writings on hegemony have been taken in since his death. I will argue that subsequent Gramscian understandings of hegemony will return, just as Gramsci did, to the labour process itself; indeed, it is around the question of wage labour – and Marxian accounts thereof – that some of main points of contention within the field play out.

Chapter Two

Gramscism and the Limits of Hegemony

This chapter will draw out some of the most significant innovations within Gramscism in order to consolidate a coherent and nuanced approach to hegemony that I began in the previous chapter where I considered Gramsci's work itself. If Gramsci's notebooks provide us with the broad parameters of what constitutes hegemony, as articulated with the concepts of coercion, consent, subaltern, intellectual function, *senso comune*, concrete phantasy, hegemonic apparatus etc., then *Gramscism* has provided us with developments of his work that take into account changed socio-economic conditions as well as new, theoretical discourses that emerged in the post-war period.

I will draw attention to divergent strands within the study of hegemony, focusing on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Stuart Hall in particular, as well as more recent interventions and critiques from Bob Jessop, Andrew Gamble and Jonathon Joseph amongst others. A dividing line is drawn between approaches that focus heavily on discourse and ideology and alternative approaches that tend to put weight on institutional or economic critique. Despite the apparent incommensurability between these strands, I will argue for a framework where the key insights of each can be accommodated and put to productive use.

By confronting and evaluating the divergences within hegemony studies, I hope to conclude my construction of a theory of hegemony that can then be productively deployed in the latter half of the thesis towards an analysis of wage labour. Understanding the complexities of hegemony is a crucial task if we are to demonstrate how the phenomena of wage-labour is integrated into the matrixes of coercion and consent, institutions and actors, *senso comune* and subalterneity, and so on.

I begin the chapter by expounding the accounts of hegemony given by Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Hall's account of Thatcherism and Laclau and Mouffe's thorough critique of hitherto Marxism shifts the debate around hegemony significantly; class

reductionism and economism, already somewhat decentred by Gramsci's reflections on the politics of his time, are subjected to renewed critique in their works, this time via a theory of radical overdetermination. While Laclau and Mouffe take aim at Marxist theories of history and any/all economic tendencies in general, Hall provides a conjunctural critique of hegemony in the UK using a very similar theoretical toolkit.

My subsequent critique of Hall and Laclau in particular does not amount to a total rejection of their innovations (as is often the case), but rather situates their works as contributing greatly to the analysis of *one side* of hegemonic functioning – that of what we might call 'practical-ideological' struggle. This conclusion is premised on my argument that they either neglect, or render insignificant, economic logics and economic categories that are fundamental to wage-labour within capitalist modernity (and therefore also to an analysis that seeks to situate wage labour within a hegemonic situation within capitalism). To problematize parts of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse, I refer back to Marx's *Capital*, which they subject to their own critique, as well as to the literature that Laclau and Mouffe draw on in their arguments; it is shown that they have deployed some pivotal misreadings of Marxist categories, the identification and remedying of which opens up the possibility of the use of some of the insights from this tradition. In turn, in order to cash out the critique of Hall's position, I draw on alternative theorisations of Thatcherism (in order to balance Hall's discourse-heavy approach). Here the works of Bob Jessop, Andrew Gamble and Jonathon Joseph are relevant.

The critics of Hall and Laclau's vein of hegemony theory are then subjected to a critique of their own, wherein it is shown that in their haste to evacuate hegemony studies of discourse theory, they lose the powerful (and necessary) theoretical achievements of their opponents without providing a sufficient replacement theory of their own.

Finally, I propose an adapted framework that allows for the coexistence of these divergent trends within Gramscism. This framework is adapted from Jonathan Joseph's (2002) distinction between 'hegemonic projects' and 'hegemonic structures' on the one hand, and Laclau's (1990) categories of 'sedimentation' and 'reactivation' on the other. This framework is intended to guide later chapters of the thesis.

1. The 'game of hegemony' in Laclau and Mouffe

Following his death in 1937, Gramsci's notebooks (and core theoretical innovations) were secured by Amadeo Togliatti (the then leader of the Italian Communist Party and friend of Gramsci's). They were not published until the 1950s however, and were only translated into English in the early 1970s. Despite early critiques and appraisals of Gramsci from within the Italian tradition, it was arguably not until the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s that the first major innovations in the study of hegemony appeared. These are exemplified most notably and influentially in the works of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Stuart Hall (Anderson, 2016).

1.1 Economism and overdetermination

The roots of Laclau and Mouffe's collaborative work within hegemony theory, as exemplified by their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), lie in their earlier readings of Marxist understandings of ideology. Both Laclau's *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (Laclau, 1977) and Mouffe's 'Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci' (Mouffe, 1979) reject the tendency towards 'economism' within Marxism, understood broadly as any theory that misrecognises or ignores the 'distinct autonomy of politics and ideology' in favour of an over-emphasis on economic relations and technological developments (Mouffe, 1979, p. 168). Economism is best exemplified in some of the Marxist writings coming out of the Second International in the early part of the century. For instance, Karl Kautsky's statement that:

We believe that the collapse of the existing society is inevitable because we know that economic development naturally and necessarily produces contradictions which oblige the exploited to combat private property (Kautsky, 1892, quoted in Mouffe, 1979, p. 173)

Economism would run into crisis as a theory in the early twentieth century when the 'necessary' breakdown of capitalism under its own contradictions – and the forecast combat

between exploiters and exploited – did not appear and then continued in its non-appearance. It was the Bolsheviks' 'revolution against *Capital*', as Gramsci would call it, in 1917 that broke in *practice* with the theory that economic dynamics alone could bring down the capitalist edifice (Gramsci, 1987, pp. 34 -37). Mouffe comments that 'it was Lenin's *political practice* rather than his actual thought which really proved to be a transforming force which shattered the narrow economistic confines of Western Marxist thought' (1979, p. 176). In effect, by going against a strictly economic reading of *Capital* as a theory of political change, Lenin as an *actor* contravened the existing theorisations of capitalism's downfall (even if his theoretical writings belied a fidelity to them). Following Lenin's practice, and recognising what it meant for revolutionary theory, it was Gramsci who truly began to develop all the 'potentialities present in Leninism', beyond economism's fallacies (Mouffe, 1979, p. 178).

The critique of economism inaugurated by Lenin and developed by Gramsci led both Mouffe and Laclau to develop a 'non-reductionist' conception of ideology. For Mouffe, this renovation of the theory of ideology is premised on (1979, p. 170 – 1):

- 1) The notion that every historical conjuncture is to be understood as concrete and as overdetermined (Althusser, 1971) by multiple, independent contradictions (to avoid the Hegelianism of claiming that there is 'one' single contradiction at work in capitalism). This lays the groundwork for the claim that there are many struggles ('contradictions'), none with necessary priority.
- 2) The notion that subjects are produced by ideology (an idea also stemming from Althusser, 1971) and that these social agents are determined by multiple ideologies simultaneously. E.g. a subject is a member of a family, has a social class, is of a certain race, has an aesthetic taste, and so on.

This Althusserian notion of ideology as interpellating, and thereby forming subjects, and not simply as revealing *essential* class- or subjective-being is a significant step away from the class or economic essentialism of most hitherto Marxism and a step towards a theory of

politics' autonomy. The object of Marxist analysis, according to Mouffe, should now be the '*articulating principle* of these ideological elements' (Mouffe, 1979, p. 172, emphasis mine). Interestingly, Mouffe's positive account of Gramsci here maintains a place for concepts such as 'mode of production', 'relations of production' and 'fundamental classes'; critical economic categories that largely drop out of the lexicon of her later writing (an issue that inflects critiques of Laclau and Mouffe, to which we shall return later).

In their essay 'Socialist Strategy – Where next?' (1981), Laclau and Mouffe build on these initial untetherings from economics-led Marxism and move closer to the language and radical arguments found later within *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. For example, the term 'contradiction' becomes used synonymously with the term 'antagonism' – signifying a move away from a discourse that might imply some kind of logical necessity and towards one that emphasises (contingent) struggle.⁴² 'Where next?' argues that new 'contradictions' within advanced capitalism require a 'Copernican revolution' in Marxist theory to be carried out in order that a comprehensive and coherent theory of political change can emerge (1981, p. 17). These contradictions/antagonisms stem roughly from the period around 1968, do not revolve around relations of production and have 'dynamics of their own' (1981, p. 21). In short, this society 'is indeed capitalist, but this is not its only characteristic; it is sexist, and patriarchal as well, not to mention racist' (ibid.).

With these new contradictions/antagonisms come new political subjects: women, students, young people, racial, sexual and regional minorities; a range that might fit in different ways under Gramsci's (largely undeveloped) category of 'subaltern' (as discussed in the previous chapter). The consequence of this historical movement and these new political struggles, in Laclau and Mouffe's eyes, is the demoting of the traditional working class from a '*necessary* hegemonic function' and a decentring (though not destruction) of the political party as agent of social transformation (1981, p. 21). Shorn of all economism and all forms of

⁴² For example, 'class antagonisms' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1981, p. 19) are spoken alongside 'contradictions which are not strictly class ones' (ibid., p. 20). Althusser had written in *For Marx* that contradictions have three forms of existence: 'non-antagonism', 'antagonism' and 'explosion' (Althusser, 1965). Laclau and Mouffe may have tacitly inherited the equivalence from there.

necessity, hegemony, and the subject positions within it, are suggested to be the result of the effort of an overdetermined construction rather than discovery (ibid., p. 22).

1.2 The crisis of Marxism and the contingency of hegemony

The fundamentals of this thesis are built on and emboldened by various post-Althusserian thinkers in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), wherein the category of contingency is much more pronounced.⁴³ Laclau and Mouffe's account is given a more substantial, and radical, historical thesis. Hegemony is in this text read as identifying a longstanding *problem* within Marxist theory, which re-emerges in different forms but with the same underlying and unresolvable tension between posited, *de jure* economic necessity ('stagism') and the *de facto* political contingency of a political conjuncture. The concept of hegemony, the authors write, emerged to 'fill a hiatus that had opened in the chain of necessity' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 7). The struggle for 'hegemony', and its theorising, is at base a response to the inability of (mainly Marxist) discourses to justify a theory of necessary history (ibid.). Luxemburg, Lenin, Kautsky (see above), Sorel and Bernstein all display this crisis in their own respects (ibid., pp. 8 – 42). Gramsci managed to break from Leninism (and Second International failings) in two important ways, both revolving around the idea of social complexity (as opposed to homogeneity).

First, as noted in the previous chapter, Gramsci's analysis moved beyond mere class alliances and recognised the role of more general 'intellectual and moral reform' within a hegemonic formation (ibid., p.66-7). Here Gramsci loosened the 'chain of necessity' between a particular subject and social struggle, by arguing that a hegemonic 'historical bloc' can be led not just by a historically-necessary economic class (the proletariat), but can be composed of a number of relations amongst various groups or subalterns (ibid.; Anderson, 2017). Second, Gramsci's conception of *senso comune* (see previous chapter) has the consequence that no subject is fully unified and coherent, meaning that there are not 'strictly speaking – [individually instantiated] classes, but complex "collective wills"' who, because of this plural subjectivity, can be mobilised into various different hegemonic

⁴³ Specifically these include Foucault, Lacan and Derrida.

relations (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 67.). Thus, 'the Gramscian theory of hegemony...accepts social complexity as the very condition of political struggle' (ibid., p. 71).

For Laclau and Mouffe, however, Gramsci does not quite escape the tension within Marxism between essentialism and the need for an account of contingency. Much as Lenin's *practice* points beyond Lenin's writing, Gramsci's theoretical apparatus points beyond Gramsci's simultaneously held belief in the central role of the proletariat in political change. Despite showing that successful hegemony requires the mobilising of consent and coercion, so as to accrue heterogeneous (even contradictory) elements within a precariously-unified hegemonic arrangement, Gramsci still retains the residues of a Leninist/vanguardist conception of radical political transformation; the proletariat will still form the core of a new hegemony. As with the assertion made in Mouffe's earlier essay (1979), Laclau and Mouffe claim that:

For Gramsci, even though the diverse social elements have a merely relational identity – achieved through articulatory practices – there must always be a *single* unifying principle in every hegemonic formation, and this can only be a fundamental class. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 69)

That is, Laclau and Mouffe see in Gramsci the premise that class hegemony constitutes 'an ultimate ontological foundation' (ibid.). An ontological foundation that entails a zero-sum game between the two fundamental classes: 'a failure in the hegemony of the working class can only be followed by a reconstitution of bourgeois hegemony' (ibid.).

Peter Thomas effectively agrees with this reading of Gramsci, albeit finding the binary to be between the bourgeoisie and proletarians (rather than the working class).⁴⁴ Thomas consistently uses this binary throughout his monograph on Gramsci's *Notebooks* (Thomas, 2009). See the 'Realisation of Hegemony' chapter, for instance, where Thomas argues, in zero-sum fashion, that '[t]hroughout the *Prison Notebooks*, there is a dialectical relationship between Gramsci's studies of achieved bourgeois hegemony and his proposals for the

⁴⁴ On the difference between the proletariat and the working class see Hansen (2015).

construction of its proletarian antithesis' (Thomas, 2009, p. 223). When things become more specific however, Thomas's characterisation becomes more ambiguous:

Gramsci's theory of proletarian hegemony becomes comprehensible, as a theory of political constitution of an alliance of subaltern classes capable of exercising leadership over other subaltern social groups and repression against its class antagonist. (Thomas, 2009, p. 137-8, n.8).

It is unclear what is specifically 'proletarian' about a hegemony where (merely) 'subaltern classes' are capable of leadership over 'other subaltern groups and repression against its class antagonist'. This detail is important, as it gets to the heart of whether proletarians (a particular subaltern group) have a *predefined* or *privileged* position within the 'game of hegemony', or whether this leading position can be adopted by *any* particular subaltern subject.

Laclau and Mouffe conclude:

Gramsci's thought appears suspended around a basic ambiguity concerning the status of the working class which finally leads it to a contradictory position. On the one hand, the political centrality of the working class has a historical, contingent character: it requires the class to come out of itself, to transform its own identity by articulating it to a plurality of struggles and democratic demands. On the other hand, it would seem that this articulatory role is assigned to it by the economic base – hence, that the centrality has a necessary character. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 70)

Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical project constitutes a final push, as it were, that moves political theory beyond the ostensible essentialisms of Marxism (including Gramsci), and into a contingent, 'articulatory' space, wherein relations between elements co-constitute those individual elements (*ibid.*, p. 96). Deepening their radicalisation of 'overdetermination,' Laclau and Mouffe make every identity a contingent and relational construct of an articulatory practice, which applies as much to meaningful objects as it does to subjects within said practice (*ibid.*, p. 97, p. 105). Once problematic historical-

determinism has given way, subject-construction – including subaltern-construction of course – is seen as contingent upon historically-specific, meaningful practices and the relations these engender. One is not a revolutionary until one engenders a practice that involves meaningfully-revolutionary elements; the two are co-dependent on each other for being what they are.⁴⁵ The authors name the ‘structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice...discourse’ (ibid., p. 105).⁴⁶

Laclau and Mouffe mobilise their cumulative political ontology of discourse most effectively against positive, essentialist determinations of class. Here they attempt to kill two birds with one stone. Firstly they are tackling the traditional Marxist notion that the ‘economic sphere’ has an ‘exclusive privilege’ in the constitution of social agents (more on this problem later in the chapter) (ibid., p. 81). Secondly, and in the same vein, they want to refute the idea that ‘the working class’ has the theoretical rigor accorded it by many scholars (ibid.). As alluded to in the ‘Where Next?’ essay, Laclau and Mouffe point, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, to the historical transformations that have reduced the homogeneity of labouring subjects; most significantly and obviously: the number of industrial labourers has withered and diffused across new and different sectors (ibid.). Compounding this pluralisation, Laclau and Mouffe note the overdetermined fragmentation of working subjects according to sex and race (which, obviously, are irreducible to an economic logic or traditional, ‘socialist’ frame). These *de facto* phenomena throw Marx’s (historically-conditioned) thesis regarding the polarisation of classes into two camps (the homogenised impoverished and the homogenised owners) into disarray. In this sense, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* identified trajectories that would in many ways only become *more* pronounced in the decades following its publication. If Gramsci’s work foresaw the disintegration of homogenised social blocs across Europe in the post-war period, Laclau and Mouffe’s work

⁴⁵ In this sense we are always-already overdetermined by multiple discourses at all times.

⁴⁶ It is crucial to note here that Laclau and Mouffe do not limit discourse to linguistic formulations alone, utilising the term for social practice in general. They write

any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities (1985, p. 107)

Discourse relates to any meaningful element as it relates to the structured totality of which it is a part.

on political construction ‘anticipated developments in Europe thirty years later, when de-industrialisation had shrunk and divided the working class, leaving a much more fragmented social landscape’ (Anderson, 2016, p. 80). The social has become yet more complex.

As we might expect, Marxist attempts to recover precision as to class definitions – Laclau and Mouffe identify Poulantzas (1975) and Olin Wright (1978) – run into problems in this regard. This is due to persistently failed attempts to forge secure definitions of the ‘working class’ subject that rely on grounding the relationship between economic position and class perspective. Poulantzas provides too rigid a definition (based on a very general ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ labouring framework) and Olin Wright provides a seemingly arbitrary number of ‘contradictory’ class positions on top of the classical Marxist model (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 83).⁴⁷ The spectre of socialism’s historical failure to coherently line up economic interests with political projects looms large once more.⁴⁸ The ultimate problem, with Poulantzas and Olin Wright’s accounts, is that they rely on notions of ‘objective interest’, which have no ‘theoretical basis whatsoever’ (ibid.). Even the idea that a worker has an ‘objective’ interest in withholding some of the surplus product of their labour from the capitalist in the labour process ‘presupposes that the worker is a *homo economicus* who tries to maximise economic surplus just as much as the capitalist’ (ibid., p. 84). And ultimately, just because one occupies a certain (subordinate) position within the workplace, this does not mean that one automatically adopts a certain political, or even confrontational, mentality (ibid.).

Laclau and Mouffe conclude that class essentialism should be abandoned; that ‘interests’ are only objective insofar as they are constructed via articulatory practice; and that instead of upon this shaky and retreating ground an analysis of (and strategy building for) hegemony

⁴⁷ For Poulantzas, ‘productive labour’ is what defines the working class, and ‘unproductive’ workers constitute a ‘new petty bourgeoisie’. Productive labour is, on his definition: ‘labour that produces surplus-value while directly reproducing the material elements that serve as the substratum of the relation of exploitation: labour that is directly involved in material production by producing use-values that increase material wealth (Poulantzas, 1975, p. 216).

⁴⁸ Laclau and Mouffe note that these more modern accounts of class do not ‘pay heed to a more substantial reality of which classical Marxism was well aware: namely that a fragmentation of positions exists *within* the social agents themselves, and that these therefore lack an ultimate rational identity’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 84).

should be built upon a taxonomy of specific overdeterminations, with no 'privileged points for the unleashing of a socialist political practice' (ibid., p. 87). With Gramsci, just as with prior Marxist discourses to some extent or another, hegemony revolved around a fundamental class, or set of classes at its centre. With this presupposition rendered untenable – in theory and in historical reality – Laclau and Mouffe claim that 'it is evidently not possible to maintain the idea of the singleness of the nodal hegemonic point' (ibid. p. 139). There can be 'a variety of hegemonic nodal points' (or subjects) – the real task of analysis is to 'ask ourselves about the forms of relation existing between them' (ibid.).

Laclau and Mouffe are thus effectively regrounding emancipatory struggle (and theory). We should not expect politics to follow directly on from capital's logic (as large parts of the Second International did), nor should we tie the overcoming of an oppressive social order to the actions of a specific kind of subject (as Gramsci, Poulantzas and Olin Wright do to various extents). Instead, the task is to determine the dynamics of various, given, overdetermined antagonisms that 'criss-cross' a social formation. Thus, the truly emancipatory frame of struggle is not (classically defined) socialism – where there is an asymmetry of subjects, but democracy, where the plane of articulation is, in theory, equal and there for contestation. Hegemony should no longer name an embarrassing *aporia* in political theory, as it does for classical Marxist theory that requires necessities that don't exist, but should instead be identified as a contingent state of things *achieved* through strategic, practical struggle. This is the new weight given to the 'game' of hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p.193).

1.3 Hegemony as populism as politics

Laclau's later work on populism (e.g. 2005; 2005a) is recognisable as a development of his earlier work with Mouffe on the specific form that this 'game' of hegemony takes. Continuing to work with the logic of contingent, political construction, Laclau expounds a theory of populism that is at the same time another approach to understanding hegemony; hegemony as a particular, populist setup.

Laclau is interested in the *form* of populism, arguing that any positive definition of particular social or ideological *content* will inevitably have a multitude of exceptions that dismantle the theory (Laclau, 2005, p. 32). He wants to ask what is the 'terrain' that makes a movement, an ideology or a practice populist? (ibid.). As with his prior work with Mouffe on hegemony as discourse, populist practices do not *express* subjective identity between subjects, but rather '*constitute* the latter' through articulation (ibid., p. 33. Emphasis in original). Groups – such as classes – are produced via practices and do not precede them (again, precluding class essentialism). Thus, populism is understood as an *ontological* category, used to designate when such and such a practice (or 'mode of articulation') is, or becomes, populist, no matter what the *ontic* contents of its discourse are (ibid.). The criteria for such an emergent situation are specified by Laclau: the *demand* is the building block of the 'social link' that can become an element of a populist situation (ibid., p. 36). Demands (in the English language at least) are requests but also impositions, claims upon others that they act upon something. However, demands can feed into one of two logics: 'logics of difference' and 'logics of equivalence' (ibid., p. 36-7).

A logic of difference is in effect when a singular, self-enclosed demand originating from a group is put to, and satisfied by, an institutional actor. For example, a demand to a university for free water fountains around campus is put forward by a student body and agreed to by a management committee. Here we have differential points within a 'social immanence', i.e. the framework of power (between the actors) is not put into question and the demand for water fountains is not linked to any wider demands on behalf of the student group. Such differential logics

presuppose that there is no social division and that any legitimate demand can be satisfied in a non-antagonistic, administrative way. Examples of social Utopias advocating the universal operation of differential logics come easily to mind: the Disraelian notion of 'one nation', the Welfare State, or the Saint-Simonian motto: 'From the government of men to the administration of things'. (ibid., p. 36)

A logic of equivalence, on the other hand, arises when unsatisfied demands link up to other unsatisfied demands amongst subjects. If, for example, the water fountain demand was

rejected and this tension is linked with other demands for fair pay for catering staff, for student bus passes, and for grants to be introduced for low-income students, all of which are left unsatisfied, then 'a kind of solidarity arises between them all' (ibid., p. 37).

A social situation in which demands tend to reaggregate themselves on the negative basis that they all remain unsatisfied is the first precondition – by no means the only one – of that mode of political articulation that we call populism. (ibid.)

This negative linkage is an 'equivalential chain', making each demand a tip of an iceberg of a larger set of social claims. The more an 'institutional system' can satisfy individual demands, the weaker these equivalential links will become – and vice versa, when fewer and fewer demands are met, the 'conditions leading to a populist rupture' come into view (ibid., p. 38). Because an equivalential link is formed out of a lack pervading all of them (the lack of satisfaction by the present institutional system), a 'frontier' is created within the social space between 'power and the underdog' (ibid.). Thus, an enemy is created through representational means: 'the *ancien régime*, the oligarchy, the Establishment or whatever' (ibid., p. 39).

To complete this theory of populism, Laclau integrates an account of empty and floating signifiers – establishing further continuity with his previous work (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 141; 2014 [1994]). Specifically, this account speaks directly to the *representation* of the equivalential chain described above. Each demand in the chain is particular, and yet their solidarity against the system points to an increasingly universal set. At a certain point, however,

a particular demand, without entirely abandoning its own particularity, starts also functioning as a signifier representing the chain as a totality (in the same way as gold, without ceasing to be a particular commodity, transforms its own materiality into the universal representation of value). (ibid., p. 39)

That is to say, a particular demand becomes the '*tendentially*' empty signifier: a symbol of quasi- leadership for the chain, even if – as is often the case – the content of said demand is

utterly distinct from the rest. With this relationship of representation, hegemony comes back into frame: 'This process by which a particular demand comes to represent an equivalential chain incommensurable with it is, of course, what we have called *hegemony*' (ibid. emphasis in original). On this theory, hegemony is a situation where an equivalential chain becomes represented and/or homogenised by a particular demand, or leader (ibid.). What this demand is (e.g. 'anti-austerity'), or *who* the leader is, is historically specific and cannot be determined in advance (recall that the specific 'ontic' content of the ontology of populism is not so important).

The extension of the breadth of an equivalential set is both enriching and impoverishing for a hegemonic populism:

Enriching: the signifiers unifying an equivalential chain, because they must cover all the links integrating the latter, have a wider reference than a purely differential content...Impoverishing: precisely because of this wider (potentially universal) reference, its connection with particular contents tends to be drastically reduced. (Ibid., p. 40)

The frontier, equivalential chain and subject positions of hegemonic populism can be subverted in two ways: firstly, by the power bloc giving in to one or more of the demands within the chain (returning us to a logic of differentiation) (ibid., p. 42). Secondly, hegemonic populism can be subverted when the significance of the frontier (between 'people' and 'power') changes (ibid.). When certain demands become the empty signifier for a popular discourse (e.g. anti-elitism), the contents of this empty signifier, being 'empty', become 'open to a *variety* of equivalential rearticulations' (ibid.). For example, anti-elitism could begin as the empty signifier of a left-leaning hegemonic populism, but then become the front of a far-right-leaning programme relatively easily; as Laclau notes, 'the twentieth century provides countless examples of these reversals' (ibid.). To capture the ambiguity and instability inherent in all meaningful frontiers, Laclau uses the term '*floating signifiers*' (emphasis in the original). Empty signifiers 'largely overlap' with floating signifiers insofar as all leading demands can be subverted for another configuration of contents (left or right wing, for example).

There is an interesting question in Laclau's discourse as to the identification of populism with politics as such. He situates populism as one pole on a continuum opposite an institutional (logic of difference) pole (ibid., p.45). These poles are in themselves 'unreachable': a society of purely differential logics would mean a 'society so dominated by administration' and of such individualised, atomistic demands that no social, solidarity struggle would be possible (ibid.). Likewise, a society made up solely of the logic of equivalence would 'involve such a dissolution of social links that the very notion of 'social demand' would lose any meaning' (ibid., p. 46). One might expect the conclusion to be that politics (and by extension hegemony) to be an admixture of these two logics, the exact composition of which would have to be decided contextually. However, Laclau expressly retains the word 'politics' solely for populism and its 'radical alternative':

If populism consists in postulating a radical alternative within the communitarian space, a choice at the crossroads on which the future of a given society hinges, does not populism become synonymous with politics? The answer can only be affirmative. Populism means putting into question the institutional order by constructing an underdog as an historical agent – i.e. an agent which is an *other* in relation to the way things stand. But this is the same as politics. (ibid., p 48).

On this model, the construction of *alternatives* to the power/institutional system constitutes politics (and hegemony). By implication, the reproduction of the same, the *preservation* of the institutional system in defence against the 'populist rupture', is not a political or hegemonic act. The practice of hegemony is placed on one side of the frontier therefore.

1.4 Conjunctural discourse analysis: Hall on Thatcherism

Laclau and Mouffe's influential development of the theory of ideology into a theory of hegemony and of populism had a marked influence upon ongoing debates within British Marxism in the 1980s, evidenced in particular by Stuart Hall's various analyses of

Thatcherism and Thatcherite hegemony.⁴⁹ I argue that we can understand Hall as adopting the theoretical ‘direction of travel’ of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory and applying it to the UK political milieu of his time. That is to say, Hall puts the analysis of hegemonic (discursive) formations to work in a specific context; the result is ‘the most clairvoyant single example of a Gramscian diagnostic of a given society on record’ (Anderson, 2016, p. 74).

Hall’s work takes as its premise that the strength of political theory lies in its ability to be applied to a particular *conjuncture*, rather than to remain at the level of general political philosophy. This, of course, he learnt from Gramsci’s taking stock, while in prison, of the long-, medium- and short-term processes that produced the particular conjuncture of 1920s Italy (Hall, 1988, p. 161).

Gramsci insisted that we must get the ‘organic’ and ‘conjunctural’ aspects of a crisis into a proper relationship. What defines the ‘conjunctural’ – the immediate terrain of struggle – is not simply the given economic conditions, but precisely the ‘incessant and persistent’ efforts which are being made to defend and conserve the status quo (Hall, 1988, p. 43)

These efforts of defending a particular hegemonic relationship between groups within a conjuncture include ‘new political configurations and “philosophies”’, new ‘ideological discourses’ and new policies (ibid.). Hall’s notion of ideology is deeply indebted to Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of discourse and articulation: ‘I adopt...a *discursive* conception of ideology – ideology (like language) is conceptualised in terms of the articulation of elements’ (ibid., p. 9).⁵⁰ Importantly, and again in consonance with Laclau and Mouffe’s accounts: ‘These new elements do not “emerge”’: they have to be constructed. (Political)

⁴⁹ Here I shall be using the essays: ‘The Great Moving Right Show’, ‘Gramsci and Us’, and ‘Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism: Two Ways of “Taking Democracy Seriously”’, all collected within *The Hard Road to Renewal* (Hall, 1988).

⁵⁰ Hall claims to ‘stop short’ before the logical conclusions of the ‘fully discursive’ position of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1988, p. 10-11). As we’ve seen above, the ‘full discursive’, ontological position of Laclau and Mouffe does not limit discourse to mere language or a logic of ideas (ideology strictly construed); for them, discourse can be the articulation of meaningful social practices and behaviours as well as linguistic utterances. Hall’s concern is with the connected ideas, implicit philosophies and *senso comune* drive political projects and so is using Laclau and Mouffe’s innovations to intervene in a quite ‘traditional’ debate around ideology. See Osborne (1991a, p. 213, n. 38) for a critique of Hall’s ambiguity.

ideological work is required to disarticulate old formations, and to rework their elements into new ones' (ibid.). Thatcherism and the 'New Right' were doing precisely this from the mid-1970s onwards – the effects of which we still live with in the 21st century.

As with Laclau and Mouffe, the demonstrable importance of ideological struggle leads Hall to definitively break with economistic tendencies within the Marxism of his day. While most Marxist work on capitalism's tendency towards crisis 'deals with economic conditions and tendencies', theorised at a 'high level of abstraction', the task of thinking crises 'strategically, conjuncturally and politically, has not been a notable area of success' (1988, p. 127). Key here for Hall is understanding the great contingency of crisis conjunctures: although a particular economic crisis 'may provide a necessary level of determination...they cannot provide the sufficient conditions for determining either the political/ideological forms which the crisis may assume' and therefore also the character of its resolution (ibid.). Hall finds the theoretical precursor to this premise in Gramsci, who writes:

It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; *they can simply create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought...*The specific question of economic hardship or well-being as a cause of new economic realities is a *partial* aspect of the question of the relations of force, at various levels (Gramsci, 1971, p. 184, my emphasis; Hall, 1988, p. 127)

Crises, in other words, cannot be 'read off' from the economic (Hall, 1988, p. 128). Further, Hall identifies a passage in Gramsci that could be read as the theoretical core of both Hall's and Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical orientations:

The demonstration [of the 'truth' of a particular hegemonic project] in the last analysis only succeeds and is 'true' if it becomes a reality, if the forces of opposition triumph; *in the immediate, it is developed in a series of ideological, religious, philosophical, political and juridical polemics, whose concreteness can be estimated to the extent to which they are convincing, and shift the existing disposition of social forces* (Gramsci, 1971, p. 178, my emphasis)

This development, or battle, of social forces over the conjunctural terrain is a 'war of position' amongst the 'trenches' of civil society institutions and state organisations (Hall, 1988, p. 131; see previous chapter for Gramsci's use of these metaphors); this war is waged via ideological and philosophical, as much as by political, means. Hall here draws positively on Laclau's aforementioned early work on ideology (1977). Because ideological elements and discursive positions have no *necessary* (economic) class belonging, and cannot be simply read off of economic realities, what 'matters' is the 'manner in which these discourses are effectively articulated to and by different class practices' (Hall, 1988, p. 139).

What does this series of articulated elements, or logic of equivalence, concretely look like in the project of the New Right (in the form of Thatcherism) that Hall was analysing? Hall has two terms that describe the specificities of Thatcherism's ideological patchwork. Firstly Hall names it 'authoritarian populism': the stitching together of popular discontents and desires with authoritarian, more traditionally disciplinarian solutions (ibid., p. 142-3).⁵¹ Crime is a perfect example of an issue that could be included in this articulation:

[Crime] is present in the real experience of the dominated classes as a threat from within to their already limited material resources...And when crime is mapped onto the wider scenarios of 'moral degradation' and the crisis of authority and social values, there is no mystery as to why some ordinary people should be actively recruited into crusades for the restoration of 'normal times' (ibid., p. 143)

Crime is mapped onto a lack of authority, everyday experience is linked to a solution or demand (more authority). So too with education, Thatcherism positioned its project as a demand for a 'return to standards' in the system, which would allow children to 'get on and compete' in a harsh world, as opposed to the narrative that children are 'owed a living' (ibid., p. 144). The same is true for welfare policy (to which we shall return in a later chapter), the popular understanding of the role of women, how race and nationhood are to

⁵¹ Hall had been using this term prior to the Thatcher government, notably in *Policing the Crisis* (1978). This analysis has obvious pertinence in the present, in the age of Bolsonaro, Trump, Erdoğan and Johnson.

be understood, and so on. In short, Thatcherism worked on the traditional elements of popular *senso comune* and guided these in a more authoritarian direction (ibid.).

Secondly, in his 'Gramsci and Us' essay, Hall collects Thatcherism's ideological elements under the title of 'regressive modernization' (Hall, 1988, p. 164): regressive because Thatcherism's ostensible utopia is that of the 'Eminent Victorians', and because it promised a return to pre-Wall Street crash, market-oriented solutions, but also 'modernization' because the project couples this regression with a *future-orientated* vision of what a *modern* Britain should be (ibid.). Following Gramsci's assertion of the necessity for there to be a 'concrete phantasy' to guide a particular hegemony (whether it be a political party, a 'prince', or set of ideas), Hall asserts that 'every crisis is a moment of reconstruction...there is no destruction which is not, also, reconstruction; that historically nothing is dismantled without attempting to put something new in its place' (ibid., p. 165). Thatcherism's 'concrete phantasy', its vision of modernisation, is built according to Hall from elements of the 'British psyche', and taps into the *masochism* of our *senso comune* (ibid., p. 166).

[Thatcher speaks to] the Dunkirk spirit – the worse off we are the better we behave. She didn't promise us the giveaway society. She said, iron times; back to the wall; stiff upper lip; on your bike; dig in...The family has kept society together; live by it. Send the women back to the hearth...By the end, she said, I will be able to redefine the nation in such a way that you will all, once again, for the first time since the Empire started to go down the tube, feel what it is like to be part of Great Britain Unlimited. You will be able, once again, to send our boys 'over there', to fly the flag, to welcome back the fleet. Britain will be great again (ibid.)

Any hard times will lead, in this phantasy, to a prosperous Britain once more (after the long, post-empire decline). In this sense of quasi-messianic leadership, we can see why Andrew Gamble characterises Thatcherite ideology as aspiring 'to be the latest religion of little England' (Gamble, 1988, p.172).

With this kind of analysis in mind, it is clear why Hall finds much to admire in Laclau and Mouffe's work; the ideological practice of Thatcherism, unfolding before Hall's eyes, was in

some way *demonstrating* the cogency of a discourse-focused approach, whilst simultaneously revealing the insufficiency of the traditional class-based analyses that Laclau and Mouffe rail against:

[t]he temptation is always, ideologically, to dismantle [a particular political formation], to force it to stand still by asking *the* classic Marxist question: who does it really represent? Now, usually when the left asks that old classic Marxist question in the old way, we are not really asking a question, we are making a statement. We already know the answer. Of course, the right represents the ruling class in power...This is Marxism as a theory of the obvious...In fact, the reason we need to ask the question is because we don't really know. It is really puzzling to say, in any simple way, whom Thatcherism represents...What is the nature of this ideology which can inscribe such a vast range of different positions and interests in it, and which seems to represent a little bit of everybody? For, make no mistake, a tiny bit of all of us is also somewhere inside the Thatcherite project (Hall, 1988, p. 165).

Thatcherism was hegemonically successful not because it stuck to this or that identifiable class project, or even because it provided the most coherent plan for economic development, but because of its more or less unitary arrangement of contradictory ideological elements that spoke across economic classes in different registers (sometimes moralist, other times business-oriented, etc.). In other words, Thatcherism produced a successful *logic of equivalence*. It was an ideology that 'speaks in our ear with the voice of freewheeling, utilitarian market-man, and in the other ear with the voice of respectable, bourgeois, patriarchal man' (Hall, 1988, p. 165-6). It managed its own 'incoherence', in Gramsci's terms.

We can also find in Hall (as in Laclau and Mouffe) an account the splintered and contradictory nature of subjects that can be mobilised in a plurality of directions. As discussed in the last chapter, Gramsci identified this as a fundamental to *senso comune* (Hall notes this inheritance). There are material interests, but they are multiple and have no necessary class belonging. In Hall's manner: 'interests are not escalators which automatically deliver people to their appointed destinations, "in place", within the political

ideological spectrum' (Hall, 1988, p. 261). As with Laclau and Mouffe, Hall argues that this requires nothing less than a regrouping of socialist strategy, wherein 'socialist' identity can no longer be considered fixed and positively articulated:

[W]e live in an era when the old political identities are collapsing. We cannot imagine socialism coming about any longer through the image of that single, singular subject we used to call Socialist Man. Socialist Man, with one mind, one set of interests, one project, is dead. And good riddance. Who needs 'him' now, with his investment in a particular historical period, with 'his' particular sense of masculinity shoring 'his' identity up in a particular set of familial relations, a particular kind of sexual identity? Who needs 'him' as the singular identity through which the great diversity of human beings and ethnic cultures in our world must enter the twenty-first century? (Hall, 1988, p. 170)

Only once UK socialism has rid itself of these anachronistic categories, and learn what Thatcherism has come to know, can it effectively produce its own hegemonic project.

2. Hegemony beyond discourse

Laclau and Mouffe's approach to hegemony has been subject to substantial critique over the past decades. Rather than focus on the criticisms of their readings of the Second International (Geras, 1987; 1988), or on the arguments that Laclau's theory of populism has an insufficient and ever-changing conception of power at a larger, national scale (Anderson, 2016; Morton, 2005), or on some of the ontological ambiguity at the base of their theory (Osborne, 1991a), I will make the case that, understood as an attempt at a *comprehensive or exhaustive* theory of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe's collaborative work (and Laclau's later work) is insufficient. This is due, I argue, to its neglect or misleading treatments of certain *economic* categories and logics.

Firstly, I claim that by rejecting (and misreading) the notion of labour-power's peculiarity as a commodity, Laclau and Mouffe occlude something fundamental to capitalist hegemony and to wage labour. Secondly, reducing wage labour to a logic of control and (interpersonal)

power bereft of economic imperatives leads Laclau and Mouffe to neglect the specifically economic coercion involved in ‘owning’ and ‘freely’ selling one’s own labour-power. This issue is particularly pivotal for my thesis concerning wage labour seen through the lens of hegemony. Along the same lines, I will demonstrate that a theory of hegemony where hegemony entails a particular demand, or leader, becoming an empty signifier for an equivalential chain (Laclau, 2005), is not suitable for (exhaustively) expressing the place of wage labour within the social dynamics of capitalism. Overall, Laclau and Mouffe’s political ontology of overdetermination is shown to preclude the specificity of economic causes and therefore flattens hegemony to a specific account of politics and politics alone. As will become apparent in later sections, these criticisms do not amount to saying that Laclau and Mouffe’s work in the subgenre of hegemony studies cannot contribute to a more comprehensive and dynamic theory.

After critiquing Laclau and Mouffe’s treatment of the economic, I turn to critiques of Stuart Hall’s account of Thatcherism, which point to similar weaknesses in such a discourse-focused analysis.

2.1 The historical role of the economic?

Evidently, Laclau and Mouffe do not overlook the economy in their attempt to rid political theory of any residues of essentialism.⁵² However, situating what is *distinctive* about economic (as opposed to the strictly political) relations, and expressing how exactly these two kinds of relations are imbricated, remains ambiguous – and problematic – in their work.

For example, in some texts the question of the causality of historical, economic developments at national and international scales is unclear. In their ‘Where Next?’ essay for example, Laclau and Mouffe still retain some elements of a political-economic analysis. For example, they draw on the Marxist concepts of ‘mode of production’ and of the development of ‘productive forces’:

⁵² Indeed, many scholars in international relations and political economy have found much to draw on in Laclau and Mouffe’s work. See, for example, Wullweber (2019; 2019a) and De Goede (2003).

The capitalist mode of production, moreover, cannot be reduced to a determinate structure of production relations that lies at the root of the class contradiction. It also involves a certain mode of development of the productive forces: industrialism. This leads to a growing process of technocratisation and bureaucratisation, which produces pertinent effects at every level of society, and it is here that the origin of most of the new antagonisms should be sought (Laclau and Mouffe, 1981, p. 21)

They even appear to accept some kind of causation between economic paradigms and social and political transformations. Speaking of Eurocommunism's post-war strategy, they write that it

should rightfully be used to denote the recognition of the need for the communist parties in the advanced capitalist countries to develop a political strategy adapted to the far-reaching transformations that these societies have undergone since the 1930s, as a result of the growing intervention of the state *consequent* upon Keynesian economic policies (ibid., p. 21. emphasis my own)

Keynesian economic policies and their correlate form of democracy are understood as producing a social model marked by the 'orientation of production to mass consumption', i.e. Fordism (ibid.). There thus appears to be at least some kind of causation, or determination, due to the modifications of the way production – work – was being re-organised.⁵³ By the end of the essay, Laclau and Mouffe expressly seek to move beyond thinking *solely* in terms of economic logic or production models:

We must therefore topple the last bastion of economism and assert the primacy of politics within the economy itself. Far from forming a homogenous field ruled by the simple logic of maximisation, the economy is in actual fact a complex relation of forces between various social agents, and the productive forces are themselves subject to rationality imposed on them by the ruling class. This means that the economy, like all other spheres of society, is the terrain of a political struggle, and

⁵³ Here we can hear echoes of Gramsci's notes on Americanism and Fordism.

that its 'laws of motion' are not governed by a simple logic, but by the hegemonic articulation existing in a given society (ibid., p. 22)

In the above passage it is unclear whether there is still space for economic relations to (co)determine the social and political domains, as had been alluded to earlier in earlier passages. If the economy is a thoroughly political, 'complex relation of forces between various social agents' then does that *include* the 'logic of maximisation' attributed to economic relations (even if it is not 'ruled' by it) or does it mean that this logic does not exist? Further, is Keynesian 'economic' policy and 'industrialism' anything *more* than 'technocratisation' and 'bureaucratisation' as it is described in this last passage? If it isn't, does it even make sense to talk of anything specifically economic about 'Keynesian' policy?

2.2 Economy dissolved

With *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the politicisation of the economy (or 'the economic') is taken to its radical zenith. Here, the "economy" is named the 'last redoubt of [the] essentialism' that Laclau and Mouffe detect throughout the history of Marxism (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 75).⁵⁴ Their aim is to reveal the economy as being in fact political through and through; the 'economic' is merely an obfuscation of discursive contestation. My critique in this section amounts to saying that by losing what is specific to capitalist exchange relations, i.e. the specificity of the economic logic involved, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony flattens wage-labour into a battle between discourses and/or discursively articulated struggles. More specifically, I take issue with Laclau and Mouffe's attempt to refute Marxist categories: they misread what 'labour-power' is within Marx's schema when they reject it, despite tacitly utilising what is useful in the concept for their own thesis.⁵⁵ I therefore follow Stanley Aronowitz's concern that 'in their passion to separate their own discourse from that of Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe have cogently argued against traditional

⁵⁴ Interestingly, similar arguments that aim at decomposing what 'the economy' means have resurfaced in recent years. See: Earle et al. (2017).

⁵⁵ To extent that it is necessary, the following sections detour into Marx's work briefly, followed in the next chapter by a more extensive engagement with wage labour and Marxian accounts.

Marxist approaches but have left little room for the categories of political economy' (Aronowitz, 1998, p. 39).

Following this rejection of Marxist categories, Laclau and Mouffe unjustifiably reduce economic relations to relations of domination and control. I show this to be unjustified by briefly interrogating the labour process theory that they themselves draw upon in apparent support of their argument. Ignoring what is specific about the labour-capital relationship and settling on an account merely of workplace relations of domination leaves certain questions unanswered: in particular the question as to the *purpose* of this control over the labour process. This weakness within their argument against any and all economic logics implies that a more coherent explanation of the 'how?' and 'why?' of wage labour, which integrates economic and political logics, is possible (and will be pursued in the following chapters).

2.3 Labour-power/labour-capacity in Laclau and Mouffe

Laclau and Mouffe claim that Marxism has an inappropriate conception of labour-power.

[M]arxism had to resort to a fiction: it conceived of labour-power as a commodity...[but] Labour-power differs from the other necessary elements of production in that the capitalist must do more than simply purchase it; he must also make it produce labour. This essential aspect, however, escapes the conception of labour-power as a commodity whose use-value is labour (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 78)

Much of their following argument regarding the political ontology of 'economic' activity hinges on this 'refutation' of a core category of Marxist analysis. If labour-power is not a commodity, then whole sections of *Capital* (not to mention swathes of Marxist literature) are false. According to this argument, because the capitalist has to make their new commodity (labour-power) perform labour, i.e. because it has to actualise the capacity of labour-power into a quantity of labour, labour-power is not, strictly speaking, a commodity. As a consequence of Marxism's misunderstanding of labour-power, what actually

constitutes the 'hidden abode' of the labour process has consistently escaped its grasp – hidden behind the category of 'commodity'. That is, until relatively recently (Laclau and Mouffe credit Braverman (1974) as being a pioneer in this regard).⁵⁶

Firstly, we should note that labour-power is not, as Laclau and Mouffe claim, ('fictitiously') taken to be a commodity by the critique of political economy (Marx), as if it were some kind of arbitrary theoretical construction, but is rather treated as such by the economic system *itself* (and by classical political economy that reflects this category in theory). The economic categories Marx uses in *Capital* are those of 'bourgeois political economy', deployed as part of his immanent critique (Postone, 1993). Second, within capitalist economies it is true, as Laclau and Mouffe state, that labour-power is unlike any other 'element of production', but this does not exclude it from being a commodity that is both bought and sold, as well as used by its buyer. I.e. it does not exclude it from being a commodity accorded an exchange value and a use value. Labour-power *is unique* insofar as it designates not a quantity of labour itself, but the *capacity* to labour on behalf of its seller. The fact that labour-power (*Arbeitskraft*) is named as such (sometimes called 'labour-capacity' by Marx, *Arbeitsvermögen*) already shows that the aspect that Laclau and Mouffe attribute to it is actually included in Marx's concept and is not something that 'escapes' Marxist conceptions necessarily (Marx, 1990, p. 270).

We mean by labour-power, or labour-capacity, the aggregate of those mental and physical *capabilities* existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, *capabilities* which he *sets in motion* whenever he produces a use-value of any kind. (ibid. Emphasis my own)

The fact that labour-capacity is not identical to its labour (its concrete use) does not make labour-capacity any less of a commodity; it is merely *unique* as a commodity insofar as it requires further action for its actualisation beyond simply being bought or sold.

⁵⁶ We shall return to Braverman in the following chapter.

The relevant specificities of labour-capacity go deeper however. As Werner Bonefeld explains, the fact that labour-capacity has an identity with its seller makes it even more unique amongst commodities (Bonefeld, 2014).

The buying, say, of an apple entails its consumption. The buying of labour power also entails its consumption. However, the commodity of labour power is inseparable from its seller. The consumption of labour power is therefore consumption of the labourer' (ibid., p. 110)

Unlike the apple, the consumption of labour-power means the consumption of its seller, and this seller has certain 'natural' limits. The seller of labour-power, might wish for their commodity (i.e. themselves) not be totally consumed, i.e. perish, and further, if endowed with politically-enforced property rights, the seller can limit how long they sell their labour-capacity for (as it is their property after all).

[The seller] must constantly treat his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and he can do this only by placing at the disposal of the buyer, i.e. handing it over to the buyer for him to consume, for a definite period of time, temporarily. In this way he manages both to alienate his labour-power and to avoid renouncing his rights of ownership of it. (Marx, 1990, p. 271)

It is the combination of these two characteristics of labour-power as a commodity that makes the labour process a politically charged terrain (along the lines that Laclau and Mouffe also go on to index). *Because* the commodity that is bought is not immediately the quantity of labour required, but instead the latent capacity for it, and because this capacity and this labouring are inseparable from the seller of the commodity, the 'putting to use' (or consumption) of labour-power constitutes a power relationship between individuals. The buyer (who pursues the consumption of the commodity s/he has bought) and the seller, who is put to use (or 'consumed').

The right of the capitalist to consume the acquired commodity labour power is pitted against the right of the worker to resist the consumption of her labour power in

order to maintain her health, integrity and, indeed, secure her survival. (Bonfeld, 2014, p. 110)

Marx's own concrete example of this struggle between labour-power seller and labour-power buyer, inherent in the dynamics of the (unique) commodity form of labour-power, is the battle over working time (the time of the 'consumption' of labour-power), focused on in chapter ten of *Capital Volume One*:

The capitalist maintains his right as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and, where possible, to make two working days out of one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the worker maintains his right as a seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to a particular normal length. (Marx, 1990, p. 344)

The struggle here, is essentially over *how much* the commodity of labour-power is actualised, or put to use. As Marx notes, between the claims of equal rights (to buy and sell labour-power), 'force decides' (ibid.). In other words, between the potential and actual realisation of labour, lies a whole apparatus of force and terrain of resistance.⁵⁷ This is not to necessarily presuppose the worker as *homo economicus* who wishes to maximise their share of the profits though, as rejected by Laclau and Mouffe when critiquing class-reductionist theories (see above). Rather, the point is that the seller and buyer do not have the same intentions going into the exchange. As Edwards notes: the labourer has sold their labour-power, but has no *intrinsic* interest in actualising their *labour* for the capitalist: 'they must show up for work, but they need not necessarily provide *labor*, much less the amount of labor that the capitalist desires to extract from the labor power they have sold'. The capitalist on the other hand *has* to put labour-power to work in order to actualise its usefulness for them (Edwards, 1979, p. 12).

⁵⁷ In *Capital, Vol. 3*, Marx writes: 'It is in each case the immediate relation of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers . . . in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence' (Marx, 1981, p. 927). Balibar reads from this that, 'the labor relation (as a relation of exploitation) is *immediately economic and political* (Balibar, 1994, p. 138)

The preceding has shown that it simply isn't true, as Laclau and Mouffe claim, that 'seeing labour-power as a simple commodity, [Marx] tended to withdraw all autonomy and relevance from the relations established in the labour process' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 80). Labour-power is not a simple commodity and it is not without relevance to (political) labour relations in Marx's work. In fact, far from being incapable of articulating these power relationships and situations of dominance, as Laclau and Mouffe claim, the critique of political economy can situate these relations as *fundamentally* tied up with the dynamics of labour-capacity *as commodity*: as bought-but-not-yet-realised.⁵⁸

This does not mean that the concrete (and conjunctural) determination of the labour process can be simply read off of the category of 'labour-power', and indeed the relevant literature on the labour process since Marx can be understood as attempts to give flesh to the bare bones that Marx provided in his critical anatomy of capitalist economies. Nonetheless an account of the power relationships involved in labouring is possible, and arguably strengthened, by the Marxian category of labour-power.

2.4 What drives the politics of production?

Disregarding the critical use of economic categories (such as labour-power), but retaining the actual content of the original concept, Laclau and Mouffe seek to show that at base, the economy is constituted by a 'politics of production' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 79). They accept that: '[a] large part of the capitalist organisation of labour can be understood only as a result of the necessity to extract labour from the labour-power purchased by the capitalist' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 78). But by emptying the labour process of a specific economic logic (and explanation), and by attempting to subsume the economy within their political ontology, I argue that Laclau and Mouffe effectively turn the economy into a blank terrain of contestation like any other.

⁵⁸ This has consequences for subject-formation and hegemony more generally, specifically the formation of being-subaltern, which seem to belie Laclau and Mouffe's account of articulatory contingency. I will cash this out in the following chapter, utilising Jason Reed's work on the biopolitics of capital (Read, 2003)

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Laclau and Mouffe consider labour relations to be significant only insofar as they are relations of control and resistance, and the labour process to be the 'ground of a struggle' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 79).⁵⁹ To buttress their approach, they point to contemporary studies of the capitalist labour process that detail the techniques of control and influence that have accompanied production (e.g. Edwards, 1979; Braverman, 1974; Tronti, 1977). These works are referenced in order to demonstrate that 'it is not a pure logic of capital which determines the evolution of the labour process' but it is instead a power struggle between workers and capitalists (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 79).

This is also evident in Laclau's later theory of hegemonic populism. Recall that this is based on a political ontology unconcerned with ontic content; if all is politics and all politics is populist (in the sense of the construction of people, frontiers and chains), then there is no room for (apparently apolitical) institutions, or alternative (economic) logics. Thus, because 'all struggles are, by definition, political...there is no room for a distinction between economic and political struggles' (Laclau, *ibid.*). As Jessop and Sum point out, using the same Heideggerian language, this political ontology makes 'an *ontic* void' of the economic space, leaving nothing but a terrain of struggle, power and (discursive) contestation (Jessop and Sum, 2013, p. 179).

However, while the rejection of *purely* economic explanations for an account of wage labour may be valid, this does not entail that the labour process is *simply* a relationship of struggle *wholly autonomous* from, or bereft of, economic logics. As we've seen already above, the struggle over the working day between the sellers of labour-power and the buyers was part of Marx's original analysis; the 'politics of production' for him revolves around the extent to which workers can be put to use (as part of a system of commodity exchange).⁶⁰ Marx aside, if we consider some of the works of those theorists called on by Laclau and Mouffe in order to support the claim of their radical political ontology of production, we in fact find support for a more integral approach. Richard Edwards, for example, whose work on the 'three main

⁵⁹ What, then, we might ask, do 'extraction', 'capitalist' or 'labour-power' mean in their discourse, once shorn of the specifically economic significance of 'capital', 'value' and 'labour-power'?

⁶⁰ In Gramsci's terms: a 'determinate market' (see Chapter One).

forms of control' Laclau and Mouffe cite in order to sketch their 'politics of production' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 79), states it simply:

[H]ierarchy at work exists and persists because it is *profitable*. Employers are able to increase their profits when they have greater control over the labour process... Finally, employers understandably do desire control, but such control is instrumental, a means toward achieving greater profits. Thus, to understand the reason for workplace hierarchy and to comprehend the twentieth-century transformation of the labor process we need to focus on the profit system – that is, on capitalism. (Edwards, 1979, p. viii. Emphasis in original)

In order to increase this profitability, production – that is, the extraction of labour from labour-power – requires a politics of (contested) control:

Control is rendered problematic because, unlike the other commodities involved in production, labour power is always embodied in people, who have their own interests and needs and who retain their power to resist being treated like a commodity (Edwards, 1979, p. 12)

Control and hierarchy have profitability as their end, and in turn, economic success requires ever greater control and hierarchy; the logic of capital impels control over the bought commodity labour-power.

If we turn to another of Laclau and Mouffe's references, Stephen Marglin's essay 'What do Bosses Do?' (1976), we again find an analysis that doesn't quite fit the mould necessary to come to the conclusion that the analysis of waged work can be completed solely with political categories.⁶¹ Marglin's main aim, to be clear, is to understand the relationship between capitalist social relations, technological development and the division of labour, and to argue that arguments around technical efficiency are fundamentally misguided

⁶¹ This is true, I argue, even if we accept that economic relations are always also political.

(Marglin, 1976, p. 13). Relevant to our discussion here however, are Marglin's statements regarding the *purpose* of the hierarchical control of production:

The social function of hierarchical work organisation is not technical efficiency, but accumulation...In the absence of hierarchical control of production, society would either have to fashion egalitarian institutions for accumulating capital or content itself with the level of capital already accumulated. (Marglin, 1976, p. 14)

Overlooking these definitional statements, Laclau and Mouffe summarise – misleadingly I argue – from these texts that:

The idea common to these works is that historical forms of capitalist control have to be studied as part of overall social relations, given that the changing organizational forms of the labour process cannot be understood merely in terms of the difference between absolute and relative surplus value (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 80)

This summary is valid insofar as the research literature does indeed reject any simplistic account of production based on a logical economic formula stripped of the power relations that surround and interact with it. What this summary neglects however, is the economic analysis that informs the literature in question; Edwards' and Marglin's interventions simply don't do the work that Laclau and Mouffe need them to in order that the emperor's clothes of the economy be torn away and a 'pan-politicism' can take its place (Jessop and Sum, 2013, p. 132). Instead, the conclusion from Edwards and Marglin is that the politics of production is strongly coupled – perhaps identified – with the economic logic that drives it and the ways in which labour-power is treated as a commodity in the process of accumulation. These separate theoretical works suggest that the debate is not a zero-sum game between absolutely inviolable historical economic determination (economism) and radically contingent political struggle (Laclau and Mouffe's position), but rather a question of precisely what sort of logic economic coercion follows, and how other power relations relate to, reinforce, or weaken, this logic.⁶²

⁶² In Foucault's words: '[T]he two processes – the accumulation [and disciplining] of men and the accumulation of capital – cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of

What emerges in the contrast between Laclau and Mouffe's approach and the work they draw from is the question as to *why* such control over the labour process is necessary in the first place: what ends does it serve? If indeed capital does 'need to exercise its domination over the labour process' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 79), then what provokes this need in their account? A theory involving critical economic categories (such as 'labour-power', profit, amongst others) can, as we have seen, ground some answers here. On this understanding, the organisation of control over the labour process is determined by the need to extract labour from labour-power (given that this labour is not available *a priori*). This need to extract is provoked, in part, by a need for profitability at the level of the enterprise and, ultimately, competition between profit-driven actors within the marketplace (Edwards, 1979; Marglin, 1976). Without recourse to a (structural) imperative for profits, nor the proposition that capitalists need to extract a surplus from labour-power for the accumulation of yet more capital, Laclau and Mouffe seem to have no answer of their own to this question of purpose, beyond a reductive quasi-will-to-power drive for control on the part of one group of people over another. By replacing distinct economic categories with political terms such as 'control' and 'domination', Laclau and Mouffe

cannot distinguish *in material terms* between capitalist and non-capitalist economic practices, institutions and formations – they are all equally discursive and can be differentiated only through their respective semiotic practices, meanings and contexts, and their performative impact. (Jessop and Sum, 2013, p. 180)

A framework with which to analyse the components of political struggle is one thing, but to understand *why* there are struggles is another. Indeed, answering the question as to the reasons why a process is the way it is can help distinguish precisely what makes capitalist social relations capitalist. Again, it is true that 'the changing organizational forms of the labour process cannot be understood merely in terms of the difference between absolute and relative surplus value' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 80), because much more is required

men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital.' (Foucault, 1977, p. 221)

for a concrete (and conjunctural) analysis than such a rigid economic outlook. And equally, 'the constitutive function [of creating subjects] could not refer exclusively to the economy', if we accept that subjects are overdetermined in all sorts of other ways (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 76). But this does not mean that economic logics do not exist, or do not play a fundamental role in creating subject positions (if not subjectivity as such) on a particular terrain. In fact, the existence of a logic of capital appears to offer certain reasons *for* the existence of logics of control, where other explanations are absent or unjustified.

2.5 Marxism is not reducible to economism, historical teleology or to class-reductionism

In light of the rich literature on the labour process (and attendant worker struggles), Laclau and Mouffe correctly call into question the 'whole idea of the development of productive forces as a natural, spontaneously progressive phenomenon' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 78). Indeed, the foregoing discussion has suggested that production is not natural nor spontaneous, but is directed towards certain ends and involves coercion and struggle at the very core of its process. Is Laclau and Mouffe's notion of economism an accurate description of Marxist thought taken as a whole however? Indeed, perhaps we should question why we are dealing with 'Marxism' as a unified body of work at all. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (amongst other texts) we can get the impression that 'Marxism' is: '[M]onolithic, totalising, mono-linear, reductionist, determinist, essentialist, devoid of any richness or diversity' (Joseph, 2002, p. 114). We can find examples of this style of categorisation throughout Laclau and Mouffe's text, most obviously evident in the regular slippage between 'classical Marxism' and 'Marxism', or in statements such as: '[f]or Marxism, the development of the productive forces plays the key role in the historical evolution towards socialism', or the idea that 'Marxism' believes that the proletariat has a 'historical mission' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 77).

To attack such a deterministic approach, Joseph writes, 'might be permissible if applied to the work of Plekhanov, or more recently G.A. Cohen', but if applied more generally it effectively writes off a whole range of Marxist approaches that are not guilty of such myopia

(Joseph, 2002, p. 114).⁶³ In other words, not all of Marxism is reducible to the economism that Laclau and Mouffe (correctly) find in the Second International's variant of it. Moishe Postone's understanding of capital's historical, 'directional dynamic' (1993), for example, proposes that it is a 'double-sided development of enrichment and impoverishment', which we can neither be accurately named the inevitable march of human progress nor of human domination (Postone, 1993, p. 35).⁶⁴ Capitalist modernity is historically contingent, even if social relations are to some extent structured and driven by an economic logic that gives it certain tendencies (to be analysed).

Modernity is not an evolutionary stage toward which all societies evolve, but a specific form of social life that originated in Western Europe...Although modernity has taken different forms in different countries and areas, my concern is not to examine those differences but to explore theoretically the nature of modernity *per se*. (Postone, 1993, p. 4)

The historical contingency of capitalism applies, in Postone's theory, to that of 'labor' also. He argues that 'labor' is not a transhistorical category in Marx's work, but rather a 'historically specific' one (Postone, 1993, p. 4). '[Labour] constitutes a historically specific, quasi-objective form of social mediation' (ibid., p.5). Far from falling into the trap of Second International Marxists then, more recent critiques of political economy – such as Postone's – are not incapable of including contingency in their account of capital and history.

There is also a danger, in Laclau and Mouffe's critique of economism, to confuse class-reductionism with critical economic analysis, and therefore to tar all Marxism with the failings of class reductionism as well. This equivalence between class determination and economic determination is present, for instance, in Mouffe's early essay:

⁶³ This diversity is already suggested in Laclau and Mouffe's own, approved references in fact, who are all of a 'Marxist' orientation of one sort or another but differ in their conclusions (e.g. Tronti, Edwards, Braverman, Marglin).

⁶⁴ Postone's work features in the next chapter's analysis of the basic structures of capitalism.

To stress the determination in the last instance by the economic is equivalent to saying determination in the last instance by the social classes inasmuch as we define classes as constituting antagonistic poles in the dominant relations of production (Mouffe, 1979, p. 171)

Given the strength of Laclau and Mouffe's attack on any fixed notion of class-identity, and given the trouble that theorists have had in giving a positive identity to things such as the 'working class' (e.g. Poulantzas 1975; Olin Wright 1978), any critical theory of wage labour, and of capitalist societies, has to avoid such pitfalls. But if the equivalence between class-reductionism and economic analysis is as strong as Mouffe claims, then once class has proven to no longer determine (in a deterministic fashion) social relations, and once the definition of class is rendered uncertain and to-be-constructed, then economic determination is also called into question, having become contingent and with no real fixity.

However, this equivalence is overly rigid and I argue ultimately unjustified; a critique of the economic categories and relations of capitalism is not one and the same thing as to posit a (crude) class analysis. We can, again, look to Postone's (1993) approach to the critique of capitalist social relations, to show this. Postone eschews a class-analysis and develops a theory of capitalism that focuses on the character of its unique form of wealth and production. More specifically, Postone distinguishes his position, which takes 'labour' as the *object* of critique, from those theories that take labour as the *standpoint* of critique (thereby becoming susceptible to problematically naturalising the wage-labour process). For Postone, class-based theories of capitalism uncritically fall into the latter camp, often overlooking what is fundamental to capitalist social relations (i.e. the necessity to 'labour') in favour of critiquing the uneven *distribution* of wealth between classes in these societies instead (1993). Postone's work is a critique of 'socialism conceived as a more efficient, humane, and just way of administering the industrial mode of production that arose under capitalism', and explicitly rejects the 'notion of the proletariat as the revolutionary Subject, in the sense of a social agent that both constitutes history and realizes itself in socialism' (Postone, 1993, p. 37).

For Postone and others (e.g. Read, 2003; Bonefeld, 2014), to conceive of economic determinations as homogeneously determined by fixed class positions is to adopt the wrong starting point for an analysis of capitalist social relations. The commodity form, labour-power, abstract labour and other categories that are active in capitalist production are all part of what determines the power relationship between the buyer of labour-power (employer) and its seller (worker), and this therefore also grounds any structural relationship between economic classes (the owners of wealth and the free labourers with nothing but their labour to sell). I will pursue this critical reading of capitalist social relations, integrating historical material via the notion of 'primitive accumulation' amongst other factors, in the next chapter. Given only this brief account of an alternative Marxism to more essentialist theories, we can assume that Marxist economic analysis does not need to entail a crude class-reductionism as Laclau and Mouffe's work suggests. The problematic nature of class essentialism, and indeed of class analysis in general does not render economic analysis, and the fruits of this analysis, irrelevant *per se*.

2.6 Re-opening the critique of wage-labour

A number of conclusions follow from the above critiques. Firstly, accepting that ideology and discursive articulation cannot be reduced to given class positions, at the very least, does not *preclude* accepting that economic logics control subjects, and determine social relations, in certain ways. Secondly, accepting that capitalism has a relatively intransigent economic logic does not imply the historical necessity of this logic, nor preclude the (political) interruption of this logic. Equally, we can infer, neither the interruption of economic logic, the changing ways in which this economic logic is actualised, nor the changing ways in which subjects are otherwise (over)determined, proves that economics logics do *not* exist.

Ultimately, Laclau and Mouffe's work on hegemony is directed towards detailing a new theory of socialist strategy and towards ridding Marxist and post-Marxist theory of an unjustified *senso comune* of its own as regards the teleological or mono-causal nature of 'the economy'. Their focus on socialist strategy lends a disposition towards politics that is focused on the constitution of subjects and on how discursive articulation produces and organises already-overdetermined actors. Their work is not trying to rethink what the

'capital' in capitalism is, and does not pay extensive attention to the wage relationship or the various structures and infrastructures relevant to its existence. Thus, while it appears that their theoretical contributions do not do all of the work that is required for analysing wage-labour within capitalist hegemonies, to some extent their chosen problematics are different: subjectivity and politics, not capital and economics. This section has proposed that the problems involved in adopting their theory begin when economic logics are subsumed (and dissolved) under their pan-political schema, rather than assigned their own particular dynamics. Laclau and Mouffe's model of hegemony is a theory of overdetermination and complexity that excludes economic determinants, and therefore should be considered a partial, political, and not comprehensive, account of hegemony.

2.7 Thatcherism beyond discourse

Unlike Laclau and Mouffe, who, at least from *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* onwards, identify the 'game of hegemony' with discursive articulation and contestation, Stuart Hall is quite clear in his essays that, following Gramsci, a successful analysis of hegemony must 'get the relationship between the "organic" and the "conjunctural" features right' (Hall, 1988, p. 131). That is, we must recognise the role that specific economic realities that are 'organic' to capital play in determining a conjuncture, while also being attentive to the ways that these realities relate to and are mobilised by social forces (and their discursive articulations). Failure to recognise both of these two *relatively* (but never wholly) autonomous determinants of modern capitalist societies (such as Britain) results in that 'fatal oscillation, so characteristic of many positions of the left today – between "economism" and "ideologism"', i.e. the over-prioritisation of the economic over the ideological and vice versa (ibid.).

Having made these caveats however, Hall's analyses do not devote similar amounts of focus to the economic conditions or institutional factors of the New Right as they do towards the 'political-ideological' and polemical bases that are necessary for a successful 'war of position'. This has opened his writing up to significant critique (Osborne, 1991a, p. 213, n. 38). If Laclau and Mouffe seem to *reject* questions of economic determination within hegemonies too quickly, Hall merely *neglects* to develop these questions in his writings on

Thatcherite hegemony. If Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical position leaves certain questions unsatisfactorily answered about the fundamentals of a capitalist system, Hall's conjunctural analysis leaves out similar questions as to the British form of capitalism that Thatcherism was marshalling.

Hall's one-sided emphasis is criticised most vociferously by Bob Jessop et al. (1984) in a debate over the character of Thatcherism held within the *New Left Review* in 1984-5. Jessop et al.'s main contention is that Hall's 'Authoritarian Populist' (AP) lens occludes or neglects the other important structural – that is institutional and economic – components to the Thatcherite 'moment'. Thatcherism's ideology should not be overemphasised, they argue, at the expense of noting its economic and state strategies. Jessop et al. think these factors are particularly important as they are more relevant to Thatcherism's inherently precarious contradictions.⁶⁵

Analysing Thatcherism in its entirety is beyond the scope of my project, and the following analysis is indicative and not comprehensive. It is indicative insofar as it substantiates the relatively simple claim that Thatcherism's hegemony revolves not just around its ideological innovations and strategy (which Hall focuses on) but also substantial institutional and economic (re)organisation. Not only this, Thatcherism's economic strategy is relevant as an example of how national economic strategy have a direct influence upon the form and nature that wage-labour acquires within a particular hegemony.

Jessop et al.'s political-economic reading is supported by interpretations of the genealogy of Thatcherism (e.g. Jacques, 1979; Keegan, 1984), including Andrew Gamble's work (1988) on Thatcherism's 'strong state, free economy' strategy. Gamble stresses that we cannot overlook Thatcherism's 'economic management and its strategy for accumulation' as part of its radical break with post-war social formations (Gamble, 1988, p. 121). Thatcherism's radical practice of denationalisation and privatisation, for example, which was 'hardly mentioned in the 1979 election manifesto', represents a 'shift away from collectivist solutions in public policy' (ibid., p. 124). Particularly relevant to the present thesis, Thatcherism also shifted the practical dynamics between the buyers and sellers of labour-power on a national level. As part of its

⁶⁵ As I note later on, their predictions of Thatcherism's collapse were, in 1984, optimistic.

‘strategy of accumulation’, it ‘abolished wage councils and minimum wage legislation and weakened the closed shop, helping to increase the pool of casual part-time workers’ (ibid., p. 127). This constituted not just an ideological, or symbolic victory, but actually directly determined the lives of workers in the ‘politics of production’; the price of the commodity labour-power, which is at one and the same time the price of the life (time) of the seller of said commodity, became cheaper (no minimum wage), the commodity became more available (more unemployed labour-power to choose from, plus normalised casual working conditions) and more determined by the decisions of the buyer (now that wage councils had no say).

Perhaps Thatcherism’s most effective economic move in this regard, was the destruction, by various means, of the UK manufacturing sector, and with it, the ‘eclipsing’ of organised labour (Gamble, 1988, p. 125).

In its first two years the Government presided over a manufacturing recession. Manufacturing employment in Britain fell by 28 per cent between 1979 and 1986, a loss of two million jobs...Along with manufacturing the position of trade unions suffered an eclipse...Mass unemployment brought a substantial drop in union membership (14 percent between 1980 and 1983). (Gamble, 1988, p. 126)

Gamble situates these preoccupations of Thatcherite hegemony as transitional responses, broadly speaking, to a global recession, the disruption of the Fordist ‘regime of accumulation’, the concomitant crisis in Keynesian economics (as it failed to maintain full employment) and other interrelated phenomena.⁶⁶ Thatcherism’s response to a crisis in the economic order was to ‘write off’ Fordist industries, and its legal and symbolic attacks on trade unions has allowed industries to ‘reorganise industrial relations around flexible specialisation’ (ibid, p.

⁶⁶ A ‘regime of accumulation’ is a complex economy reality (Jessop and Sum, 2006). In short, a regime of accumulation signifies a particular type of labour process (e.g. Fordist, ‘post-Fordist’), and with it, a particular kind of consumption that is facilitated (e.g. when rising or falling wages are tied to the productivity of the regime). Gamble writes: ‘The Fordist regime of accumulation was based on assembly-line mass production, and the gradual elimination of skilled workers through the systematic incorporation of their skills into the production process using the techniques of scientific management’ (Gamble, 1988, p. 5). Considering his notes on ‘Americanism and Fordism’ (see Chapter One), this makes Gramsci a ‘proto-theorist’ of regimes of accumulation (Jessop and Sum, 2006, p. 348).

195; Leys, 1985; Leadbeater and Lloyd, 1987).⁶⁷ In summary, and as if following Gramsci's playbook, Thatcherism used these converging economic crises to 'create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 184). And while the 'certain modes of thought' of Thatcherism have their own dynamics (Hall, Laclau and Mouffe), they must be understood as related to an economic strategy that has direct, political effects on individuals – waged-workers in particular. That is to say, drastic shifts in the economic base such as these, away from manufacturing and into a more finance-led and precarious economy, is surely accompanied through and through by the ideology that Hall identifies as 'regressive modernisation', but such economic realities also have worldly effects *irreducible* to this ideology. This is to recognise the 'various levels' at which the relations of hegemony function (Gramsci, 1971, p. 184).

Likewise, Thatcherism's 'recasting' of the state institutions sedimented its hegemonic trajectory. This involved 'civil service reorganisation,' 'a reinforced policing apparatus', 'the radical centralisation of government power' and the 'assault on local government' (Jessop et al., 1984, p. 50). Gamble therefore concludes that Thatcherism should be understood not simply as an ideological or economic project, but also as a form of *statecraft* (Gamble, 1988). None of these specific, and important, activities are explicitly expressed in Hall's 'Authoritarian Populism' or 'Regressive Modernisation' ideological ensembles, even though these ideologies may have been mobilised to justify such state reorganisations (e.g. *authoritarian populism* as the discursive *expression* of police retrenchment).

Jessop et al. criticise Hall for neglecting to mention restructurings such as these, particularly because as they see it, Thatcherism's hegemony papers over the cracks of an ongoing 'crisis of the British State' and of a contradictory economic strategy (Jessop et al., 1984, p. 47).

While Thatcherism pursues the 'involuntary euthanasia' of British industry and the traditional working class (ibid., p. 48), its accumulation strategy, according to Jessop et al., was leading to its own catastrophe.

⁶⁷ Writing in 1988, Gamble writes: 'Some Ministers in the Thatcher Government doubt that many of the successful companies in the future will be industrial in the traditional sense' (Gamble, 1988, p. 195). This would prove to be a clairvoyant assessment.

There is no real means of ensuring productive restructuring, investment, and innovation to secure sustained recovery and growth...there is little evidence that, once unions have been shackled and entrepreneurs liberated, markets will autonomously generate domestic expansion. (ibid.)

They conclude that despite the rhetoric of 'laissez-faire' and 'monetarism', the government 'has nowhere to go and nothing to do' (ibid.). These economic errors, privatisations, cuts and attacks on workers consolidate Thatcherite hegemony but also sow the seeds of its apparent downfall, by stoking resistance at local levels (ibid., p. 51-2). Thus, Jessop et al.'s account comes to the conclusion that the terrain of hegemony in Britain is more nuanced than Hall's account of populism allows, and, bereft of an analysis of the problems inherent in the contemporary deindustrialised economy, Hall's model ultimately leaves much to be desired in the way of strategy too. The strength of their alternative approach is therefore at least partly predicated on whether their economic and institutional analysis would be vindicated as Thatcherism developed.⁶⁸

2.8 In defence of ideology-critique and discourse approaches

Acknowledging the gaps in a theory, as Jessop et al. do, is one thing, but proposing a more adequate analysis is another; there are questions that Hall, Laclau and Mouffe pose which are unanswered or neglected by their critics. Here I want to substantiate the claim that in the outright rejection of discourse analysis and ideology-critique, critics such as Jessop et al. lose valuable elements of a coherent analysis of hegemony and offer no adequate replacement. In short, they replace one one-sided approach with another.

Hall's own frank response to the accusations of one-sidedness is to explicitly acknowledge that his account of Thatcherism was never intended as a replacement for economic analysis; he is explicit in admitting that he is not focusing on *those elements* of hegemony, in part due to a judgment as to where there exists a lack depth within left critique.

⁶⁸ This is evaluated below.

I work on the political/ideological dimension (a) because I happen to have some competence in that area, and (b) because it is often neglected or reductively treated by the left generally and by some Marxists. But the idea that because one works at that level, one therefore assumes economic questions to be residual or unimportant is absurd. I think the ideological dimension of Thatcherism to be crucial. I am certain the left neither understands it nor knows how to conduct this level of struggle – and is constantly misled by misreading its importance. (Hall, 1988, p. 156)

‘Authoritarian Populism’ (AP), according to Hall, is not intended to capture all that there is to Thatcherism, but is rather a concept that remedies a void. By misunderstanding Hall’s conscious choice of emphasis, Jessop et al. have created an ‘ideologist’ straw man with which to confront with economic analysis. This unfortunate derailing of the discussion of Thatcherite hegemony means that the important critiques of Thatcherism from both camps run parallel, never truly meeting. Hall’s clarification nevertheless distinguishes him from Laclau and Mouffe: the economy is not considered as, as in their works, as the ‘last redoubt of essentialism’, but instead as an appropriate object of an alternative analysis to be carried out (albeit by someone else).

By missing the point of Hall’s critique, and therefore by not answering the question of the composition of the discursive strategy of Thatcherite populism, Jessop et al. have ‘robbed themselves of insights from which their own analysis might have profited’ (Hall, 1998, p. 156). Jessop et al. refuse to accept the thrust of Hall’s approach towards the complexity of Thatcherism’s discursive logic of equivalence, and this refusal (symptomatic of more reductive Marxist models), points to perhaps the most obvious weakness of Jessop et al.’s critique: whilst they acknowledge Thatcherism as populist, they themselves have no coherent, alternative model of their own as to what this populism involves. This is especially significant as this definition is what is primarily at stake in Laclau and Mouffe’s contribution to political theory and in Hall’s contribution to the analysis of Thatcherism.

This lack of an alternative theory of populism, or perhaps lack of understanding of what Hall (and behind him Laclau and Mouffe) achieve with their readings of hegemony, is revealed at various points in Jessop et al.’s text. For instance, they see the concept of AP as

‘inconsistent’, insofar as when Hall uses it, ‘sometimes its authoritarian, disciplinary, coercive pole is emphasized, sometimes its populist, popular, and consensual pole’ (Jessop et al., 1984, p. 35). Equally, later on in their critique they claim that while the ‘AP approach demonstrates how Thatcherism has attempted to establish a chain of equivalences among themes such as monetarism, the strong state, law and order, the family, etc...it tends to reify these linkages and to ignore their changing emphases and contexts’ (ibid. p. 42). But this is entirely what Hall’s concept of AP, or ‘regressive modernisation’ is intended to capture: the contradictory discursive chain of elements that facilitates a successful hegemony of a particular programme/group over others. Hall is in fact rallying against the kind of socialist strategy that thinks that simply having a coherent, non-contradictory project, aligned perfectly with identifiable class interests, is the best route to victory. Thatcherism’s success, *in spite of but also because of* its contradictory nature, demonstrates the falsity of this way of thinking; to be hegemonic is to accommodate and/or neutralise (coercion/consent) opposing elements within a single direction of travel. Hall would therefore agree wholeheartedly with Jessop et al. when they conclude that Thatcherism is less a ‘monolithic monstrosity and more an alliance of disparate forces around a self-contradictory programme’ (ibid., p. 38).

The lack of, and need for, some kind of theory of populism reveals itself further in the way in which Jessop et al.’s critique veers extremely close to the specifics of Laclau’s later theory of populism. Mirroring Laclau’s later distinction between ‘differential logics’ and ‘equivalential logics’, Jessop et al. note how Thatcherism’s ‘Two Nations’ strategy is based on a ‘*single, vertical cleavage*’ (or Laclau might say: ‘internal frontier’), that opposes the ‘productive to the parasitic’ (Jessop et al., 1984, p. 51 (emphasis in original); Laclau, 2005).⁶⁹ In contrast, the Keynesian welfare state is seen by Jessop et al. as a ‘collectivist’ project that cannot abide such a frontier (ibid.). As we have seen, Laclau too uses the welfare state as an example of a non-antagonistic utopia of differential, administrative logic in contrast to the cleavages of populism (Laclau, 2005, p. 36). Even if the analyses here are not exactly the same, they appear to be at least commensurable, displaying some of the same structural

⁶⁹ I will develop the content of this binary – the stigmatisation of those who ‘don’t work’ – in Chapter Four.

features. Jessop et al. attempt to fend off any accusations of similarity with a discourse-focused theory:

This is not to suggest that Thatcherism reduces all social antagonisms to the 'productive/parasitic' cleavage in some sort of discourse of equivalence. Other dichotomies are also deployed in Thatcherism, e.g. individual freedom vs. state coercion, East vs West, etc. (Jessop et al., 1984, p. 51)

But this distinction posits a weak, straw man of discourse theory and merely underlines Jessop et al.'s proximity to it further. While it is true to say that in Laclau's model a particular chain of equivalence has its context-specific strengths and weaknesses ('extension' and 'intension') should it reach quasi-universality across the social, there is nothing in his discourse that precludes there being a number of chains of equivalence being deployed at the same time in different contexts and struggles. In any case, Jessop et al. conclude that the single cleavage of productive/parasitic 'does provide a most useful insight into the dynamic of Thatcherism', but go no further in cashing out what this social cleavage means for a theory of hegemony (or 'political ontology'), as Laclau does (ibid.).

In symmetry with the discourse-orientated approaches that Jessop et al. seek to oppose, their method is therefore one-sided in another direction: understanding Thatcherism primarily according to its accumulation strategy, institutional design, policy direction and voting base begs the question as to what is unique about Thatcherism's successful populism so as to make it so successful?

Significantly, as previously alluded to, Jessop et al.'s interventions came in 1984 and tentatively predicted Thatcherism's decline. They point to apparent serious weaknesses and contradictions in Thatcherism's economic policy and its declining base of support, attempting to show that these tensions are the secret to the fragility of its particular hegemony. This prediction did not come to fruition: Thatcherism would continue to be hegemonic in Britain for another six years (taking Thatcher's leadership itself as a marker) and arguably the shift in political parameters that its hegemony achieved has remained in force for decades since (more on this hegemonic trajectory in the following chapters). This

suggests that however aggressively the Thatcher government dismantled trade union power, however much destruction was rendered unto the manufacturing sector and however much violence was done to the unemployed, the project of Thatcherism managed to reproduce consent and justify its coercion through its particular brand of (authoritarian) populism. The question is thus posed: how, if the economic strategy was so flawed, and so incommensurable with the material interests of the popular support it had garnered, did Thatcherism manage to be hegemonic for so long? This is a situation that is to be explained, not ignored.

In 1990, with the benefit of hindsight, Colin Leys concludes that while Jessop et al.'s alternative approach 'demonstrates the power and indispensability of "traditional" political economy', it remains itself 'limited' insofar as it often ignores the key questions that Hall was trying to answer (Leys, 1990, p. 119).

Because [Jessop et al.] reject the centrality of ideology, they underestimate the Conservatives' accomplishment in securing at least national acquiescence in a new kind of national accommodation to the forces of the world market. It is true that the effects of this accommodation are likely to cost the Conservatives the next election,⁷⁰ but neither Hall nor anyone else has ever maintained that Thatcherism had discovered the secret of permanent electoral success. What may well be permanent, however, is the Thatcherite 'settlement' – at least as permanent as that of the post-war "Keynesian welfare state". (ibid.).

3. Consolidating an approach to hegemony

I want to claim that the different, contrasting theoretical perspectives presented here are not mutually exclusive. That is, integration can occur if we place significance on different contributions to different *aspects* of the mechanisms of hegemony, thereby allocating each theory a certain amount of explanatory power. Criticisms of Hall and Laclau's ideological and/or discursive readings of hegemony reveal important limitations to an understanding of

⁷⁰ It didn't cost the Conservatives the next election.

hegemony that deals solely, or even primarily, with the dynamics of ideology, discourse articulation or what we might call relations of 'mere' political power. By looking closely at specific hegemonic formations, such as Thatcherism, it appears that there are deeper, more intransitive factors (such as basic relations between capital and labour, specific labour market policies and so on) that (partially) determine subjects within capitalism, set the agenda for the space(s) of articulation and generally provide parameters for hegemony.

Hall's analysis of Thatcherism as hegemonic should be understood (as he explicitly intended it to be) as limited to its ideological aspects. Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony is a coherent model of how discourse interpolates subjects along chains of equivalence, but their political ontology cannot interpret economic relations without flattening them to political relationships of discourse or of simple inter-personal control. If we want to allow space for an account of wage labour, in an effort to contribute to a more integral theory of hegemony, we have to go beyond their analyses whilst retaining their strengths.

Equally however, as has been argued, discourse and ideology are essential to the reproduction of hegemonic situations (including the reproduction of these deeper intransitive factors), and critics of Hall and Laclau can lean too far in the other direction, either providing a less convincing account of discursive/ideological functioning, not providing one at all, or even presupposing elements of the discursive approach implicitly. Ideology and equivalential articulation are fundamental to securing a hegemony, and they act, in turn, as conditions of possibility of securing and reproducing regimes of accumulation, state structures and wage labour relations.

How can these differences and co-dependencies within hegemony be theorised together coherently? How can we bring together an analysis of relatively intransitive 'structures' with an analysis of hegemonic articulations? I want to conclude this chapter by drawing on two distinctions. First, I will adapt a distinction borrowed from Joseph (2002), in order to make the insights from across this theoretical spectrum work conjointly in producing a robust approach to hegemony that avoids economism on the one hand – there is no single, necessary logic to history or to the dynamics of wage labour – and pan-politicism on the other; there is not a single, political logic that determines *all* social relations either. To

complement Joseph's distinction, I will also draw on Laclau's distinction of 'sedimentation' and 'reactivation'. This final section will unite the concepts developed thus far in my thesis, and establish a theoretical platform with which to tackle the phenomena of wage labour through the lens of hegemony.

3.1 Two 'aspects' of hegemony

Jonathan Joseph's account of hegemony is highly critical of post-structuralist and humanist readings of hegemony,⁷¹ which he categorises generally as readings that reduce hegemony 'to its expression' (Joseph, 2002, pp. 99 – 121). That is to say, for Joseph, understandings of hegemony that identify it exclusively with discursive construction, or merely active political struggle, flatten the concept to the manner in which it is 'expressed'; hegemony, as understood in this way, would be nothing but these actualised practices. We've seen how this characterisation might be applied generally to both Laclau and Mouffe's model and also to Hall's more conjunctural take on Thatcherism. Both hegemony understood as the discursive articulation of meaningful elements, or as an equivalential chain of demands, functions at the level of (signifying) expression (whether as language or via connected social practices, the structured chain of elements (discourse) is *expressed*). Equally, Thatcherite hegemony as 'authoritarian populism' or 'regressive modernisation' implies an expressive practice (to garner consent and justify coercion) that contains the elements that make up its ideological patchwork.

As we've seen, these accounts – taken on their own – flatten the concept of hegemony so that economic factors that function according to different logics are either dissolved of their specificity or their absence implies that they might be understood as irrelevant to a hegemonic situation. I've articulated why this flattening is insufficient by, firstly, critiquing Laclau and Mouffe's (mis)reading of (Marx's) categories that are essential to the critique of capitalism, by revealing the questions of economic purpose that their theory begs, and by questioning their general categorisation of Marxism, which prevents potentially useful

⁷¹ Without unpacking the various sections where Joseph deals with each thinker in turn, we can summarise that he includes, for example, Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe under the categorisation of post-structuralist, and E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams as humanist.

insights from that tradition being mobilised. Secondly, I have noted the importance of statecraft and of economic determinants in the Thatcherite hegemonic moment, which Hall's 'Thatcherism-as-new-*senso comune*' reading does not include (nor preclude, it should be noted).

To avoid flattening hegemony to its expression, but also to avoid a rigidly structuralist account (what Laclau might call an 'institutional discourse'), Joseph proposes a 'distinction, necessarily crude in its nature...between a deeper hegemony that operates at a structural level and a surface hegemony which is embodied in conscious hegemonic projects' (ibid., p. 128).⁷² This distinction is always going to be at least minimally imprecise, because 'hegemony is not a thing or discrete social object but a series of mutually dependent social relations', and therefore where a project ends and structure starts will often be hard to identify.

Structural hegemony refers to the relatively 'intransigent' processes/social relations that ensure 'the unity and cohesion of the social system' (ibid.). Joseph points to fundamental economic relations and the processes of the state apparatus as examples of this more sedimented and 'pathway-determining' hegemony (ibid.). While it is possible to describe these structural processes, structural hegemony is in force even when (and especially when) its effects and function are not consciously expressed by the subjects it conditions; hegemonic structures can be, in this sense, more basic even than expressible *senso comune*.

Hegemonic projects on the other hand exist 'in a more conscious, political and manifold sense' (ibid.). Hegemonic projects are often dependent on deeper, more intransigent hegemonic structures but 'how these conscious projects emerge, however, is not pre-given and the concept of emergence stresses that such projects have their own irreducible dynamics' (ibid.). For example, a prolonged worker struggle against exploitative employer practices around the level wages and/or the status of employee contracts presupposes the existence of legal structures which they can harness or resist, as well as the (structural)

⁷² Joseph criticises, for example, Mandel (1980; 1978) for encouraging 'a view of history based less on social relations, human actions, class struggle and hegemonic projects, and more on the development of the productive forces' (Joseph, 2002, p. 183-4).

economic relation of wage-labour itself which they are not (in this example) calling into question. In other words, the legal and economic structures set the terms for the hegemonic contestation.⁷³ Nevertheless, the nature, success and effects of this struggle cannot be simply read off these economic and legal structures that are involved.

Structural hegemony and hegemonic projects are 'clearly linked', are 'mutually dependent' and even 'presuppose each other' for Joseph (ibid., p. 128 and p. 132). 'Structural hegemony and surface hegemony [hegemonic projects] are two aspects of a continual process', where hegemonic projects 'represent the political moment in the reproduction of the structures of the social formation' and, vice versa, structures are '*expressed*' or '*actualised*' in hegemonic projects (ibid., p. 131 and p. 133). The nature of this actualisation cannot be determined in advance (therefore there is no 'mission of history' or fully-determined 'essential' driver of society), but the grounding structures can be at least known and certain tendencies predicted. For example, under capitalism 'the process of accumulation must be facilitated', and can be done by any number of hegemonic projects with their own properties and tendencies, e.g. Keynesianism, neoliberalism (in the form of Thatcherism, Blairism etc.), fascist protectionism, socialist protectionism, state capitalism and so on (ibid., p. 133). Structures and projects may be actualised at different 'levels' of hegemony, but they are never wholly autonomous of each other.

On a smaller scale, and of great relevance to my thesis, we can hypothesise that the wage-labour social relation (that grounds and involves other social relations)⁷⁴ is structurally fundamental to capitalism, with its own effects, and around which projects with *their* own characteristics vie for hegemonic position. To use Edwards' title (1979), the workplace is a 'contested terrain', but the terrain's broad parameters are set by structures fundamental to that society. For example, in a later chapter we will ask how the discourse of a 'work ethic' is mobilised across hegemonic projects in order to legitimate the wage-labour relationship fundamental to capitalism. The work ethic can take many forms and will relate to different economic structures at different historical conjunctures, but within a broadly capitalist

⁷³ We could also note how, in this example, the economic power (rooted in the economic logic) of each of the parties has significant effects on the struggle itself.

⁷⁴ This is the subject of the next chapter.

hegemony it will relate to wage-labour in at least *some* way. For example, I will look at how Thatcherism and later the 'Third Way' projects gave wage-labour particular significances as part of their hegemonic projects, and how they modified existing (welfare) state structures in order to complement this shift in discourse.

The theorisation of this co-dependency between structures and projects is further complicated due to the fact that the lines between structure and project are sometimes not easily drawn. For example, trade unions were at one point an emergent hegemonic project amongst workers in the late nineteenth century, but today they can be understood as institutions that act as part of the entrenched, relatively intransigent structure of capitalist hegemonies (Miliband, 1984). Equally, the welfare state is recognisably an (infra)structure of contemporary capitalism, which has functionally remained in existence throughout different hegemonic projects – although not without important differences and changes at different points. However, the welfare state is at the same time recognisable as the product of a (once) new hegemonic project within capitalism – early twentieth-century liberalism and then later post-war social democracy (as discussed at length by Hall, Laclau and Jessop in turn).

To avoid an ontological dualism, or reification, I suggest that we must claim that all structures were once products of projects of one kind or another; Joseph does not address this in his text, and as such his theory remains problematic, perhaps even fetishistic. To help make sense of the identity and distinction between hegemonic projects and hegemonic structures, we can draw on categories that Laclau uses in his *New Reflections* essay (1990). There, Laclau draws on Husserl's writing on scientific method and applies it to a theory of political processes. For Husserl, 'the practice of any scientific discipline entails a routinization in which the results of previous scientific investigation tend to be taken for granted' (Laclau, 1990, p. 34). When original scientific thought becomes routine, it becomes 'sedimented', its origins forgotten, giving the appearance of necessity, fixity and ahistoricity.

In contrast, the act of recovering, in thought, the constitutive activity of this original science is called 'reactivation' (ibid.). Laclau redeploys these two categories with regards to hegemonic, social and political practices:

Insofar as an act of institution [of certain practices] has been successful, a 'forgetting of the origins' tends to occur; the system of possible alternatives tends to vanish and the traces of the original contingency to fade. This is the moment of sedimentation...[Reactivation] consists of rediscovering, through the emergence of new antagonisms, the contingent nature of so-called 'objectivity'. (ibid., p. 35).

There exist *sedimented* quasi-objective practices which appear natural, without origins and which have become routine; wage-labour would be an example of such a practice. Equally, these sedimented practices can be 'reactivated' so as to reveal their contingency and question their continued existence via antagonism: this is the practice of politics for Laclau (ibid.).⁷⁵ Using Laclau, therefore, we can say that both hegemonic structures and projects are ensembles of social practices of different degrees of 'sedimentation' (Laclau, 1990, p. 34). Structures are 'routinized' and naturalised, and projects either reactivate elements of these sedimented practices and transform them, or else retrench and re-routinize them.

To introduce these categories back into Joseph, we can say that hegemonic projects can, at certain points, transform the deeper hegemonic structures of society that they relate to. This would be a process of what Laclau refers to as the 'reactivation' of sedimented quasi-objectivity (Laclau, 1990). When hegemonic projects do this, they move from mere contestation over the content of the particular 'surface' hegemonic project to a more integral shift within, or away from, capitalist hegemony as such (ibid., p. 130). I.e. when structural relations are challenged via reactivation, the contingency of capitalist social relations is revealed, opening up the possibility of their transformation. To return to the example of worker struggles,

this [project-induced] moment where strike action goes beyond a struggle for wages and starts to challenge the whole basis of the production process, as might be seen, for example, with the British miners' strike of 1984-5. When such struggles truly

⁷⁵ It is also arguably the function of critical theory.

move to the deeper hegemonic level, conflicts emerge between agents [and collective wills] and the structures themselves. (Joseph, 2002, p. 133)

Whether the miners' strike genuinely threatened the underlying hegemonic structures of capitalist hegemony is open to question, but we can see how Joseph's project-structure model, coupled with Laclau's concepts of 'sedimentation' and 'reactivation', provides certain criteria by which we can judge how transformative a particular hegemonic project truly is. For instance, a programme of national or public ownership does challenge dominant property discourses and practices that are crucial to the structures of capitalist society; private ownership of assets and production in general is, classically understood, one of the fundamentals of capitalism. That is to say, the project of transforming ownership conditions is not an insignificant transformation that leaves hegemonic structures untouched, but rather does indeed disturb *structurally*-inscribed, *sedimented* relations. However, armed with an analysis of *other* sedimented practices and antagonistic relations involved within current hegemonies (e.g. gender or race relations, wage-labour relations, systemic environmental degradation, etc.), we can see how ownership programmes alone are not by themselves sufficient to supersede the current hegemony.⁷⁶

Indeed, such a narrow criteria for what counts as radically transformative could lead to 'the absurd notion according to which the degree of "leftness" of a programme is gauged by the number of companies it proposes to nationalize' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 75). To continue with Laclau and Mouffe's comments here, even if ownership changes refer simply to a shift from private to state hands (therefore keeping sedimented state *structures* unperturbed), then real 'democratisation' can easily be neutralised. Reflecting on this topic in the context of the twentieth century, Laclau and Mouffe conclude that 'social democracy became a politico-economic alternative *within* a given State form, and not a radical alternative to that form' (ibid.). Certain sedimented practices were reactivated, whilst others remained sedimented.

⁷⁶ This recalls the issue of Soviet 'communism' that was touched on at the end of the last chapter.

Laclau and Mouffe's theory of hegemony in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* can fit in with the model proposed here.⁷⁷ If we utilise Laclau and Mouffe's reading of hegemony as a reading appropriate to the analysis of *projects* (rather than to the analysis of hegemony in all of its relevant facets), then we can largely avoid the problematic position of economic categories in their theory (as these are more relevant to the hegemonic *structure* of capitalism). Discursive contests and the construction of equivalential chains are then to be understood as *relating* to the more intransitive, sedimented structures of hegemony, either adapting to, modifying, or radically reactivating/transforming them depending on the context. Discursive antagonism reactivates 'objective' hegemonic practices, in Laclau's Husserlian language. Recalling the above example of the state as a fundamental structure of hegemony, the task of hegemonic projects would be of a 'deepening and articulation of a variety of antagonisms within both the State and civil society, which allows a 'war of position' against the *dominant hegemonic forms*' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 75. My emphasis).

In the final chapter of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, we find a way of discussing (non-essentialist) antagonisms *within the context* of broader hegemonic structures that approximates, and almost implies, the method I am constructing here. There, Laclau and Mouffe point to the new 'hegemonic formation' arising after the Second World War, consisting of 'a series of changes at the level of the labour process' and the 'form of the state' (ibid., p. 160).

If we examine the problem from an economic point of view, the decisive change is what Michel Aglietta has termed the transition from an extensive to an intensive regime of accumulation. The latter is characterised by the spread of capitalist relations of production to the whole set of social relations, and the subordination of the latter to the logic of production for profit. (ibid.; Aglietta, 2015 [1979])

⁷⁷ This mapping comes with a caveat however: for Laclau and Mouffe, hegemonic contestation/populism does not necessarily require conscious activity for it to emerge. Hegemonic projects can be the result of a convergence, not seen in advance by conscious participants, of different demands or different ideological elements.

Alongside new structural (sedimented) economic realities, we must also consider, they claim, the new hegemonic structure that is the Keynesian Welfare State:

[F]or if on the one hand this new type of state was necessary to perform a series of functions required by the new capitalist regime of accumulation, it is also the result of what Bowles and Gintis have called the “post-World War accord between capital and labour”. (Ibid., p. 161; Bowles and Gintis, 1982)

The state form and structural capitalist social relations interact of course: in the case of the Keynesian hegemonic project, social security ‘allows workers to survive without being obliged to sell their labour-power at any price’, thereby transforming the relationship between buyers and sellers of labour-power (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 62). On top of, and interacting with, these hegemonic structures, the deepening ‘democratic revolution’ that Laclau and Mouffe are interested in points beyond the ambiguous, Keynesian hegemonic project, with new social movements exercising different antagonisms, deepening democratic reform in pursuit of autonomy (ibid., p. 164). We can see here that in these passages Laclau and Mouffe *relate* political struggle to broader, sedimented political and economic structures, whilst allowing for the possibility for these political struggles (hegemonic projects) to modify (or reactivate) these structures. There is therefore at least the suggestion here of deeper structures within capitalist hegemony, irreducible to (but not unrelated to) the plane of articulation that is governed by the (discursive) production of meaningful, open totalities.

We can also utilise Joseph’s and Laclau’s distinctions to integrate Hall’s, Gamble’s and Jessop et al.’s respective accounts of Thatcherism, which approach the problem of hegemony from different starting points. Andrew Gamble’s integrative analysis of Thatcherism’s ‘recasting of political discourse’, its ‘statecraft’ and its ‘economic management’ for example, fits well with the project-structure method deployed here. Gamble’s analysis concludes that there are three elements necessary for any new hegemonic project:

1. A vision of the lines of future economic development
2. A means to make this vision effective
3. A means to make it popular

(Gamble, 1988, p. 180)

Read along Joseph's lines, these elements amount to saying that a hegemonic project has to secure the basic relations of capitalism (including wage-labour relations and some kind of regime of accumulation), and in order to do so must harness other (coercive) hegemonic structures (e.g. legal, state) as well as produce as much consent as possible from the subaltern for these actions (using a discursive, populist strategy).

We saw how Thatcherism cannot be understood in a one-sided fashion, either by focusing only on its discourse/ideology (at the expense of its economic and statecraft practices), nor by neglecting the importance of this discourse/ideology (by trying to give a state-centred or economics-focused reading). Thatcherism should indeed be understood integrally by considering how it changed the 'regime of accumulation' away from a manufacturing base towards a finance-centred model. But securing this new regime of accumulation was expressed and achieved politically (as a project) by attacking the unions, restructuring the (welfare) state, privatising industries, positioning the Conservative Party as both 'modernisers' and 'Victorians', and exercising, to use Hall's words, the 'British masochism' (Hall, 1988).⁷⁸ Here we can also make use of Jessop et al.'s own, relevant contributions to the taxonomy of Thatcherite discourse: its so-called 'Two Nations' strategy that separates 'productive/parasitic', and 'employed/unemployed' (Jessop et al., 1984, p. 50). The project was populist, authoritarian, modern and regressive, and reactivated the incumbent structures of capitalism to forge a new relationship between structures and discourses.

Identifying this complex, hegemonic mixture of chains of equivalence, institutional design, economic policy and the continued importance of capitalism's sedimented social relations will be attempted – albeit with a narrowed remit – in the following chapters, where I

⁷⁸ Jessop et al. suggest that AP can designate a 'definite hegemonic project which articulates an alternative vision of the national-popular interest with the specific policies necessary to secure its realisation' (Jessop et al., 1984, p. 56).

attempt to draw together an analysis of wage-labour. Chapter Three documents the emergence of wage labour as a hegemonic structure (in the UK) and the structure and architecture of the workplace, including the micro-physics of discipline. These structural elements of hegemony are then brought into conversation with a coherent account of what the commodity labour-power is/does.

In the final chapter (Four) on 'hegemonic projects and wage labour' I will turn to address a case study of a hegemonic project and its specific relationship to the structures relevant to wage-labour. Using my consolidated Gramscian framework, I will focus on New Labour as a hegemonic project that reconfigured (amongst other things) wage-labour in certain ways by utilising a particular form of the work ethic as part of its discourse and by transforming – i.e. reactivating – the structures of the welfare state. The work ethic is a discourse fundamental to understanding how consent is manufactured and how the coercion of wage-labour is legitimated. Focusing on New Labour as a case study of neoliberalism (and a descendent of Thatcherism's project) in effect in the UK in this regard maintains the understanding – held by Gramsci and Hall – that any analysis of hegemony has to be conjunctural. In this concluding chapter, key concepts of the analysis of hegemony drawn from the first two chapters will be brought into contact with the analysis of wage labour carried out in chapter three.

Chapter Three

Hegemonic Structures and Wage Labour:

The (wage) labouring society and hegemony in the 'hidden abode'

Utilising the interpretative framework of hegemony as constituted by a co-determination of sedimented social practices (that I have referred to as 'structures') and particular hegemonic 'projects', the following chapters set out to detail what these involve in relation to wage labour. In the current chapter, I will focus on the nature of wage labour understood as a key hegemonic *structure* within capitalism, and in turn discuss this structure in the language of hegemony that I have developed so far. To reiterate, by hegemonic structures I mean sedimented practices that are relatively intransigent and that routinize particular social relations. These practices do not have to be consciously attended to in the act of their performance; that is, they do not have to be (and often *are not*) activated *consciously* by subjects each time they are enacted (Joseph, 2002). Hegemonic structures are the well-trodden pathways that subjects take on a daily basis, and, while historically contingent, they are experienced as relatively permanent (or sometimes even as absolutely necessary).

Primarily, in this chapter I demonstrate the importance of wage labour as a sedimented social relation (structure) within capitalism, and thus I also demonstrate its fundamentality to any given hegemonies within capitalist society or 'mode of production' (to use Marx's language). This is relevant both to discussions of the nature of waged work as well as to any discussion of hegemony at any level; the implication being that questions of political leadership, freedom, power and democracy cannot ignore this fundamental practice of everyday life, and equally, debates around waged work cannot ignore its 'macro-level' character as a key hegemonic (that is, political) structure. It is my argument that the reproduction of hegemony within capitalism requires, and entails, the existence of social relations that are, in part, anchored in, or in some relation with, wage labour as a structural social relation. The hegemonic structure of wage labour also has implications for the condition of *being* (or rather, *being made to be*) labour power/capacity that subjects find themselves in in capitalist hegemonies. Each of these issues are here detailed in turn.

Drawing on lessons from Chapter Two regarding the debates around the 'economic', this chapter maintains the possibility of analysing wage labour without treating the 'economic' in abstraction, as a 'sphere' or 'realm' distinct from 'politics'; production is always political. Equally, however, we must be careful not to do away with the critique of political economy and the particular form of power (effects) that we can reveal via said critique; economic logics exist, but not in abstraction from power relations.

With regards to theoretical traditions, my task in this chapter is also to continue to bring together the literature on hegemony with the labour process theory briefly indicated in the last chapter; this will mean trying to bring together concepts from these traditions in new ways. For instance, where and in what sense, can we identify the two sides of hegemony – coercion and consent – in relation to wage labour at the scale of the social system as well as that of the workplace? How does Gramsci's notion of 'subalterneity' dovetail with the concrete practices of wage labour(ing)?

The chapter concludes that the hegemonic structure of wage labour can be characterised:

- 1) By its fundamental position within capitalist societies, predominantly guaranteed by the historical and continual separation of people from the means to their subsistence (so-called 'primitive accumulation'). This situation is understood as a 'foundational coercion'.
- 2) By the mechanisms of coercion and consent occurring *within* workplaces, in order to secure control over wage labourers and guarantee the realisation of labour in the labour process. Hegemony is in this context demonstrated to be a response to the indeterminacy inherent in the purchase and use of labour power.
- 3) By the creation of a specific kind of ideal subaltern subject, that/who is, in part, the product of each of the above phenomena.

1. Wage labour as inescapable within capitalist societies

In the previous chapter we already started to look at the object in question: wage labour. Wage labour, as we saw, is a topic common to the key literature on hegemony: Gramsci's writing on Americanism and Fordist/Taylorist production, as well as Laclau and Mouffe's treatment of the 'politics of production', constitute examples of hegemony theory trying to come to terms with an activity seemingly fundamental to the society in question.

Wage labour is the practice that results from the exchange of labour-power for money. Labour-power is treated in many ways like any other commodity – as some exchangeable thing, of equal value to something else. Here we are not dealing with labour as such – that metabolic 'process between man and nature' that various thinkers, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, have picked up on in Marx's work (see Arendt, 1998 [1958]). Rather, wage labour is a situation wherein 'a man brings his labour-power to market for sale as a commodity' and then is put to use in the buyer's employ (Marx, 1990, p. 283).

This exchange that grounds wage labour is typically understood by scholars as the '*differentia specifica*' of capitalist societies (e.g. Braverman, 1974, p. 35). Wage labour has, however, existed in other types of society, including ancient Greece – despite the co-existence of slave labour (Meiksins Wood, 2016). What constitutes the uniqueness of wage labour under capitalism therefore – in comparison to these previous societies – is the unique historical relationship that labourers have to *markets*, that is, systems of (ostensibly) reciprocal exchange.

1.1 The market as imperative and the 'free labourer'

As Meiksins Wood notes, markets have existed for centuries, across different types of social systems, but predominantly as an 'opportunity' for the seller to improve their lot (Meiksins Wood, 2017). Individuals would often – depending on their particular circumstance and status – have their own means to survival, via the use of some common land or the use of a lord's land (in exchange for a quantity of produce), and would engage in markets in order to

sell their surplus produce for extra financial gain.⁷⁹ Within capitalist societies, by contrast, the market exists as an ‘imperative’, i.e. exchanging commodities at the market has become non-optional, essential to survival, i.e. essential to the reproduction of life (ibid.). If you have goods to sell at the market, i.e. if you already own a stock of exchangeable commodities, then you may be able to prosper, accumulate wealth through the continual sale and purchase of goods, employ labourers and ultimately establish a system for this accumulation (i.e. start a business). If, however, you own no commodities to sell, then you have only one thing worth exchanging on the market: your capacity to work for another.

How, and in what sense, does the market become an imperative rather than an opportunity in capitalism, if ostensibly markets are based on a ‘free exchange’ between the buyer and seller who each require what the other has? Marx writes that ‘in order that the owner of money may find labour-power on the market as a commodity for sale, various conditions must first be fulfilled’ (Marx, 1990, p. 270).⁸⁰ These required conditions are not apparent at the point of exchange – which appears to be between free and equal individuals – and yet they form the necessary, coercive condition for it. Crucial here is the notion that the seller of labour-power must be ‘free’ in a double sense: she is free on the one hand insofar as she is free to sell her labour-power, and ‘hence h[er] person’ (ibid., p. 271). On the other hand, the labourer is ‘free’ insofar as ‘he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realisation of his labour-power’ (ibid., p. 272-3). That is to say, the seller of labour-power, being ‘freed’ of the means by which she could create her own commodities for sale, has nothing to sell but her labour-power, her capacity to labour.

It is clear that this ‘freedom’ is really a compulsion however, for in market-*imperative* society (capitalism) the means by which we can survive – food, shelter, clothes – are themselves accessed only through the market, that is, only through the exchange of equivalent values, usually via the form of money. The ‘free labourer’ is therefore free to

⁷⁹ This is not intended to be a comprehensive and/or positive picture of precapitalist life, which was suffused with overt, political domination.

⁸⁰ Marx is here dealing in a theoretical abstraction, in order to distil what is going on behind the appearance of free exchange within capitalism: ‘we confine ourselves here to the fact theoretically’ (Marx, 1990, p. 273).

make a choice between starving and the sale of their only commodity, 'labour-power'. S/he is therefore only 'formally "free"', because 'in order to survive, he is placed in the position of a job-seeker' (Macherey, 2015, p. 5).

The condition of coerced 'freedom' to labour is, in contrast to the precarious position of the free labourer, beneficial for the buyers of this labour-power (i.e. for the owners of wealth who wish to accumulate). Positioned on the other side of the exchange, the buyer requires people-as-labour-power in order to transform raw materials (the 'means' that they own) into commodities for sale. In other words, the owners of money require free labourers to be readily 'available' (that is, looking for buyers of their time and energy) in order that commodities can be made, more money be produced from the sale of said commodities, so that then more labour-power can be bought, more commodities can be made, and so on (Marx, 1990, p. 274). This cycle constitutes the skeleton 'circuit of capital' (Arthur, 1996). Capitalist society is rooted in, and defined by, this cyclical relationship of co-dependency between buyers and sellers of labour-power.

Thus, the apparent freedom ('freedom' to choose which buyer of your labour-power) and equality (between buyers and sellers of things of equal value) conceals a coercion at the heart of capitalist society; a coercion that is maintained in and through the co-dependency between buyers and sellers of labour-power. The sellers of labour-power are compelled for their survival – or reproduction – to perform this function *in* the market (as a bearer of a commodity to be bought and sold) and *for* the market (as a creator of other commodities for exchange). The commodity labour-power, and the treatment of subjects *as* labour-power, is therefore at the core of this socio-economic system.

Such a society is not a natural or necessary state of affairs. Marx is clear that:

nature does not produce on the one hand owners of money or commodities, and on the other hand men possessing nothing but their own labour-power. This relation has no basis in natural history, nor does it have a social basis common to all periods of human history. (Marx, 1990, p. 273)

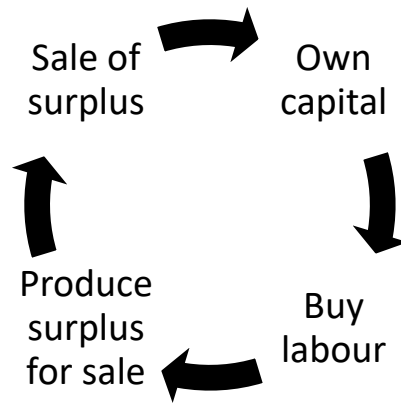
A society of 'free' labourers, wherein an 'immense collection of commodities', including labour-power is bought and sold, is historically unique and only fairly recently normalised into *senso comune*.⁸¹ Moving beyond Marx's 'theoretical' abstractions then (Marx, 1990, p. 273), it is important to understand exactly how these social relations, and the market as imperative, came about historically. How is/was the 'free labourer' 'freed' from their means to survival, and compelled to engage in the market with only their selves to sell?

1.2 Primitive Accumulation as 'foundational coercion'

Primitive accumulation cut through traditional lifeways like scissors. The first blade served to undermine the ability of people to provide for themselves. The other blade was a system of stern measures required to keep people from finding alternative survival strategies outside the system of wage labor. (Perelman, 2000, p. 14)

'So-called primitive accumulation' is Marx's name for the process required to force the situation wherein the 'free' labourer must engage with the owner of wealth via the sale of their capacity to labour. These brutal histories, written in 'letters of blood and fire' (Marx, 1990, p. 875), explain what classical political economy cannot. For Adam Smith, the origins of market society lie in the sterile formula that 'the accumulation of stock must, in the nature of things, be previous to the division of labour' (Smith, 1976, p. 277). Marx identifies a circular aporia here in traditional accounts of the origins of capitalist society: the accumulation of capital requires a surplus to sell; a surplus presupposes a system wherein 'free' labourers produce a surplus beyond their wage; this system presupposes 'free' labourers on the one hand and owners of wealth on the other; owning wealth requires the accumulation of capital – which returns us to the start of the vicious cycle (Marx, 1990, p.873). As Read puts it, 'in order to accumulate capital, it is necessary to possess capital' (Read, 2002, p. 121).

⁸¹ Though not without continued resistance.



Smith’s account is typical of a quasi-religious origin story of capitalist society – where every beginning point either presupposes a prior process, or else there was a mythical (ex-nihilo) beginning of capitalist accumulation (ibid.). In contrast, Marx’s initial survey of this historical process – found in chapters twenty six and seven in *Capital Volume One* – diagnoses ‘a several centuries-long process, in which a small group of people brutally expropriated the means of production from the people of precapitalist society around the globe’ (Perelman, 2000, p. 26).⁸² This process was global – Marx writes, for example:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. (Marx, 1977, p. 915)

In England – to take an example relevant to the present project – the accumulation of labourers started with a process of land use reform. This was in the context where the productivity of land became – for various reasons – incredibly important for agrarian

⁸² Marx’s critique of classical critical political economy often involves mocking the seemingly pure categories of economics by confronting them with an historical account of the coercive (‘bloody’) foundations of modern capitalism. As Perelman writes, Marx ‘intended this historical analysis to refute the contention of classical political economy that markets supposedly work fairly because invisible hands somehow intelligently guide the world toward inevitable prosperity and even a higher level of culture’ (Perelman, 2000, p. 29)

landlords (Meiksins Wood, 2017, pp. 95 – 120). As landlords required more productive use of their land, tenant farmers competed with each other to be more productive in their use, in order to secure rentable land from these landlords (ibid.). This established a competitive market, and a market 'rate' of productivity to which all farmers would begin to be judged by, as well as making exclusive access to land a vital resource for economic survival. In Foucault's genealogy:

The transition to an intensive agriculture exercised, over the rights to use common lands, over various tolerated practices, over small accepted illegalities, a more and more restrictive pressure...landed property became absolute property: all the tolerated 'rights' that the peasantry had acquired or preserved...were now rejected by the new owners who regarded them quite simply as theft. (Foucault, 1977, p. 85)

The enclosures of common land, whereby previously universally-accessible and useable land was physically and legislatively fenced off, were the product, and most obvious expression, of this process of primitive accumulation in England. These enclosures were eventually cemented in parliamentary legislation that was deployed at an almost exponential rate between 1750 and 1850 (Mingay, 1997).⁸³ 'By the nineteenth century,' Marx writes (perhaps with exaggeration), 'the very memory of the connection between the agricultural labourer and communal property had, of course, vanished' (Marx, 1990, p. 889).

Around the same time as the process of enclosure, punishments for being idle, and/or making a livelihood outside of the wage were also accelerated:

According to a 1572 statute, beggars over the age of fourteen were to be severely flogged and branded with a red-hot iron on the left ear unless someone was willing to take them into service for two years. Repeat offenders over eighteen were to be executed unless someone would take them into service. Third offenses automatically

⁸³ Mingay calculates that between 1730 and 1754 there were on average four parliamentary enclosure Acts per year; the number of Acts then rose dramatically in the period between 1755 and 1764 to twenty-two a year, and even sixty-four in the 1770s (Mingay, 1997, p. 21-22).

resulted in execution (Perelman, 2000, p. 14; see also: Marx 1977, p. 896ff and Mantoux, 1961, p. 432).

Continued resistance on the part of individuals to the enclosure of land and the increasing exclusion of other, market- independent ways of ‘making’ your living, increased the imperative to create a poor population who would be ever ‘available,’ i.e. coerced, for waged work. As Perelman writes:

In fact, almost everyone close to the process of primitive accumulation, whether a friend or foe of labor, agreed with Charles Hall’s (1805) verdict that ‘if they were not poor, they would not submit to employments’ (Perelman, 2000, p. 15; Hall, 1965, p. 144)

This is a glimpse of the historical reality of the theoretical abstraction of the ‘freely available’ worker, utilised by political economy and parodied by Marx; a process of the creation/accumulation of a (waged) working class, ultimately disciplined into accepting and adopting the commodity form of labour-power for sale in order to survive (Cleaver, 1979, p. 75).⁸⁴

These processes, which can be characterised as dispossession and violence (as in the later chapters of *Capital*), but also as the mass-imposition of the commodity form onto human life (Cleaver, 1979), amounted to the steady sedimentation of wage labour as the dominant social relation – what I am calling a hegemonic structure – within an increasingly globalised world.

1.3 Labour markets as the (re)appearance of coercion

We’ve seen how it took highly coercive, violent, means to restructure non- or pre-capitalist communities, nations and societies into market-imperative societies. Once increasingly

⁸⁴ Foucault’s work on discipline converges here with Marx’s initiative to uncover the concealed origins of capitalist society (Foucault, 1977, p. 221). Indeed, Read (2003) amongst others sees Foucault’s work as providing ‘absent’ concepts such as ‘disciplinary power’ to compliment Marx’s work (e.g. Read, 2003, p. 85).

moulded in this way however, the evidence of this foundational coercion is masked, the punishments for deviation is normalised or rendered unnecessary, and the appearance of free exchange between formally equal subjects emerges and becomes established as the *senso comune* of the epoch.

That is to say, once markets became imperative for a great many people, ‘capitalists learned that purely market pressures were more effective’ in subordinating working people than the more brutal coercion of prior primitive accumulation (Perelman, 2000, p. 30).⁸⁵ ‘Direct extra-economic force is still of course used,’ Marx writes,

but only in exceptional cases. In the ordinary run of things, the worker can be left to the “natural laws of production” i.e., it is possible to rely on his dependence on capital, which springs from the conditions of production themselves, and is guaranteed in perpetuity by them. (Marx, 1990, p. 899-900)

For totally different theoretical purposes, Friedrich Hayek expresses the same point: the market as imperative installs a new coercive mechanism into social relations.

[Market] competition produces in this way a kind of impersonal compulsion which makes it necessary for numerous individuals to adjust their way of life in a manner that no deliberate instructions or commands could bring about (Hayek, 2014, . 313)

The move from pre-capitalist to capitalist social relations – from market as opportunity to market as imperative – can thus also be characterised thus as a move from personal relations of domination to largely impersonal, reified, relations of domination via market necessity (Postone, 1993).

There is a temptation here, not without textual support in Marx, to understand primitive accumulation as a pre-capitalist condition for fully-established capitalist markets – a

⁸⁵ This coincides with the trajectory away from quasi-feudal punishments and towards less overtly violent disciplinary measures articulated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*.

conditioning that was completed in history some centuries ago.⁸⁶ However, as authors such as Bonefeld, Read and Perelman are keen to stress, capitalism as a social system *subsists* through its social constitution of coercive dispossession (Bonefeld, 2014, p. 85; Perelman, 2000). Primitive accumulation is not a past act, but is a *permanent* accumulation. This, Bonefeld explains, is manifest in the constant ‘divorce of labour[ing people] from the means of production’, the constant (re)production of the ‘free’ labourer (Bonefeld, 2014, p. 85-6).⁸⁷ This is to say that in some way, primitive accumulation never really finished, but rather persists in and through the dependence upon markets for access to the means to life.⁸⁸ This state of affairs can be written differently as the continued dispossession of immediate access to subsistence for the vast majority of the population. ‘The productive labourer does not represent an eternal condition of labour. Rather, the productive labourer is historically specific. She carries the violence of primitive accumulation within her branded existence as the dispossessed producer’ (ibid., p. 87). The “labour market” is thus what Gramsci would term a ‘determinate market’ – i.e. ‘a determined relation of social forces’ congealed into a quasi-objective order of things ‘guaranteed (that is rendered permanent) by a determined political, moral and juridical superstructure’ (Gramsci, 1971, p. 410); in this case, markets are rendered (relatively) permanent by a founding and continued coercion, and attended to by the laws of the state.⁸⁹

Wage labour in sum, is the generalised practice that is, strictly speaking, the result and continued performance of a coerced dispossession. It is a practice constantly at risk of being naturalised and sedimented and its routinisation contributes to our forgetting of its

⁸⁶ For example, at one point in the *Grundrisse*, Marx writes ‘The conditions and presuppositions of the becoming, or the arising, of capital presuppose precisely that it is not yet in being but merely in becoming; they therefore disappear as real capital arises, capital which itself, on the basis of its own reality, posits the conditions for its realization.’ (Marx 1973, p. 459). However, in *Capital Volume One* we find statements such as: ‘As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale’ (Marx, 1990, p. 874). This suggests an ongoing process, as theorists such as Bonefeld and Read claim.

⁸⁷ ‘In Latin’, Bonefeld writes, ““per” means through, way; and “manere” means to remain, to be continuous; permanent then connotes a lasting character, maintained through and also in time’ (Bonefeld, 2014, p. 85). Primitive accumulation, is therefore really continuous accumulation and dispossession, now routinized as objective quasi-natural practices (wage labour).

⁸⁸ Bonefeld uses the term *aufgehoben*, which he translates as ‘suspended’, to describe the persistence/transformation of primitive accumulation (Bonefeld, 2014, p. 86).

⁸⁹ We would now say, for example, employment law.

(primitive accumulation) origins.⁹⁰ The coercion of market-dependency appears to both buyer and seller of labour-power as an equal exchange between free subjects, and this appearance is key to the consensual agreement to wage labour. In this regard, the labour contract is 'one of the most powerful instruments along with the wage' itself for the garnering of consent to the coercive system of wage labour (Read, 2003, p. 100). The 'legal fiction of the contract takes the worker as an isolated individual free to dispose of his or her labour power, thereby excluding the material and social conditions that constrain and force this exchange' (ibid.). The employment contract is the final seal on the apparently free exchange, petrifying the coercion at the base of the economy by formalising the consent to it.⁹¹

The historical routinization and 'objectification' (Laclau) of wage labour as a structure fundamental to capitalist societies is evidently crucial to an understanding of how any hegemonic project operates within (or against) these parameters.

2. Hegemony in the 'hidden abode': coercion and consent in the workplace

This sphere [of the market], within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labour-power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to, is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is

⁹⁰ Marx's work, as we've seen, as well as subsequent works including Foucault's writings, aim at the 'reactivation' of the origins of capitalist development, which throws the 'necessary' and routine nature of these social relations into doubt.

⁹¹ 'The Roman slave was held by chains; the wage laborer is bound to his owner by invisible threads. The appearance of independence is maintained by a constant change in the person of the individual employer, and by the legal fiction of a contract' (Marx, 1990, p. 719). Here Marx's metaphor for the employment contract, an invisible thread, is highly appropriate: the coercive compulsion to work disappears insofar as it appears as a consensual, mutually beneficial agreement between equal parties. Behind the contract lies the dispossession and coercion to engage with the market that characterises capitalism.

his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself. Beyond the ostensible freedom, equality and utility of the market, of the exchange of labour-power as a commodity, lies the 'hidden abode' of the workplace. (Marx, 1990, p. 280)

Marx's words here, filled with bitter sarcasm and grim foreboding, indicate a contrast between the ostensible 'freedom' in the realm of exchange and what goes on in the workplace once someone's labour-power has been sold to their buyer. Here, at the level of the enterprise, the factory, the office – in other words, the bounded workplace – we see hegemonic power relations in effect more evidently than the quasi-natural, economic, impersonal compulsion of market-dependency just discussed. By considering hegemony within the workplace, we are moving our analysis from looking at the widespread compulsion to engage in wage labour that characterises a key structure of capitalist society, to considering the widespread 'micro-physics' of hegemony that takes place in capillary form, in different locations, on a daily basis.

2.1 (Closing) the gap between labour-power and labour at work

The dynamics of hegemony within wage labouring – i.e. within the workplace, during the working day – revolve around the peculiarities of labour-power as a commodity bought and sold. As sketched in the previous chapter, the human labourer, as labour-power/capacity, is not immediately the labour that it will actualise as part of the labour contract.⁹² Human labour-power is in this way 'indeterminate' (Elson, 1979; Braverman, 1974). That is to say, we have no prescribed activities that we carry out automatically – rather, the human is a 'fluidity, a potential, which in any society has to be socially 'fixed' or objectified' in particular ways (Elson, 1979, p. 128).

It is in this sense that Braverman contrasts human labour-power to that of animal instincts. Despite the fact that the difference between humans and animals is one of degree (and not

⁹² 'Labour-power is pure potential, very much different from the corresponding acts' (Virno, 2015, p. 159). This, as Mezzadra notes, involves an Aristotelian distinction between potency and actualisation (Mezzadra, 2018, p. 58). Note also Braverman's continuous referral to Aristotle's taxonomies and metaphysics throughout his treatment of the problem (Braverman, 1974, p. 31,36).

of kind), there still exists a huge difference between the malleability and mutability of purposes that occurs for humans in contrast to the rest of animal life (Braverman, 1974, p. 33-5). Spiders spin webs because it is in their nature – the specific labour of spinning is inseparable from being a spider. Bees makes hives and beavers make dams mechanically – their potential labouring is always rigidly determined to be the actual hive-making or dam-building they will carry out. For women and men, by contrast, ‘any instinctual patterns of work which they may have possessed at the dawn of their evolution have long since atrophied or been submerged by social forms’ (ibid., p. 34). The diverse history of humankind’s activities demonstrates this simple point: throughout our history as *homo sapiens* and *homo faber*, ‘human labour becomes indeterminate, and its various determinate forms henceforth are the products not of biology but of the complex interaction between tools and social relations, technology and society’ (ibid., p. 35).

Within capitalism this indeterminacy of human labour-power is an issue to be reckoned with in the production process.⁹³ On the one hand, the purposive adaptability of human proto-labourers provides the useful basis upon which is built employers’ (ever-increasing) capital: the ability to increase the productivity of human labour-power – whether through technical augmentation, or by coercion or consent – means there is much potential for the owner of wealth to increase their wealth at higher and higher rates.

The means [the employer] employs may vary from the enforcement upon the worker of the longest possible working day in the early period of capitalism to the use of the most productive instruments of labor and the greatest intensity of labor, but they are always aimed at realising the potential inherent in labor power...for it is

⁹³ This indeterminacy is exacerbated by the fact that strictly speaking, wage labourers do not really ‘sell’ anything. Sandro Mezzadra, amongst others, corrects Marx’s formulation: the free labourer does not ‘sell’ their labour-power (this would be slavery, as Marx himself notes). Rather, they sell their labour-power for a certain amount of time (the contents of is to be determined by the purchaser). We are therefore really talking about a lease or rental agreement (Mezzadra, 2018, p. 60; Macherey, 2015, p. 31). The case is different in ‘piece-work’ – i.e. when workers are only paid for a completed task, no matter how long they took to make it. Piece-work was very common up until at least 1870 (and still is today in new firms such as Deliveroo, Mechanical Turk and TaskRabbit). By paying workers only for the completed ‘piece’ of work, capitalists effectively reduce the difference between labour power and actual labour (Braverman, 1974, pp. 41-3).

this that will yield for him the greatest surplus and thus the greatest profit.

(Braverman, 1974, p. 39)

At the same time, this indeterminacy of labour-power means that nothing is certain; the actualisation of labour from labour power might not occur in fact – or might not occur at the level /rate that the capitalist would like.

But if the capitalist builds upon this distinctive quality and potential of human labour power, it is also this quality, by its very indeterminacy, which places before him his greatest challenge and problem. (Braverman, 1974, p. 39)

This ‘problem’ for the capitalist, provokes the need for control over the labour process. From their perspective nothing is assured and there is everything to be done; the labourer has sold their time, but can never sell a water-tight guarantee of their commitment to the aim of efficient production and profit for their employer. In this sense *‘the labour process has become the responsibility of the capitalist’* (ibid., italics in original).⁹⁴

If it is true that the dynamics of wage labour, including the specificities of the commodity form of labour capacity, requires as part of its exercise that there exist some form of control in order to guarantee that labour power becomes labour (i.e. becomes an actual product or service), then this requires particular techniques of coercion or consent. Each of these sides to the hegemonic coin needs to be unpacked further.

2.2 Workplace management as techniques of coercion and consent

In the practice of management, both halves of the ‘centaur of hegemony’ (to use Gramsci’s metaphor) are brought to bear on the workforce: coercion and consent.⁹⁵ In an earlier

⁹⁴ The move to the ‘hidden abode’, wherein labour-power is at the practical disposal of their employer is what Marx calls the ‘real subsumption’ of labour (as compared to the ‘formal subsumption’ which is merely the exchange). (Marx, 1990, pp. 1019 – 38).

⁹⁵ Recalling a discussion from chapter one, Gramsci uses ‘Machiavelli’s Centaur – half animal and half-human’ in order to flesh out ‘the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilisation’ involved in hegemony (Gramsci, 1971, p. 169-70).

chapter, we saw how Gramsci was an early interpreter of what Taylorist ‘scientific management’ meant for hegemony within the newly emerging industrial workplace and what it was doing to labouring subjects. Labour process theorists, whether drawing explicitly on Gramsci or not, have since extended these insights in a plethora of directions (See Thompson, 1989). What is particularly relevant here is the differentiation and co-mingling of coercion and consent in different forms within the ‘putting to work’ of labour power that is wage labour in the workplace. For instance, in his canonical study, Edwards splits his model of workplace control into techniques of ‘direction’, ‘evaluation’ and ‘discipline’. Note how ‘discipline’ in Edwards’ vocabulary is not just about coercion and correction, but also involves the garnering of consent to some degree (‘to elicit cooperation’ ... ‘enforce compliance’) (see Box 1).

1. Direction, or a mechanism or method by which the employer directs work tasks, specifying what needs to be done, in what order, with what degree of precision or accuracy. And in what period of time.
2. Evaluation, or a procedure whereby the employer supervises and evaluates to correct mistakes or other failures in production, to assess each worker’s performance, and to identify individual workers or groups of workers who are not performing work tasks adequately.
3. Discipline, or an apparatus that the employer uses to discipline and reward workers, in order to elicit cooperation and enforce compliance with the capitalist’s direction of the labour process.

(Box 1: Edwards’ schema of types of workplace control, 1979, p. 18)

Indeed, as with political hegemony at a society-level, hegemony in the ‘hidden abode’ often involves an inextricable matrix of coercion-consent that is hard to untangle. I will here distinguish coercion and consent theoretically for the purposes of exposition, but with the caveat that things are never this clear cut.

Taylorism (introduced in Chapter One) is perhaps the most famous referent for management techniques.⁹⁶ For Braverman, amongst others (e.g. those in the *operaismo* milieu (CSE, 1976)), Taylorism is nothing less than ‘the verbalisation of the capitalist mode of production’ (Braverman, 1974, p. 60). Despite the fact that new management techniques have come after Taylor’s standardised principles were first expressed (Pugh, 1987), theorists are keen to stress that these principles have only become less discussed because they have become part of the furniture, as it were; the ‘bedrock of all work design’ (Braverman, 1974, p. 60). That is, Taylorism as the name of a practice has become part of the hegemonic ensemble that is wage labour. While it is true that Taylorism has often ‘been confused [and blurred] with a broader re-orientation of management’ in general (Edwards, 1979, p. 98), it does provide a useful label for discussing primarily *coercive* management.

Taylor ‘raised the concept of control to an entirely new plane when he asserted as an *absolute necessity for adequate management the dictation to the worker of the precise manner in which work is to be performed*’ (Braverman, 1974, p. 62. Italics in original). Key within this discourse is the notion that workers should be left without any decision whatsoever, that each motion of the body is to be tracked, its efficiency optimised, and that the most effective routine be put in place for maximum productivity.⁹⁷ By removing ‘brain work’ from workers, Taylorism moves this work onto supervisors, managers and technologies of observation – in order to learn about how best to organise the workforce but also to note any deviations on the part of workers. Woodcock’s recent study of the modern call-centre shows how this plays out in office work, as one example:

The arrangement of the call-centre floor is also reminiscent of the Panopticon. Each row of desks has a supervisor seated at the end. From here they can observe individual workers, both their physical performance and their computer screens.
(Woodcock, 2017, p. 81)

⁹⁶ It is important to note the differences between “Taylorism” as the writing and practice of the F.W. Taylor the man and “Taylorism” considered broadly as the micro-physical control of the labour process (Thompson, 1989, p. 126).

⁹⁷ Taylor writes: ‘All possible brain work should be removed from the shop and centred in the planning or laying-out department’ (Taylor, 1903, p. 98-99).

Taylorism can be understood as epitomising coercion insofar as it is the systematic exclusion of the need for consent – or, more accurately, it assures labourers consent through constant supervision and direction (Edwards, 1979). These workers do not, according to the ideal Taylorist system, have to assent to be controlled, do not have to ideologically accept or internalise management (or even capitalist) ideas; they are effectively conduits to be manipulated.

Taylorism comes up against its limitations due to its rigidity however. Resistance to employer control from labourers requires employers to engage in a range of other possible tactics – and not simply coercion; Braverman’s (and indeed Marx’s) account of the labour process can sometimes omit this (Thompson, 1989, p. 153).⁹⁸ For theorists such as Burawoy and Friedman, more ‘successful’ management’ balances Taylorist coercion with a ‘parallel requirement for some level of creative participation of shop floor workers’ (Thompson, 1989, p. 133; Friedman, 1977a; Burawoy, 1979). Participation here effectively means cognitive engagement and/or relative room for worker control on (and of) the job. Friedman deploys the concept of ‘responsible autonomy’, in contrast to ‘direct control’, in order to note how management attempts to garner consent amongst the workforce to the labour process (1977b). The management strategy of ‘direct control’ involves ‘coercive threats, close supervision and minimising individual worker responsibility’ (i.e. what we have placed under the frame of Taylorism, broadly conceived). The Responsible Autonomy strategy, on the other hand,

attempts to harness the adaptability of labour power by giving workers leeway and encouraging them to adapt to changing situations in a manner beneficial to the firm. To do this top managers give workers status, authority, responsibility and try to win their loyalty and co-opt their organisations to the firm's ideals. (Friedman, 1977b, p. 49)

⁹⁸ Michael Burawoy writes of Braverman: ‘He makes no reference to the psychological and other processes through which subordination to capital is secured, the processes through which workers come to comply with and otherwise advance their own dehumanisation’ (1981, p. 90). On Marx, Burawoy writes that he ‘had no place in his theory of the labour process for the organisation of consent’ (1979, p. 27). In the previous chapter we saw how this omission in Marx (and Second International Marxism) was the point of departure for Laclau and Mouffe’s regrouping of socialist thought; my thesis has been that in abjuring some of Marx’s categories, and not following Marxist labour process theory closely enough, their position is weakened.

In other words, coercion might not be enough to secure labour from labour power, and, as Gramsci noted previously, coercion in the workplace must 'be ingeniously combined with persuasion and consent' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 310).⁹⁹

Consent as a concept can sometimes be too ambiguous and lose its precision in labour process debates (Thompson, 1989, p. 176). Following Thompson's caution, I will divide the notion into at least two different, further concepts: 'consent as compromise' and 'consent as internalisation'. Examples of compromise include explicit agreements between labourers and their employers, which might include rises in wages in return for higher productivity rates, or shorter working days in exchange for an intensification of the labour process. We can thus say that compromise involves a more or less conscious awareness (or rationalisation) of the exchange and/or concessions involved between buyer and seller; one consents to certain working conditions for a particular, advantageous reason. Consent as internalisation is a much more complex and difficult phenomena: it involves various mechanisms deployed in order to motivate workers' disposition towards the employer's goals (whether those goals themselves are internalised explicitly or not). Friedman's Responsible Autonomy concept captures one example of this internalisation: by giving workers more autonomy on the job, relations of coercion become less apparent and the labour process *feels* more like independence.

Martha Crowley's research has demonstrated how internalisation-consent is active in higher-income professions (Crowley, 2012). 'Very high rates of pride are apparent across professional configurations,' she writes, and yet "'burnout", marked by near-constant work effort, emotional devastation, deteriorating health and family break down, is an "integral part of life"' (Crowley, 2012, p. 1396). This burnout is conditioned by an '*internal* drive to display the highest level of performance', wherein the worker has internalised the company's purposes as their own (ibid.). As Umney summarises:

⁹⁹ Gramsci and Taylor both saw high wages, for example, as methods of assuring worker consent to the labour process.

In this situation, true autonomy is surely a mirage. Professional workers may live in fear of the consequences of disappointing their managers and falling behind. They typically have to impose intense self-control in order to meet organisational expectations – in particular, they are pushed to furnish an enormous amount of “voluntary effort”, which breaks down boundaries between work and personal life. (Umney, 2018, p. 74; Crowley, 2012)

For Burawoy, achieving hegemonic internalisation in work might simply entail making the labour process more interesting (thereby deterring the refusal to engage). In his studies, workers often play ‘games’: the manipulation of sets of informal rules, or the practice of making (quasi-autonomous) time and space for yourself on the job and so on. Workers of all kinds use this manipulation of employer rules and regulations in order to adapt to the environment of control in which they work (Burawoy, 1981, p. 92). It might involve taking longer toilet/coffee breaks, turning meetings into more casual chats, or justifying slow work as ‘taking care’, for example. Such ‘gaming’ of the system is both a practice of forcing more freedom into the job role and also a process that ultimately accommodates these workers to the labour process.

More active management strategies for the internalisation of consent can involve ‘games’ in the more obvious sense. Returning to Woodcock’s call-centre ethnography, we can see how training games, such as knowledge quizzes, and motivational sessions are used to facilitate workers’ affective engagement with the tasks at hand; their labour is teased out of them via ostensible ‘fun’ (Woodcock, 2017, p. 74 - 75). As with the theorists utilised above, Woodcock maintains that these ‘soft’ strategies of consent are grounded in the imperative to specify the indeterminacy of labour power as a commodity that is specific to capitalism (Woodcock, 2019).

Woodcock’s call centre study also shows the mutually reinforcing relationship that coercion and consent have with one another in the modern workplace. This close entanglement is evident in the impression workers get that the ‘fun’ activities management come up with have their own prescriptions:

It is not enough to take part: the worker must take part in a particular way. Ostensibly it is about 'fun', but it also involved a 'coercive nature'. Failing to take part in a genuine way risks one's labelling as a 'party pooper'...Thus these attempts to intensify the labour process involve new affective demands for workers. (ibid., p. 74).

The inducement to internalise (consent to) the imperative to labour optimally is coercive; this blurs the distinction between the two sides of the hegemonic coin.

Woodcock's study helpfully highlights how mechanisms of consent are not always successful: working subjects can resist attempts at internalising the managerial mantras, the inducements to work harder and so on. Even if consent is not achieved however (i.e. workers do not 'buy in' to the provocations to labour better), mechanisms of supervision, direction and punishment can maintain a baseline of labouring for the employer. To counterpose two of Woodcock's examples, the call-centre staff were told to 'just be yourself' as a method of producing their (internalising) consent, but, in another scenario, once one of their number did not complete the basic tasks of the labour process, the threat (and actualisation) of punishment was deployed (Woodcock, 2017, p. 82).¹⁰⁰

2.3 Logical antagonism or a practical tendency to antagonism?

It is important to identify what kind of relationship we are identifying between employers and workers here: whether there is a logical and/or historical *necessity* for hegemonic mechanisms to occur between buyers and sellers, or if in fact hegemony is contingent to workplace relations. Engaging with Laclau's pertinent, *post-Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, reflections on wage labour and antagonism is useful in drawing out certain distinctions.¹⁰¹

Laclau argues that Marxism (typically that of the Second International) is mistaken when it sees a fundamental, contradictory antagonism between workers and employers as sellers

¹⁰⁰ In this example, the punishment was being fired on the spot (Woodcock, 2017, p.82).

¹⁰¹ It can be noted that this issue is a microcosm – at the level of the workplace – of the debate/crisis around hegemony that the Second International, and later Laclau and Mouffe, dealt with in their writings.

and buyers of labour-power. Instead, he proposes that the significant antagonism with regards to wage labour is that between the labourer qua labourer and the labourer qua an identity outside of the wage labour relation (Laclau, 1990, p. 9).

The conflict is not internal to capitalist relations of production (in which the worker counts merely as a seller of labour power), but takes place between the relations of production and the worker's identity outside of them. (Laclau, 1990, p. 9).

For example, the capitalist's extension of the working day, or lowering of wages, provokes an antagonism between the individual as a consumer, or non-worker, on the one hand and as a waged worker on the other (ibid.). For Laclau, to describe the relation between the seller and buyer of labour-power as antagonistic is to miss the fact that there simply is, logically-speaking, no inherent antagonism at play here.

To show that capitalist relations of production are *intrinsically* antagonistic would therefore mean demonstrating that the antagonism stems *logically* from the relationship between buyer and seller of labour power (ibid.)

But as Laclau points out, this isn't the case: 'there is nothing in the category of "seller of labour power" to suggest such resistance [to the capitalist extraction of surplus] is a *logical* conclusion' following from the wage labour relationship (ibid.). He therefore concludes: 'conceived as a form, capitalist relations of production are not intrinsically antagonistic' (Laclau, 1990, p. 9).

Laclau is clear as to what he is rejecting when he rejects a logical flow from the facts of capitalist (exploitative) wage labour to political antagonism. 'It is obviously not being denied that conflicts exist between workers and entrepreneurs, but merely that they spring from the logical analysis of the wage-labour/capital relationship' (ibid.). I argue, in consonance with Laclau, that when wage labourers are practically treated as labour-power then no antagonism *necessarily* issues. Against Laclau, who then seeks to articulate the ways in which antagonism is only ever produced when a 'constitutive outside' violates an identity, leading him away from wage labour (or the 'production process') as a site of antagonism in

itself, I argue that antagonism regularly issues *within* the workplace for similar reasons that Laclau outlines; the worker is *never* wholly reducible to labour power even *in* the workplace.

Relinquishing notions of logical (or necessary) consistency between the economic categories of capitalism and political antagonism, we can and should ask instead whether we are talking about a *tendency* of a particular kind of society to lead towards antagonism due to the peculiarities of commodity exchange and of the peculiarities of understanding people (practically) as the commodity labour-power. That is not say that *inherent* in the concept of (the exchange of) labour-power is antagonism, but that *inherent* in the exchange of labour power *are* different imperatives on the part of buyers and sellers, that can sometimes align, but *often* do not. This is for the same reasons that Laclau identifies: workers are never fully-identified with their being labour power for an employer, and have other wills, interests, desires that can determine their activity in other ways.¹⁰² It is this indeterminate multiplicity – which makes labour-power a peculiar commodity amongst others – in contrast to what labourers are to their buyers, who understand them primarily as means of production, that entails that the production process tends towards antagonism (without logically necessitating it).

It is in this sense that we can identify a basic non-alignment (*not* contradiction) between the interests of the buyer of labour-power – who needs to maximally utilise this capacity to labour in order to produce commodities for profit – and the seller of labour-power – who needs to merely fulfil the minimum requirements of employment in order to achieve their purpose of gaining an income.¹⁰³ As we've seen, this *disjunction* – not to say contradiction – of purpose between the buyer and seller involves the fact that labour power must be set to work in order for it to be useful to the buyer; in order, that is, that the buyer achieve their purpose of producing goods and ultimately profit. In other words labour productivity – or simply, labour power being productive– is *always* part of the purpose of the exchange on

¹⁰² This multiplicity (or 'collective will') of desires and intentions within an individual might indeed concur with the employers' interest, but the crucial point is that this is not determined in advance nearly to the same extent that the profit-motive determines an employer *qua* employer.

¹⁰³ In the previous chapter, drawing on labour theorist Edwards, we saw how labourers (qua labour power) 'must show up for work, but they need not necessarily provide *labor*, much less the amount of labor that the capitalist desires to extract from the labor power they have sold'. The capitalist on the other hand *has* to put labour-power to work in order to actualise its usefulness for them (Edwards, 1979, p. 12).

the part of the employer, but it is *not always* the purpose of the exchange for the labourer.¹⁰⁴

This gap between purposes requires a whole apparatus of control that I have discussed under the frame of management, which involves proportions of coercion and consent, in order that the indeterminacy of labour-power becomes actualised quantities of labour. As Umney writes: ‘This does not mean that all workplaces are always under intense control, but it does mean that new attempts at extending control will always be lurking around the corner’ (Umney, 2018, p. 83). Here we are clearly not talking about a logical antagonism within the sphere of production – a logic that can be shown to be contradictory or not – but rather a *practical* tendency within capitalist social relations to coerce and control labourers into acting as productive labour power, the response to which can be various shades of resistance or compliance on the part of labouring subjects.

3. Wage labour subalterneity: the productive subject

We can say that at the moment he [sic] accepts the provisions stipulated by his employment contract, the worker undergoes a quasi-miraculous mutation: he ceases to be his body in person, whose existence is by definition equal to no other, and becomes a “productive subject,” a bearer of “labor-power,” whose performance – “social labor” – is subjected to a common evaluation; and, in this fashion, he is subjected [*assujetti*], in all senses of the word. (Macherey, 2015, p. 31)

Here Macherey notes how the move from the ‘dull compulsion’ of labour markets to the coercion-consent matrix internal to the workplace produces a particular kind of subaltern subjectivity. Recall that for Gramsci, to be subaltern is to be incapacitated within a certain set of power relations relative to other subject positions (Crehan, 2016; Green, 2011a). Subalterneity is what I have called in chapter one an ‘empty’ category of analysis: a lens

¹⁰⁴ This is a softer claim than, for example, Braverman’s, which is that the interests of wage labourers and employers are directly ‘opposing’ (Braverman, 1974, p. 39). They are not *necessarily* opposing – and indeed management techniques are designed so as to garner strong internalised consent to capitalist interests which would complicate any opposition.

which must be applied in different hegemonic contexts to understand subjects and power. With regard to the emergent worker-subject of Fordism/Taylorism, for example, Gramsci saw that a new 'psycho-physical' subject was in the making, that correlated to the 'ultra-production' of industrial capitalism (Gramsci, 1971, p. 301). In this section I relate Gramsci's concept of the subaltern to what has been revealed about wage labour as a hegemonic structure relevant to capitalism more broadly.

3.1 Enhancing the body's forces

To reiterate, market-dependency requires subjects to adopt the function of being-labour power, and in turn the indeterminacy of this unique commodity requires that power relations of coercion and consent be deployed to activate its actual use. The peculiarity of 'our' commodity labour power is that its use is inseparable from the use (or rent) of the physical, conscious selves of humans.

As any other commodity, labour power displays a dual character [of a useable and exchangeable thing], but its absolute peculiarity lies in the fact that this dual character is deeply rooted in life, in the body of each individual and in the social fabric they are part of. (Mezzadra, 2018, p. 58)

Like any other production tool employed in the labour process, labour power must be made productive in order to produce and convert its products into profit. What is stopping human labour power being immediately productive (unlike machines and, to a lesser extent animals) however, are the subjective excesses (i.e. indeterminacies or resistances) of the 'bearers' of this commodity. This subjective material is therefore constantly 'worked on' as part of the labour process (as we have already noted).

Having considered how labourers consent to the imposition of the wage form – sometimes by internalising the employer's perspective, sometimes by compromising with their employer's aims – in the previous section, we can make some further claims about the constitution of subaltern subjects within this system of imposed wage labour. Michel

Foucault's thesis in *Discipline and Punish* is particularly relevant here. For Foucault, what is at play in the modern period of disciplinary power is

a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. (Foucault, 1977, p. 138)

Discipline 'produces subjected and practised bodies, "docile" bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)' (ibid.). The production of these docile but useful bodies requires a number of processes of coercion. In part it relies on the so-called 'primitive accumulation' of the means of subsistence (as we've seen), but also various hegemonic apparatuses (e.g. schools, prisons, workhouses) with which to mould subjective faculties to be more or less predisposed to the rhythms and pressures of labouring.¹⁰⁵ In this regard, Foucault's works, both on discipline and on 'biopower', emphasise the imperatives of power within the modern period to produce the requisite (human) workforce for the society at hand.¹⁰⁶

Developing Foucault's work in relation to Marx's, Jason Read argues that the key category with which to describe the process of subjectification of wage labourers is 'abstract labour', conceived as a historically-specific, theoretically-discernible (but never empirically-observable) benchmark for the 'socially average' labour of labouring subjects (Read, 2003, p. 83).¹⁰⁷ Read posits, via Foucault and Marx, that the problem of making a diverse population of individuals into so many units of labour power requires the disciplining of bodies into normalised and 'socially average' labour capacities that can be calculated, improved and

¹⁰⁵ Here there is clear overlap between Foucault's work and Gramsci's notes (covered in Chapter One) on various institutions such as the Church and schooling that play, for him, 'social intellectual functions'.

¹⁰⁶ Recalling a passage already cited in chapter one, Foucault's preoccupation with the production of the correct subjectivity for production continues from his work on discipline through to his 'biopolitics' work. In *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, he notes how 'indispensable' biopower was to the development of capitalism: capitalism 'had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without making them more difficult to govern' (Foucault, 1998, p. 140-1).

¹⁰⁷ Read notes that despite the many similarities in their works, 'there remains a profound difference between Foucault and Marx on the historical progression formation of this [disciplinary] type of power' (Read, 2003, p. 86).

rendered ever more productive as a result (ibid., p.84). It is this ‘social average’ – the productivity *norm* that is set historically and specifically to a certain type of labour – and its correlate, the ‘socially average’ individual, that leads us to the notion of labour power’s subaltern *interchangeability*.

3.2 Interchangeability

We have seen how the form of subjectivity typical of capitalist social relations is tied to the characteristics of the commodity form. Just as the commodity form makes individual things interchangeable, despite differences in their possible use, capitalism also creates relatively indifferent – or standardised – worker-subjects that embody a more or less general capacity to labour; this production of general subjectivity is the production of labour in its abstract capacity, shorn of its specificity (Read, 2003, p. 62; Bonefeld, 2014, pp. 121-128).

Indifference towards any specific kind of labour presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant...Indifference towards specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease move from one labour to another...Not only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form. (Marx, 1973, p. 104)

Marx is clarifying that ‘the abstraction of the category “labour”, “labour as such”, labour pure and simple, *becomes true in practice*’ within capitalism (Marx, 1973, p. 105. Emphasis added). Just as a ‘quantity’ of labour is an abstraction that is *practically* fundamental to capitalist social relations (in no other society have diverse activities been understood as interchangeable ‘labours’), the human subject – the wage labour subaltern – also becomes understood, and to a practical extent *lived*, as translatable *homo oeconomicus* (Macherey, 2015, p. 19). This tendency towards abstract interchangeability of labour power finds its reason in the basic premise of capitalist accumulation and production: these processes, as we’ve seen, require readily-available labour power that can be employed for use in the production process. In order to maximise the potential for the utilisation of this population

of 'free' labourers, the nature of the kind of labours (jobs) involved must be levelled on the one hand, and the capacities of the wage labour subaltern must be simultaneously standardised and optimised on the other. The former relates to debates around the deskilling of jobs – exacerbated by Taylorism (Braverman, 1974; Thompson, 1989 pp. 71-7); the latter pertains to the incessant production of a relatively-homogenous potential workforce that can be 'put to work', in a variety of kinds of employ, wherever there is an opportunity (or market) for the production of goods.

What is common, in this interchangeability, is subjectivity as a productive force. In this way, labour power interchangeability therefore also provides another solution – for the owner of capital – to the constant problem of labour power's indeterminacy discussed above; the cultivation of a disciplined, skilled, productive subjectivity (on a mass scale) reduces the sheer indeterminacy of what the human is capable of – and more importantly, what it is capable of being compelled to do.

What I have underlined here is that being a productive subject is what is required of the wage labour subaltern in *general*. As we shall see in the following chapters, beyond this basic determination (which can take many different forms of *being-productive*) the subaltern condition acquires more specific characteristics within different hegemonic *projects* – which is to say that the subaltern determined by the *structure* of wage labour is always implicated in tendencies to (re)engineer it into different forms and modalities depending on the nature of the *project* that is currently hegemonic.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has developed an understanding of wage labour within a perspective preoccupied with the dynamics of hegemony in capitalist societies. It has detailed the way in which wage labour is a hegemonic structure – defined as a sedimented, relatively intransigent social relation (Joseph, 2002; Laclau, 1990).¹⁰⁹ As a social relation characteristic

¹⁰⁸ This is not to imply that hegemonic projects are always successful in producing the productive subject.

¹⁰⁹ Such an understanding also has a strategic significance. Gramsci perceived the study of hegemony to itself be a political undertaking; knowing how a hegemonic situation is created and maintained is at the same time

of (i.e. not incidental to) capitalist societies – intimately relevant to the ways in which markets function as *imperatives* – wage labour has been shown to act as a coercive anchor for a range of power effects. Primarily, primitive accumulation is both the violent *condition* for the sedimentation of wage labour, but is also its continued *result* – as labourers are kept in perpetual separation from alternative routes to their own survival.

As regards the ‘hidden abode’ of workplaces themselves, I have argued that the renting of labour power for production involves hegemonic processes in capillary form, within individual capitalist enterprises. Utilising a distinction deployed by labour process theorists (and Marx) between labour power and the acts of labouring, I have argued that hegemonic processes of coercion and consent are constantly called upon in the attempt to close the persistent gap between the potential for labour and its actuality. These processes are embodied in management strategies – Taylorism being the most famous signifier for a range of micro-physical coercions deployed in order to force labour power’s productivity. These mechanisms of coercion and consent contribute to the normalisation (sedimentation) of a particular kind of subaltern subjectivity: the productive subject.

In the next chapter I develop the concept that partners that of ‘hegemonic structure’: hegemonic projects. If wage labour is as fundamental to capitalism as I have claimed, then, so my hypothesis runs, any (and every) hegemonic project within capitalism will configure itself in relation to it in some manner. The discussion will develop this chapter’s findings by articulating how specific hegemonic projects have historically situated wage labour as part of their discourses. Just as Gramsci noted the specificities of wage labour within the

knowing how to unmake or transform it (Thomas, 2009, p. 222). In the same way, interrogating what wage labour is – its origins, its imbrication with a foundational coercion – leads us to understanding the historical origins and continued functioning of capitalism as a social-economic system. Knowing the ‘secret’ of so-called primitive accumulation is, in the language of Laclau, a form of ‘reactivation’ – and therefore political intervention – by which the routine imperative of market-dependence, of the purchase and sale of the labour-power familiar in the present is made problematic and de-naturalised. ‘The understanding of primitive accumulation as the constituent premise of the existent forces destroys their deceptive appearance as forces of nature’ (Bonefeld, 2014, p. 84). Using other vocabulary, accounts of primitive accumulation allows us to reveal ‘the contingent nature of so-called “objectivity”’ (Laclau, 1990, p. 35). The ‘attendant forms of necessity and stability’ that capitalist social relations embody are really based on a contingent set of historical events (Read, 2003, p. 39).¹⁰⁹ Thus, understanding the origins of a hegemonic structure such as wage labour not only helps us understand it for what it is – a contingent, historically sedimented practice – but also posits the possibility of its counter-hegemonic overcoming.

emergent Fordist/Taylorist project of industrial capitalism, it will become apparent that within the hegemonic project of New Labour, wage labour takes on new, historically-specific characteristics. In turn, in relation to the project of New Labour, historically-specific, emergent wage labour subalterns are also identified and theorised.

Chapter Four

Hegemonic Projects and Wage Labour: New Labour Case Study

This chapter continues the deployment and demonstration of the approach for analysing hegemony developed in chapters one and two. In the third chapter, I articulated the way in which wage labour is a fundamental, emergent *structure* of capitalism and I described the particular effects that this structure has upon subjects and on the organisation of hegemony within capitalist society. To detail this, I used Joseph's distinction between hegemonic structures (or 'structural hegemony') and hegemonic projects (sometimes referred to by Joseph as 'surface hegemony'). Recalling Joseph:

Structural hegemony and surface [project] hegemony are two aspects of a continual process. Structural hegemony concerns the deep underlying conditions within society and the unity of the social formation. Surface hegemony concerns the actual hegemonic projects that arise out of this situation. (Joseph, 2002, p. 131).¹¹⁰

However, in order to avoid Joseph's 'necessarily rough and abstracted' distinction between hegemonic structures and projects - wherein he risks fetishizing structures as beyond the purview of human activity (Joseph, 2002, p. 131), Laclau's concepts of sedimentation and reactivation were also introduced. These allow us to account for structures *as* projects or outcomes *of* (potentially multiple) projects – albeit heavily-sedimented, relatively-intransigent outcomes. According to this position, hegemonic structures and projects are social practices and relations with different degrees of sedimentation – different degrees of apparent contingency and necessity (Laclau, 1990, p. 34).

The previous chapter detoured through an historical account of capitalism to show the emergence and historical sedimentation of the wages system; i.e. the emergence of a hegemonic structure out of a set of (contingent) hegemonic projects. This included the

¹¹⁰ Thatcherism, for example, arose out of the crisis of Fordism, as was noted in chapter two.

making illegal of idleness, the need to ‘improve’ plots of land on the part of farmers, the enclosure of land so as to force populations to find employers for survival and the punishment of begging; in short, the coercive disciplining of a workforce of labour-power. This history is concealed by the apparent freedom that the market-imperative society provides, which has become a ‘routinised’, ahistorical fact (Meiksins-Wood, 2017; Laclau, 1990, p. 34).¹¹¹

This chapter will discuss how hegemonic *projects* function, in relation to the wage labour structure. Hegemony *qua* project refers to ‘the sense in which hegemony is often understood’ (Joseph, 2002, p. 128). This applies, as I argued in chapter two, to Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of hegemony as a contestation of discourses, equivalential chains and sets of antagonisms. It also resonates with Hall’s analysis of Thatcherism’s hegemony – with his strong emphasis on the contradictory, discursive ensemble that Thatcherism utilised to garner consent for its coercion. A hegemonic project, argues Joseph, is ‘the more active element representing, as it does, conscious’ and conjunctural actions on the parts of agents, as compared and contrasted with hegemonic structures (ibid., p. 131). For example, we can imagine a hegemonic project that works to destroy the wage system, utilising various discourses, actors and conscious actions to succeed,¹¹² whereas the hegemonic *structure* of wage labour, requires very little (if any) conscious articulation, remaining silent in its force. In this example, the wage system is sedimented, its contingency ‘forgotten’, meanwhile the opposing hegemonic project strives to reactivate this contingency, revealing this structure to be a mutable thing after all, bringing it into the purview of antagonism.

Crucially, hegemonic projects ‘perform the function of ensuring the reproduction of social structures and structural ensembles’ (Joseph, 2002, p. 131). The question, for this chapter and for my overall project of understanding how hegemony relates to wage labour, is therefore to understand precisely how – and by what historically-specific means – do hegemonic projects reproduce the wage labour relation as a structure.

¹¹¹ Conversely, historicising and critiquing capitalism and its emergent structures is an act of reactivation, in Laclau’s terminology, which can have resistant or even revolutionary political effects. Marx’s work is a good example of this, amongst others.

¹¹² The movements coalescing around the ‘refusal of work’ mantra in Italy in the 1970s are a similar example of this (See Wright, 2002).

Following Gramsci's and Hall's contributions to the field, the answer to such a question must be done conjuncturally – that is, by identifying the reproduction of wage labour within a historically-specific hegemonic project. To this end, following Chapter Two's brief treatment of Thatcherism, this chapter will analyse in detail what is known as 'New Labour' as a case study of a hegemonic project. There are a number of specific questions that I draw on from previous chapters (i.e. from the history of hegemony studies, the history of Gramscism). What forms of coercion and consent did New Labour mobilise as part of its hegemonic governance? How did these specifically relate to wage labour as a hegemonic structure of capitalism? What does New Labour's political and economic governance of the wage labour relation say about the character of its hegemonic project more broadly?

To answer these questions, I will proceed with the Gramscian methodology I have so far developed. This entails, firstly, going to the language of New Labour, to reveal the world conception and *senso comune* it is attempting to establish via its discursive representations of the world; here I will be utilising Norman Fairclough's thorough work on the issue as well as documents internal to New Labour's project, such as the reflections of key political advisor Philip Gould (Fairclough, 2000; Gould, 2011). Secondly, it entails understanding how the New Labour project related to, transformed and shaped wage labour (*qua* structure of capitalism) via its economic governance; for this I will consider the critical literature on the political economy of New Labour and its 'workplace politics' (or 'politics of production' in Laclau and Mouffe's terms). In a following section I will examine New Labour's use of the work ethic to justify its approach to wage labour, situating it within the context of that ethic. Finally, with this analysis in hand, I will engage with two indirect ways in which the project reshaped what it meant to be a wage labourer: the workfare system of social security and the drive for 'employability'.

I take New Labour to mean the project of the UK Labour Party, led by Tony Blair, spanning approximately from the mid-1990s until the 2010 election loss (although of course elements of New Labour both predate this timespan and have outlasted it). As with Thatcherism before it, this hegemonic project uses the political party – that 'collective will' Gramsci identified as a core, organisational 'cell', and intellectual function (Gramsci, 2007, p. 247). By

being a relatively hegemonic project within the Labour Party itself – i.e. by being able to give a certain discursive coherence to the Party – New Labour can use its output (speeches, white papers, articles, reports) to attempt to establish a national *senso comune*.¹¹³ As Fairclough explains, ‘there are diverse discourses and voices within New Labour, but there is also a sufficient commonality to give the sense of a broad unity and consistency of vision’ (Fairclough, 2000, p. 21).¹¹⁴ As we shall see, this vision and practice has consequences for the way in which New Labour relates to wage labour. Although there is not the capacity here, it is also important to note the centrality and authority that Blair himself, along with his close circle of advisors, had within the project (Fairclough, 2000, pp. 95 – 118; Gould, 2011, p. 235).¹¹⁵ Having a tight grip on the messaging of the Party under New Labour’s hegemony further ensured coherence across its rhetoric.

New Labour is a (a nationally-specific) part of a broader, transnational ‘Third Way’ that is most often described as a position attempting to adopt and supersede elements of traditionally ‘right’ and ‘left’ political and economic programmes (Giddens, 1998). For example, Blair will often describe it as an attempt to ‘combine enterprise’ (a particularly Thatcherite term) and ‘fairness’ (which fits well with a social democratic, or more left-leaning, programme) (Blair, 1998). Seen through the lens of hegemony, the ‘Third Way’ is a positioning that attempts to appear to resolve (and dissolve) antagonism – which is understood as a feature of an older, outdated politics.¹¹⁶ Needless to say, Third Way projects must also *de facto* be understood as a historically-specific form of politics within capitalist social relations (i.e. they must relate to capitalist society’s fundamental structures in some way). Exactly how New Labour actualises this relation, and whether it could succeed in realising a non-antagonistic hegemony will be fleshed out in this chapter.¹¹⁷

1. New Labour’s *concezione del mondo*

¹¹³ This hegemony within the Party was helped by its landslide election victory of 1997.

¹¹⁴ This consistency makes New Labour a useful case study of an hegemonic project.

¹¹⁵ In his influential ‘The Unfinished Revolution’ document, that was circulated within the Labour Party, Philip Gould recommended that ‘Labour must replace competing existing structures with a single chain of command leading directly to the leader of the party’ (Gould, 2011, p. 235).

¹¹⁶ The temporal dimensions of Third Way and New Labour discourses are, as I shall demonstrate, crucially important.

¹¹⁷ I will occasionally be discussing New Labour in the present tense, so as to be continuous with the critical contemporary literature from which I draw.

Whilst much of government action ‘is language’, insofar as governments announce, declare, debate, deploy spokespeople and send communications, New Labour was distinctive for its particular stress on the importance of language and the dissemination of a particular vocabulary (Fairclough, 2000, p. 12).¹¹⁸ Examining a wide corpus of early-middle period New Labour texts – the period when its hegemonic project was perhaps at its strongest – Fairclough notes the high rate of appearance of related words: ‘new’ occurs 609 times, ‘modern’ occurs 89 times and ‘modernise/modernisation’ 87 times.¹¹⁹ As with Thatcherism’s hegemonic project, New Labour understands itself as a modern and modernising project.¹²⁰ That is to say, modernity, and in particular ‘the new’ and ‘change’, constitute what Gramsci would term a ‘concrete phantasy’: a kind of utopian *telos* that is used to arrange other aspects of its discourse. For Gramsci, as we’ve seen, a ‘concrete phantasy’ acts as a ‘divinity or the categorical imperative’: it acts as an ethical justification and catalyst for action (Gramsci, 1971, p. 133). How exactly do these notions of change and the contemporary world function in this way within New Labour’s discourse? What purpose do they serve? Key in this regard is the precise way in which the modern, contemporary or the ‘new’ world is represented. For example, a government White Paper reads:

In the increasingly global economy of today, we cannot compete in the old way. Capital is mobile, technology can migrate quickly and goods can be made in low cost countries and shipped to developed markets. (Department for Trade and Industry, 1998)

¹¹⁸ Although there is not the capacity to do so here, it is important to note New Labour’s utilisation of that crucial part of any modern hegemonic apparatus, the news media. This functions, as was noted in chapter one, *de facto* as ‘the material organisation aimed at maintaining, defending and developing the theoretical or ideological “front” of a particular hegemony (Gramsci, 1999, p. 380). Garnering the consent of the three largest coalitions of news media partners – including the Murdoch Group, the Mirror Group and Richard Desmond’s empire – was essential to constructing a hegemonic intellectual ‘front’ for New Labour (Curran and Seaton, 2010, p. 74).

¹¹⁹ This corpus consists of fifty-three Blair speeches between 1997-9, five interviews with Blair, a speech from Gordon Brown, the 1997 Labour Manifesto, chapters from Green Papers on welfare and pension reforms and a White Paper on competition.

¹²⁰ The fact that the predicate ‘new’ is part of its very name, shows a tactic on the part of New Labour to supersede (or abandon) previous associations that the Labour Party has had.

As Fairclough notes, passages such as this naturalise and fetishise economic relations, concealing global actors such as multinational corporations (the active agents here) and establishing a strategic representation of reality as moving almost incomprehensively fast (Fairclough, 2000, p. 23-4).¹²¹ The modern, global economy – as contrasted with the ‘old way’ – leaves very little room for active intervention: claims about goods and capital are put forward without there being agents behind them, whilst technology is positioned as an agent in itself, contributing to ‘constructing change’ – here understood as the force of markets – as ‘inevitable’ (ibid., p. 26). In this way, New Labour’s construction of economic activity hides what Gramsci describes as the element of ‘conscious leadership’ that underpins apparently impersonal and ‘spontaneous’ forces (Gramsci, 1971, p. 324-326).

In a similar register to Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*, New Labour’s discourse trades off the revolutionary nature of modern capitalism.

We all know this is a world of dramatic change. In technology; in trade; in media and communications; in the new global economy refashioning our industries and capital markets. In society; in family structure; in communities; in lifestyles. (Blair, 1998a)

‘Change’ is here an empty signifier in Laclau’s sense, the content of which is being immediately defined as the movements of global capital, the transformative nature of technology and other impersonal forces. These cascading lists of changes seem ‘designed to persuade people that the changes New Labour is proposing are a part of an inevitable process’ (Fairclough, 2000, p. 28). In response to this world of rapid change, New Labour proposes a new *senso comune*, which amounts to abandoning the possibility of resistance and adapting *realistically* to the given conditions. It is, after all, quite literally nonsensical to be opposed to change *per se*.

The choice is: to let change overwhelm us, to resist it or equip ourselves to survive and prosper in it. The first leads to a fragmented society. The second is pointless and

¹²¹ Fairclough conceives of the multinationals as the ‘ghost in the machine’ of New Labour’s discourse, insofar as they are rarely, if ever named, and yet are the implicit actors that are making the world of global capital turn (Fairclough, 2000, p. 23).

futile, trying to keep the clock from turning. The only way is surely to analyse the challenge of change and to meet it. (Blair, 1998a)

As Gramsci knew, the intellectual function of leadership – issuing in this case from the ‘modern prince’ that is the party – is to enact a ‘foundation of a new and integral conception of the world’, a new representation of how the world works (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). New Labour’s *concezione del mundo* is of a global world in flux, with the flow of commodities and capital unstoppable and with national governments’ remit limited to adaptation. This is the image of the world that fixes the parameters of New Labour’s *senso comune*.

1.2 ‘One nation’: New Labour’s *senso comune*

Beyond the image of modernity that New Labour deploys to frame its project, New Labour’s ideology – its *senso comune* – has other specific characteristics. To reiterate, a *senso comune* in the Gramscian sense is the ‘assemblage of truisms accepted within a particular social world’ (Crehan, 2016, p. 43). It is the set of beliefs, ‘facts’ and narratives that are *common* and appear natural to many, despite their historically-contingent roots.¹²² As with all hegemonic projects, New Labour’s relative coherence is constituted by an unsteady discourse, constructed from elements of both traditionally Left and (new, Thatcherite) Right discourse, which is in constant need of re-articulation.¹²³ In other words, the *senso comune* that New Labour deploys is ‘fragmentary, incoherent and inconsistent’, in its own particular way (Gramsci, 1971, p. 419).

Inconsistent discursive elements are primarily held together by New Labour’s self-positioning as an all-inclusive project. The proliferation of what Hall calls ‘troubling adverbs’ such as “between”, “above”, and “beyond” shows both an aversion to taking a divisive, ideological position and, more significantly, the attempt to suture contradictory elements

¹²² We can say, with Laclau, that *senso comune* is paradigmatic of sedimentation.

¹²³ In this sense, New Labour’s strategy of garnering consent from groups beyond the traditional left involved occupying some of the ‘enemy’s’ discursive territory (Fairclough, 2000, p. 21).

together under one project (Hall, 1998, p. 10).¹²⁴ Take for example, Blair's announcement that: 'My vision for the 21st century is of a popular politics reconciling themes which in the past have wrongly been regarded as antagonistic' (Blair, 1998). Becoming 'above' political divides – existing 'on a Higher Plane' in these ways – mirrors the 'below' of *sensu comune*: the acknowledged, correct position is always apparently beyond antagonism (Hall, 1998, p. 11). Fairclough demonstrates this 'non-antagonistic' strategy, which we might also call 'affirmative combination', most clearly in Blair's uses of 'not only but also' rhetoric (p. 44).

The meaning 'not only but also' is pervasively used [by advocates of New Labour] in formulations of the 'Third Way', in a variety of expressions...a stressed *and* (marked by italics), but other expressions include *as well as*, *yet also*, and so forth ('fairness *and* enterprise', 'fairness *as well as* enterprise')...Such expressions draw attention to assumed incompatibilities while at the same time denying them. (Fairclough, 2000, p. 45)

This discursive strategy is evident in Blair's Fabian pamphlet of 1998:

Cutting corporation tax to help business *and* introducing a minimum wage to help the lowest paid...New investment and reforms in our schools to give young people the skills they need *and* cracking down hard on juvenile crime to create secure communities. Reforming central government to give it greater strategic capacity *and* devolving power to bring it closer to people. (Blair 1998a)

The use of incompatible pairs suggests – but never makes explicit (to avoid naming antagonism) – demands from different sectors of society that New Labour is attempting to suture; the invocation of 'enterprise' culture might refer to the demands of sectors of business and finance for a friendly business environment, whilst the nod to 'fairness' and 'attacking poverty' speaks to implicit subaltern demands for greater equality.

¹²⁴ This is paradigmatic of 'Third Way' positions in general (Fairclough, 2000, p. 43).

Finally, the discursive slippage utilised to ground the *senso comune* of a coalition of interests is evident when New Labour consistently uses the pronoun ‘we’ in strategic and contradictory ways. As both Laclau and Fairclough understand,

[P]art of what distinguishes one political discourse from another is how collective identities are constructed – what lines are drawn within the body politic, who is included and who is excluded, who a party claims to speak for, who it speaks against. (Fairclough, 2000, p. 35)

‘We’ and ‘us’ play integral discursive functions in New Labour’s *senso comune* – and is firmly part of the ‘one nation’ or ‘one Britain’ strategy that Blair himself pushed for (Gould, 2011, p. 246-7). ‘We’ can refer exclusively to the Government or inclusively to the people of Britain as a whole (ibid.). Fairclough shows how New Labour plays off this ambiguity in order to obscure the differences of the those included in the ‘we’ as well as shift the position of governance and responsibility. For instance, consider Blair’s statement that: ‘If Britain is to succeed in the new world marketplace, it has no future as a low-skill, low-quality, low-value, low-wage economy. To be competitive, we have to aim high’ (Blair, 1998). ‘Britain’ and ‘we’ are here equivalent but in a particular way. We should ask, as Fairclough does: ‘who is the “we” here? Perhaps those involved in the British economy? But then isn’t it only those control the economy, in conjunction with those who control the state, who set “aims”?’ (Fairclough, 2000, p. 36).

New Labour’s discourse regularly uses ‘we’ in order to ‘hide’ the role of government in this way, giving an active role to a wider ‘we’ – the population generally speaking – in key areas: most notably, economic performance and welfare ‘dependency’ (see sections below). By oscillating between ‘we’ as New Labour and ‘we’ as ‘the people’ in these areas, New Labour’s projects indicates the ability (and perhaps intention) to shift the burden of economic performance, and for tackling issues such as poverty, away from government and towards the vague ‘we’ of the population at large.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ This strategy prefigures David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ notion that came just a few years later.

We can see how New Labour's strategy of discursively dissolving antagonisms and subjective differences in the act of their articulation fits with a 'logic of difference' that we described via Laclau in chapter two. A logic of difference is at play when political institutions meet and resolve demands via their own mechanisms whilst leaving the framework of the political system itself unquestioned. To describe this logic, Laclau draws on the Saint-Simonian motto 'from the government of men to the administration of things' (Laclau, 2005, p. 36). Perhaps, as Stuart Hall declares, New Labour does not represent 'the populism of Mrs Thatcher's neo-liberal Right but it is a variant species of "authoritarian populism" non the less [*sic*] – corporate and managerialist in its "downward" leadership style' (Hall, 1998, p. 13). Recall that the term 'authoritarian populism' – used by Hall to describe Thatcherism's hegemonic style – signifies a contradictory kind of populism, a populism 'from above' as it were. New Labour's 'managerialist populism', or 'corporate populism', is arguably even more contradictory, positioning itself not along the lines of 'strong state, free economy', but rather as a non-antagonistic project that creates no ruptural 'frontiers' whatsoever in the manner in which Laclau describes populism proper.

2. New Labour and wage labour relations

Given the character of New Labour's rhetoric – a non-antagonistic, inclusive discourse that ostensibly has no enemies and operates according to a 'new' style of administration – it is important to understand what transformations or initiatives were *actualised* in the lived labour market under its hegemonic project. New Labour's self-presentation as a 'beyond' (traditional) left and (new) right project can be partially evaluated according these findings. Does its ideology of non-antagonism and 'new' politics translate across into its disposition towards the practices and relations within the wage labour system, as a (hegemonic) structure of capitalism?¹²⁶ This question is particularly interesting as it can demonstrate the ways in which public rhetoric and political action might diverge, and how these two things relate to each other in that divergence.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Does, in other words, everyone really 'win'?

¹²⁷ In other words, is this discourse – in the Laclau and Mouffe sense – coherent across all of its elements?

To answer this broad question in the context of what we have already established regarding hegemonic projects within capitalism, we need to pursue a more specific one: how, and in what manner, does New Labour ensure the reproduction of the circuit of capital, the circuit of accumulation and the wage labour relationship that was discussed in Chapter Three? To indicate the character of New Labour's particular statecraft and economic strategies in this regard I will focus on three relevant phenomena: the National Minimum Wage, New Labour's strategy for mediating between workers (labour-power) and their employers and finally job/income polarisation.

2.1 Securing the reproduction of labour-power: the National Minimum Wage

What it meant to embody labour-power in Britain and what the nature of the typical relationship between employers and employed was like during New Labour's hegemonic project is perhaps less clear cut than under Thatcherism's incremental, but overtly divisive, strategy (Umney, 2018, p. 48). Significant improvements to working life – to what it means to be labour-power – were deployed during the New Labour period. The introduction of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in 1999, for example, was one the most significant interventions into the labour market of the twentieth century.¹²⁸ By enforcing a basic floor for waged labour (set at a 'sensible' level), the state effectively set hard parameters for the relationship between employers and employees; in other words, it establishes that embodied labour-power must have, at least, certain amount of income in order to reproduce itself (Labour Party, 1996).¹²⁹

Whilst still existing within the structurally-coercive wage system – i.e. it does not constitute a break with that structure – the NMW does benefit those closest to the proletarian condition (of having nothing to sell but one's labour). Research from academic scholars as well as the independent Low Pay Commission have demonstrated that in the two decades since its introduction the NMW has been successful in reducing income inequality, in redistributing income to the lowest paid workers and in having little or no negative effects

¹²⁸ This was not an uncontroversial element of New Labour's project, and conservative forces contested it strongly. See Wood (199) for an overview of the policy in the hospitality industry context.

¹²⁹ The same is true of Working Family Tax Credit and Child Care Tax Credit.

on employment levels overall (LPC, 2019; Dickens, Manning and Butcher, 2012; Joyce and Sibieta, 2013). The NMW benefits the lowest income groups in society most, as it partially ensures a basic standard of living, and does not let the level of resources that workers can receive be directly determined by the strength or weakness of the bargaining power of employers or employees. It is an example of the state intervening in the circuit of capital and setting one of the terms of engagement between actors in that circuit.

2.2 Neutering organised labour

We stand for a new partnership between government and industry

(Blair, 1995, quoted in Gould, 2011, p. 232)

In other, crucial respects however, New Labour's interventions vis-à-vis waged labour were continuous with the neoliberal form of governance that characterised previous, successive governments since the late 1970s. The fallout from Thatcherism's aggressive coercion against organised labour – i.e. the trade union movement – is more or less maintained throughout New Labour's dominance. Having not initiated this shift in the balance of forces, this transformation of *senso comune* away from worker power, New Labour's hegemonic project could function within the already-sedimented, shared *concezione del mundo* of weaker unions and stronger (financial) capital that Thatcherism had worked to achieve. New Labour's discourse of going 'beyond' the New Right, in reality amounted to small concessions to workers (e.g. the NMW), whilst maintaining the post-79 political-economic settlement, merely modifying the language used.

Perhaps most symptomatic of New Labour's approach to wage labour is its 'partnership' discourse and governance strategy. 'Partnership' is identified by Fairclough as one of New Labour's 'keywords' that mark its discourse as distinct from previous Labour Party discourses, which attempted to recognise disparities of interest between workers and their employers (Fairclough, 2000, p. 17).¹³⁰ Partnerships are New Labour's attempt to suture the aims of trade unions with those of employers and demonstrate that 'mutual gains' can be

¹³⁰ This disparity was noted in chapter three as the basis for a tendency towards practical antagonism between employers and employed.

had from practical collaboration (Badigannavar and Kelly, 2011; Kelly, 2004; McIlroy, 2008; Rainbird and Stuart, 2011). These partnerships most often involved 'workplace learning' whereby trade unions would have a central position in skills training and learning on the job, potentially allowing for a larger union presence in the workplace plus more convivial relationships with employers (McIlroy, 2008, p. 284). The promise, promoted by the Trades Union Congress, was that worker voice – and power to resist – would be strengthened by such a role. From the employer's perspective,

Competitive markets also increase the employers' need for a flexible and committed workforce and this might induce the employers to work in partnership with workers and their representatives to elicit greater flexibility and thereby secure higher levels of productivity. (Badigannavar and Kelly, 2011, p. 6)

The practical result of 'partnerships' was not mutual however. With the benefit of hindsight, researchers have found that workplaces with 'partnership' relations between management and worker representatives (as opposed to traditional, more abrasive 'organising' relations) reported fewer 'meaningful' consultations with management, more 'unfair' treatment of employees, and 'bullying' of workers by management (Badigannavar and Kelly, 2011, p. 15). John Kelly identifies that in the majority of cases studied, partnership agreements were of the 'employer-dominant' type, inevitably constituting a quashing of worker resistance (Kelly, 2004, p. 287). In the first six years of New Labour's partnership schemes, trade union membership and density had failed to increase as promised, and union activity continued to have a reduced, 'modest' impact on pay and working conditions (Metcalf, 2003).

Ultimately, as Umney summarises, workplace partnerships effectively entailed a recognition that employees 'deserved a voice, but not to the extent that [they] might actually challenge the prerogatives of capital'; that is to say, the prerogatives of turning a profit, squeezing labour costs and competing within regional, national and/or international contexts (Umney, 2018, p. 49). New Labour's hegemonic strategy, Smith and Morton argue, was to 'seek to domesticate, rather than exclude workers' voice, through constraints on militant trade unionism and the promotion of co-operative trade unionism' (Smith and Morton, 2006, p. 405).

New Labour's partnership initiative did not defuse or sublimate the always-threatening antagonism between labour-power and its purchaser as the public-facing 'beyond antagonism' discourse would suggest. Rather, partnerships did more to embed the domination of employers over their workforces, whilst concealing these asymmetrical relations via the language of 'mutuality'. In effect, 'partnerships' meant that trade unions and the Trades Union Congress played a role in garnering workplace compliance, mobilising their leadership over the rank and file members to promote collaboration and deter cultures of radicalism. The partnership agenda was a way of garnering consent in the form of compromise: trade unions would potentially have more access to workers, at the price of being 'partnered' with the same employers that they were supposed to guard against.

2.3 'Two Nations' return: job polarisation

Finally, the labour market under New Labour saw continued 'job polarisation', entailing a greater division between kinds of waged work available to the population (Goos and Manning, 2007; Goos, Manning and Salomons, 2014). Job polarisation is a global phenomenon, affecting many countries, particularly in the Global North, including Sweden, the United States, Japan and others (e.g. Adermon and Gustavsson, 2015). It refers to a phenomenon wherein, since 1979, the middle-income, often medium-skilled waged work has seen a decline in job growth, whilst either 'pole' of the wage spectrum has seen a converse increase in job numbers; there has been a hollowing out of middle-income roles, and a creation of 'lousy' and 'lovely' jobs (Goos and Manning, 2007).¹³¹

So, for example, there has been an increase in management consultant roles, data processing managers, computer analysts, treasurers and other executive roles on high incomes, alongside more care assistants, hospital assistants, hotel porters and flight attendants who tend to have lower incomes (ibid., p. 124-5). Goos and Manning have studied this trend in the context both of Thatcherism and its fall out (1979 – 1999) (ibid.), but also in the period from 1993 – 2010, which includes New Labour's hegemonic project

¹³¹ Goos and Manning sometimes pithily call this division as one between 'McJobs' and 'MacJobs' (2003)

(Goos, Manning and Salomons, 2014). The two main drivers for job polarisation are computerisation and the offshoring of jobs, made possible by communications technologies (ibid.; Autor, 2013). Jobs that are made up of relatively routine tasks that are susceptible to automation and replacement by computer processes, or those that can be outsourced to areas of the world with lower labour costs, are those clustered around the middle of the income spectrum. Low-income jobs such as teaching roles, hospitality, portering and care are extremely non-routine, as they involve hard to replicate, human actions and dexterity. Equally, high-income roles in business involve lots of affective labour, including personal meetings and skills such as persuasion and maintaining personal networks (Goos, Manning and Salomons, 2014).

Job polarisation is a phenomenon that decisively marks the end of the post-war 'settlement' between labour and capital, between industry and so-called 'social democracy', wherein rising industrial activity correlated with rising living standards for those who sold their labour-power (Gamble, 1988). The New Labour project continued Thatcherism's strategy of avoiding an industrial strategy that would seek to reverse the polarisation of incomes and job quality. Instead, the project's focus on individual education, retraining and subjective 'employability' (see section 5 below), effectively refused responsibility for shaping labour market conditions, allowing a continuing polarisation between employment groups and an exacerbation of what we might identify as a renewed 'Two Nations' situation, similar to that identified in Thatcherism by Jessop et al (1984).

Job polarisation is a tendency that stands in stark contrast with New Labour's rhetoric of a unified, 'one nation' and of avoiding a 'low-skill, low-quality, low-value, low-wage economy' (Blair, 1998). Whilst one pole – where financial, data and executive jobs are congregated – does indeed represent the kind of high-value, high-income labour power that New Labour aspire to, the hollowing out of middle-income job creation and the growth in 'McJobs', demonstrates a reality at odds with the goal of 'aiming high' that was claimed by Blair.

Lastly, we can note that job polarisation is symptomatic of another trend within New Labour's economic record: record levels of income inequality (Joyce and Sibieta, 2013, p. 183). In their comparative study of different periods, Joyce and Sibieta found that inequality

as measured by the Gini coefficient rose, over the Thatcherite period, from 0.25 in 1979 to 0.34 in the early 1990s (ibid., p. 182). During New Labour's project, the Gini rose to 0.35 during New Labour's first term in office in 2000/1 and then again rose to 0.36 around the time of the financial crash of 2007/8. Overall, and covering almost the entire timespan of the New Labour project, Joyce and Sibieta found that 'the Gini coefficient rose from 0.33 in 1996/7 to 0.36 in 2009/10 (ibid., p. 183). It is important to specify that, as is common to aspects of New Labour's project, there were no drastic *spikes* in income inequality comparable to those seen in the Thatcherite period (ibid., p. 187). Rather, the parameters of a world conception that Thatcherism had inaugurated – i.e. the concentration of financial capacity at one pole of society – was largely maintained and reproduced by New Labour via their approach to the labour market governance. High inequality was *maintained* through the New Labour period, if not *inaugurated*.

3. The 'Work-Ethic State'

Work is the only route to sustained financial independence. But it is much more. Work is not just about earning a living. It is a way of life... Work helps to fulfil our aspirations – it is the key to independence, self-respect and opportunities for advancement... Work brings a sense of order that is missing from the lives of many unemployed young men... [The 'socially excluded'] and their families are trapped in dependency... where the dominant influence on young people is the culture of the street, not the values that bind families and communities together. (Harman, 1997; quoted in Fairclough, 2000, p. 57)

In this speech by then Minister of Social Security Harriet Harman, there are clear religious undertones beneath the surface of this discourse: work provides a 'sense of order', it is part of the 'values that bind families'. Above all, the economic value of work is side-lined in favour of the more fundamental significance of work: the ability to rise above your lot, answer the call to 'advance' in life. This discourse around work – and the word is used almost exclusively to mean wage labour – is common to New Labour's hegemonic project, heavily informing its approach to unemployment and social security in particular (addressed below). Having just detailed New Labour's relationship to wage labour *qua* structure of

capitalism through its labour market strategies, and before we examine other relevant aspects of its hegemonic project, it's important to note how a strong form of 'work ethic' is central to New Labour's hegemonic project; how wage labour is legitimated and articulated via this work ethic within written and spoken discourse. Both Peck and Fairclough recognise this centrality in their analyses, with the former going as far as to define New Labour's government a 'Work-Ethic State' (Peck, 2001, p. 302).

3.1 The modern work ethic as mechanism of consent

The modern work ethic – as is commonly used today – is a form of the 'Protestant Work Ethic' (PWE) chronicled by Max Weber (Weber, 1958; 2002). For Weber, this ethic, which contingently emerged as a consequence of the Reformation, gave work a new and elevated significance.

What characterised the Protestant ethos in particular was the ethical sanction for and the psychological impetus to work; ascetic Protestantism preached the moral import of constant and methodical productive effort on the part of self-disciplined individual subjects. (Weeks, 2011, p. 39)

The infraction of the PWE's rules is not to be understood 'as foolishness', Weber writes, 'but as forgetfulness of duty' (Weber, 1958, p. 51). One was prescribed to dedicate oneself to a life of 'organised worldly labour' not because it would guarantee one's place in an after life, but because it would assuage the anxiety of not knowing whether you were one of the worthy elect or not (ibid., p. 83, 121; Weeks, 2011, p. 45). Hard work was understood as part of faithful practice, rather than a method of salvation.

Weber's account is also an attempt to explain the origins of capitalism's dominance as a widespread set of ideas and collective consciousness. His account has been questioned from a Marxian perspective for lending too much causal power to ideas and beliefs at the expense of an explanation at the level of material relations (e.g. Meiksins-Wood, 2016). Kathi Weeks disagrees with this reading however, arguing that Marx's account of the restructuring of everyday life around wage labour and Weber's account of the shift in

consciousness around work's value 'mirror one another, with the role of consent and coercion reversed' (Weeks, 2011, p. 39).

In one [Marx], the proletariat must first be forced into the wage relation before its consent can be manufactured; in the other [Weber], consent to work must be won before necessity can play its role in inducing compliance...Thus to Marx's account of the primitive accumulation of private property, Weber adds a story about the primitive construction of capitalist subjectivities. (ibid.)

Weeks reading of the relationship between Marx and Weber – as one of complementarity – is consonant with the language of hegemony I have been developing across these chapters. In the previous chapter I partitioned consent within the waged workplace into 'compromise' on the one hand and 'internalisation' on the other; in Weeks' account, the work ethic is a discourse that interpolates subjects, via internalisation, into a dedicated relation to their work, forming them into subalterns within an increasingly sedimented wage system (or structure). At the same time, we saw how Taylorism, the organisation of the workplace and the structural foundation of primitive accumulation make up the coercive counterpart to this subjective consent.

Importantly, the PWE has become secularised and what is now known as 'the work ethic' has lost its religious significance in its everyday use. This, Weber was keen to acknowledge, merely deepens its incoherence.

Where the fulfilment of the calling cannot directly be related to the highest spiritual and cultural values, or when, on the other hand, it need not be felt simply as economic compulsion, the individual generally abandons to justify it at all (Weber, 1958, p. 182)

From the perspective of the Puritan worker, the ubiquity of (secular) work without end reveals a hollowness to our '*workaday* existence' (Weber, 1946, p. 149). Without a religious justification and context, the work ethic becomes an imperative to work for works' sake: hence the ease with which it has become untethered, open to multiple uses. Indeed, as

Weeks notes, it has been and is used in diverse contexts and from different perspectives. It can be deployed by the rich to implore the poor to labour but has equally been wielded by workers movements to slander the rich for not living off of the fruits of their own labour (Weeks, 2011, p. 46).

We can understand how the work ethic is an almost paradigmatic case of *senso comune*. It is fragmented and incoherent: it asks subjects primarily to approach their work as a calling, but one which gives no real assurances that this calling is worth pursuing – particularly now that its religious underpinning no longer holds. ‘Not even religiously instrumental, the rationality of the behaviour appears increasingly tenuous’ (Weeks, 2011, p. 45). And yet, despite these idiosyncratic origins and unfounded prescriptions, the work ethic is so commonly held that it is taken for granted as a moral guideline; its *sedimentation* is so well-achieved that the irrationality of imperatives are irrelevant.

Weeks traces the modifications that the modern work ethic has had in the post-Fordist, neoliberal era of governance.

Whereas Fordism demanded from its core workers a lifetime of compliance with work discipline, post-Fordism also demands of many of its workers flexibility, adaptability, and continual reinvention. If originally the work ethic was the means by which already disciplined workers were delivered to their exploitation, it serves a more directly productive function today: where attitudes themselves are productive, a strong work ethic guarantees the necessary level of willing commitment and subjective investment. (Weeks, 2011, p. 70)

Weeks’ characterisation of the post-Fordist work ethic fits with New Labour’s mobilisation of metaphors of change, newness and a fast-moving world in its *concezione del mondo* (detailed above). Adaptability, flexibility and commitment to the job at hand are the subjective characteristics that compliment a world of uncertainty, of lack of control (the movements of capital are out of reach) and scarcity of opportunity; one has to be ready to take one’s chances and give it our all. As Arlie Hochschild observes in her study of modern

service work: ‘Seeming to “love the job” becomes part of the job’ itself (Hochschild, 1983, p. 6; see also Boltanski and Chiapello, 2017 [1999]).

As the following sections will show, it is this, post-Fordist form of the work ethic that infiltrates New Labour’s reorganisation of social security, its disposition towards the subaltern unemployed as well as those in waged work.

4. New Labour’s ‘workfare’ coercion

Part of New Labour’s hegemonic strategy regarding the labour market was to mobilise the state functions so as to put greater pressure on those ‘out of work’ to find jobs. This involved a work ethic discourse as well as a restructuring of state services. In this sense, William Walters attempts to distinguish New Labour’s project – which he describes as ‘*human capitalism*’ – from a general neoliberal disposition on account of its interventionist welfare policies.

Like neo-liberalism, human capitalism holds that wealth and prosperity depend ultimately on the capacity of individuals, regions, and nations to respond to the demands and opportunities that an increasingly global and competitive economic environment present. Both reject the premise they associate with the “Keynesian welfare state”...However, human capitalism [New Labour] differs when it insists that competitiveness requires a state that is variously described as “enabling,” “entrepreneurial,” “catalysing”...The essential negative tactic of deregulation will not suffice. (Walters, 1996, p. 212)

In the context of the vast and rich literature on neoliberalism available to us, we can see how Walters distinction – whilst revealing in some respects – does not hold (Davies, 2014; Mirowski, 2013; Foucault, 2008). Neoliberalism is distinct from classical liberal political economy precisely *due* to its interventionist nature: markets are not merely meant to be ‘let be’, but rather must be created, monitored, made more competitive (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski, 2013). This neoliberal disposition is expressed most evidently in the New Right’s discourse on competition and trade unions (as was touched on in chapter two). In the New

Right (Thatcherite), neoliberal *concezione del mondo*, whilst monopoly firms are to be tolerated in the marketplace, trade unions constitute unjustified monopolies, acting as ‘distorters of the labour market, keeping wages artificially high, pricing workers out of jobs and restricting industrial development and productivity’ (Hayes, 1994, p. 64). Consequently, a liberal *laissez-faire* approach to statecraft was not sufficient: union monopoly on the price of labour had to be abolished and a competitive field reasserted. This took the form of legislation detailing specific strike ballot procedures, expanding the ability of employers to sack strikers, as well as enforcing the protection of non-union dissidents and so on (ibid.).¹³² In this sense, New Labour’s ‘catalysing’ and interventionist project (of ‘human capitalism’) is a continuation of, rather than detour from, neoliberal statecraft (embodied by Thatcherism and the broader New Right).

New Labour’s interventionist approach to welfare is masked – in typical fashion – by its surface discourse. According to Hall’s early assessment, “‘Reform’ is the weasel-word, the floating signifier,’ which masks the strategic ambiguity in New Labour’s discourse around welfare (Hall, 1998, p. 12; 2003). Behind this floating signifier however – perhaps obscured by it – lies a clear and distinct disposition towards wage labour and its counterpart, unemployment; it is one strongly underpinned by the work ethic’s demand that work is one of the highest virtues.

In the following sections I will argue that New Labour’s approach is continuous with the broad tendency of primitive accumulation in Britain. Before analysing this continuity however, it is important that we detail exactly what the regulation of the unemployed as the activity of a fundamentally *sedimented* structure of (British) capitalism entails; New Labour’s coupling of ‘welfare’ and work cannot be understood outside of this frame.

¹³² Some of the Trade Union Acts have already been mentioned in chapter two’s treatment of Thatcherism.

4.1 The emergence of an unemployment structure in the history of ‘primitive accumulation’

‘If they were not poor, they would not submit to employments’

Charles Hall (Hall, 1965, p. 144)

As we saw in the last chapter, the emergence of capitalist social relations was constituted by a steady erosion of life outside of market interactions. The market – including the waged labour market – became an imperative for the majority of the population as land was taken away and punishments for idleness increased in severity and level enforcement.

Part of this process of primitive accumulation was the increasing regulation, punishment and control of those who for whatever reason were not engaging in the emerging, capitalist labour market: those we now call the ‘unemployed’. At times, this coercion of the ‘workless’ built on earlier, draconian laws involving human slavery, such as those introduced in 1547:

In light of complaints of idleness and vagabondrie it is therefore enacted that if any man or woman able to work should refuse to labour, and live idly for three days, that he or she, should be branded with a red-hot iron on the breast with a letter V, and should be adjudged the slaves for three years of any person who should inform against the said idler. (Quoted in Seabrook, 2013, p. 45; Lansley and Mack, 2015, p. 122).

As early as the original Elizabethan Laws on poor relief, the first distinction between ‘deserving’ and ‘underserving’ appeared in Britain (Seabrook, 2013, p. 46). Such a divide has had crucial and long-lasting effects for life outside of the wage system ever since.

This seemingly unproblematic distinction in reality created difficulty in administration, since identifying the “deserving” is more complex than it appears. These were the aged, the sick and children; but there were also “deserving

unemployed”, people who would work, but were unable to find it. Alms houses, orphanages and hospitals provided for the “impotent” poor. The “undeserving” were criminals, robbers and beggars. These were to be beaten, and anyone repeatedly found begging could be imprisoned or hanged. (Seabrook, 2013, p. 46-7)

The debates about who exactly ‘counts’ as eligible for poor relief and support continued throughout the history of poor relief, right up until New Labour’s ‘workfare’ system. Also common to this history – despite the variety of laws and infrastructures that have been instantiated and subsequently replaced – are assumptions about the ‘natural’ state of mankind and individual responsibility for survival.

It is crucial, in this context, to understand the changing definitions of poverty over time. For long periods of British history, ‘poverty’ was simply synonymous with the condition of labouring, of being ‘free’ of everything save for your labour-power (as Marx puts it). We find this in Bentham: ‘Poverty is the state of everyone who, in order to obtain subsistence, is forced to have recourse to labour’ (quoted in Boralevi 1984, p. 98). In agreement, Patrick Colquhoun once remarked that poverty,

is that state and condition of society where the individual has no surplus labour in store, or, in other words, no property or means of subsistence but what is derived from the constant exercise of industry in the various occupations of life. (Colquhoun, 1806; quoted in Englander, 2013, p. 5)

Neither the older, Elizabethan laws, nor the ‘New Laws’ of 1834 sought to destroy poverty as such. Criticising the relative generosity that English charity and alms-giving displays to the poor, the founding report of the New Poor Laws states this clearly:

In no part of Europe except England has it been thought fit that the provision, whether compulsory or voluntary, should be applied to more than the relief of *indigence*, the state of a person unable to labour, or unable to obtain, in return for his labour, the means of subsistence. It has never been deemed expedient that the provision should extend to the relief of *poverty*; that is, the state of one who, in

order to obtain a mere subsistence, is forced to have recourse to labour. (Report on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1834, pp. 127, 146-7; appendix to Englander, 2013)¹³³

Poverty was not the opponent, but in fact the premise and aim of the new regulation of workers; the system initiated by the New Laws was a sedimentation of primitive accumulation, or perpetual poverty – the withdrawal of semi-autonomous life from the population. In establishing this new administration of the poor, the New Poor Law ‘proceeded with the brute repression of able-bodied male pauperism and reduction of rates coupled with a vigorous programme of workhouse construction’ (Englander, 2013, p. 14). In this way, the 1834 New Laws marked a significant new phase of the regulation of those outside of the now-hegemonic structure of wage labour in Britain. By no longer leaving those outside of (waged) work to their own devices, or survival, and by establishing a system of workhouse sites to enclose them in, we can identify the emergence of *a structure that is complimentary* to the wage system: what will at a later stage in history become ‘social security’ or the ‘welfare state’.

The 19th century workhouse as a space of internment was explicitly premised on the idea that life outside of work (and life inside the workhouse itself) must be demonstrably worse than life in waged labour (Englander, 2013, p. 31; Longmate, 2003).

The first and essential of all conditions, a principle which we find universally admitted...is that [the pauper’s] situation on the whole shall not be made really or apparently so eligible as the situation of the independent labourer of the lowest class. (Report on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1834, pp. 127, 146-7)

¹³³ Further, Edwin Chadwick argued a defence of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1837, of which he was the principal architect, with similar language:

The Commissioners might have added that poverty...is the natural, the primitive, the general and the unchangeable state of man; that as labour is the source of wealth, so is poverty of labour. Banish poverty, you banish wealth. Indigence, therefore, and not poverty is the evil, the removal of which is the proper object of Poor Laws. Indigence may be provided for... but all attempts to extirpate poverty can have no effects but bad ones. (Chadwick 1837, p. 18; quoted in Dean, 1991)

The condition of being a wage labourer had to have a brutal mirror image in the life of non-wage labourers to ensure it as the only desirable and viable option.¹³⁴ The ‘creation of a deterrent poor law system, it was thought, would force the pauper from the workhouse to find whatever employment he could find on the open market’ (Englander, 2013, p. 12). This is a perfect historical example of how the coercive process of primitive accumulation reproduces the structure of wage labour. Alongside this new practice, and in mutual reinforcement with it, a new *senso comune* was established in British government policy: without the coercion of poor conditions, those in receipt of out-of-work support would remain idle, ‘dependent’ and non-active in their search for employment (ibid.).

The discursive legacy of poverty – wherein to labour is to be poor and to be poor is natural or necessary – was both transformed and maintained in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: a kind of *aufhebung* of the wage labour/unemployment pair that emerged out of the process of primitive accumulation. For example, Henry Mayhew’s and Charles Booth’s landmark studies (1862 and 1902 respectively) sought to redefine poverty along new lines of income and self-sufficiency, whilst retaining certain, implicit assumptions about the workless. Booth’s categorisation of ‘the poor’ (from ‘A class’ to ‘F class’) aimed to divide workers between those ‘submerged’ within want and those who had a greater capacity to reproduce their lives through their own labour (Booth, 1902-3, vol. 1).¹³⁵ Booth’s strategy of distinguishing those who were once considered part of the indiscriminate ‘poor’ – on account of their status as ‘free’ labourers – led him to declare the ‘final divorce between labour and poverty’, seemingly marking a departure from previous significations (ibid.; Englander, 1995). In reality, such a divorce was political and never merely ‘empirical’:¹³⁶ Booth recognised that coercing and punishing the lower categories of ‘very poor’ would push the higher classes of impoverished worker in to consenting to ‘self-supporting habits’ out of fear of falling into the lower categories (Englander, 2013, p. 67).

¹³⁴ The impoverishment of non-wage life is famously depicted in Charles Dickens’ novels, particularly *Oliver Twist* (1839).

¹³⁵ According to the accounts of Englander and Himmelfarb, Booth’s categorisation was partly a response to the political activities of socialist groups in London, who were trying to mobilise both the labouring and non-labouring poor in the name of a unified working class (Englander, 2013, p. 67; Himmelfarb, 1991).

¹³⁶ ‘Modern scholars wonder where on earth he got the idea [for such strict divisions] from’ (Englander, 2013, p. 66).

Poverty was not to be categorised away, but merely wielded *coercively* against the dispossessed themselves, sowing division.¹³⁷

Booth's discourse – the extreme form of the 'deserving and undeserving' distinction that threads through the history of primitive accumulation – took the form of proposals for labour colonies for the very poorest, or 'least efficient' members of the working class(es), wherein civil liberties would be stripped and physical restraints enforced.¹³⁸ The inmates would be 'gradually absorbed into other industries, or if the worst comes to worst, they pass through the workhouse and finally die' (Booth, 1902-3, vol. 1, pp. 163-170). The ultimate threat with which to discipline the population of proto-labour-power was a price that progress had to pay, according to Booth: 'However slowly and kindly it may be done...it is not a pleasant process to be improved off the face of the earth' (ibid.).

Out of the interventions of Joseph Roundtree and Sidney and Beatrice Webb amongst others at the turn of the century, the fundamentals of a 'social security' structure were established. Through their studies, 'pauperism had been unpacked' and poverty – now understood primarily as the lack of income – had been found to be more conditioned by misfortune, lack of employment opportunities and sickness than by individual failings of character (Englander, 2013, p. 78). The workhouse system was proving too costly, public unrest surrounding the poor conditions within the workhouse was growing and widespread unemployment was damaging the success of industry. The 1909 Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, formed to deal with this crisis, recommended the creation of a 'Labour Exchange, established and maintained by the Board of Trade to provide efficient machinery for putting those requiring workers into prompt communication' (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1909, p. 207).

This constituted yet another new regime of regulation for the unemployed – who now had the opportunity (and obligation) to receive state support at the same location that jobs

¹³⁷ Telling, in this regard, is that Booth himself was a large employer of port labour, having a 'shrewd understanding of the imperfections of the labour market' (Englander, 2013, p. 67). Dividing the working class, and sedimenting a disciplining threat of pauperism, are useful tactics for employers searching for cheap and compliant labour power.

¹³⁸ This image is reminiscent of Bentham's plans for 'Pauperland' (Seabrook, 2013).

would be advertised and allocated.¹³⁹ Churchill was clear as to at least one other function of this new system:

It is not possible to make the distinction between the vagrant and the loafer on the one hand and the *bona fide* workman on the other, except in conjunction with some elaborate and effective system of testing willingness to work such as is afforded by the system of labor [*sic*] exchanges. (Churchill, 1909)

Such a distinction between the ‘vagrant’ and the ‘legitimate’ job-seeker, so common to the history of poor relief and social security, will recur through the origins of the welfare state and into New Labour’s workfare project.

4.2 The post-war ‘welfare state’: a slight deviation from the trend

The crisis of the New Poor Law system and the necessity of matching labour power with potential employers via labour exchanges are the grounds of the origins of the next shift in the character of the power exerted over labour power in Britain: the post-World War Two ‘welfare state’ (King, 1995; Cootes, 1966; Hay, 1975; Renwick, 2017). On a standard definition, the Beveridge Plan-inspired welfare state – embedded within what we can broadly call the social democratic, Keynesian hegemonic project – comprised of:

State provision of social services to individuals or families in particular circumstances or contingencies: basically social security, health, social welfare, education and training, and housing. These may be further subdivided into benefits in cash and services in kind. (Gough, 1979, p. 3)

These services and cash benefits – with which we are mainly concerned here – are all directed at providing support to the population, *largely* – but not entirely – irrespective of their status as wage labourers. It marked a modest change in the discursive disposition towards industrial life – acknowledging that destitution and poverty are not always the fault

¹³⁹ It was this apparent efficiency that managed to convince conservatives – such as Churchill – and liberals alike that the labour exchanges were practical for the economy (King, 1995, p. 32).

of individuals but rather are common to modern, capitalist societies in general. Individual 'welfare' – understood broadly as subjective wellbeing or the objective capacity to achieve this wellbeing – was now to be supplied at scale by the state (Goodin et al, 2008, p. 115-6).

The welfare state structure occupies an ambiguous position within the circuit of capital accumulation, and therefore has an ambiguous status for the situation of labour power in modern economies (Gough, 1979, p. 12; Hall, 1988; Habermas, 1988; O'Connor, 2017). Ensuring the reproduction of living labour power via housing, healthcare, out of work cash benefits and education is necessary for capital accumulation to continue – workers need to be alive, well and skilled in order to go to work to produce for their employers. But simultaneously these services and resources are nonetheless the grounds of the reproduction of the individual lives that are inseparable from this capacity to labour; ensuring that people survive the contingencies of modern, industrial life is almost tautologically of benefit to those people and is therefore in their interest, broadly construed. In this sense, Hall writes:

The Keynesian Welfare State was a contradictory structure, a 'historic compromise', which both achieved something in a reformist direction for the working class and became an instrument in disciplining it (Hall, 1988, p. 158)

The Beveridge Plan, therefore, embedded in an economy governed by a Keynesian *sensu comune*, was genuinely reformist insofar as it put in place an infrastructure by which people could survive more easily whether they had a job or not – taking life outside of the pure, blind play of market forces. At the same time, the expansion of the structure for out-of-work regulation also constituted an increase in state involvement in individual lives, including their physical and mental health, in 'order to adapt them to the requirements of the capitalist economy' (Gough, 1979, p. 14; Rose, 1989). This intrusive capacity is the manner in which the welfare state is continuous with the workhouse system of the 19th century.

The welfare state system can be considered a significant, more benign, deviation on the one hand, and a continuation of the coercive disciplining of proto-labour power on the other. To

concentrate on its 'positive aspects', is to 'lose sight of its repressive, capital-oriented side' (Gough, 1979, p. 14). Equally, to focus on the 'negative' aspects, is 'to lose sight of the very real gains' – such as the National Health Service – that the welfare state represents for those forced to sell their labour in order to survive (ibid.). It is by understanding this fundamental ambiguity – and teasing out which aspects of welfare are disciplinary towards labour power and which are more obviously beneficial – that we can understand the important changes to this structure that New Labour's hegemonic project would carry out.

4.3: New Labour: the return of workfare

This history helps us situate the return of individualised social security that was a crucial part of New Labour's hegemonic project. New Labour's project can be understood as part of the supersession of the 1945-1979 'historic compromise' that marked a slight – but significant – shift away from a largely punitive system of regulation inherited from the age of the Poor Laws. A Labour Party report from 1995 indicates how New Labour fits into the broader trajectory we've just detailed, declaring its intention 'to modernise the welfare state and use the benefit system to get people back into work' (Labour Party, 1995, p. 54).¹⁴⁰ That is to say, the aim is to use wage labour – and the search for it – as a justification and condition for receipt of material support. Without this effort – and this marks the new severity of New Labour's governance – the unemployed can be held to account via sanctions (withdrawal of benefits). New Labour combines this individualising of responsibility – as we shall see – with an abjuring of governmental responsibility for labour market intervention (a responsibility that was central to the Keynesian-social democratic project). In sum, New Labour's hegemonic project marks a departure from the deviated of 'old' Labour – a distinction central, as we've seen, to New Labour's self-representation.

[T]he unemployed themselves are no longer portrayed, as in the Old Labour convention, as the unfortunate victims of deindustrialisation and job loss, but as active agents in a dysfunctional economy of benefit dependency, fraud, and illegal

¹⁴⁰ Not the reappearance of the keyword 'modernise'.

work; it is seen as axiomatic that the unemployed should be “obliged” to “cooperate”. (Peck, 2001, p. 280)

This more active approach to out of work social ‘security’ – wherein responsibility for securing a job lies at the feet of individuals – has become labelled ‘workfare’, recalling the workhouse system of the 19th century. Like that system, it involves a renewed attempt at dividing the unemployed from the employed as well as dividing the ‘deserving’ unemployed from the ‘underserving’.

Of course, this approach did not emerge *ex nihilo*, and New Labour are, in many respects, merely continuing along a trajectory already instigated by the previous (post-Thatcherite) Conservative government in the early 1990s as well as similar practices in the United States (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992, p. 55; Peck, 2001, p. 268).¹⁴¹ A key building block of the workfare apparatus in this regard was introduced one year before the New Labour project became a government, as one of the final acts of the incumbent Conservatives. This was the introduction of Job Seekers Allowance, which constituted a reorganisation of the out of work benefits system along stronger, work-centred (and work *ethical*) lines. ‘The Job Seeker’s Allowance’ (JSA), social security secretary Peter Lilley explained, ‘gives extra help to those who want to get jobs and makes it a bit tougher for those who are workshy...who don’t try’ (quoted in Peck, 2001, p. 282). After some hesitancy, New Labour effectively adopted this approach to welfare wholesale (Peck, 2001, p.292).

However, whilst the ground was indeed prepared by previous governments both nationally and internationally, Peck notes that ‘[t]he preoccupation with the work ethic in the U.S. workfare discourse simply was not present in anything like the same way in the British debate under the Conservatives’ (Peck, 2001, p. 272). This preoccupation, and the work ethic *senso comune* that comes with it, would emerge instead with, and through, New Labour’s project. This work ethic is expressed most explicitly by one of its leaders, Peter Mandelson:

¹⁴¹ Evidently I am arguing that New Labour, as with their immediate Conservative predecessors, are also continuing in line with centuries of discipline and regulation for the ‘workless’.

It is a crucial New Labour commitment that society must accept a serious obligation to find work for the young unemployed...In these circumstances the young unemployed themselves have to accept obligations too... It is not right that some people should collect the dole, live on the black economy, and then refuse to cooperate with society's efforts to reintegrate them into the labour market...In circumstances where new opportunity is being offered and refused, there should be no absolute entitlement to continued receipt of social security benefits...*Such a tough discipline is necessary to demonstrate the seriousness of the government's efforts and break the culture of hopelessness, idleness and cynicism.* (Mandelson and Liddle, 1996, p. 102. Italics added)

Here a work ethic discourse underpins the language of 'obligation' that exists on the part of the unemployed to find work; it is so much a sense-in-common that it does need mentioning, rather functioning as an implied and accepted ground upon which policy can be constructed. We can also see in Mandelson's discourse an acknowledgement of this coercion at the heart of workfarism: failure to embody the correct disposition towards work ('cynicism', 'idleness') calls for the threat of withdrawal of benefit support. This work ethic rhetoric is reinforced by the JSA that practically embodied it. As its name implies, Job Seeker's Allowance is a benefit that materially divides those who should receive support (those demonstrably looking for a job) from those who are underserving (those who are not).¹⁴²

'Every social group', Gramsci writes,

coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one of more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 5)

¹⁴² Mandelson stops short of explicitly identifying this discipline as essential to capitalist labour markets.

Gramsci is here identifying the bourgeoisie and the concomitant sets of intellectuals that are brought into existence for the management of a particular political, social and economic system (capitalism). We can integrate this observation to analyse the composition of hegemonic projects and initiatives such as New Labour's workfare agenda. A key 'organic intellectual' here is Richard Layard – the Director of the Centre for Economic Performance who became a special advisor to the government in 1997. Giving evidence to the House of Commons in 1996, Layard claimed that indefinite benefit payments, by facilitating longer periods of job searching when the labour market is in recession or experiencing rapid structural change, 'are a subsidy to idleness' which draw people into the trap of long-term unemployment (ESC, 1996, p. 17; Finn 2000, p. 386). We can note the close consonance between statements such as this and those found in the New Poor Laws from over one hundred and sixty years prior. In the 1834 founding report, with similar language to that of Layard, it is expressed that: '[e]very penny bestowed that tends to render the condition of the pauper more eligible than that of the independent labourer, is a bounty on indolence and vice' (Report on the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, 1834, pp. 127, 146-7). In both we can note how the work ethic – and the war on 'idleness' is proposed as grounds in order to coerce subjects into employment.

New Labour's 'tough-love' approach to social security – labour-market training 'backed up by a little coercion' (Peck, 2001, p. 312) – is coherent with its affirmative 'rights *but also* responsibilities', seemingly non-antagonistic *senso comune*, detailed earlier (Peck, 2001, p. 307). Peck notes that this work-ethic imbued sanctions regime 'derives largely from the ideological predilections of the Labour leadership rather than from the kind of practical knowledge of the on-the-ground programming that otherwise is lauded by New Labour' (ibid., p. 303). New Labour's project of workfare is thus best understood as a central part of its 'regressive modernism', 'human capitalism' or 'managerial populism'. Whilst using the language of mutual obligation underpinned by a logic of administration, the New Labour project enforced reforms supported by a work ethic rhetoric, that increased the pressure on those *outside* of the wage labour relation in order that they consent *to* that relation.

5. New Labour's employability agenda: coercion, consent and labouring subjectivity before the job

New Labour's relationship to wage labour – the way it reproduced it or transformed it as a hegemonic structure – is revealed to be more complex when we consider its discourse of 'employability'. Following a review of available literature, New Labour's 'official' definition of the concept is more or less synthesised in a Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) report from 1998:

In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work. (Hillage and Pollard, 1998)

From an early stage New Labour 'put improving employability at the centre of its strategy for modernising the country' (Finn, 2000, p. 384; see also McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). Indeed, the New Labour government of 1997 raised five billion pounds committed to New Deal programmes aimed at increasing the employability of the population – with young people specifically targeted (ibid., p. 389). In a speech to European Socialists, Blair declared,

For us and Europe, jobs must be the priority; to create jobs we must be competitive; to be competitive in the modern world, knowledge, skills, technology and enterprise are the keys, not rigid regulation and old-style interventionism...Employability – knowledge, technology and skills, not legislation alone – is what counts. (Blair, 1997; see also Peck, 2001, p. 311)

This marks a continuation of the departure – started by Thatcherism – from the post-war consensus that full-employment should be the aim of active state-intervention (ibid., p. 385). Instead of job creation, or state-simulated growth that might lead to it, the focus of

New Labour's project is to tackle unemployment by focusing on the subjective capabilities of workers themselves. Subjects are expected to be 'employable', if not necessarily employed (ibid.; Moore, 2010).¹⁴³

How does employability relate to the hegemonic structure of wage labour and therefore what does this say about the character of New Labour's hegemony? Relating employability to the commodity labour-power we can say that it indicates a set of capacities or traits that are required of labour-power by their purchaser, the employer; being 'employable' can quite literally mean the level of desirability to the one who employs.¹⁴⁴ Becoming employable, or cultivating one's employability is thus a process of (unwaged) work, the purpose of which is to develop the capacities – and productivity – of one's labour-power (Standing, 2014, p. 964); that this commodity for sale is at one and the same time our selves makes this activity a kind of work on the self.¹⁴⁵

As this practice of employability occurs before the purchase and use of one's labour power, to cultivate one's employability therefore means to shape oneself as *potentially* commodifiable, i.e. exchangeable, and this temporal stance towards oneself (you are always *anticipating* employment) means that the disciplinary wage labour relationship (i.e. between employee and employer) effectively begins even before employment itself (Guizzo and Stronge, 2018; Moore, 2010). We can say that in contrast to disciplinary power as conceived originally by Foucault (1977), which works on the body and the soul within a tightly-bound spatial location – the hospital, the office, the school (i.e. *only once* the individual had entered the employment relation) – employability culture requires that the individual is always already influenced or affected by *future* employment:

¹⁴³ This strategy was not without contemporary criticism. Marquand writes, for example, 'The notion.... that the workfare state can turn the trick all by itself, that a mixture of training, education and moral suasion can transform the entire society into winners...is an illusion' (Marquand, 1998).

¹⁴⁴ New Labour's emphasis on employability its function as a way of 'advertising' yourself to employers, is concurrent with self-branding literature from the period. For example, Peters' (1997) foundational article in *Fast Company* 'The Brand Called You', or Montoya and Vandehey's (2008) *The Brand Called You: Make your business stand out in a crowded marketplace*. See Jones (2019) for a review of this literature.

¹⁴⁵ I have developed this reading of employability elsewhere (Phull and Stronge, 2019)

The worker who can demonstrate employability has begun a relationship of subordination to capital before even necessarily being employed, meaning that capitalism is successfully becoming integrated into increasing levels of people's everyday lives. (Moore, 2010, p. 39-40)

Employability is a new kind of coercive pressure upon wage labourers – not the discipline of the workplace, nor the impossibility of survival outside of the wage system that primitive accumulation achieves, but a constant imperative to become suitable to employers via the accumulation of skills and attributes;¹⁴⁶ Ciara Cremin calls this process of becoming-employable 'reflexive exploitation' in which we are involved in an 'ongoing reflection of the self as an object of exchange' (Cremin, 2011, p. 45). That is to say, this demand upon bearers of labour-power enforces an *internalisation* of the demands of their potential employers; an internalisation that, following the discussion in the previous chapter, we can identify as a form of hegemonic consent.

Employability is a discourse that asks subjects to become of a particular type:

This type of subjectivity must be held by the individual who craves security but is also in love with change, one who is competitive but also longs to work in groups, longs for success and achievement, and so on. This was to be a new kind of citizen who longs for self-fulfilment through [waged] work, but in a way that is not complementary to the society of the industrial age. (Moore, 2010, p. 31)

More than just a particular set of skills, employability expects workers 'to have particular "labour attitudes" (Moore, 2010, p. 40; Worth, 2003, p. 608). Worth lists these as follows:

- Flexible personality
- Incurable learner
- Learner worker

¹⁴⁶ Moore uses explicitly Gramscian terminology, considering the emergence of employability to be a '*global passive revolution*' that can be perceived in 'three historically and economically different locations: South Korea, the UK, and Singapore' (2010, p. 11. Italics in original).

- Enriched communicator
- Entrepreneur
- Employable
- Self-managed/directed
- Innovator
- Independent thinker
- Individual
- Adaptable
- Job sharer

(Worth, 2003, p. 608)

This analysis is supported by Gershon (2017), who finds that despite the imperative to ‘be yourself’ that employability gurus demand, most employers are receptive to a small set of identifiable ‘positive’ characteristics such as: confidence, cooperative, hardworking, flexible and others. (ibid., pp. 61 – 88).

Insofar as it asks of subjects to coalesce around a homogenous worker identity then, employability mimics the interchangeability that we noted in chapter three: if the subject *qua* labour power is moulded into an average, abstract capacity to labour – in line with the requirements of standardised commodity production – then the subject *qua* proto-labour-power (employable) is pushed to embody a similar, relatively interchangeable set of shared, expected properties in order to secure employment in the first place. The pressure to become the employable subject permeates the workers’ life *before* they have even embodied the rentable labour-power for their employer.

By placing emphasis on employability, rather than actual employment, New Labour’s hegemony expands what it means to be labour-power in a capitalist labour market. This can be articulated and summarised in the language of hegemony. Through mechanisms of coercion – without the ‘right attitude’ and skillset you won’t get a job – the internalisation of a form of subjectivity is pressed upon individuals as a kind of adornment they must perform in job interviews, on their CVs and in interactions with the welfare system. Subjects

simply *have to* consent to their own determination as proto-labour-power if they want access to an income (and survive). Drawing on the work of Weeks, Hochschild and others that we discussed regarding the work ethic earlier, the employability agenda is an attempt to 'bake in' a post-Fordist work ethic suitable to the changed demands of employers at the end of the twentieth century. The employable, but not necessarily employed, subject is perhaps the archetypal subaltern that the New Labour project brought into being.

6. Conclusion: rhetoric, reality and New Labour's relationship with wage labour

We can draw some of the threads of the above interpretation together to conclude our account of New Labour as an hegemonic project and the ways in which it relates to wage labour as a hegemonic structure intrinsic to capitalism. Overall, and in relation to our chosen area – we can claim that New Labour's hegemony was of a particular incoherence in the sense that Gramsci uses it. By 'coherence', recalling the first chapter, Gramsci does not only mean logical coherence, the coherence within a discourse between its various elements or between its premises and conclusions. Rather, Gramsci expanded the meaning of the term to include the *historical efficacy* of a given world conception (Thomas, 2009, p. 369); the coherence between words or beliefs and actions or worldly effects. The example Gramsci gives is between thought and action within an individual:

[I]s it not frequently the case that there is a contradiction between one's intellectual choice and one's conduct? Which therefore would be the real conception of the world: that logically affirmed as an intellectual choice? or that which emerges from the real activity of each man, which is implicit in his mode of action? (Gramsci, 1971, p. 326)

Often, we are *incoherent* subjects, insofar as our intellectual life does not cohere with our practical activities. Put another way, coherence is the name for the *strategic* unity between world conceptions and their actualisation; it is the making-effective of our 'intellectual choices'.

Applying this concept to New Labour's hegemonic project, we can summarise the precise ways in which New Labour was incoherent and how it succeeded hegemonically via this incoherence;¹⁴⁷ the ways in which its rhetoric is at odds with its practice (Fairclough, 2000, p. 155).¹⁴⁸ The hegemonic strategy, or discourse of elements, of New Labour was to utilise the language of *non-antagonism* in order to maintain – via coercion and consent – a particular situation, the parameters of which had been established by the neoliberal shift embodied by Thatcherism (Hall, 1998; Gilbert, 2004).¹⁴⁹¹⁵⁰ This is most obvious, as we've seen, in the relationships in and around waged work, wherein, as I have argued, there is a practical tendency *for antagonism* between the employers of labour power (who have an interest in using this labour as much as possible) and those embodying labour power (who do not necessarily share this interest).

New Labour did not have coherence in this regard. Under New Labour's *ostensibly* non-antagonistic 'partnership' approach to this relationship, weaker capacity on the part of wage labourers to resist felt problems at work as and when certain antagonisms did arise, e.g. managerial bullying, reveals a hegemonic governance that facilitated an increased asymmetry between either side of the employment relationship. Further, without having to claim that having strong trade unions is tantamount to having ideal conditions for the sellers of labour power (see critiques already alluded to, such as Miliband (1984)), once unions were confined to the role of workplace 'partners' under New Labour, organised worker voice continued to decline in numbers, working conditions could worsen and economic

¹⁴⁷ To be clear, an hegemonic project does not need to be coherent – in the Gramscian sense – in order to be successful. One could argue that no hegemonic project within a capitalist system – with its many inconsistencies and tendency to create antagonism – can exist without maintaining at least some incoherence as part of its alliances and oppositions.

¹⁴⁸ As pro-Labour think tank director Matthew Taylor said at the time: 'You can't understand New Labour unless you get to grips with the reality-rhetoric dichotomy' (Taylor, 1999). Taylor emphasises, optimistically, the ways in which New Labour's rhetoric is often more conservative than the reality of its actions. In contrast, this chapter has attempted to show how the reverse is more true.

¹⁴⁹ The divide between rhetoric and practice constitutes a split within the discourse of New Labour in the sense that Laclau and Mouffe use the term – given that 'discourse' for them is not limited to language, but is more akin to an organisation of elements in general (see chapter two).

¹⁵⁰ There are evidently various divergences between the New Labour and Thatcherite hegemonic projects – which cannot be teased out here, not least the contrast between the former's socially liberal instincts versus the much more authoritarian Thatcherite style of governance. Nonetheless, as this chapter has shown, the agenda of maintaining a labour market that works for the employer over and above collective and individual labour power was clearly transmitted from one project to the other. For more on the cultural continuities and discontinuities between the two projects see: Gilbert (2004) and Bewes and Gilbert (2000).

inequality could increase, exacerbated by continued job polarisation.¹⁵¹ By pointing to these phenomena, I have ‘set the discourse of “partnership” against how New Labour actually governs’ (Fairclough, 2000, p. 156). New Labour’s hegemonic project was one in which workplaces were less democratic than before, where income distribution was polarised (even though a universal minimum was set) and where good jobs accrued to the very top whilst ‘McJobs’ proliferated at the bottom.

We can also conclude that New Labour created fertile conditions for new areas of antagonism around the wage labour relationship that perhaps had only been dormant in previous hegemonic projects. An industrial strategy that focused on the ‘supply side’ (i.e. the subjective responsibility of labour power) meant more pressure (‘obligations’ and ‘responsibilities’) upon those outside and at the fringes of the labour market – who already were under the coercion of the market-imperative (chapter three). The relationship between job-seeker and the state, in the form of a ‘workfare’ Job Seekers Allowance and harsher sanctions regime, recalled the Poor Laws’ practice of a system of punitive regulation of the workless, and rejected the post-war consensus represented by the welfare state; in this sense New Labour’s workfare regime sits comfortably in the broader history of primitive accumulation that the present and previous chapters have been articulating.

This kind of coercion within New Labour’s project, coupled with its various employability training initiatives also represent an increased attempt at internalising the post-Fordist work ethic – which I have defined as a *senso comune*, facilitating internalisation-consent. ‘Full employability’ (and not full employment) is an imperative not only for government to create training programmes for the unemployed, but is also – and mainly – an imperative on individuals to become the right kind of ‘promise’ to employers; flexible, skilled, entrepreneurial and autonomous are some of the (somewhat ironic) capacities that the employability agenda aims at instilling in subjects.¹⁵² In other words, the coercion of a punitive workfare system (and the harshness of unemployed life that lies behind it) is

¹⁵¹ As noted in an above section, income inequality never returned to pre-Thatcherite levels and at certain points reached new peaks.

¹⁵² Of course, its success, and whether subjects really did begin to internalise this employability discourse is not assured.

complimented by discourses aimed at garnering consent to the wage labour relation (even before subjects have entered that relation). The combined mix of pressures on wage labourers and the potential antagonisms that lie therein, as part of New Labour's hegemonic project, had their own legacies that remain in place in contemporary Britain.

Conclusion:

Hegemony and Wage Labour in the UK

Over the preceding chapters, I have constructed an account of hegemony that speaks to what I have shown to be a lacuna in the field of study: a sustained engagement with wage labour as a crucial component of capitalist societies and *a fortiori* any hegemony – or hegemonic situation – that operates within them. In brief, I have developed the hypothesis that if to study hegemony is to study the given (multi-faceted) mechanisms of coercion and consent in a particular historical conjuncture, then to study capitalist hegemony requires us to study wage labour as in some way imbricated within these mechanisms. I have then sought to show how we can account for this imbrication within a dynamic theory of hegemony that builds on existing work in a number of fields.

Over the course of the dissertation I have argued that wage labour relations are often touched on – or glossed – within the field of hegemony studies, and yet are relatively poorly theorised or even side-lined in favour of wider cultural or political phenomena. I identified this as a problematic lacuna particularly in the work of theorists such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Stuart Hall. I have argued that the lack of engagement with ‘the economic’, taken in the broadest sense of exchange relations, is particularly significant as it precludes rigorous engagement with wage labour and its potential position within a given hegemonic conjuncture. Aside from underlining the centrality of wage labour to the economic logic of capitalist societies, I have made the argument that the absence of wage labour within accounts of hegemony ignores a fundamental aspect of the *history* of capitalist societies such as that of the UK: the historical *emergence and sedimentation* of wage labour, also known as ‘primitive accumulation’. This history – detailed in Chapter Three – has been identified as a ‘foundational coercion’ that, I have argued, must be recognised by accounts of hegemony if these accounts aspire to be adequate to the analysis of power and domination in modern societies.

At the same time, I have aimed to not throw the baby out with the bathwater, and have included the insights and developments of the theory of hegemony that Laclau, Mouffe and

Hall bring to the debate. In this regard it was important to consider the important lacunae that exist in the literature critical of these authors too, as I have done in Chapter Two. In working through these debates, I built a 'working hypothesis' of hegemony that tries to include economic logics without creating a new fetishism of structure, and that could include an analysis of discourse and populism without untethering politics from economic relations entirely.

The other direction of argument within my thesis has been to bring the categories taken from the analysis of hegemony (coercion, consent, organic intellectuals, sedimentation, and others) to bear on the analysis of the labour process itself, and to situate the wage labour process within (the wider) mechanisms of hegemony (that operate at larger scales of the social and the political). The (broadly conceived) labour process theory tradition – including authors such as Braverman, Friedman and others – reveals key insights into the character of concrete labour processes involved in wage labour relations. Thus far, however, this scholarship has remained at a relative distance from the concepts and vocabulary of the field of hegemony studies. This non-communication between fields is particularly glaring – as I argued in Chapter Three – insofar as the categories of hegemony can interpret workplace relations in ways that reveal much about the 'politics of the work' at the level of the everyday. I drew on analyses of a variety of different kinds of work – from Taylor's original texts on 'scientific management', to Friedman's examination of factory work, through to Woodcock's recent study of call centres as well as Crowley's study of high-income professions.

In the final chapter of the thesis I brought the different components of the preceding chapters together in order to produce an interpretation of New Labour's hegemonic project as a case study. Producing a new reading of New Labour as a hegemonic project with its own particular relationship to wage labour as a key structure of society functions not only to create a new interpretation, but also to demonstrate the method of analysing hegemony that I had developed through the theoretical debates of the preceding chapters. New Labour's project was in part continuous with Thatcherism and in part had new and different elements. In the chapter in question I chose to focus closely on two notable elements that are particularly relevant to the study of wage labour (and its position as a 'hegemonic

structure' within society): so-called 'employability' and welfare (as workfare). Both of these elements, I have argued, are peripheral to the wage labour process and yet crucial to understanding wage labour as a hegemonic structure.

Employability is a self-practice whereby the proto-wage labourer cultivates themselves as a kind of promise towards future-employers, demanding the subject to become a specific kind of subaltern with particular attitudes and dispositions towards work; I defined this kind of practice as one that inculcates internalisation-consent – one of the concepts I expanded on from the labour process scholarship addressed in chapter three. The employable, but not necessarily employed, subject is one of the innovations of New Labour's hegemonic project.

I read the 'workfare' schemes of New Labour as a continuation of the accelerated tendency within capitalist societies to use coercive means in order to discipline those in (and out) of the wage relation. In this sense, the articulation of the history of the foundational coercion at the (historical and ongoing) base of wage labour – in Chapter Three – in the UK was continued, in Chapter Four, by an account of the history of unemployment and the coercions involved in disciplining large parts of the UK population into engaging with the wage relation. Often, as I showed, this coercion was carried out under the explicit pretences and justifications of discouraging "idleness". New Labour's project deployed an updated, aspirational version of the centuries-old work ethic that functions to elicit acceptance of (or consent to) the state's disciplinary measures.

1. Opportunities for further development of concepts

By integrating the conceptual vocabularies of hegemony studies and accounts of the waged labour process, my thesis opens up the possibility for the further development of questions of (the critique of) political economy and power in capitalist societies. To give one example, a constant source of debate within Marxist literature is the question of the value of labour power – a factor which will determine, to a large extent, the level of the price paid for labour (wages). Marx notes, in the opening chapter of *Capital*, that the level of wages (the cost of labour power to the buyer/employer) is determined by the cost of the production of the commodity just like any other – i.e. in this case the cost of keeping labour power, the

productive subject, alive (Marx, 1990; Harvey, 2010). This way of accounting for the value of labour and its price (wage), Andrew Friedman notes (1977a), is therefore based on 'subsistence': the value of labour power is the labour time necessary to produce the subsistence goods necessary to maintain and (re)produce workers (Friedman, 1977a, p. 267).

At the end of his pathbreaking book on wage labour and managerial relations, Friedman complicates this orthodox Marxist analysis by noting that once *struggle* is inserted into the dynamics of wage labour, then 'the aspect of the major relation of production which Marx did consider must also be altered: that is, the money which the worker receives in return for his labour power' (Friedman, 1977a, p. 267). That is to say, if we accept that wage labour has a tendency to antagonism – as I have argued in consonance with Friedman in chapter three – then the very terms of wage labour (and its value) are thrown into question and cannot be resolved in a calculation of mere physiological need. To make workers work, they don't just need food and rest; they need to agree to enter the employment relationship on [x] terms. If the wage levels – just like length of working hours and other conditions – are determined in part by the level of willingness, resistance and actualised power of the labour power-bearing workforce, then we have to shift our analysis from what constitutes (the costs of) "need" and towards the relations of power, and indeed subjective dispositions in the workplace if we want to understand what determines the 'value of labour'.

'The unequal distribution of income within countries and between them does not reflect differing needs, it reflects differing desire *and ability* to resist, plus managerial strategies' (Friedman, 1977a, p. 268).

Friedman is noting that the level of wage incomes – the *de facto* value of wage labour in a given, historical society – are primarily (but not exclusively) set according to the extent to which workers *accept* the wage relation in its given state. In other words, it is not what (goods and services) are necessary to ensure that workers are *capable* of working (physiologically) – i.e. what they absolutely *need* in order to function as a worker: 'rather it

is what is necessary to ensure that workers will be *willing to accept* their being utilised as labour power, under the specific conditions of the workplace (ibid., p. 268).¹⁵³

My account of hegemony (and its relation to wage labour) can contribute here. In chapter three I folded Friedman's concept of 'responsible autonomy' into a coercion-consent (hegemony) framework. Friedman had developed his concept in response to more rigid accounts of workplace control that emphasise coercion to the expense of consent strategies; these approaches precisely cannot account for the subjective acceptance of (or consent to) external control. Recalling chapter three, (Taylorist) coercion is not always the most effective means by which labour power can be turned into labour output. By bestowing some 'status, authority, responsibility' on the workforce, and by 'try[ing] to win their loyalty and co-opt their organisations to the firm's ideals', the acceptance of working conditions – and therefore the consent necessary to maintain the wage labour relation – can be achieved (Friedman, 1977a, p. 49).

In this sense, my thesis can continue Friedman's brief speculations on the 'value of labour' by adding more flesh onto the bones of the (hegemonic) factors that regulate the consent of the workforce to particular conditions – including the determination of the value of their labour. These factors can be part of workplace dynamics – which is what Friedman is focusing on – but also wider, cultural standards (as to what is acceptable at work and what is not) that are recognised and internalised by wage labour subalterns. In other words, if we factor in hegemony at the micro-physical, and wider, scales, then the question of the determination of the 'value of labour' (of wage levels) becomes a question of hegemonic power – and the struggles therein. This kind of analysis would engage with questions of the balance of forces within a given historical society (Gramsci), of the particular divisions and demands that traverse the social and political (Laclau) as well as the questions explored in Chapter Three around managerial strategy and workplace organisation. Friedman himself recognises that wider, social and cultural factors will determine the consciousness of the waged worker:

¹⁵³ Being physiologically capable is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for actualising wage labour.

[The willingness to accept a particular wage level] will also depend on consciousness of one's own position as a consumer compared to other groups within firms, areas or countries, the strength of one's idea of a 'fair' distribution as well as particular desires and grievances which arise from struggle normally during productive activity. (Friedman, 1977a, p. 268)

He does not go as far to integrate a theory of hegemony however, and we might ask: if we accept that hegemonic relations help determine the *sensu comune* of a society, including those engaged in wage labour on a day to day basis, then how can we articulate the relationship between the value of labour and wider, hegemonic projects? Seeing how elements from these different scales intersect would be both a study of changing *sensu comune* around employment as well as a study of the changing value of labour. For example, we might trace how intensified campaigning around outsourcing and low wages at the political level (and in public sphere) can influence the waged worker's standard of acceptability for wage levels *in* the workplace – thereby challenging (and, if successful, changing) the value of the labour power in question.¹⁵⁴

2. What is next: where could this lead?

By building and integrating an account of wage labour into an analysis of hegemony, my project has laid some groundwork for a more comprehensive interpretation of other concrete hegemonic situations – or 'case studies', as it were. The project, after all, has been both an intervention into the *method* of analysing hegemony/ies – this was what Chapter Two was concerned with – and also a toolkit with which to potentially bring to bear upon other, given hegemonic situations.

One such study might be on post-financial crash, austerity Britain. If we retain a tight focus of wage labour and its intersection with the mechanisms, social functions and power

¹⁵⁴ This question of the 'politics' of work at the granular level of the workplace was also opened up several years later – as we saw – by Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and surrounding texts. In their case, however, an economic logic was not included in the picture of wage relations to the extent that it is in Friedman.

relations of hegemony, there is much to be uncovered: how can we characterise the hegemonic project in these years, and how did it relate to the wage labour relation and other relevant, surrounding phenomena? What is the *senso comune* around wage labour in this period? How is the commodity labour power lived within the workplace and within wage labour relations?

The (ongoing) austerity period in the UK also makes questions of welfare – such as those I explored in Chapter Four – all the more pertinent. According to a study that factors in surveys on poverty spanning multiple decades, the UK has entered a new period of ‘mass poverty’ wherein the number of people falling below the minimum standards of the day had doubled in the years between 1983 and 2012 (Lansley and Mack, 1984; 1985; 2015; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000; ESRC, 2012). The austerity period has also seen a significant increase in the amount of people now drifting in and out of waged work in the UK: since 2006, 60% more people have moved between a job and unemployment, propagating a ‘low-pay, no-pay cycle’ (Thompson, 2015; Joseph Roundtree Foundation, 2010). In these circumstances, new discourses around poverty have been deployed in order to justify poverty: one example is the ‘skivers versus strivers’ rhetoric utilised by Shadow Chancellor George Osborne and reiterated by various Conservative ministers, that created a new ‘Two Nations’ image, mirroring Thatcherism’s own populist division (Patrick, 2017). This ‘new poverty’ and this closer relationship between employed and unemployed life throws up various questions of continuity and discontinuity between the present and previous hegemonic moments that could be explored in a similar manner to what I have carried out with respect to New Labour.

2.1 New forms of subalterneity?

Another expansion of the present dissertation might flow from an engagement with the question of the changing composition (and definitions) of ‘the working class’ (Umney, 2018). The term ‘precariat’ – designating what some see as a new economic class grouping – is often associated with the writing of Guy Standing (2011, 2014; 2014a) although the term had been used previously by researchers in different contexts for slightly different purposes in the 1980s (Standing, 2011, p. 8-10). The precariat indexes workers without stable wage

labour contracts, with very little career mobility, often – but not exclusively – employed by digital platforms, and who are largely ineligible for welfare benefits, amongst other characteristics (ibid.).¹⁵⁵

Standing sees the precariat as standing to one side of the traditional working class – having different relationships to the means of production (for example, many precariat taxi drivers own their own vehicles – as is the case with Uber drivers) and different (or no) relationships to career progression opportunities that much of the mid-twentieth century UK working class had (Standing, 2011; 2014).¹⁵⁶ The portmanteau ‘precariat’ is preceded conceptually (and historically) by André Gorz’s notion of the ‘neo-proletariat’ (Gorz, 1982). Gorz shares Laclau, Mouffe and Hall’s critique of strict notions of class, taking ‘scientific socialism’ as his theoretical opponent. As with Laclau and Mouffe (1981), Gorz points towards the advancement of the capitalist division of labour (and its highly stratified deployment) as a cause of class disintegration (and therefore also the disempowerment of the concept of class in the traditional sense).

In the majority of cases, whether in the factory or the office, work is now a passive, pre-programmed activity which has been totally subordinated to the working of big machinery, leaving no room for personal initiative. It is no longer possible for workers to identify with ‘their’ work or ‘their’ function in the productive process. (Gorz, 1982, p. 67)¹⁵⁷

For Gorz, this mass non-identification with work, provoked by an ever more stratified labour process, brings with it a non-identification with a particular class identity (ibid.). This non-class of labouring subjects Gorz calls the ‘neo-proletariat’: ‘It includes all the

¹⁵⁵ On form of precarious working life is the ‘zero-hour contract’ whereby wage labourers are unsure, week to week or even day to day, how many waged hours they will be prescribed by their employers. Official government statistics estimate that there are around a million contracts that cannot guarantee a minimum of hours (and therefore regular minimum income) in existence (ONS 2018b).

¹⁵⁶ Some authors have pointed out that these precarious conditions are in fact a *return* to the standard situation of wage labour prior to the stable wage relationship that was normalised in the twentieth century (Cant, 2019; Komlosy, 2018).

¹⁵⁷ This description is capturing something similar to what Laclau and Mouffe refer to in summary as the ‘process of technocratisation and bureaucratisation’ that have created new antagonisms in the post-war period (Laclau and Mouffe, 1981, p. 21)

supernumeraries of present-day social production, who are potentially or actually unemployed, whether permanently or temporarily, partially or completely' (ibid., p. 68). The standardisation of labour processes (i.e. the development of Taylorist models of organisation and control), coupled with developments in labour-saving technology in the workplace, has accelerated the decline of artisanal ways of working and sedimented a more standardised set of skills for labour power to embody. In Chapter Three we noted how capitalist exchange relations have a tendency to cultivate homogeneity and interchangeability between the kinds of labour power (productive subjects) on the market. With the (return of) the question of the changing nature of what it is to embody labour power in the UK today, questions drawn from my dissertation might be: what kind of subaltern is brought into being by the contemporary precarious labour market? What form does standardisation take in jobs that are highly individualised, in contrast to archetypal factory work from previous centuries that Marx and his descendants were analysing? If it is true, as Gorz and Standing claim, that flexible and precarious work disidentifies the worker from the labour process in ways different and more extreme than in the past, then what does this imply for the contemporary work ethic and its power as a discourse that inculcates internalisation-consent?

2.2 New capitalism, the rise of the rentier, the end of waged work?

Linked to new forms of precarious subalterneity, we can also see potential in utilising the framework of hegemony I have developed in this dissertation for the purposes of analysing the changing nature of capitalism and its structures. Whether it is called 'platform capitalism' (Srniczek, 2016), 'rentier capitalism' (Standing, 2017), or even more speculatively, 'vectoralism' (Wark, 2020), there is an emergent line of argument within relevant literature that capitalist economic relations are changing; whether this change is a shift towards another mode of production entirely, or simply a new *project* of arranging capitalist exchange relations is part of this debate.¹⁵⁸ Are we seeing a return to a quasi-feudal hierarchy where rent (otherwise called 'unearned income') is becoming the dominant form

¹⁵⁸ Standing argues that rentierism marks an end point to neoliberalism as a form of capitalism, whereas Wark posits the hypothesis that the dominance of information as a commodity means that we have in fact entered a post-capital age.

of economic power, as opposed to the circuit of capital-investment-surplus-capital that has characterises “traditional” capitalist economies? As Piketty, Standing, Mazzucato and Srnicek all identify: housing, intellectual property, digital business services and big data platforms such as Google, Amazon and Facebook now make up large portions – if not quite yet the majority – of economic activity across the world (Piketty, 2014; Srnicek, 2016; Standing, 2017; Mazzucato, 2013; 2018). The rates of return on simply owning property – including the platform upon which traditional exchange activity takes place – has further sedimented divides between those who must sell their labour to survive and those who largely do not, as well as between generations who had the economic capacity to own housing property and those who do not (Milburn, 2019). What does a rent-orientated global and national economy mean for the hegemonic structure of wage labour in the UK? Just as studying hegemony requires us to name the subaltern – in their relationship with the actor(s) involved in this relation of subalterneity (employers) – would a rent-orientated economy force us to also name the landlord, or the data corporation as actors with which the tendency towards antagonism might be actualised?

The debate around the changing nature of the structure of capitalism is coupled with what we can call a ‘crisis of work’ discourse, which speaks to a variety of structural impasses and exacerbating tendencies surrounding and involving wage labour on a global scale. This area of discourse ranges from future-orientated predictions of mass technological-unemployment (Ford, 2015; Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014; Schlogl and Sumner, 2018; Frey and Osborne, 2013) to the requirement to think through what an increasingly elderly population means for the type of work we can expect to become most prevalent, as well as how poorly-paid, gendered and racialised care work currently is (Fraser, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017). Whilst predictions of automation-induced mass unemployment have recurred throughout the twentieth century (See: Gorz, 1982; Rifkin, 1995), the debate is still ongoing as to whether “this time might be different”, as we went an age of ‘intelligent machines’ such as driverless cars, admin bots and advanced machine learning (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014).

Demographic change is much more certain by comparison, and so, therefore, is the increase in demand for care labour. In this hypothetical conjuncture, an analysis of wage labour and

its relationship to a hegemonic project would no doubt require a genealogy of the division of labour between genders, as well as how the work ethic has been utilised and contested within feminist literature dealing with female employment and work within the household. Weeks (2011) provides a useful primer in this regard). The longstanding discourse that naturalises and genders care work, we can speculate, might be pushed to its limit – contested – in an age where available jobs will increasingly centre around care for (elderly) others in some capacity (Hester and Srnicek, 2018). How a hegemonic project engages with these structural issues – and which elements will make up the discourse it deploys – is a question that the direction of travel established by my dissertation can contribute to, methodologically.

3. Questions of hegemony and wage labour will continue

No matter what the job composition of the labour market in the years to come will be, as long as there is a profit-motive in place – a necessary requirement for the survival and expansion of capital – then we can predict that hegemonic relations, and the tendency towards antagonism, within waged work will persist; while the nature of a ‘workplace’ may also change, we can expect managerial techniques to adapt accordingly and thus our analyses of workplace control will require updating. Just as the specific methods of coercion and consent deployed by managers as part of the wage relation have changed since Taylor’s day – from stopwatches and time-motion studies, to the digital tracking and customer-evaluations that regulate labour power today – we can expect similar modifications to occur in the years ahead (Gerber and Krzywdzinski, 2019). The question for us is of the adequacy of our concepts to these changing circumstances and the underlying logic(s) that drive them. In this regard, the conceptual architecture that I’ve built and deployed in this thesis has made the case for the lens of hegemony as a useful tool.

As this thesis came its final stages in the first half of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic shut down the global economy in a matter of weeks. This is well and truly a crisis of work above all else, with entire industries effectively paused for at least a year (and most likely for much longer). Various questions are now being asked of the world of employment: what kinds of work are essential to the maintenance of society’s most necessary operations? Which kinds of work

do we value the most and which jobs do we remunerate with the lowest pay? How many industries and workforces can operate remotely, away from the workplace, and what does this mean for the hegemonic relations they are usually imbricated within? Equally, and in consonance with a theme of the current thesis, this crisis of work has brought renewed focus on social security and the function of cash benefits in general. As millions more people begin to rely on the UK's punitive welfare system, greater political pressure is being applied by activists, politicians and medical experts for more substantial out of work benefits and sick pay for those who don't have a job or who need to remain at home.¹⁵⁹ The *senso comune* around welfare – premised on a deeply sedimented work ethic that articulates a 'deserving' and 'undeserving' binary – is being shaken.

These questions pertain directly to the *governance* of the labour market, with states across the globe directly intervening in the wage system by subsidising company payrolls and worker wages.¹⁶⁰ This is a powerful (perhaps unprecedented) demonstration of the purpose of the hegemonic governance of the world of employment: capitalist society and its key actors – firms, banks, rentiers, the public sector, private sector, and so on – relies on the circuits of capital running as smoothly as possible, from pay check to rent payment, from balance sheet to payments on liabilities. When a natural disaster produces a break in this circuit, it is down to the contemporary hegemonic forces to bring it back online; whether this will happen, and in what form the world of wage labour will re-emerge, is yet to be seen (see Blakeley, 2020, for an early attempt at predicting the resultant constellation of forces). There is no doubt, however, that Covid has produced a new conjuncture, out of the elements of the old, and this presents new hegemonic contestations concerning the world of employment.

¹⁵⁹ See for example, the signed letter to the UK government from the research and campaign organisation of health professionals Medact (Medact, 2020). It called, amongst other things, for the Prime Minister to: 'Maintain income support for employed and self-employed workers to at least 80% of wages, ensuring that income support is paid at real living wage at a minimum and extend it to workers unable to work for the duration of the Covid-19 outbreak'. It continues: 'Reduce the five week delay in accessing Universal Credit and increase temporary uplift to at least 80% of real living wage levels across all benefits (ibid.). These calls are symptomatic of a growing consensus that welfare institutions are in need of large scale reform.

¹⁶⁰ For example, estimates from the National Audit Office in September 2020 found the UK government will spend in the region of £280 billion on support packages for companies, workers and landlords. See NAO (2020).

With a future of multiple crises of capitalism open before us – of growing precarity, environmental breakdown, new automation technologies and ageing populations – we can expect new hegemonic projects to emerge that attempt to govern the hegemonic structure of work amongst the gathering storm of these new factors.¹⁶¹ As this dissertation has argued, through historical example and through theoretical debate, the forms these micro and macro hegemonic relations will take can only be analysed accurately if they are taken conjuncturally and with the position of wage labour in view.

¹⁶¹ For example, some elements of 'Eco-fascism' that marries environmentalism with white supremacy might emerge as part of a conservative response to the climate crisis and (related) increase in migration (Manavis, 2018).

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