

CLASSES AND THE 'SPECIFICITY OF POLITICS'  
IN MARXISM AND SOCIOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This work is directed to an examination and assessment of the attempts made by sociology and Marxism to conceptualise the 'specificity of politics', and more particularly to establish the theoretical connections between such a sphere and the sphere of economic class relations. This question is discussed almost entirely within the context of modern capitalist societies.

The work is divided into two sections of three chapters each, the first dealing with sociological approaches, and the second with Marxist approaches to the problem. Three themes link the two sections together. Chapters Two and Five examine attempts to theorise property relations under conditions of modern capitalism. Chapters Three and Six look at modes of analysing political institutions, regimes and state apparatuses. Chapters Four and Seven evaluate a variety of attempts to investigate the characteristics of political action in capitalist societies.

What is suggested here is that neither discourse is able to theorise the desired 'specificity' with any coherence. It is further suggested that although there is clearly a considerable breadth of difference between sociological and Marxist approaches to the question of politics, despite such substantive variation, both forms of analysis are open to a range of common theoretical difficulties. The most general and pervasive of these concerns the reliance of both positions on teleological and ontological forms of argument.

A teleological discourse in the sense under consideration here, refers to one which presents a conceptual system containing a hierarchical principal of ordering, such that particular forms may be regarded as a realisation or expression of their position in the hierarchy. Both sociology and Marxism consider 'societies', 'social formations', economic and political systems as either realising processes given in an essential hierarchy of concepts, or as being recognisable only by virtue of their place within that hierarchy.

In both sociology and Marxism such teleology is combined with definite forms of ontology, which define the essential structures, determining processes and constituent agents of the social world. In the case of sociology, one has either a culturalist-idealist account of the nature of social reality, a functionalist one, or some form of combination of the two. In Marxism, social relations are conceived as reflecting materialistic forms of determination, operating within the structural and structuring dynamic of a determinate mode of production.

It is suggested here that the effect of this combination of ontology and teleology is to make the analysis of the 'specificity' of politics sought by both positions impossible. Moreover, the work concludes by suggesting that once those same teleological and ontological assumptions are rejected the problem of 'specificity' can no longer be posed as a meaningful problem. Chapter Eight discusses the implication of that suggestion for socialist political analysis.

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## PREFACE

A comment on the nature of the development of this work may be helpful to the reader. The original intention was to concentrate upon critically examining Marxism's attempt to produce a 'non-reductionist' theory of political structure and action in capitalist societies. At that time the aim was to work broadly within the conceptual structure of Marxist political analysis, showing the advantages which that approach - notably the project of 'political class analysis' - had over non-Marxist approaches.

Within a very short time it became apparent that such a project was impossible. For one thing, Marxist attempts to theorise politics as a 'relatively autonomous' sphere of the 'social totality' were increasingly based on arguments of a transparently circular and self contradictory nature. Moreover, the problems which arose in Marxian discourse could, in certain respects, be seen to be similar in form, if not content, to the problems arising in non-Marxist modes of analysis. In view of this, the work came to be structured around the attempt to show how the teleological and ontological assumptions of Marxism and sociology combined to produce common theoretical and political difficulties.

The major consequence of this was that the terms of the original problem were transformed in the light of that critique. In particular the analysis ceased to be concerned with resolving the problems of 'reductionism' and 'specificity' concentrating instead upon asking how these problems came to be formulated in the first place, and asking whether, in the absence of teleology and ontology they constituted problems at all. Ultimately then, the original project was turned upon its head, for having set out with the intention of posing the problems of political analysis through an application of the Marxist concepts of 'class' and 'state', the precise role of these concepts in socialist political analysis was called into question.

CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

This work is concerned with examining attempts by Marxists and sociologists to construct a theory of the 'specificity of politics'. That objective is one which is most readily associated with Marxism and Section Two of this study considers some of that work. Though the problem has not pre-occupied sociologists to the same extent as Marxists there is nevertheless a substantial body of work in political sociology directed at the problem of 'specificity'. The first section of this work examines a selection of attempts by sociologists to address that question. It will be apparent that in the sociological works selected for consideration in Section One a number of themes and problems arise which are also prevalent in Marxism.

Sociologists approaching this question have done so with the intention of establishing 'the political' as a theoretical sphere which is autonomous from economic class relations, thereby avoiding the 'deterministic' reading of politics of which they accuse Marxism. Marxism, on the other hand, has sought to establish the theory of politics within a wider theory of materialism. This has been regarded as a problem having a significance of more than a 'theoretical' kind - in the narrow sense of that word. Marxists have regarded the question of the specificity of politics as having crucial strategic and practical significance, but equally they have insisted upon establishing a rigorous theoretical solution to it. In consequence politics has tended to be conceived as a 'relatively autonomous' sphere of the social totality, a solution which is said to give both the benefits of theoretical sophistication and adequate room for political manoeuvre.

Although the sociological and Marxist works considered here may then produce incompatible positions, not least because of their varying intentions, they are chosen for their common aim of seeking a theory of 'the political'. To this end one problem which is of special concern to both discourses is that of analysing the 'class-politics relation'

in a way which avoids the pitfalls of determinism, whether this be determinism of an 'economistic' or for that matter an 'idealistic' form.

That the problem of the specificity of politics has been a central area of analysis can be illustrated by even the most cursory examination of theoretical traditions. All of the major perspectives in political sociology—functionalist, pluralist, Weberian - have generated attempts to theorise the 'autonomy' of politics. This autonomy may be established in a variety of ways, some simplistic some highly complex. One of the characteristics of Weberian analysis for example, is the attempt to avoid 'determinism' by a simple insistence on the priority of the human subject in social action. In its more extreme forms this tends to lead to a political analysis centred around an examination of the struggle between contending individuals. More sophisticated Weberian and neo-Weberian positions, whilst placing priority on the category of social action, nevertheless seek to account for the social conditions that affect such action. This may take a variety of forms from an emphasis upon certain processes ('rationalisation' or 'social closure'), to an emphasis on structural factors (role relations in 'associations' or structuration').

Pluralist analysis seeks to establish the autonomy of politics in a number of ways; at the theoretical level by a simple borrowing from neo-classical economic conceptions of market equilibrium; at the empirical level by a commonsense emphasis on the particularity of the elements in the overall decision-making process. Most fundamentally, pluralism rests upon a conception of society as progressively 'differentiated', and although cruder pluralist positions take this differentiation as proof of pluralistic political processes, more sophisticated theorists, such as Parsons, see the inadequacy of this view. In Parsons' case pluralism is combined with

functionalism as a strategy for establishing the autonomy of politics. This gives rise to a highly complex view of autonomy, where the specificity of politics is established as part of a wider pluralistic theory of social development.

Marxism has been historically preoccupied by the problem of 'reductionism' and perhaps this question has no more dominated debates than in the last decade. The denigration of cruder 'economistic' versions of historical materialism has been based upon rigorous attempts to redefine and reconceptualise the 'base/superstructure' model of the 'class-politics relation' present in Marx's 'Preface'. Here, relations of production 'correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces' and constitute 'the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness' (1).

All major theorists of the twentieth century, from Lenin, Gramsci and Mao, to present day Althusserians and their critics have concentrated their attention upon refining this formulation. The dominant concepts in current Marxian political debate are invoked as a response and indeed as a solution to the economistic reading of politics which the 'base/superstructure' analogy is said to sanction - 'over-determination', 'relative autonomy', 'conjunctural' movements and analyses. Consider for example, Meszaros' attempt to establish a necessary connection between the problem of 'specificity' and the concept of 'relative autonomy':

'One cannot grasp the 'specific' without identifying the manifold interconnections within a given system of complex mediations ... Marx's assertions about the ontological significance of economics become meaningful only if we are able to grasp the Marxian idea



of manifold specific mediations in the most varied fields, which are not simply 'built upon' an economic basis but also actively structure the latter through the immensely intricate and relatively autonomous structure of their own' (2).

Nor is it by any means accidental that some of this conceptual refinement has been forged in political struggles of a decidedly 'practical' nature; for above all else it is the purportedly erroneous strategic consequences of a reductionist reading of politics which has led Marxism to concentrate attention upon the theoretical elucidation of the 'specificity' of politics. Marxism has continually reasserted the view that an effective socialist political analysis must be both materialist and able to identify political agents, relations and structures in a non-reductionist form.

The two sections of this work are directed to an examination and assessment of the attempts by sociology and Marxism to conceptualise the 'specificity of politics' and more particularly to establish the theoretical connections between such a sphere and the sphere of economic classes. This question is discussed almost entirely within the context of modern capitalist societies. It is argued that neither discourse is in fact able to theorise the desired specificity with any coherence. It is further suggested that although there is clearly a considerable breadth of difference between sociological and Marxian approaches to the question of politics, despite such substantive variation, both forms of analysis are open to a range of common theoretical difficulties. The most general and pervasive of these concerns the reliance of both positions on teleological and ontological forms of argument (3).

A teleological discourse in the sense under consideration here, refers to one which presents a conceptual system containing a

hierarchical principal of ordering, such that particular forms may be regarded as a realisation or expression of their position in the hierarchy. Both sociology and Marxism consider 'societies', 'social formations', economic and political systems as either realising processes given in an essential hierarchy of concepts, or as being recognisable only by virtue of their place within that hierarchy.

In both sociology and Marxism such teleology is combined with definite forms of ontology, which define both the essential structures and determining processes of the social world. In the case of sociology, one has either a culturalist-idealist account of the nature of social reality, a functionalist one, or some form of combination of the two. In Marxism, social relations are conceived as reflecting materialistic forms of determination, operating within the structural and structuring dynamic of a determinate mode of production.

Both sociology and Marxism then, exhibit certain fundamental teleological concepts or theoretical principles of determination. It is suggested here that the effect is to make the analysis of the specific sphere of politics sought by both positions, problematic. Such specificity is also made problematic by a second, related set of problems which arises concerning the nature and constitution of social agents and relations. Both positions conceive these in an essential form. In its most general sense, this amounts to a reduction of agents to human individuals, or to agents with the supposedly essential capacities of human individuals. In Marxism there is an additional complication in so far as individuals are regarded as the embodiments of essential class relations. In both sociology and Marxism then, one has a conception of social, political and economic relations being a product of certain essential teleological processes, enacted by certain essential categories of agent. This again calls into question the capacity of these discourses to carry out

the specific analysis of the political which is regarded as fundamental to their project.

A teleological system of concepts is built into the very structure of sociological theory, by virtue of the dominant concerns of the 'founding fathers'. In particular the central concepts of Durkheim (differentiation and the division of labour) and Weber (rationalisation) have shaped the sociological analysis of modern economic and political structures.

Durkheim took over the concept of division of labour from the economists, who in his words viewed it as 'the supreme law of human societies and the condition of their progress'<sup>(4)</sup> and tried to show that it was by no means peculiar to the economic world, but could be seen in politics, administration, science, aesthetics and indeed throughout the entire range of social institutions. It could moreover in his view, be regarded as a general law, applying to organisms as well as to societies, a law having universal applicability, so that societies in conforming to it seemed 'to be yielding to a movement that was born before them, and that similarly governs the entire world'<sup>(5)</sup>.

Weber in turn, regarded certain Western cultural phenomena, the most basic of which was rationalisation, as lying 'in a line of development having universal significance and value'<sup>(6)</sup>. The spread of rationality as a cultural phenomenon was, in Weber's view, a pre-condition of modern industrial capitalism and its spread into law, politics, industry and administration merely re-emphasised for him, its significance as a general factor in social development.

The teleologies of rationalisation and differentiation, in combination with other related concepts (industrialism, technocracy etc)

have provided a basis for the sociological analysis of modern economic and political structures. Perhaps the best known formulation has been the 'convergence hypothesis' which is at the core of 'post-capitalist' theory. Though it has been said that the concept of convergence 'now appears rather old-fashioned and clumsy, and has been abandoned, at least in the naive ways in which it was presented a decade ago'<sup>(7)</sup>, there are, as we shall see, good grounds for saying that some notion of convergence is inherent in the sociological analysis of economic and political systems.

Section One of this work looks at the ways in which these general teleological constructions of classical sociology combine with ontological conceptions in the analysis of economic and political relations. It should be clear from what has already been said that the general teleologies of the founding fathers are constructed around ontological propositions about the essential nature of social relations. Put simply, one is generally presented with three possible approaches. Firstly, society may be conceived as an organism - totality where the processes which constitute social relations are defined as essentially functional ones. Secondly, social relations may be conceived as necessarily subjective in form, ontological primacy being attached to the category of 'social action'. Thirdly, there may be some combination of the two approaches, a result which, is far from uncommon amongst economic and political theorists.

The three chapters comprising this section are primarily concerned with discussing the problems which arise in certain attempts to theorise capitalist economic relations, political institutions, regimes and practices. Of the various problems which are outlined the following are amongst the most important. It is suggested that the teleological assumptions of much sociological analysis are incompatible

with the attempt to provide 'specific' and 'empirical' accounts of political and economic processes (Chapters Two and Three). It is further suggested that the subjectivist-individualist view of social agency which invariably arises in sociological discourse has several problematic consequences. Firstly it gives rise to a tendency for social, political and economic relations to be conflated within a general and nebulous conception of 'action' (Chapters Two and Four). Secondly, it contributes to the general incapacity of sociology to recognise the conditions of existence of given social relations. Moreover once action is deemed to be an essentially 'human' capacity, the discussion of the possible effects of those relations is foreclosed. This has two further serious consequences. On the one hand sociologists are inevitably moved, at some point, to reduce the analysis of social relations to 'inter-personal' relations thereby effectively denying the possibility of agents being constituted which are not so reducible. That issue is discussed in an economic context in Chapter Two. On the other hand, once it is denied that social relations need to be so conceived the question arises of how adequate are sociology's attempts to theorise action and its 'conditions of existence' by polarising 'subjective' action with 'objective' structure (Chapter Four).

Section Two examines the Marxist attempt to theorise politics on the basis of materialist modes of analysis. In this context it is suggested that one of the criteria for evaluating the success of the Marxist project is to ascertain whether it provides a coherent base for political calculation. It is suggested that Marxism fails on this score, its failure being traceable to the basic conceptual structure which materialism provides. Contrary to current Marxist opinion, the framework for a coherent political theory does not depend

upon another reworking of the classical concepts, but upon a rejection of the theoretical premises upon which Marxist theory has depended.

The conceptual structure of Marxism posits a definite ontological primacy, a primacy which gives effect to a teleological position involving:

- (a) the generation of a hierarchical structure of concepts with a given order or priority and,
- (b) the suggestion of an essential process of history which may be realised by an essential category of agents.

The theoretical foundations for this position are presented most lucidly in Marx's 1859 Preface. The 'Preface' does two things.

Firstly, it defines the structural characteristics of social formations:

'In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness'.

Secondly, it designates the basic processes to which such structures are to be historically subjected:

'At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production or - what is but a legal expression for the same thing - with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution' (8).

The contradictory relationship between forces and relations of production is then to be regarded as the 'motor of history', a motor which effects transformations between historically determinate systems of production. The 'mode of production' defined as a 'contradictory unity' of such forces and relations, stands at the pinnacle of the Marxian conceptual hierarchy. Just as the processes which govern the mode of production are defined materialistically, the structure of given modes is likewise defined. The mode of production comprises the 'levels' of the economic, the political and the ideological, a 'complex totality' structured by the determination of the economic in the last instance, but a form of structuring which permits the 'relative autonomy' of political and ideological instances.

Marxism is therefore characterised both by ontology and teleology. The 'mode of production of material life' provides a key to the analysis of the entire social structure. Not only is the mode of production 'structured in dominance' by the economic, but specific societies/social formations may be defined as similarly 'complex totalities' structured around a dominant mode of production and obeying the same historical and structural principles. Marx is concerned then, with the analysis of 'capital' rather than 'capitals' because specific economic, political or ideological structures may be said to embody the principles of the capitalist mode of production (CMP) and the 'laws of motion' which give them effect. As Marx so succinctly puts it for the benefit of his German readers, 'De te fabula narratur' (9).

The suggestion that history follows a definite direction necessitates a particular view of social agency in Marxism. The clue to this is given again in 'Capital': 'here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class

interests'<sup>(10)</sup>. The true subjects of economic relations are then, to use Althusser's play on words, not 'subjects', but 'Subjects' - that is to say structural relations and historical processes, per se. Yet this also hides a paradox which will require detailed discussion in Section Two; namely, that for Marxism, social agents, though 'inessential' (in the sense that they are secondary 'embodiments' of prior relations), are 'essentially' human (in the sense that they possess the 'essential' capacities which enable them to be regarded as mere embodiments and personifications). Two issues arise here. The first, which has already been mentioned, concerns the legitimacy of the view that agency may be reduced to human subjectivity. The second concerns Marxism's attempt to conceive political agency in class terms, a position which partly depends upon a notion of politics as ('conscious') class practice.

Apart from the matter of social agency, which is itself of crucial strategic importance for Marxism, the most pressing strategic problem concerns the question of how specific theoretical connections can be drawn between the two sides of the conceptually dichotomous structure that defines historical materialism. How, in other words, can one present coherent connections between 'modes of production' and particular 'social formations', between 'capital in general' and 'individual capitals? How is one to gauge the precise effectivity of general tendential laws at the level of concrete social formations? More generally, how is one to theoretically elucidate the effectivity of the political and the ideological (and their particular consequences) in relation to the material base (and its general laws of motion)? Marxism has always been characterised by a frantic insistence upon the possibility of this relationship being theorised in a 'non-reductionist', but nevertheless 'complex' form. This insistence has been at the forefront of contemporary debate; indeed the



theoretical project that it points to has provided the rationale for the form which current debates have taken.

What is suggested in Section Two of this work is that attempts by Marxists to carry out such theoretical projects have been unsuccessful, not because of the complexity of the subject matter, but because of the fundamental incoherence of the materialist position. The projects which Marxists have set themselves are impossible ones. More important, it is only because Marxist analysis has not been consistently governed by its incoherent materialist epistemology, that Marxists have been able to make (in some cases) effective political interventions. Marxist political analysis does not comprise a theoretical unity reflecting a materialist epistemology. Marxist discourse is not a product of the 'adoption' of materialism. Rather it is a product of a range of propositions and arguments which are frequently quite incompatible with it. One of the implications of this is that the whole 'problem of reductionism' has itself to be called into question.

Though the chapters of Section Two address three discrete topics (capitalist possession, the state, 'political-class analysis') - and in so doing largely parallel the structure of Section One - they illustrate how the various general problems outlined above, arise in particular contexts. Perhaps the one theme which, more than any other, however, links the three chapters is the question of 'class interest' and its conditions of existence. Indeed it is because of the difficulties associated with Marxism's attempt to theorise politics in class terms that Section Two begins to raise doubts about the way in which the problems of 'reductionism' and 'specificity' are constructed in Marxist (and for that matter socio-logical) discourse. In consequence of this, the concluding chapter of this work attempts to call into doubt the problem of specificity

by problematising the very concepts of class unity and class unity.

The following three chapters of Section One provide a critique of certain themes in the sociology of politics. They are not intended to constitute a critique of political sociology as such, but of attempts by political sociologists to resolve the 'problem of specificity'. It will become evident in Section Two that the same theoretical issues and problems which are selected for consideration here reappear in the context of Marxian discourse. In particular it will be shown that the combination of ontological and teleological arguments in both sociology and Marxism makes any recognition of the effectivity <sup>(11)</sup> of political relations impossible. Yet it is the very recognition of such effectivity which any solution to the 'problem of specificity' demands. More than that however, the work concludes by suggesting that once those ontological and teleological assumptions are rejected the 'problem of specificity' can no longer be posed as a meaningful theoretical problem.

**SECTION ONE: SOCIOLOGY, CLASSES AND POLITICS**

CHAPTER TWOSOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE WESTERN ECONOMY

The following chapter is divided into three sections. The first outlines the major theoretical perspectives on the development of modern economies. Section Two examines three central problems which arise in the course of those analyses. The first of these concerns the consequences of the teleological form of that analysis. The second concerns the failure of that analysis to recognise the effect of political conditions on economic relations. The third considers the consequences of sociology's attempt to reduce economic relations to relations between individuals. Section Three presents a critical analysis of what is probably the predominant sociological theory of the economy, 'managerialism', suggesting that that position exhibits all of the three problems previously outlined. Particular attention is given here however to the effects of managerialism's individualistic mode of analysis and its failure to recognise the legal conditions of existence of property relations.

1. PERSPECTIVES ON THE ECONOMY

The sociological analysis of Western economies has given rise to a multiplicity of concepts and terms aimed at depicting the essence of the economic structure. Though the list of terms is lengthy - 'industrial society', 'post-industrial society', 'modern society', 'post-capitalist society', 'technocratic society', etc. - all share common characteristics and problems. This section will attempt to indicate such areas of similarity and difficulty.

Virtually all sociological analyses of the economy have some theoretical foundation in one (or more) of three approaches; structural functionalism, the 'action' approach; technological determinism.

Before saying something about these approaches, two things should be noted. In the first place, the isolation of approaches does not imply that any particular author 'adopts' a position in a logically consistent manner; for example, that Weber's analysis of capitalism and its development is deducible from Weberian methodological foundations. Secondly, there is no mutual exclusivity between positions. On the contrary, many of the works under consideration here consciously or unconsciously adopt theoretical positions from more than one 'camp'.

(a) Structural-Functionalism

Durkheim provides one of the earliest theoretical foundations for the sociological analysis of modern economies with the concept of the 'division of labour'. Two things stand out with respect to this concept. Firstly, in Durkheim's view it signifies a general law of development of human (and for that matter non-human) organisms. Since differentiation constitutes both a precondition of social development, and a measure of it, the functionalist analysis of society is thus founded upon an examination of the extent and purported consequences of the differentiation process. Secondly, Durkheim's concept of 'division of labour' is in consequence much broader than that of the economists. The differentiation of economies is only one institutional manifestation of social differentiation.

Durkheim's analysis of differentiation is in fact contextualised in 'The Rules'. Here it is made clear that the Durkheimian analysis of social structure is teleological, and indeed to a large extent explicitly evolutionary. It is for example 'known' that 'the constituent parts of every society are societies more simple than

itself', the study of social development following how these simple societies combine 'to form more complex wholes'<sup>(1)</sup>.

The same text also attempts to relate these teleological assumptions to the practices of sociological investigation. Hence sociology may be defined 'as the science of institutions, of their genesis, and of their functioning'<sup>(2)</sup>.

Durkheim's analysis of 'The Division of Labour in Society' provides an excellent example of the attempt at a teleological and developmental analysis of social institutions. In this case, the problem under investigation is a 'moral' one, the foremost social manifestation of morality being social solidarity. Indeed social solidarity is a 'completely moral phenomenon'<sup>(3)</sup>, a coherent examination of the forms of which can only be attempted through an analysis of the 'steadily growing development of the division of labour'<sup>(4)</sup>.

It has been argued<sup>(5)</sup> that Durkheim's emphasis on the importance of differentiation and specialisation demands some theory of social integration, and indeed the basis for such a theory is found in the concept of 'function'. Hence, Durkheim's first consideration is to examine 'the function of the division of labour' or 'the need it supplies'<sup>(6)</sup> and much of his subsequent work is intended to show that differentiation is the source of social solidarity and indeed a 'condition of existence'<sup>(7)</sup> of society itself.

The validity of that argument apart, it is noticeable that Durkheim seeks to link together three themes in this discussion - solidarity, functionality and institutional analyses. Consider for example, the case of 'organic solidarity', a form of solidarity which features a 'system of different organs each of which has a special role and which are themselves formed of differentiated parts'<sup>(8)</sup>.

Here in fact we have a rudimentary formulation of the attempt to conceive social institutions ('organs') as differentiated

elements, functioning towards specific socially integrative ends.

A developed account of the relationship between functional differentiation and the substantive practices of particular social institutions only emerges however, in Parsons' work. What most characterises that analysis is the systematic attempt to argue that social structures and institutions differentiate along functional lines. This produces the GAIL formula (goal attainment, adaptation, integration, latency) and the claim that the differentiation process causes such 'functional prerequisites' to be discharged through the emergence of particular institutions and 'concrete collectivities'.

One of the clearest accounts of this is to be found in 'Economy and Society' where Parsons and Smelser seek to 'integrate' economic and social theory by demonstrating that sociology provides the general theoretical foundation for the analysis of economies. Towards this end, the concept of 'functional differentiation' is fundamental. Here an economy is to be seen as 'a sub-system differentiated from other sub-systems of society. The specifically economic aspect of the theory of social systems, therefore is a special case of the general theory of the social system'<sup>(9)</sup>. An economy then, is defined as a functionally specific element of the functional totality, one which fulfils the prerequisite associated with it ('adaptation'). It has determinate boundaries and undertakes specific exchanges with other elements of the social totality.

What then does the functionalist approach to economic relations seek to provide us with? At least two things can be identified. Firstly, it seeks to give a developmental account of the 'specificity' of the economy vis-a-vis the other elements of the social totality. Secondly, it provides a means of analysing economic relations which relates them to the wider social structure. In these two respects then, functionalism attempts to provide a social structural account

of the economy, though the validity of that account depends of course entirely upon the coherence of the postulates of functionality and differentiation.

(b) The Weberian 'Action' Approach

Whereas the functionalist approach at least purports to give an account of economic relations in rigorously structural terms, Weber's analysis of the economy rests upon an investigation of the nature and characteristics of economic action.

Weber's sociology is grounded in the method of 'interpretative understanding', seeking to generate a science which attempts to understand 'social action'. The latter includes 'all human behaviour when and insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it....Action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby orientated in its course'<sup>(10)</sup>. The social character of action is therefore derived from the relation of the human subject to its meanings and intentions. Action is not possible without such meaning.

Weber's conception of an economy follows on naturally from his definition of the subject matter of sociology:

'Action will be said to be 'economically orientated' so far as according to its subjective meaning, it is concerned with the satisfaction of a desire for 'utilities'. Economic action is a peaceful use of the actor's control over resources, which is primarily economically oriented. Economically rational action is action which is rationally oriented by deliberate planning, to economic ends'<sup>(11)</sup>.

This definition of economic action signifies the conceptual basis of Weber's approach to the analysis of capitalist economies. On the one hand, capitalism has to be defined as a type of individual orientation to action. On the other hand, it is to be subsumed under



the teleological category of rational action, and the process of 'rationalisation' associated with it. For Weber the rationalisation process is a developmental one, possessing universal significance, much as the concept of differentiation possesses those qualities in the functionalist perspective. Since the rationalisation of the West, which is manifested in the 'protestant ethic', and made effective in the 'spirit of capitalism', constitutes in Weber's view a precondition of capitalist development, it follows that capitalism has to be defined as a type of rational action. Hence, 'capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit and forever renewed profit by means of continuous rational capitalist enterprise' (12).

For the moment, let it merely be noted that Weber's attempt to theorise capitalist economies in the above terms raises two questions. The first concerns the coherence of the category of 'action' as the datum of sociological analysis. Can a subjectively interpretative account of social and economic relations be presented in a manner which is neither incoherent nor totally speculative? The second concerns the attempt to conceive economic relations in individualistic terms. Does such an approach have the capacity to present an account of the social conditions of existence of these relations, and of the essential processes, such as 'rationalisation' which are claimed to be at the centre of economic analysis?

### (c) Technological Determinism

The third major sociological approach to the analysis of Western economies has been one which rests upon a more or less explicit technicism. This is perhaps best expressed in the concept of a 'logic of industrialism' which is said to cause advanced industrial societies to take on an increasingly convergent structural form. One of the most important aspects of this type of analysis is the attempt to

construct a rigidly apolitical conception of economic and social development, though it has to be said that a similar apoliticism is also inherent in functionalist and action based analyses, if in a less explicit form.

Perhaps the systematic nature of this apoliticism can best be illustrated by contrasting technicist theory with the Marxian view of economic and social development. The latter theory considers historical development to be a product of dialectical processes between forces of production (technology, means of production, and forms of organisation of the labour process) and relations of production (class relations). Whether coherent or not, one of the intentions of that argument is to expose technical relations as political-class relations. The technicist position however seeks to deny that view, by giving sole causal priority to a single dimension of the 'productive forces' - namely technology. Here technology is seen as a neutral, apolitical force which itself progressively neutralises political ideologies and practices; hence 'the end of ideology'.

Probably the most influential version of this type of argument is found in the work of Kerr et al, who argue for an increasing 'convergence'<sup>(13)</sup> between advanced industrial societies. Here the process of historical development is seen to involve a perpetual tension between the forces of political ideology and the determinations of technology. History 'is a contest between ideologies and national traits on the one hand, and technology and the changes that process brings on the other'.<sup>(14)</sup> Ultimately this 'titanic struggle' has its parameters shaped by the 'logic of industrialism', so that the 'age of ideology' is ended and replaced by an 'age of realism' where workers accept the 'web of rules', managers cease to push the workforce to extreme limits, and economic decisions become technical ones, being formulated outside the ambit of politics.

The outcome of all this is said to be one of 'pluralistic industrialism', a process whereby the 'logic of industrialism' is tempered by specific national and cultural factors. The suggestion here is that development proceeds, not towards some simplistic convergence, but towards a pluralistically defined 'third way' between capitalism and socialism. In the view of the authors one is left then with a convergence towards a limited 'range of alternatives' involving what appears to be variation around the theme of mixed economy <sup>(15)</sup>.

Perhaps the most popularised version of technicist theory is however Galbraith's. Whilst starting from similar premises to Kerr et al., Galbraith provides a far more explicit attempt to theorise economies as politically neutral, technical structures. It is suggested for example, that the demands of technology and industrialism cause the market to be increasingly superseded by planning. Galbraith considers this factor to be important in the analysis, not only of capitalist economies but also of socialist ones. For example, socialist planning in Eastern European countries is, in his view, not dependent on socialist political ideology at all. Instead, it is argued that 'the modern large corporation and the modern apparatus of socialist planning are variant accommodations to the same need' <sup>(16)</sup>.

Contrary to some other theorists of convergence therefore, Galbraith insists that there is no tendency for the Soviet Union to move towards a market economy. Such decentralisation as has occurred has involved merely a shift in some planning functions to the firm. The market itself is incompatible with the demands of the Technostructure, both the Soviet Union and the West having 'outgrown' it. The demands of the industrial system therefore cause convergence to 'a roughly similar design for organisation and planning' <sup>(17)</sup>.

Likewise it is suggested that the demands of the system have considerable implications for the relationship between the industrial

system, characterised in particular by the 'Mature Corporation' and the state. The Mature Corporation is dependent on the state for manpower regulation of aggregate demand, stability in wages and prices, and so on. More than this however the goals of the state are in accord with those of the Mature Corporation. Indeed 'the goals of the industrial system ... become the goals of all who are associated with it and thus by slight extension (sic), the goals of the society itself'<sup>(18)</sup>. The industrial system will thus no longer be regarded as separate from government, but will become part of a larger complex. As Galbraith puts it: 'the Mature Corporation, as it develops, becomes part of the larger administrative complex associated with the state. In time the line between the two will disappear ... the industrial system will merge into the state'<sup>(19)</sup>.

## 2. PROBLEMS IN THE POSITIONS OUTLINED

### (a) Teleology, Specificity and Variation

The first and most general problem which arises in all of the theoretical positions outlined concerns the relationship between teleological principles of determinations (differentiation, rationalisation, industrialism/technology) and the effectivity of the specific social, political or cultural-ideological practices occurring within determinate societies. Though this problem arises in all of the perspectives under discussion, it appears most apparent in technicist theories.

For example, despite the attempt by Kerr et al, to suggest that specific national, cultural and ideological factors have a substantive effect on social and economic development, it is clear that to a large extent such factors are simply swallowed up in the overall 'logic of industrialism'. Hence it is possible for them to predict a definite 'road ahead' and to make specific predictions. As industrialism develops, there is said to be decline in industrial conflict<sup>(20)</sup>, there is an end of ideology<sup>(21)</sup>, embourgeoisement prevails<sup>(22)</sup>, and communism withers away<sup>(23)</sup>.

There is however, a clear tension contained within the overall argument concerning the relationship between industrialism's 'logic' and the effectivity of specific social conditions. Kerr et al are placed in an impossible position, for if specific factors are to be regarded as effective, one is left with a 'logic' without logic, a developmentalism whose development is indeterminate.

Though the solution in the original version of 'Industrialism and Industrial Man' is to reassert the priority of industrialism over and above nation, culture, ideology and politics, it is significant that the 'Postscript' to the 1973 edition tries to grant much more effectivity to specific social conditions. It is now suggested that 'pluralistic industrialism' contains a wide range of alternatives,

varying from 'modified market socialism' to 'modified state syndicalism',<sup>(24)</sup>. This solution is clearly an attempt to deal with the most serious difficulty faced by convergence theorists - that convergence has not taken place. But that matter apart, such a solution still faces the problems of operating with a conceptual teleology which lacks effect. Moreover, that type of solution also raises new problems, notably the sheer range of 'variation' suggested in such a model of 'pluralistic industrialism' which raises serious consequences about the explanatory adequacy of the concepts of industrialism and technology.

Nevertheless proponents of convergence theory have of late opted for the sort of 'partial convergence' which the qualifications described above imply. Aron for example, continues to insist upon the validity and utility of the concept of 'industrial society' but emphasises in the manner of Kerr et al that such societies may take a variety of forms. The vague and indeterminate conclusions which are drawn from this view are however hardly illuminating<sup>(25)</sup>, and the same substantive failing is found in the work of Feldman and Moore. Their suggestion that the 'common destination' of industrialism is 'factory production', 'urbanisation' and 'the extension of markets'<sup>(26)</sup> provides a fittingly shallow conclusion to the promises and expectations of convergence theory. This shallowness signifies the crux of the problem for if cultural political and other factors are effective in social and economic development, the conceptual function of the industrialism/technology pair - in particular their capacity to serve as a guide or 'measuring rod' for comparative analysis - is called into serious doubt.

This in turn raises another serious problem for theorists of 'industrialism', for apart from the problem of the relationship of social conditions to teleological processes, there is the more specific

one of how such theorists can account for variations and differences in development. It is one thing to recognise variation, but a quite different thing to account for it in the context of a teleological discourse. What tends to happen in all of the perspectives under consideration here, is that where variations from the direction of development are recognised, no consistent or coherent account is given of them.

The general problem of the relationship of specificity and 'variation' to teleology will in fact be discussed in far more detail in the following chapter, where it will become apparent that the sort of problems outlined here are by no means peculiar to theorists of technocracy, industrialism, and convergence. Further comment on this question will therefore be reserved until then. For the moment, more detailed attention will be paid to two other theoretical problems, firstly the attempt by sociological theorists to construct an apolitical theory of the economy, secondly the consequences of sociology's essentialist analysis of economic relations.

#### (B) The Neutralisation of Political Conditions

The problem under discussion here is clearly one aspect of that just considered, for in seeking to adopt an 'apolitical' conception of economic development, the theorists in question explicitly deny the effectivity of political-social conditions on economic processes. In considering this question it needs to be noted that the basis for an apolitical analysis of the economy can take a number of forms, although the most important for our purposes is to be found in the work of Weber. Before examining that approach however, two alternative ones may be mentioned very briefly.

Galbraith's account of state-economy relations described above, provides a good example of a strictly 'technicist' attempt to demarcate politics from the economy. His attempt to subdue the category of political ideology by incorporating politics into the Technostructure is based on a vaguely defined and crudely constructed conception of 'technical needs', the primacy of which neutralises political ideologies.

A much more sophisticated and non-technicist functionalism - though one which produces similar substantive arguments - may be found in Parsons and Smelser. One of the things suggested by them is that certain 'natural' economic developments raise the possibility that Western and Eastern economies may adopt a 'third possibility' which is neither capitalistic nor socialistic. Such a possibility arises because of the progressive differentiation between polity and economy in developed societies. In the view of Parsons and Smelser, classical nineteenth century capitalism was characterised by political domination<sup>(27)</sup> of the economy, due to the relative lack of differentiation of the social structure. Specifically 'economic' goals and functions were not therefore established in the American economy until the present century, 'the first case in economic history in which economic goals and values in a strict analytical sense' had primacy in the economy. In the authors' view 'this is neither capitalism in the classical (and we think Marxist) sense, nor socialism in the sense that the state takes over economic functions'<sup>(28)</sup>.

The significant point here is that this argument causes Parsons and Smelser to ask whether 'totalitarian domination' in the USSR - a 'fusion' of economy and polity - can withstand the 'natural' tendencies for economy and polity to differentiate. Here then we have a clear expression of the view that (Soviet) political ideology



is out of step with the 'natural' dictates of structural differentiation. In other words economies, if they are to function effectively, are by 'nature' non-political.

It is Weber however, who provides the most systematic and influential attempt to conceive economic relations in a technical or politically neutral form. At the centre of this attempt is Weber's desire to show that the rationalisation process itself sets strictly technical imperatives for social, political, and economic development. Crucial to this undertaking is the attempt to establish a rigorous distinction between 'formal' and 'substantive' rationality.

Though that distinction pervades all spheres of Weberian analysis, an indication of what lies behind it can be given by citing Weber's definition of the two dimensions of economic rationality. In the context of economic action 'formal rationality' refers to

'the extent of quantitative calculation or accounting which is technically possible and which is actually applied', whilst 'substantive rationality' comprises

'the degree in which a given group of persons...is, or could be adequately provided with goods by means of an economically oriented course of action (which) will be interpreted in terms of a given set of ultimate values' (29).

The crucial distinction here is the attempt to differentiate between the 'technical and valuational sides of social practice. Weber argues that one can make a rigorous theoretical distinction between social practice which is 'technically' directed to the most efficient methods of gaining a given end, and practice which is rationally oriented to 'ultimate values' (political, ideological, religious etc. ).

Now one needs to be very precise in summarising Weber's

argument with respect to this distinction. In particular it has to be recognised that he does not take a naively rigid position when analysing the formal and substantive dimensions in an empirical context. Thus, he himself emphasises that any empirical situation involves substantive considerations, in the sense that economic activity is always oriented to some 'ultimate end'. Moreover, it is also made clear that formal rationality is always dependent upon determinate substantive social conditions<sup>(30)</sup>.

But at the same time Weber's recognition of the substantive conditions that lie behind formal rationality is itself highly ambiguous. For he not only sees the 'substantive' as imposing social conditions upon the formal, he also sees it as setting definite limitations on the effectivity of the formal. This becomes most apparent in his attempt to compare 'market' economies and 'planned' economies. In this context, although Weber's methodological position required him to deny that either system could be defended on 'scientific' grounds, it is apparent that he saw the market economy as the only one capable of achieving a maximum degree of formal rationality. In his view, socialist economic organisation would have to accept an 'inevitable reduction in formal rationality of calculation', this conclusion being part of a wider assumption which saw socialism as a mere 'example of the fact that substantive and formal rationality are inevitably largely opposed'<sup>(31)</sup>. In other words, substantive considerations of political ideology set severe limitations on the capacity of economic actors to achieve formal rationality of calculation. Socialism constitutes a situation where the achievement of formal rationality is 'inevitably reduced'. But in capitalist market economies the achievement of technical formal rationality is to a large extent possible.

Now there are in fact two serious problems which arise in Weber's position. In the first place, it is clear that his defence of market economies is founded upon a rigid individualism since they appear to 'work' for Weber, precisely because they are 'by far the most important case of typical widespread social action pre-dominantly oriented to 'self-interest'(32). Some of the implications of such an individualistic view of economic relations will be discussed in the next part of this section. The more important question for present purposes concerns the actual coherence of the attempt to draw a rigorous distinction between 'formal' and 'substantive' action. Some of the dimensions of that question can in fact best be considered by examining, if only briefly, two of the best known critical discussions of Weber's position.

Marcuse's main criticism of Weber is based upon the suggestion that he identified the 'formal rationality' of capitalism with its 'bourgeois capitalist reason', or in other words that his 'analysis of capitalism was not sufficiently value-free inasmuch as it took into its 'pure' definitions of formal rationality valuations peculiar to capitalism'(33).

Habermas' argument is rather more complex and its specific content need not concern us here. He does however, make two claims worthy of mention. Firstly, he suggests that 'technical rationality' may function as a means of political domination in capitalist societies in the way that Marcuse argues. Secondly, he proposes that in spite of this, the concept of technical rationality cannot be dispensed with in the way that Marcuse - at least according to Habermas - suggests. For Habermas, formal or technical reason is inherent in any large scale industrial economy. In this respect, at least, he is in accord with Weber's attempt to conceive society as

predominantly 'bureaucratised' in both its political and economic spheres.

What is interesting about Habermas however, is his failure to recognise the ambivalence of Marcuse's argument. Marcuse in fact adopts two positions. On the one hand, it is suggested that Weber's concept of 'formal rationality' is erroneous because it stands as a euphemism for 'capitalist rationality'. On the other hand, it is apparent that Marcuse is quite unwilling to criticise the concept of formal rationality itself. In this respect his argument is remarkably similar to that of Weber and Habermas. The realisation that in any empirical context substantive conditions impose themselves on formal action, does not lead any of the three to question the feasibility of the concept of formalism. For Weber, formal rationality is to a considerable extent realised within capitalist market economies. For Marcuse, something very like it may be realised under different (non-capitalist) conditions. For above all else, Marcuse wants to retain a conception of 'economic rationality' - a teleology which can be realised under different social conditions. Marcuse's objection to Weber is not directed at the concept of formally rational action but at Weber's failure to define it 'correctly'. The problem for Marcuse is that Weber's 'critique stops, accepts the allegedly inexorable, and turns into apologetics - worse, into the denunciation of the possible alternative, that is of a qualitatively different historical rationality',<sup>(34)</sup>.

This conception of an historically realisable end state of truly 'formal rationality' serves as a measure against which Marcuse can contrast the 'irrationality' of capitalism. Capitalist rationality is therefore seen as the 'negation' of genuinely rational action. What is most apparent then, is Marcuse's consistent refusal to

dispense with the concept of formal-technical rationality. Indeed ultimately he will only go so far as to say that 'the concept of technical reason is perhaps ideological' (35).

Though it may appear that discussion of Habermas and Marcuse has been a digression, both in fact reproduce positions remarkably similar to Weber's. Each maintains that substantive conditions may adversely affect formal means, but that formalism is both possible and indeed realisable in practice. What this again amounts to is an attempt to deny the effectivity of social, political and ideological conditions on economic practices. Some of the major substantive difficulties that that argument produces for sociological analyses of the economy will be discussed in Section Three of this chapter. But it should be obvious that the attempt to theorise a sphere of 'formal' economic action, outside the sphere of politics and ideology is subject to serious difficulties. The concept of 'formal' action is impossible to sustain as soon as any effectivity is granted to the social conditions of production of economic practice. For a recognition of the effectivity of social conditions - whether they be political, ideological, cultural or legal - makes any conception of 'formal-technical' means of calculation and action impossible. If the 'means of production' of social and economic practice, have social conditions of existence then they cannot be conceived as merely technical and politically neutral in form, and the concept of 'formal rationality' is rendered incoherent' (36).

### (c) The Problem of Economic Agency

The third problem to be discussed here concerns sociology's attempt to construct economic relations in particular - though for

that matter social relations in general - upon a model of individual action. To put it as succinctly as possible, sociology either conceives agents as individuals, or as entities with the capacities of individuals. This conception of economic and social relations arises in fact, as a corollary of the general teleological principles already discussed. This section will attempt to clarify the nature of that connection. The following section will illustrate some of the substantive consequences of sociology's individualism.

Almost without exception, economic theorists have conceived economic relations as a function of human motivation. Theoretical debate has thus tended to centre upon the question of the character of such motivation. For example, in recent years managerialist economists have criticised the lack of 'realism' of traditional theories of 'profit maximisation', and the 'narrow' conception of 'homo oeconomicus' that underpins them, arguing instead for a 'broader' theory of 'managerial discretion'<sup>(37)</sup>. Given that all of these debates are however set within the confines of the concept of motivation, the analysis they encourage is more or less psychologicistic in emphasis.

But what, it may be asked, is wrong with psychologism? At least one notable sociological theorist, Homans, has defended it on the grounds that the only general propositions of sociology are in fact psychological. Indeed Homan's view is that all social behaviour may be traced back to its 'elementary forms' through the explanatory postulates of behavioural psychology and 'elementary economics'<sup>(38)</sup>. Here then, the agent of social action is to be considered subject to the same motivations as the maximiser of classical economic theory.

The problems with such a psychologicistic account of social agency have been spelt out most clearly by Parsons. The criticisms which

he raises, in fact arise as a direct consequence of his attempt to postulate discrete systems of action with specific and distinct 'levels of organisation' the effects of which are irreducible to each other, or to the characteristics of individuals or aggregates of individuals. Contrary to Homan's attempt to account for the emergence of social and economic institutions, such as the nuclear family, or the division of labour, in rigidly individualistic and voluntaristic terms, Parsons instead places emphasis on the 'phenomenon of differences in levels of organisation' between systems of behaviour. In Parson's view, when Homans speaks for example, of money 'as if it were hardly different from any other transferable object with reward value, and hardly different from a physical object such as Skinner's but of grain'<sup>(39)</sup>, he fails to specify any of the organisational conditions under which the medium exists. The conditions of a market and monetary system presuppose, for example, the institutions of property and contract, but psychologism can say nothing of these in its banal voluntarism.

The sort of comments made by critics like Parsons in fact suggest that psychologism faces two crucial difficulties. Firstly, it combines two quite incompatible forms of argument. Although social and economic relations are reduced to interpersonal relations between individuals, at the same time certain social conditions are assumed to be operative. For example 'managerial discretion' presumes the social distribution and legitimation of institutionalised 'norms' of management, which in turn presupposes the legal and cultural recognition of the category 'manager' as economic agent; without the effectivity of social conditions such as these - conditions which constitute the manager qua manager - that agent is no position to exercise 'discretion,' about anything. But unless such social conditions can be conceptualised in rigidly individualistic terms,

psychologicistic discourse is incoherent. Psychology is however invariably silent on these questions, preferring to take certain social (extra-individual) processes for granted.

Secondly, if social relations are a function of some essentially individual capacity, how is one to account for variations in social, economic, and political structure? For if all social relations are a product of the actions of 'men as men', to use Homan's phrase, any explanations of such variation can only be arbitrary and contingent.

Sociological critics of writers such as Homans and those in the tradition of 'motivational' analysis in economics, would contend that what is in fact required is a rigorous sociological account of social action. Nichols<sup>(40)</sup> for example is largely concerned in his discussion of 'managerialism', with establishing the manager as 'Social Man' rather than 'Psychological Man', a task which is very much rooted in the tradition of Weberian analysis.

Weber's work in fact establishes a starting point for most sociological discussion of economic agency. As well as insisting upon the meaningful nature of social action Weber insists on its individualistic character. Action 'exists only as the behaviour of one or more individual human beings'<sup>(41)</sup>. According to this view 'collectivities' and social relations are strictly reducible to the actions of individuals. Take the case of that social relation known as 'the state'. That the state 'exists ... means this and only this; that on the basis of certain kinds of known subjective attitude of certain individuals there will result in the average sense a certain specific type of action'<sup>(42)</sup>.

Weber's conception of an economy follows on from this, economic relations being the aggregated economically oriented actions of individuals. Apart from the existence of such actions there is no economy, since it ceases to exist as a sociologically relevant category



once there is no longer 'the probability that corresponding to a given subjective meaning complex (the appropriate) type of action will take place' (43).

A major problem however, arises in Weber's conception of an economy. Parsons<sup>(44)</sup> notes that, in dealing with the modern economy, Weber takes certain conditions for granted. Two are of particular importance. Firstly, it is assumed that the economy is 'rationalised' so that individuals orient their decisions to the rational weighing of utilities and costs. Secondly, it is assumed that a 'mentality' exists favourable to the functioning of such an economy - hence the importance of the 'spirit of capitalism'. In Parsons' view these assumptions enable Weber to provide a non-psychologicistic account of economic processes such as 'profit-making'. Far from accounting for profit in hedonistic terms, Weber in fact emphasises that modern business is in no way exceptionally 'acquisitively minded'. Profit appears when its social conditions of existence are present, or as Parsons puts it, what most characterises Weber's view of the modern economy is not the behavioural attitudes but 'the extent and peculiar character of the opportunity' (45).

Weber's non psychologicistic account is however itself problematic for the 'peculiar opportunity' which he recognises, is explained by the presence of certain shared attributes amongst the actors in modern economic systems. But there is a contradiction here between the existence of shared attributes and the individualistic form in which Weber conceptualises economic action. For the existence of a shared rationality of action which provides the social precondition of the capitalist profit motive presupposes an assimilation of values on a collective basis. Weber can give no indication of how values and attributes come to be collectively shared and socially structured, given the methodology of individualism. In effect Weber, like Homans,

merely assumes the effectivity of certain social conditions whilst offering no possible means of theorising them.

It is partly towards a resolution of difficulties of this sort that Parsons' attempt to theorise social relations in a non-individualistic manner is directed. Despite Parsons' acceptance of Weberian assumptions in his early writings, even here he distances himself from Weber in specific respects. In the case of 'economic rationality' for example, Parsons emphasises that it should be conceived as 'an emergent property which can be observed only when a plurality of unit acts is treated together as constituting an integrated system of action'<sup>(46)</sup>. This principle of 'emergence' serves to indicate the possibility of the existence of systems of action which are more than simple aggregates of individual actions. It is this view which lies behind the attempt in Parsons' later work to develop a conception of systems of action with distinct modes of organisation. This latter concept enables Parsons to theorise the social system (and its sub systems) as a distinct level of organisation which cannot be reduced to the functioning of the personality system. According to this view, the concept of economic rationality may now 'designate either a property of a social system or a property of a personality system, but these two references must not be confused'<sup>(47)</sup>. A system then, is not an aggregation of individual acts, but a theoretically specific object. Each system may be said to have a capacity for 'boundary maintenance', the distinction between systems residing in 'their foci of organisation as systems and hence in the substantive functional problems of their operation as systems'<sup>(48)</sup>.

The success of Parsons' project can perhaps best be gauged by turning again to the question of economic rationality. In 'Economy and Society', Parsons and Smelser pose the question of how the economy's value system is constituted<sup>(49)</sup>. Their answer to this is that

the primary content of the economic value system is that of 'economic rationality'. Since they are here referring to the economy as a differentiated sub-system of the social system, it is clear that rationalisation in this context should not be confused with rationalisation in the personality system. In other words, rationality as a primary element in the motivation of economic activity cannot rest upon a narrow psychological theory of 'human nature'.

Having said that it is interesting to note the way in which Parsons and Smelser conceive the process of the institutionalisation of economic values and motivations in any economy. What they suggest is that the institutionalisation process in the economic sub system (or social system more generally) is a direct parallel of the internalisation of values by individuals in the personality system: 'internalisation of culture patterns in social situations is the motivational counterpart in the personality structure of the same patterns in the social system' (50).

Despite Parsons' insistence that economic motivation has to be treated as complex, and irreducible to the 'profit motive', conceived as some 'inborn propensity of human nature', this account of institutional motivation can hardly be used to support his contention that social systems are specific and distinct from personality systems and unit acts. For one thing the phrase 'motivational counterpart' has a dubious theoretical status. Since it actually appears to conflate the two systems, its presence serves as a direct rebuttal of the claim that systems are specific. The very best that one could say of it would be that it stands in place of those (absent) concepts through which Parsons could (if they were present) theorise the specific processes of discrete systems.

In fact Parsons' tendency to view the processes of the social system through the essential capacities of the personality system is

by no means peculiar to this example. Even though the GAIL formula for the analysis of social systems is intended to counter psychologistic and reductionist accounts of social action by specifying processes of exchange between sub systems, it is significant that system capacities are synonymous with individual capacities. Hence, systems 'seek goals' 'desire ends', are 'gratified' etc.

Parsons' work is therefore essentially two-sided. He rightly recognises the incoherence of individualistic conceptions of social action and relations. But his attempt to theorise social relations in a non-essentialist form falters. He persistently recognises that it is necessary for systems to be regarded as more than aggregates of unit acts, but never conceptualises systemic action in a coherent form<sup>(51)</sup>.

The reasons for Parsons' failings are far too complex to consider here in any detail. But two may merely be mentioned. In the first place, it has been argued that there is an obvious tension in Parsons' work between the concept of 'system' and the 'action frame of reference', the existence of definite reductionist tendencies in the latter having serious effects on Parsons' capacity to theorise the former<sup>(52)</sup>. Secondly, Parsons' failings are, in no small part due to his attempt to construct a theory of social and economic action on teleological grounds. The connection between teleology and individualism is admittedly less apparent in Parsons than it is in Weber. In the latter's work the process of rationalisation is rightly, or wrongly constructed on a model of action as essentially 'individualistic' because, meaningful. Though Parsons rejects that view, his own work is similarly constructed to emphasise the developmental priority of functional differentiation. Parsons' 'actors' no less than Weber's serve ('function') to realise essential ends. It is but a short step to endowing them with essential capacities for realising these ends.

In a sense, what has been inferred though somewhat obliquely in the third part of this section, parallels what has been suggested in the first two parts. For much of the difficulty associated with Weberian and Parsonian analysis of economic relations concerns their refusal, precisely because of the teleological construction of their arguments, to examine the specific social conditions of economic action. If economic actors merely serve to realise pre-determined ends there clearly can be no possible recognition of the social conditions of economic action. What in fact emerges from the argument of Section Two is the fact that all of the sociological positions under discussion operate with teleological and individualistic conceptions of economic action, the necessary combination of which sanctions the refusal to examine any of the specific conditions of economic action. The following section will try to show some of the substantive effects of that theoretical shortcoming.

### 3. A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MANAGERIALISM

Sociological theories of 'industrial' or 'post-capitalist' society undoubtedly have one major theme in common; that of 'managerialism' or the 'separation of ownership and control'. It is this theme above all else which provides the basis for analysis of business structure and enterprise. The theme of 'separation of ownership and control' can be traced back directly to the theoretical positions discussed in Section One of this chapter. For example, the most simplistic of these theories, technical determinism, asserts that 'technical needs' give rise to the emergence of a category of appropriately qualified individuals (managers, technocrats etc) whose function is to guide economies along the appropriate technical lines.

That explanation of the emergence of managers has its parallels in Weberian and functionalists accounts of economic development. The former sees the process of rationalisation as one which produces a particular orientation to action within the sphere of the economy, an orientation that is again increasingly technical in form. The 'bureaucratisation' of politics is accompanied by a bureaucratic organisation of the economy, where the worker's separation from the means of production becomes less significant than his increased separation from the means of economic organisation and administration. According to this view, it is the 'dictatorship of the official' rather than the 'dictatorship of the capitalist' which comes to characterise modern economic and political organisation<sup>(53)</sup>. The important division within economic organisation is therefore no longer that between worker and capitalist but that between worker and management, the latter possessing all the attributes, capacities and powers of the bureaucratic functionary or 'organisation man'.

Functionalism is able to present a very literal account of the so-called 'separation' between ownership and control since the very

concept of separation is implicit in the notion of functional differentiation itself. One has then, both a conception of the progressive functional separation or specialisation of polity and economy, together with a corresponding specialisation of the agents appropriate to each. Parsons for one, provides a specifically functionalist account of the emergence of a managerial stratum. In his view, nineteenth century capitalism comprised an 'incomplete differentiation' of the economy, involving the fusion of a number of elements - occupation, kinship, property - in the family firm. Though it is claimed that family capitalism was essential to Western industrialisation, Parsons claims that 'beyond certain levels' it became an obstacle to further development, so that subsequently a differentiation took place that gave rise to a distinct managerial grouping<sup>(54)</sup>.

↓ This section will demonstrate that managerialism, the predominant contemporary sociological theory of the economy, exhibits all of the problems described in Section Two. Particular attention will however be paid here to the interplay between three themes, the individualistic view of economic relations, sociological conceptions of 'property' (especially private property) and the consequences of the failure to recognise the effectivity of the legal conditions of existence of economic relations.

If one were to attempt to specify the principle characteristics of a capitalist economy, a minimal definition would probably include the following features; a system of commodity production involving a money economy, where possession of the means of production is in private hands, and a 'separated' category of wage labourers is employed by private capital for the production of profit.

Sociological and managerialist conceptions of a capitalist economy are however, notable in one particular respect - their adoption of the view that 'private' ownership of the means of production is necessarily synonymous with individual ownership. In Dahrendorf's view for example, the concept of capitalism can only be applied when the continued 'union of private ownership and factual control of the means of production' can be demonstrated. What this amounts to however, is a demand that a 'typical capitalist' be identified who is 'at the same time', legal owner of the factory, manager of production and commander of the workforce<sup>(55)</sup>.

Perhaps the clearest exposition of this type of view is found in Burnham, for whom 'capitalism' is equated with production under the domination of 'capitalists' and therefore for whom 'private enterprise' is synonymous with individual enterprise. Burnham insists that the capitalist class is 'comprised of those who as individuals own...the instruments of production', private enterprise being based upon private property rights vested in 'individuals as individuals'<sup>(56)</sup>. This attempt to equate capitalism as a system of economic production with an ideal type of classical entrepreneurial capitalism, is adopted by other writers in the managerialist tradition such as Crosland, for whom capitalism is necessarily founded upon a 'laissez-faire' ideology which supports individualism and the 'invisible hand of market forces'.

Clearly, any form of collective proprietorship or state control of enterprise signals the end of capitalism for writers in this tradition. Burnham argues that state intervention 'beyond a certain point' is incompatible with the continued existence of private production, since such intervention has to lead to the elimination of capitalists from the economy. In this view then, the capitalist state



is by definition of a particularly 'limited' type, since an extension of state ownership is synonymous with a decrease in capitalist ownership: 'You cannot call an economy of state ownership capitalist because in it there are no capitalists. A capitalist is one who, as an individual has ownership interests in the instruments of production; who as an individual, employs workers, pays their wages, and is entitled to the product of their labour'<sup>(57)</sup>. In a state economy on the other hand, ownership would be vested in 'the state as an institution', and individuals would work for 'the state as an institution'.

The point at stake here is not whether an economy with state run sectors can be called 'capitalist' or not, but whether Burnham's attempt to polarise the categories of 'individual ownership' and 'institutional ownership' is valid. For in making this polarisation, Burnham in fact adopts a position which is common to all of the writers under discussion here - namely the view that institutional, collective, or corporate possession is incompatible with private possession of the means of production. It is that proposition which is at the core of the managerialist argument and which will be subjected to criticism.

Before that however, let us first consider some of the pronouncements of managerialists in a little more detail. For this purpose it is useful to distinguish two broad strands of managerialist theory which Nichols has encapsulated in the terms 'non-sectional' and 'sectional'<sup>(58)</sup>.

The non-sectional version of managerialist theory is most adequately represented in the work of Berle and Means. Here it is argued that the typical business enterprise of the nineteenth century, which was owned by individuals or small groups and managed by them, has been supplanted by great aggregations where 'tens and even hundreds of thousands of workers and property worth hundreds of millions of

dollars, belonging to tens or even hundreds of thousands of individuals, are combined through the corporate mechanism into a single producing organisation under unified control and management' (59).

The 'separation of ownership and control' which has supposedly arisen in these circumstances is based then, on the development during the period following the end of the eighteenth century, of the joint-stock company, a development which in Berle and Means' view produces a dispersal of ownership of the means of production. The dispersal of ownership of shares which has taken place has, it is said, led to a situation where the modern corporation is 'owned' by hundreds of thousands of unconnected shareholders.

Together with this has emerged a corresponding change in the relationship of 'control' of the means of production. The property owner has, in Berle and Means' view, changed his position of owner-manager for one where he is simply a recipient of the wages of capital. There exists then, a body of owners who exercise virtually no control over the operation of the means of production. In fact it is suggested that owners no longer own physical means of production, but rather 'pieces of paper'. Control over physical means of production is now vested in managers, the so-called 'New Princes'.

A large part of Berle and Means' work is in fact directed at elaborating upon the nature of 'control' in the modern business enterprise. In the original work, a number of distinct forms of control are identified; control through ownership, control through a legal device, majority, minority and management control (60). Though any combination of these strategies may co-exist, Berle and Means' analysis of the two hundred largest US corporations suggests that managerial control is increasingly dominant, managers becoming the 'new economic autocrats'.

However, Berle and Means are far from suggesting that managerial control leads of necessity to a managerial domination contrary to social interests. Instead they suggest that the separation of ownership and control has cleared the way for the community 'to demand that the modern corporation serve not alone the owners or the control but all society'. Indeed, in Berle and Means' view it is essential that if the corporate system is to survive, its control 'should develop into a purely neutral technocracy' (61). Berle, writing thirty years later, clearly believes that such a situation has in fact evolved, for managers are now seen to be endowed with a 'corporate conscience' which demands they act in a socially responsible manner, in accordance with the 'public consensus' (62).

Burnham's sectional version of managerialist theory is both constructed on different theoretical principles and reaches quite different substantive conclusions from Berle and Means. Although Burnham's work is highly inconsistent and in consequence difficult to summarise succinctly, three main themes may be deciphered. Firstly, it is claimed that 'the instruments of production are the seat of social domination' (63). A managerially controlled economy is thus also a managerially controlled society. Managerialism therefore replaces political ideologies such as capitalism, socialism and fascism around which political domination has previously been constructed.

Secondly, the 'managerial revolution' is dependent upon increased state ownership of the means of production. This raises one question for Burnham. If state ownership deprives individuals of property rights, how can there be a ruling class? His answer to this is 'comparatively simple'. Managers will rule, not because they control the means of production directly, but because they have indirect control 'through their control of the state' which itself owns the means of production.

In short, the state 'will if we wish to put it that way, be the 'property' of the managers' (64).

Thirdly, since in Burnham's view, managers like any other controllers of the means of production, will exercise such control in their own interests, it follows that all conceptions of a 'socially responsible' management are rejected.

Both versions of managerialism described above clearly depend upon a view of capitalism having been superseded by 'managerialism' because of the transferal of property from individual hands to collective (corporate or state) hands. For this argument to be possible 'private' property has to be synonymous with individual property. It is to the coherence of that argument to which attention must now be turned.

What is particularly significant about this individualistic conception of economic relations is the implication it has for the concept of property. To begin with, it is apparent that all of the texts under consideration here are only able to 'individualise' private property because of their particularly limited conception of the effectivity of law. The significance of this limitation may be illustrated by reference to the work of Dahrendorf, Berle and Means and Burnham, as well as some of their critics.

The clearest definition of 'property' given by any of the authors under consideration is found in Berle: 'Property is in essence a relationship between an individual (or perhaps a group of individuals) and a tangible or intangible thing... In law the essence of proprietorship was the owner's capacity to exclude everyone but himself from possession, use or control... Growth of the corporate system changed that... Two or three individuals 'incorporated' their business; it was still small still capable of being possessed. They were stockholders, but they were also directors and managers... So long as the business and

corporation continued small, the stockholders largely determined what the corporate title holder actually did...Enlargement of the corporation made it evident that fissures on the surface of property represented a clear division' (65).

The enlargement of the corporation therefore led of necessity to a break in the 'traditional logic of property', one which in Berle and Means' view eventually produced the separation of ownership and control which 'destroyed the unity that we commonly call property' (66). Property therefore divided into the 'passive' or 'nominal' ownership of shareholders, and the 'active' powers of managers.

The point on which this entire argument hinges is Berle's claim that 'small scale' business is the only one 'capable of being possessed', the emergence of corporate forms of enterprise leading to the destruction of the unity that comprises property. That claim depends in turn upon the individualisation of economic relations, a conception which has the effect of deeming legally recognised corporate forms of possession to be illusory; that is to say, the law may recognise corporate possession, but 'in fact' it merely hides a 'separation' within the relation of property - a separation which calls that concept into question. For if Berle's argument is to be interpreted literally, the concept of corporate property is an impossible one.

In respect of this view of law it is interesting that Burnham seeks to emphasise a distinction between 'legal concepts' and 'economic facts', a corollary of his somewhat 'economistic' conception of legal relations. We are told, for example, that control of the instruments of production is the crux of property right, the concept property right merely 'summing up' such control (67).

Now there is clearly more than one issue at stake here. It is quite legitimate for Burnham to seek a distinction between economic

relations and legal relations, but this does not justify the reduction of legal relations to a 'summary' of economic relations. To distinguish economic relations from legal relations does not mean the latter are ineffectual in the constitution of the former, but on that matter Burnham is silent.

Despite the considerable superiority of Dahrendorf's analysis over Burnham's, his text produces a very similar problem. One of the crucial components of Dahrendorf's thesis is his critique of Marx's conception of property - or more accurately the conception of property which he attributes to Marx. According to Dahrendorf, property may be viewed in two ways; as control of the means of production, or as a legally recognised statutory property right. In his view, Marx bases his analysis on the 'narrow legal concept of property'<sup>(68)</sup> whereas the correct solution is the opposite one. A manager who controls has property rights because property is 'a special case of authority'. Dahrendorf in fact accepts Marx's quite erroneous theorisation of the joint-stock company, and the demise of private property associated with it, merely objecting to the theme of 'classlessness' which Marx's view of socialisation ultimately implies. Instead Dahrendorf proposes to 'replace the possession or non-possession of effective private property by the exercise of, or exclusion from, authority as the criterion of class formation'. In Dahrendorf's view, this suggests that 'control over the means of production is but a special case of authority, and the connection of control with legal property an incidental phenomenon of the industrialising societies of Europe and the US'<sup>(69)</sup>.

The problem with Dahrendorf's analysis is in fact similar to that of Berle and Means, except where the latter divide property into two aspects (legal ownership and control), Dahrendorf turns each aspect into a discrete definition of property (property is either theorised in terms of legal ownership or control). Since, in his view, the latter definition is the 'correct' one, it is clear that legal conditions, in so far as they are given any recognition at all, are simply called into being to reflect already constituted 'control' relations. Hence the claim that the conjunction of legal ownership with control in early capitalism is simply 'incidental' or contingent. In other periods of history, including the present, according to Dahrendorf, control is subject to no effective legal conditions at all. In short, Dahrendorf's view of the law is strikingly similar to Burnham's.

The point to be emphasised here however, is that property ownership is always subject to legal conditions of existence, conditions which are, for example, effective in designating the possible agents which may 'possess', their capacities, rights, obligations and so on. More may be said on that in a moment, but mere recognition of that fact raises another problem. If property as a relation is always subject to the effects of legal conditions of existence, the dissolution of the unity of property which comprises the separation of ownership and control is clearly an impossibility. The 'legal' and 'control' aspects of property can never be separated without property ceasing to exist as a meaningful relation.

Ironically Burnham is the only managerialist who has an awareness of this problem, even if it is a somewhat perverse one, for he states that 'the concept of separation of ownership and control has no

sociological or historical meaning. Ownership means control; if there is no control then there is no ownership'. Whatever the inadequacies of Burnham's reasoning - his argument is based on a denial of the effectivity of law - the point that ownership and control are inseparable has important repercussions. For if legal ownership and control are indeed separated, then it cannot merely be maintained, as Berle and Means suggest, that property is 'in transition'. Property simply ceases to exist. The managerialist thesis implies then, not merely the demise of capitalist production, but of any conceivable form of economic production under the effective direction of a legally recognised category of economic agents.

What is particularly significant is that, thirty years after 'The Modern Corporation and Private Property' Berle finally reaches that very conclusion. Economic production is now characterised by 'power without property'. The mere separation of ownership and control is now replaced by 'something more profound - the increasing elimination of proprietary ownership itself and its replacement by, substantially, a power system'<sup>(70)</sup>. The outcome of this is a 'new social-economic structure' whose effects are 'necessarily political'; a situation where individuals participate in 'People's Capitalism' through their political influences on the democratic state.

Though Berle's argument may have at last achieved logical consistency, two things may be said. Firstly, it does not resolve the problem just mentioned; is a system of economic production possible without property relations (private or communal)? Secondly, his analysis slides easily into the type of position whereby economic analysis is subsumed under some generalised category of 'power' or 'control', the effect of which is a systematic conflation



of specific categories of social relation.

More will be said on that later, but for the moment let us return to the question of the effectivity of legal conditions of possession. It has already been said that the managerialist argument regards legal relations not only as ineffectual, but also as positively illusory. Berle and Means quote with approval, the German theorist **Rathenau** whose conception of the corporation is in fact strikingly similar to that of some Marxists (see especially page 177 below): 'The depersonalisation of ownership simultaneously implies the objectification of the thing owned... the enterprise assumes an independent life as if it belonged to no one... The depersonalisation of ownership, the objectification of the enterprise, the detachment of property from the possessor, leads to a point where the enterprise becomes transformed into an institution which resembles the state in character' <sup>(71)</sup>.

Such a view of the corporation usually rests on two assumptions: Firstly, that it is reducible to its constituent member-individuals (managers, shareholders, etc.). Secondly, that because of such reducibility, legal forms of recognition are mere illusions behind which 'real' (inter-personal) relations hide.

The first of these assumptions sanctions an examination of the economy through a perusal of 'managerial behaviour'. Alternatively it may cause critics of managerialism to seek to uncover the essential individuals 'for whom managers hold their powers in trust' <sup>(72)</sup>. But the view that corporate enterprises is reducible to individuals is untenable. For one thing it shares all of the problems of psychological and individualistic analysis already discussed. For another, it ceases to have any coherence once the second assumption is dispersed with. That this is so may be illustrated by considering

the effectivity of one specific legal form, the concept of 'legal' or 'corporate personality'.

A registered company (as distinct from a partnership) is characterised by the statutory provision of 'corporate personality'. A corporation is defined according to the various Companies Acts as an association endowed with a legal personality which is separate and distinct from those of the individuals who compose it. A company is therefore an artificial legal person with legal rights and obligations. It is a continuing legal entity which may remain in existence irrespective of the continued existence of its members or functionaries. It can own property, undertake contracts, sue or be sued in its own name, and be liable to tax as a company, independently of the liability of its participants. Such a legal person will employ directors who are empowered to act on its behalf, but as agents such directors, along with all other company employees do not have the authority to exceed the powers of the company itself.

The establishment of the corporation as a legal entity distinct from individuals who participate in it as members, shareholders or employees is 'not just a convenient device for the ownership of business assets... It also has a significant effect on the position of the members of the company, its directors and those who deal with it' <sup>(73)</sup>. Three such effects are worthy of mention. First and most obvious, is the fact that the company's separate status limits the liability of shareholders and directors. As Hadden points out, the concept of limited liability is a far reaching one since 'a company may be convicted of a criminal offence in addition to any liability on its director or employees, on the grounds that their acts and omissions may be attributed to the company itself' <sup>(74)</sup>. Secondly, irrespective of the extent of managerial powers (and contrary to the

view of 'sectional' managerialists and Marxists alike) managers and directors are unable to appropriate the profits of the company. Directorial remunerations are a charge against, not an appropriation of, profits. Such remunerations may therefore be regarded as an 'expense'<sup>(75)</sup>. Thirdly, following on from the latter, the company's separate legal personality means that its property must be regarded as distinct from that of its shareholders. No single shareholder, or group of shareholders is entitled to alienate company property. One example illustrates this principle clearly:

'Gold belonging to a Dutch banking company was confiscated in 1940 by the Board of Trade as Custodian of Enemy Property, since the company fell under the terms of the definition of an enemy company. On the cessation of hostilities, the requisite sum in compensation was made over to the Administrator of Hungarian Property on the ground that all of the shares were owned by Hungarians. The company itself was nonetheless ultimately held entitled to recover the money. The company's property was neither the property of the shareholders nor held or managed by the company on behalf of its shareholders', it belonged to the company alone'<sup>(76)</sup>.

The suggestion that the corporation itself comprises the agent of possession of the means of production contrasts sharply with managerialist assumptions, and indeed with the arguments of many of those who criticise managerialism. Scott's view is fairly typical of the latter current. Having accepted that 'the corporation itself is the unit which is legally recognised as having ownership of the assets' he then claims that this is merely 'nominal ownership', since 'effective ownership' has to rest with 'real social groupings'. His conclusion is that effective ownership therefore resides in 'a few large shareholders', who 'retain real ownership through a partial legal ownership'<sup>(77)</sup>.

But there are two serious problems with an argument of this type. Firstly Scott equates the legal conditions of possession with legal ownership of shares, when in fact the two are far from synonymous. Possession is always subject to some legal conditions (unless it is 'plunder') and such conditions are effective. But holding of shares is clearly not a legal condition of corporate possession. The shareholder is a recipient of dividends under certain conditions, by virtue of his ownership of 'pieces of paper'. Apart from that he is separated from possession of corporate property. That legal categories are effective in the establishment of the corporation as possessor of the means of production makes Scott's reduction of legal conditions to shareholding impossible. The purpose of that reduction is to individualise and essentialise the analysis of possession. But the effectivity of legal relations makes such an essentialism untenable.

Before raising the second problem what is one to say about the question with which managerialists and their critics are so concerned - the struggle within the corporation for 'control'? Clearly the position taken here relegates that issue to a secondary level. That is not to say the matter is unimportant, only that it is not a relevant factor in the identification of the agent of possession of the means of production. The effectivity of the law in establishing the corporation as possessor, and the managerial 'controller' of the means of production as delegated employee of that possession, re-asserts the 'unity of property'. It also means that the claims made by managerialists and their critics about the nature and capacities of managerial agents of 'control' are unfounded. The 'soulfulness' of managers does not prove the demise of capitalist private property, any more than their ownership of shares establishes them as 'capitalists'.

Managers are merely delegated agents of a capital, and the question of their personal capacities is not relevant to an analysis of property relations.

Again, this is not to suggest that an analysis of the processes of 'control' within a corporation could not be valuable. But two things should be said about the way that analysis has so far been conducted in sociological literature. Firstly, most approaches have been manifestly subjective in orientation, not to say downright psychologicistic. The literature abounds with attempts to discuss managerial 'aims', 'desires', 'wills', the extent of 'ruthlessness' and so on<sup>(78)</sup>. Secondly, the way in which the concept of 'control' has been applied serves to conflate a whole range of quite distinct social and economic relations. This applies not only to the conflation of categories such as possession, shareholding, economic and technical calculation and so on, but to much wider spheres. It is interesting, for example, that Berle and Burnham, though representing opposite sides of the managerialist spectrum, both interfuse state and economy through the concept of 'control', exercised through the manager-bureaucrat. The most extreme development of this type of conflation is of course found in the concept of convergence itself. In Burnham's view, managerial society is one where all political and ideological practices are mere facets of an ideology of 'control', so that political leaders are synonymous with economic leaders. As Burnham puts it 'Stalin or Hitler prepares for a new political turn more or less as a production manager prepares for getting out a new model on his assembly line'<sup>(79)</sup>.

The second problem arising from Scott's analysis concerns his attempt to reduce the analysis of corporate possession to the actions of 'a few large shareholders'. This again constitutes an attempt to reduce economic action to the actions of individuals. But such

a principle faces serious difficulties. For one thing it is possible to find many examples of social relations where only supra-individual agents can function as legitimate agents of action. Take for example the case of trades unions as agents of economic action. Unions are the agents which undertake the responsibility of contractual bargaining on behalf of their members. The individual member may be required, for the purposes of employment, to sign a wage labour contract, but the terms of that contract are not determined by him, nor even usually influenced by him as an individual. The union's prior decisions as agent of economic action binds the wage labourer to certain contractual terms. He, as an individual, has no authority or status to undertake separate contractual bargaining with the employer, In this particular sphere then, the individual has no legal or customary recognition as an agent.

It could still of course be argued that the actions or decisions of the union are merely a function of the aggregated actions or decisions of its individual members. But the processes of decision making are never so reducible, precisely because decision making is always subject to the effects of specific conditions of existence. To take one simple example, it is evident that the process of arriving at a 'collective' decision by a union is dependent not only on the availability of information and the manner of its distribution but also on processes such as voting. In this latter case, it is apparent that the manner in which votes are cast and enumerated has quite specific effects on the nature of decisions reached. The internal processes of calculating and weighing votes in unions, business corporations, political parties and the like therefore has an effectivity which makes the reduction of collective decisions to the actions of individuals impossible. In short, the effectivity of the conditions of existence of social action render individualism

redundant as a form of explanation.

This section has tried to draw together some of the strands of criticism outlined in Section Two and show their relevance to the substantive analysis of the economy. Throughout the chapter, the interdependence of three themes teleology, individualism, and the denial of the effectivity of social conditions in the constitution of economic relations - has been emphasised. Though the last section has concentrated in particular on the relationship between sociology's essentialist conception of economic agency and its denial of the legal conditions of existence of property under contemporary economic relations, it should be apparent that a similar analysis could be constructed to fit different aspects of the problem of economic analysis. For example, the concept of 'separation of ownership and control' is accounted for in each of the three theoretical perspectives previously discussed by a strictly teleological mode of analysis. The emergence of the joint-stock company is seen to derive from functional differentiation, economic rationalisation, the technical needs of the economy, or some combination of these factors. Yet such an argument clearly commits the error of denying the social conditions which accompanied incorporation. When these social conditions are taken into account however, the sociological explanation of that process becomes highly dubious. Take for example the specific political conditions within which incorporation arose. Hunt has shown very clearly that incorporation far from being an inevitable or necessary product of social and economic development, only arose 'after a protracted and bitter struggle' of more than a century, after which Parliament was forced to 'concede' the principles of incorporation and limited liability<sup>(80)</sup>. That same theme of the effectivity of the conditions of existence of political practice will provide one of the topics for discussion in the following chapters.

CHAPTER THREETELEOLOGY AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter is concerned with the theme of teleology in political analysis. It has already been seen in Chapter One that a teleological structure of concepts is built into sociological theory, most notably through the influences of the Durkheimian and Weberian views of social development. Such influences are prevalent in some areas of political sociology and it is to a consideration of the effects of these influences upon political analysis that the present chapter is directed.

The first section of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of pluralist political theory, though because the subject to be considered here is much wider than pluralism itself it is not intended to provide a detailed or adequate discussion of that theme. Rather, the intention is to show two things. Firstly, that pluralism as a concept is based upon explicitly teleological and indeed developmental assumptions. The basic theoretical support for these assumptions is given in the concept of 'structural differentiation'. That concept purports to signify a tendency for societies to develop according to a criterion of increased specialisation, one of the supposed corollaries of such a development being the wholesale 'pluralisation of social relations. Consider, for example, Rose's view of the American political system. In his opinion it is not merely political power which is distributed pluralistically, for 'the society itself is pluralistic. The different spheres of life do not interpenetrate each other in the way that in India for example, religious values and institutions permeate the average man's (life)'. Here then, is a literal application of Durkheim's attempt to conceive social structures as being subject to developmental processes, modern societies according to this view producing social institutions and



practices which are increasingly distinct from one another. In America then, 'every person has differentiated roles and values for the various spheres of life, and so power too usually does not significantly cross the boundaries of each sphere in which it is created' (1).

The second feature to be emphasised in Section One in fact follows on from this, for it is apparent that implicit in the above notion is the suggestion that pluralism as a concept is pertinent to comparative social and political analysis. In the example cited above then, the proposition is that some societies are more differentiated and pluralistic than others, the extent of 'pluralism' thus providing a basis for the comparative analysis of political development. Section Two of the chapter will be devoted to an examination of some of the problems of comparative political analysis.

It is because of the interdependence of these two themes that Sections One and Two are linked together by a discussion of the work of Talcott Parsons. Indeed, Section Two is almost entirely devoted to an evaluation of his work. The justification for concentrating on Parsons to such an extent is twofold. Firstly, he provides a far more rigorous theorisation of the processes of 'pluralisation' of social, economic and political relations than many of the more renowned exponents of pluralism. Secondly, his work represents to a very considerable extent a culmination of the theoretical traditions of Durkheim and Weber, his analysis of politics being based upon a conscious fusion of the teleological propositions of both authors. The mode of political analysis which derives from this fusion has moreover, had a considerable influence upon other writers in the sphere of comparative politics, some of whom will be discussed at the end of Section Two.

The central problem to be posed in this chapter concerns the consequences of the adoption of teleological concepts for the analysis

of specific 'empirical' political relations. Pluralist theorists insist that above all else their analysis is able to account for specific forms of political relation at any level of the political process; from the 'empirical' aspects of decision making at the level of community politics, to the specific characteristics of regimes and movements at the macro-political level. It will be suggested here however, that there is a basic incompatibility between the recognition and analysis of specific political conditions and the teleological propositions upon which such recognition and analysis is to be founded. In all cases, the problem of reconciling teleological principles with the specificity of social and political conditions is only achieved by strategies which are both arbitrary and theoretically incoherent.

#### 1. (a) DAHLIAN PLURALISM: THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF EVENTS

The pluralistic conception of politics is based upon the claim that power is diffuse and fragmented because structural differentiation has given rise, not only to a multiplicity of institutions and groups, but also to the multiplicity of social and political interests attached to them. Politics may then be conceived as a process of competition between multiple and diverse interests. This conception of politics is therefore inextricably linked with the concept of structural differentiation by virtue of the purported effects which that process has on the production and dissemination of political interests. Truman, like Rose, considers this generation of 'interest groups' to be crucial to the analysis of contemporary American politics, since such groups 'are apparently more significant in the complex and interdependent society of our own day'<sup>(2)</sup> than in the America of the past.

Dahl presents probably the most systematic account of the pluralist position, his conception being to a large extent based upon the commonly expressed view that politics is synonymous with a market place. According to the more extreme versions of this view it is thus possible to draw analogies between economic and political processes; votes may be 'sold' for policy preferences, governments act as 'brokers' and so on. Dahl himself regards the 'fundamental axiom' of American pluralism to be that 'instead of a single centre of sovereign power there must be multiple centres...none of which is or can be wholly sovereign'<sup>(3)</sup>. The existence of such multiple centres of power enables it to be 'tamed, civilised, controlled, and limited to decent human purposes', coercion being reduced to a minimum. The existence of opportunities for minorities to veto policies to which they object, guarantees that government by mutual consent, and for mutual benefit will be realised. In 'Pluralist Democracy in the United States' Dahl therefore devotes chapters, not only to the formal areas of American government - President, Congress and Supreme Court - but also to 'The Other 90,000 Governments' in towns, municipalities, school districts and the like. In this latter respect, the independence of leaders from one another and their differing objectives is said to maintain a dispersal of power, since no single, unified group of leaders can be identified. Policy making in the United States therefore derives, it is claimed, from bargaining between a number of different levels in the political system - White House, bureaucracy, congressional committees, federal and state courts, local governments and a whole range of particular interest groups. Though Dahl recognises that not all individuals and groups may exert an equal influence, he would claim both that no single individual or group can possess undue influence, and that virtually all individuals and groups have some political resource. There is, in consequence, no dominant

elite, class, or group in politics, but instead a relatively balanced plurality of interests. Since government must respond to demands placed upon it, policy is therefore an outcome of compromise, and this enables political conflict to be reduced, the accent of the system being on consent rather than power as such<sup>(4)</sup>.

The assumption behind this type of argument is that the political market is in a state of equilibrium, or at least relative equilibrium vis-a-vis the component pressures made upon it. Hence Dahl would claim both that in America there is a 'high probability that an active and legitimate group...can make itself heard effectively'<sup>(5)</sup> and that individuals and groups who are effective by virtue of some particular skill or influence, will have their power restricted to particular issue areas. This idea that power is restricted to particular spheres is central to all pluralist conceptions of the political process, from Galbraith's 'countervailing powers', to Reisman's 'veto groups', and indeed to Dahl's own conception of 'polyarchy'.

The major critical response to pluralist theory from within sociology has centred around the attempt to identify a distinct 'power elite' or 'ruling elite', the most famous exponent of that position being Mills. Mills' thesis is that the USA possesses a national power elite, a group so integrated that 'the top of American society is increasingly unified and often seems wilfully coordinated'<sup>(6)</sup> Such an elite, according to this view feels itself to be, and is recognised as, 'the inner circle' of 'the upper social classes'. Accordingly, its members 'form a more or less compact social and psychological entity; they have become self-conscious members of a social class'<sup>(7)</sup>. In consequence of this self-consciousness, the members of the power elite are connected by a variety of shared ties including kinship, class, education, occupation, values and attitudes.

To use Mills' own words 'they accept one another, understand one another, marry one another, tend to work and to think if not together at least alike' (8).

Though Mills takes the view that the power elite shares a 'psychological and social unity', he insists that it cannot be accounted for in psychological terms alone. Power is, in his view, increasingly attached to certain institutional complexes in modern society, the most important of which are the military, the political executive and big business. It is this triumvirate which stands at the apex of American society, and although such a group does not in Mills' view coincide with what Marxists term a ruling class - indeed he rejects the term - he insists that it possesses a unity based upon a 'coincidence of interests' between its elements (9).

The unity and cohesion of the power elite, in Mills' view explodes the idea that the power system in America is balanced between fragmented groupings. In so far as there are 'veto groups' in American society they are, according to Mills now only operative at the 'middle levels of power'. 'Fundamental issues' and 'big decisions' (10) are however, outside the domain of the pluralist process being the prerogative of the power elite itself.

What is interesting for present purposes is the range of criticisms to which ruling elite theory has been subjected by pluralist critics. In the first place many would seek to reject Mills' argument on strictly empirical grounds. For example, the view that common social background produces shared political assumptions and prejudices is disputed by a number of writers. One study found no pronounced 'elite consensus on issues related to a fundamental restructuring of the economy, nor on issues which might be regarded as fundamental by other criteria', going on to reject 'the thesis of concurrent elite action in defence of the status quo' (11).

Whatever the adequacy of these sort of claims however, by far the most important criticisms have been made by American pluralists themselves. Polsby, though in fact directing his criticism against 'stratificationist' theories of community power, raises one problem which is quite pertinent to ruling elite theory when he refers to 'the set of logical leaps which by implication establishes the identity of individual and collective value positions'<sup>(12)</sup>. It is indeed symptomatic of ruling elite theorists such as Mills that no specific theoretical connections are drawn between the interests of individual incumbents of elite positions and the interests of the elite per se.

The most systematic criticism of ruling elite theory is however, made by Dahl himself. Two critical comments are of particular significance. The first, quite rightly points to the sheer speculativeness of the ruling elite model which sanctions a process of argument by infinite regression; if one fails to unearth a distinct ruling elite one can still maintain the covert existence of such an elite 'behind the scenes', whose very seclusion constitutes its strength. The second is more serious again since Dahl maintains quite correctly that the concept 'power' is meaningless unless one is able to designate specific boundaries within which relations of power are contained. In short, it is necessary to state the 'scope'<sup>(13)</sup> of an actor's power, since anything less renders the concept useless. But the work of Mills and others is precisely characterised by the view that power is a generalised relationship pertaining to a limitless set of social relations, yet concentrated in the hands of a small minority of individuals. In the case of this latter criticism then, Dahl is seeking to establish criteria for identifying the scope of specific empirical power relations, since without such a means of specification it is suggested that the concept of power is meaningless.

Dahl's study of New Haven provides by far the best example of the attempt to give empirical substance to pluralist theory, and in so doing to illustrate what is meant by 'polyarchy'. The first section of this study examines the historical development of what Dahl considers to be the progressive social, economic and political differentiation of New Haven life. This development 'from oligarchy to pluralism' has arisen under the impetus of successive historical differentiations. The 'patricians' who possessed a concentration of education, wealth and political power, gave way under the dictates of economic and social differentiation to the 'entrepreneurs' whose emergence saw a splitting off of wealth and power from status. The later influx of groups of varying ethnic origin, in Dahl's opinion, diversified political power increasingly, until no single group was able to dominate the community. Dahl emphasises that the existence of a pluralistic system in New Haven does not imply the absence of inequalities of power and influence, only that such inequalities are 'dispersed' rather than 'cumulative', as was the case in the 19th century.

Dahl not only attempts to provide empirical verification of the historical process of differentiation but empirical proof of polyarchy itself. Indeed, this is the core of Dahlian pluralism, for contrary to elite theorists such as Mills, it is Dahl's claim that an analysis of the 'scope' of power has to rest upon the empirical examination of specific actions by incumbents of power positions - what he refers to in another context as 'the careful examination of a series of concrete decisions' (14).

This argument is indeed the crux of the pluralist position and for that matter of the pluralist critique of 'power elite', 'reputationalist' and 'stratification' theories of the distribution

of power. Polsby provides one of the most succinct accounts of what is claimed to be the advantage of the empirical approach to the study of power by 'issue' or 'event' analysis<sup>(15)</sup>. In his view non-pluralist approaches to the problem merely encourage 'the systematic misreporting of facts' and 'the formulation of vague, ambiguous, unrealistic and unprovable assertions' about power. In contrast to this, the pluralist approach begins from the presupposition that 'nothing categorical can be assumed' about the distribution of power in any social relation. On the contrary, that approach sets out to 'study specific outcomes in order to determine who actually prevails in...decision making'. The pluralist method therefore selects a number of 'significant' issue-areas for consideration, and by studying 'actual behaviour' is able to 'determine empirically whether or not the same group rules in two or more issue-areas'. In the pluralist view then, it is only by a study of the 'exercise'<sup>(16)</sup> of power in an empirical context that its 'scope' can be designated.

Dahl's analysis of New Haven clearly conforms to the protocols laid down by Polsby. That study involves a consideration of three specific issue-areas; public education policy, urban redevelopment and political nominations. In conjunction with this Dahl also identifies three categories of leaders in New Haven; 'politicians', 'social notables' and economic notables'. One of his intentions in doing this is to gauge the influence of these groups, a 'rough test' of which is to examine the frequency with which any individual 'successfully initiates an important policy over the opposition of others, or vetoes policies initiated by others, or initiates a policy where no opposition appears'<sup>(17)</sup>. In fact Dahl concludes that by and large leaders in one issue area are 'not likely to be influential in another' and that leaders in different issue areas 'do not seem to be drawn from a single, homogeneous stratum of the community'<sup>(18)</sup>.



What is postulated then is not a system of democracy or equality per se so much as a system of 'polyarchy' or 'dispersed inequalities', where resources are neither equally distributed nor unequally distributed. Instead, they are 'fragmented'<sup>(19)</sup>. According to this view, although resources for influencing officials may be unequally distributed, no individuals have a monopoly of resources and those best off in respect of access to one resource, are often badly off with respect to others. Moreover, no influence resource dominates more than a minority of issue areas and virtually nobody in a polyarchy is entirely lacking in some effective resource. The scope of decision makers is therefore seen to be largely confined to specific areas and necessarily responsive to public pressure by virtue of the popular distribution of political resources.

It is not the intention of this chapter to discuss questions arising from the 'community power' debate, though some of the problems which arise in the analysis of power by contributors to that debate will be discussed in the following chapter. Instead, it is necessary at this point to raise some of the problems which are basic to the pluralist position as presented by Dahl, Polsby and others. Two are especially pertinent to the present discussion.

The first concerns the relationship between the postulate of progressive social differentiation and the attainment and reproduction of conditions of relative equilibrium in the 'political market'. All pluralists maintain that the political systems may be regarded as a market place where a multiplicity of individuals and groups compete for political power which is essentially fragmented and diffuse. The assumption is that the process of differentiation generates a diversity of political interests which compete in the political market for scarce resources. The empirical 'event' analysis carried out by Dahl

and others is said to establish the fact that the political market in question enjoys conditions of relative equilibrium.

But what is the source of this state of equilibrium? Why should one, for example, assume the existence of equilibrium conditions rather than conditions of oligopoly or monopoly? Pluralism's response to this appears to be that relative equilibrium 'follows on' from the postulate of differentiation. But this can hardly be the case. For even if one were to accept the principle of differentiation and what goes with it - the emergence of a multiplicity of social and political interest groups - that in itself says nothing about the relationship pertaining between them. One has in other words, no reason at all to assume the existence of equilibrium, rather than non-equilibrium conditions.

Now the Dahlian response to this would be to say that 'empirical analysis' of polyarchies has 'shown' the political market to be characterised by conditions of relative equilibrium. But however 'empirical' the analyses of Dahl or Polsby are claimed to be, they face a serious problem. For what is lacking in their account is any explanation of the conditions of existence of the diffuse social distribution of political power which both constitutes and secures the reproduction of the equilibrium state. The only response which pluralists make to this question is simply to reassert the specificity of individual 'empirical' issues and decisions. But that merely assumes the effectivity of certain processes or conditions which distribute power socially in accordance with such individual powers and decisions. In other words, the Dahlian position assumes the effectivity of certain social conditions without having any means of recognising them.

The second problem is partly a corollary of the first, since the type of problem outlined above calls into question the capacity of Dahlians to carry out a rigorous 'empirical' analysis of specific political relations. For however, 'empirical' Dahl's analysis might appear to be, it is orchestrated by a number of tacit assumptions of a decidedly 'non-empirical' nature. The second question, and the more general matter of pluralism's capacity to carry out the specific analysis which it seeks, whilst retaining teleological and developmental concepts, will be considered in more detail in Section Two. For the moment however, let us further pursue the first problem outlined above by a consideration of Parsonian pluralism.

(b) PARSONIAN PLURALISM

It has been seen that beyond descriptive statements about the 'market' nature of pluralist politics Dahlian pluralist theory has nothing to say about the processes and conditions which guarantee the social distribution of power in the fragmented form appropriate to the reproduction of conditions of relative equilibrium in the market. Parsons' work on the other hand, comprises a complex attempt to theorise the specific sphere of the polity, its relationship to the other spheres of the social structure, and the precise market mechanisms under which it functions. Unlike other pluralists then, Parsons does attempt to make an explicit conceptualisation of the 'market' model of politics and its social conditions of existence.

The clearest indication of Parsons' approach to political analysis is given in his critical review of Mills' 'Power Elite' (20). Here his main criticism concerns Mills' concentration on the question of what power an individual or group can command. Parsons' own emphasis is quite different, being based upon a notion of functionality -

there are many elements in a society which are relatively powerless in the sense of having a capacity to make 'big decisions' but these elements may nevertheless be of great functional importance. This approach leads Parsons to reject Mills' 'zero sum' concept of power, for a quite different one. Power is instead defined as 'a facility for the performance of function in and on behalf of society as a system' (21).

The theory of politics to which Parsons adheres derives directly from his work on the economy. In 'Economy and Society' an attempt is made to draw certain congruences between the categories of economic theory and the theory of social systems. A large part of that work is therefore devoted to theorising the economy as a functionally differentiated sub-system of society and to examining the exchange processes both between economy and society and within the economy itself.

In 'Politics and Social Structure' Parsons tries to draw on the former analysis in order to develop a theory of politics (22). Two propositions derived from 'Economy and Society' are deemed to be of particular importance. The first is the view that the proper theoretical subject matter of the social sciences should be analytically defined functional sub-systems of larger social systems. Just as the economy had been identified as a primary functional sub-system of a differentiated society, so could the polity be similarly identified. The second concerns the notion of money as an exchange medium with symbolic properties. In Parsons' view, the existence of money as an economic exchange medium raises the possibility of their being parallel media in other sub-systems. Thus, in the case of the polity 'power' serves as the parallel medium to money in the economy.

Parsons is emphatic that this second aspect is crucial both in the analysis of relations between polity and society and in specifying the mechanisms of political systems themselves. His conceptualisation

of economic, political and other social relations thus rests upon the identification of systemic exchanges between functionally differentiated sub-systems of society, such exchanges being effected through the operation of determinate media such as money or power. In his view this conception of exchange relations provides the crucial element in analysing both the internal processes of the polity and the manner of its functioning, as well as its relationship to other areas of society. Parsons' later works on politics are therefore concerned with mapping out the specific exchanges (inputs and outputs) which define political relations at a number of levels. For example, at the level of the polity-society relation, the political system is said to produce power as a resource, this being exchanged for parallel resources produced by other sub-systems, such as money in the economy. According to this view then, the economic system might be said to use authorisation received from the polity to raise capital, the polity using money to purchase goods. Clearly the argument can be used as a basis for specifying political functioning at a number of levels within the polity itself, that system being considered as a functionally differentiated sub-system which may in principle be broken down into successively more specialised component elements. In other words, Parsons could in principle account for the precise political exchanges which might constitute pluralistic market processes at any number of levels within the polity.

Without going further into the complexities of Parsons' argument it should be apparent that his position is 'pluralistic' in the strict sense of that word, since it depends upon the postulate that social development is synonymous with 'social differentiation' that process generating a plurality of collectivities in the social system. What

is however peculiar to the Parsonian argument, as opposed to Dahl's, is the recognition that the teleological concept of differentiation is, in itself, insufficient to justify the market equilibrium conception of social and political relations. Consequently, in Parsons' version of pluralism, the concept of differentiation has to be supplemented by functionalism. By proposing the functional differentiation of social structures Parsons is at least able to offer some form of theoretical account of the social distribution of power which is necessary to the pluralist argument, yet upon which writers such as Dahl are silent. Hence whereas Dahlian theorists argue in largely non-functional terms - Polby in fact, rejects the basic propositions of functionalism<sup>(23)</sup> - it is by and large 'functionalist pluralists' who provide the theoretical response to the problem of the social distribution of power in pluralist systems<sup>(24)</sup>.

Now the suggestion that the Parsonian position provides a theoretical response to that question, however limited, is not to imply any defence of functionalism. The problems with that type of position are many and well documented and for present purposes only two need to be mentioned. In the first place there are a whole range of difficulties concerning the adequacy of functionalist explanation<sup>(25)</sup>. Secondly, and of direct relevance to the subject under discussion in this chapter is the fundamentally arbitrary nature of the attempt to impose a functionalist ontology upon the teleology of differentiation - that is the essentially uncontested assumption that there is some necessary tendency for social development to proceed along 'functional' lines. Indeed, the next section will suggest that this strategy of supplementing teleological argument by arbitrary theoretical insertions is both central and necessary to the project of pluralist comparative political analysis.

Rather than pursue a more detailed critique of functionalism however, let us instead attempt to evaluate the Parsonian account of pluralistic political mechanisms from the particular standpoint of its capacity to account for the specific empirical processes of politics. It has already been seen that Dahlian analysts insist upon the investigation of empirical cases and indeed, despite his relative abstraction, Parsons is no less emphatic that his version of pluralism be able to account for specific political forms.

One of the assumptions which Parsons regards as basic to the analysis of pluralistic social relations is of course that of 'equilibrium'. This refers to the process of maintenance of a set of relations between the structure of a system and its environment. Parsons does not claim that all systems achieve equilibrium but insists that 'Whether maintenance actually occurs or not, and in what measure, is entirely an empirical question' (26)

Parsons clarifies this issue by drawing a distinction between two types of 'process'. The first refers to processes within a given structure of a system (exchange). The second refers to processes which result in major changes in the structure itself. The former has an equilibrium state as its point of reference. A stable equilibrium is realised when small changes in one direction balance those in another. This is of course the basis of the concept of exchange - a balancing of inputs and outputs occurs which enables an original equilibrium to be restored. Parsons grounds his analysis of the economy (27) and politics on the first meaning of 'process'.

The second meaning refers to changes in the equilibrium state itself (structural differentiation) and hence to changes in the structure of the system. Significantly, it is claimed that there is a continuity between the two forms of process. Exchange guarantees a

degree of system equilibrium, but the greater its magnitude, the more is it likely to be associated with structural change proper. In the latter case the structure of the system will be transformed.

Parsons appears to be suggesting here that structural change arises from specific variations in the equilibrium-exchange process; in other words that it is subject to the effects of particular social, political and economic conditions. In view of this, it can be claimed that the presence or absence of a determinate degree of equilibrium or change is an 'empirical' or indeed 'relative' matter<sup>(28)</sup>. The 'state of the market' so to speak, is an empirical question, just as it is for Dahl. Yet the matter is clearly nothing of the sort and indications of what Parsons really has in mind are apparent throughout his work. For example we are told that in a static equilibrium, integrative mechanisms keep endogenous variations 'within limits compatible with the maintenance of the main structural patterns'<sup>(29)</sup>. Such 'structural patterns' are of course defined functionally; that is to say, the pattern of structural differentiation is dictated by a functionalist ontology. The effectivity of exchange as a means of accounting for social change is therefore undermined by the direction which is already imposed on social processes. The continuity which Parsons seeks to establish between exchange processes and structural change proper is an impossibility. Where one serves to permit the conceptualisation of particular forms and conditions of social relations, the other renders such specificity redundant. Structural differentiation gives social change a definite direction by virtue of the functionalist imperative attached to it. In view of this, Parsons' claim that the presence or absence of particular forms of change is an empirical matter cannot be coherently maintained. There are no particular forms of change; or if their existence is claimed, Parsons



cannot theoretically account for them. The effects of social exchange processes will either follow the direction of the teleology or they will not. Parsons' problem is that there is no means by which he can give a theoretical account of the latter possibility, for if the effects of particular social, political and economic conditions can determine ('empirically') the direction of change, one is left with a teleological concept (structural differentiation) which lacks explanatory value.

In other words Parsons' introduction of the concept of functionality though resolving some of the problems that Dahl's 'empiricism' simply evades produces greater problems of its own. For the conjunction of functionality with differentiation undermines any attempt to carry out an analysis of the precise state of the political market at any particular juncture. Equilibrium cannot be explained pluralistically without recourse to functionalism, but that in turn precludes the very empirical analysis that pluralists demand. It is to a broader consideration of the contradiction between teleology and specificity that Section Two of this chapter is directed.

## 2. PARSONS' COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ANALYSIS

### (a) GENERAL

Teleological and evolutionist theories are of course prevalent in a variety of sociological discourses, the most notable case being that of convergence theory. Though Parsons is not directly associated with this position, his sociology is based upon a number of concepts which are teleological in emphasis, the most significant being 'structural differentiation' (via the Durkheimian tradition) and 'rationalisation' (via Weber). Parsons' claim to originality lies in his fusion of these two orders of concepts - of which more will be said later - a fusion which has been subsequently adopted by many sociologists and political scientists.

The concept of differentiation is especially crucial to Parsons' sociology. As a concept, it implies a tendency for systems to advance according to the criterion of adaptive capacity. Differentiation therefore involves a process of 'adaptive upgrading'<sup>(30)</sup>. Such upgrading is realised in Parson's view by virtue of the claim that social structures become differentiated along functional lines. This proposition is the starting point of Parsonian sociology and enables him to present the fourfold classification of the social system (GAIL). More significantly the structural functional connection is the means of comparative sociological analysis, for in Parsons' view 'Societies differ from each other in the degree to which the collectivities of which they are composed are differentiated in terms of functional primacy'<sup>(31)</sup>. In consequence it is possible for Parsons to classify societies according to their degree of differentiation and related functional specialisms.

Despite the sophistication of his analysis, the application of the teleological concept of differentiation provides Parsons' work with

a number of problems. The most obvious of these concerns the duality which exists between the analytical and the concrete in Parsons' work. The author characterises his work by the term 'analytical realism' 'whereby concepts 'correspond not to concrete phenomena, but to elements in them which are analytically separate from other elements' (32). He is emphatic that a rigorous distinction must be maintained between analytical categories and concrete units or collectivities. Thus we are told that the 'political' is an analytical category parallel to the 'economic'. As such, it does not 'directly' correspond to concrete organisational units in societies. Its precise relation to such units will vary both within particular societies and between different societies (33). However, the fact that correspondence is not direct presumably allows one to infer that it is indirect. In consequence, Parsons claims that the functional differentiation of societies and the concrete structure of collectivities are 'overlapping classifications'.

Despite the intended distinction between the analytical and the concrete, however, it is only by positing degrees of correspondence between the two that Parsons is able to carry out comparative sociological and political analysis. This is particularly apparent in the fusion which he proposes between the concepts of differentiation and function. By fusing these two terms, an analytical category can be given a concrete referent and it may be claimed that 'it is inherent that the analytical boundaries will correspond to the lines of differentiation between concrete roles and collectivities most clearly in those societies which are in general highly differentiated' (34). On the one hand therefore, there is a distinction between functional/analytical and concrete categories. On the other hand it is stated that in some societies there is more of a correspondence between such categories than there is in other societies.

This raises two problems with respect to the manner in which the conditions of existence of social and political relations are specified. In the first place, Parsons' analysis rests upon the view that differentiation leads to enhanced adaptive capacity, or efficiency. In view of this, specific social formations and the political relations contained within them, can only be analysed in terms of their degree of differentiation. This amounts in practice to employing the criterion of optimum differentiation - as portrayed by the USA - as a measuring rod. Societies may then be analysed according to the extent to which they are 'sufficiently differentiated' a term which crops up repeatedly in 'Economy and Society'. The effect of this is that the analysis of particular conditions of existence of determinate social and political relations is made impossible and indeed redundant. Such conditions are already given in the concept of differentiation itself.

The second problem concerns the status of differentiation as a concrete process with theoretical effects. This concerns in particular its relationship to the concepts of media of exchange. Parsons claims that certain of the central theoretical concepts of politics and economics are a direct function of the historical process of differentiation. Thus, money emerges at a particular point of history which implies that economic theory is literally inapplicable in an undifferentiated society. Given his acceptance of this view, the claim that 'we have found it convenient for the most part to choose illustrations from our own society and its recent history' (35) is hardly surprising. Indeed, such a concentration on the USA is theoretically necessary, rather than merely convenient, in view of the fact that the concepts of economic theory are more applicable there than elsewhere. Though Parsons does not suggest that there

is an exact correspondence between the analytical and the concrete in the USA, it is apparent that many aspects of American social structure provide, in his own words, 'a fair approximation' of just such a correspondence. In view of this however, his claim that the theoretical scheme for the analysis of economy (polity) and society is not bound to any particular type of social formation<sup>(36)</sup> is open to serious doubt.

As in the case of economic theory, the question of the general applicability of the exchange process to the analysis of politics in a comparative context must be raised. If the central concepts of exchange are a consequence of the process of differentiation, can they be appropriate to the analysis of societies at different stages of that process? Mitchell poses this question by asking if Parsons' exchange model of political relations can be applied to primitive societies, the USA, Burma and the Soviet Union with equal degrees of effectiveness and concludes that it 'must...undergo the crucial tests of empirical research and theoretical criticism'<sup>(37)</sup> In fact there is nothing empirical about this matter at all. Parsons' derivation of the concepts of economic and political theory from differentiation, makes the notion of exchange more applicable to some societies than others. This calls the validity of Parsonian comparative analysis into question and raises the issue of whether such analysis is possible in those terms, a question which will be reconsidered below.

The second problem that arises from Parsons' adoption of an explicit teleology concerns the relationship he tries to establish between the concept of structural differentiation and that of rationalisation. This is of particular relevance to some of the substantive issues to be dealt with later. In a real sense it may be said that Parsons' work is a conscious fusion of a variety of emphases. Two of the most notable of these, Durkheim and Weber,

provide the concepts of differentiation and rationalisation. Parsons' attempt to fuse these concepts serves as a basis for much of his political sociology. In view of this, it is appropriate to examine the background to this fusion, before going on to consider its application in the particular examples under consideration.

Weber regarded certain Western cultural phenomena, the most fundamental of which was rationalisation, as lying 'in a line of development having universal significance and value<sup>(38)</sup>. Parsons' accepts the validity of this view and though his concept of rationalisation is not strictly reducible to that of Weber, the position taken in his more recent works is fairly close to Weber's.

Apart from arguing for a progressive process of rationalisation, Parsons chooses to fuse it with the process of differentiation. The most explicit statement of this position is found in 'Economy and Society'.

'We would like to reformulate the process of rationalisation as the tendency of social systems to develop progressively higher levels of structural differentiation under the pressure of adaptive exigencies<sup>(39)</sup>.

In the case of the political system, Parsons is able to relate this position directly to Weberian analysis of authority types so that

'Where the political aspect of social structure is sufficiently differentiated from the others, all authority is 'rational legal' in Weber's sense. His two other types of authority occur where structural differentiation is relatively incomplete'<sup>(40)</sup>.

The reason for the fusion of the two concepts is a simple one. Parsons needs to explain why some economic and political systems are more differentiated than others. In order to account for the difference in degree of differentiation between say, the USA and Sri Lanka,

Parsons would need to argue that the two processes may in certain cases be united. Thus in the American instance, the existence of an appropriately rationalistic system of ideas provides the condition of a high degree of differentiation. The general theoretical problems which arise from this position have been discussed elsewhere and need only be mentioned briefly<sup>(41)</sup>. In the first place Parsons' concept of system is defined as both specific and irreducible to other systems or orientations. Each system is subject to its own particular conditions of functioning. Once it is argued that the functional attributes of systems are conditioned by patterns of ideas, the specificity and irreducibility of such systems is denied. In short, Parsons is thrown back into the morass of cultural and ideal determinations that he has sought to avoid since the publication of 'The Structure of Social Action'. Secondly, the relation between the concepts of action and system in Parsons' work have been shown to be subject to a number of problems. An example of such a problem occurs in the fusion of rationalisation (an orientational process) with structural differentiation (a systemic process), as well as in other instances.

Before examining particular examples of Parsonian political analysis, it is necessary at the outset to consider the more recent theoretical developments in his work, notably the explicitly evolutionist position which he has adopted since the 1960's. This development is especially pertinent to a number of the conclusions drawn in his political analysis. It must be emphasised however, that Parsons' evolutionism is only novel for its explicitness. He has always recognised a progressive differentiation and rationalisation. What is significant about his later pronouncements is their range. He would now argue for example, that there is a direct continuity between

cultural and natural evolution <sup>(42)</sup> one aspect of this being the parallel between the emergence of man as a biological species and the emergence of 'modern societies'. The degree of directness with which Parsons regards this parallel is most apparent in his concept of 'evolutionary universal'. An evolutionary universal is defined as an organisational development which arises out of the process of 'adaptation' in its Darwinian sense <sup>(43)</sup>. The development of a particular universal functions to increase the adaptive capacity of a system, so that only systems which adopt the particular universal in question can attain higher levels of adaptive capacity. In this respect, Parsons cites a number of examples from organic evolution, such as the development of vision, the hands and the brain. In the case of vision, Parsons suggests that it appears to be a prerequisite of all higher levels of organic evolution. Only in the case of particular groups like bats has it been lost, and in these instances the organisms concerned have not subsequently given rise to important evolutionary developments <sup>(44)</sup>. In Parsons' view the same argument can be applied to social evolution. Once can then argue that apparently equally viable social forms are not necessarily equal at all in terms of their potentiality for contributing to further evolutionary developments <sup>(45)</sup>.

Parsons provides a number of concepts to account for the 'progressive' evolution to higher systems levels (differentiation, adaptive upgrading, inclusion, value generalisation <sup>(46)</sup>). In addition, to this he adds a further emphasis concerning the exchange processes between units of the social system. He suggests that besides effecting the exchange processes, the media can also facilitate creative increases in the extent and level of operations within social systems. Parsons conceives the conditions of these added capacities in a particular way:

'anchorage in a high order sub-system of action is the basic



condition of the upgrading effects of a generalised medium of exchange.

On a very broad basis therefore, cultural development is essential for the evolutionary advance of social systems' (47).

What is in fact suggested here is that a hierarchy of determinations governs the process of evolutionary development (48). Cultural phenomena constitute the 'controlling factor' in this hierarchy. In consequence, the exchange processes by which Parsons conceptualises political relations are directly subject to the effects of cultural determinations. Certain of the capacities of the media of exchange are therefore dependent on particular types of cultural developments. More generally, Parsons would argue that any social development is at root a cultural one. Parsons insists that such a position does not contravene his own long established methodological protocols, but there is good reason to suggest that such culturalism leads precisely to the forms of idealism which he sought to refute in 'The Structure of Social Action'. For example, when he tries to account for some of the developments which have caused the emergence of 'modern societies' (49) he offers a strictly cultural-ideal account of phenomena. We are told that four complexes are fundamental to the structure of modern societies, bureaucratic organisation, money and market systems, a generalised and universalistic legal system and the democratic association. These complexes are accounted for, less in terms of the evolutionary categories proposed than in terms of systems of ideas - in particular rationalisation. Thus bureaucracies and market systems depend upon the presence of rationality of action and generalised universalistic norms. The development of bureaucratic organisations and markets, in those empires which have failed to have universalistic norms, leads in Parsons' view to their having a static quality and frequently to their 'retrogression'. Though many of the elements of generalised universalistic norms appear in earlier

societies, their development in the West, constitutes a 'distinctive new step'. 'A process of differentiation of secular government from religious organisation leads to the development of a general legal system based upon the principle of formal rationality. Moreover, a highly organised universalistic legal order, is generally a prerequisite for the development of the democratic association, which has elective leadership and universal franchise. In a strict sense, the democratic association, which Parsons regards as the most important constituent of modern societies, is based on the principles of formal rationality.

In Parsons' view then, the development of 'modern societies' has to be accounted for at the level of cultural and ideal determinations. Apart from the fact that this creates a number of problems for the internal consistency and coherence of Parsons' discourse, it is necessary to examine the effect of this and other arguments on the substantive political analyses. The main question to be posed in the remainder of this section concerns the manner in which Parsons tries to account for political forms which may appear to deviate from the direction of the dominant teleology of rationality/differentiation. Parsons is adamant in claiming that his position can deal with such variations. Indeed, he is highly critical of earlier evolutionist theories in sociology, which he argues, could not do so. The question is however, not whether Parsons can argue for the existence of such variations, but whether he can theoretically account for them.

(b) SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

GERMAN FASCISM (50)

Parsons' attempt to account for the development of fascism in Germany has to be seen in the context of his view of social evolution

in general and of Western social and political development in particular. This point applies despite the fact that the essays on fascism appeared before Parsons' more explicit evolutionist arguments were presented. The context within which he views German fascism is a familiar one in sociology: 'why did not Germany continue in what many have thought to be the main line of the evolution of Western society, the progressive approach to the realisation of 'liberal-democratic' patterns and values'?<sup>(51)</sup> Writing in 1942, it is evident that Parsons regards Nazi Germany as a deviant form of society, one which shows every indication of continuing to 'depart progressively more radically from the main line of Western social development since the Renaissance'<sup>(52)</sup>. It is indeed, 'a radically new type of society'.

Though Parsons' work on fascism is concerned with a variety of problems, such as refuting the view that it can be regarded as a simple stage of capitalist development, the main part of his analysis is concerned with the rationalisation process. It will be suggested here that Parsons faces the difficult problem of having to argue that fascism is both a deviation from and an aspect of the process of rationalisation. On the one hand, fascism exhibits items of conduct which are outside the confines of the rationalisation process. On the other hand, rationalisation is universal in the West and Germany is a part of the West. Before examining this further, let us first summarise Parsons' position.

He addresses the problem of German fascism, not by reference to 'external factors' which may have influenced its development - such as Germany's treatment by the allies after World War 1 - but seeks to ground the problem in terms of 'factors distinctive to the social structure of Germany'. What is significant about this however, is that all of these factors are seen in the context of the process of

rationalisation. Parsons thus begins his analysis by considering the degree to which Germany possesses a rationalistic orientation. Germany, like other industrial societies, exhibits those characteristics defined in Parsons' later work as 'evolutionary universals'. The economy is based upon a highly organised market with regulation of exchange processes. There is a highly bureaucratised structure. There are firmly established property laws. In these crucial respects then, Germany has the classic features of other Western industrial societies.

However, it is also suggested that in certain areas Germany portrays quite different tendencies. It is for example, characterised by 'interdependent' 'feudal', militaristic, bureaucratic and authoritarian features'<sup>(53)</sup>. Taken together, these constitute the ideology of 'Prussian conservatism'. Such influences limited the decisiveness and effectivity of parliamentarism, reduced the degree of economic individualism and led towards tendencies involving the formalisation of status, the development of an ethic of masculine superiority and a sharper segregation of sex roles than in societies like the USA.

Given that the revolution of 1918 removed some of the more feudal elements from political power, and given that adherence to the rule of law, as well as to other features of 'modern society' pertained in Germany, Parsons asks why did the country move in the direction that it did? His solution to this problem is based upon an argument which relates the concept of rationalisation to the concept of anomie. In Parsons view a dramatic tendency in modern society concerns the development of charismatic movements out of a situation of rational-legal authority. Western society, it is claimed, provides a particularly fruitful soil for such developments, since it is a society type which exhibits a high degree of social strain, this

leading in turn to anomie<sup>(54)</sup>. Though strain is endemic in any large scale, complex society, Parsons claims that it is particularly evident in societies which passed through an industrial revolution. The latter process leads to urbanisation, migration, frequent economic instability and transformations in the technical, occupational, political and religious structures. What is more important for Parsons is the fact that at the root of these changes is the process of rationalisation. This is the source of strain which is most specific to Western societies, its chief characteristic being that it undermines traditional patterns and symbols, by rational or pseudo-rational criticism. Such rationalisation occurs in science and technology, the economy, government, philosophy, religion, the arts and culture, its effect being that large numbers of people fail to have enough which they can 'take for granted'. In Parsons' view, the rapidity of such changes leads to widespread psychological uncertainty, aggression and a tendency to unstable emotionalism and a susceptibility to propaganda, leading to mass mobilisation around 'various kinds of symbols'. In these circumstances:

'Charismatic movements of various sorts seem to function...as mechanisms of 'reintegration' which give large numbers of disorganised, insecure people a definite orientation, gives 'meaning' to their lives'<sup>(55)</sup>. According to Parsons, the best contemporary examples of such tendencies are found in the cases of communism and fascism.

Parsons does recognise that the argument that rationalisation produces anomie, cannot explain why anomie produces fascism, rather than something else entirely. In order to account for the specific emergence of fascism, Parsons has to extend the argument further. The way in which he tries to do this is predictable. If one set of ideas cannot account for the existence of a phenomenon, the culturalist

perspective demands that one finds another set which will. It is therefore argued that rationalisation divides elements of the population according to whether they tend towards 'progressive/emancipated' values or 'traditional/conservative' ones. Hence, different elements of the population react differently to rationalisation, according to their value orientations. In the case of the emancipated sections of the population, there is a development of the 'debunking' attitude, which undermines traditional values. Conversely, those associated with the traditional elements of the social structure, tend to react according to a 'fundamentalist' viewpoint. Here traditional values are regarded as fundamentally moral and any departure from them is deemed unacceptable. Parsons argues that political movements of the left have usually been associated with emancipated elements, whilst those of the right have more often been tied to traditional elements. National Socialism in Germany was therefore a product of this second traditional value pattern, producing a fundamentalist reaction to rationalisation. Indeed Parsons suggests that most of its negative symbols represented groups of emancipation - political radicals, Jews etc.

By the introduction of a second category of ideas, Parsons is able to incorporate fascism into the mainstream of Western development, whilst simultaneously showing it to be a deviation from that development. Yet this hardly constitutes a satisfactory solution. Contrary to Parsons' stated intentions, it is evident that the explanation he provides is neither 'structural' nor 'social'. Parsons indeed makes no reference to a specific and irreducible realm of the 'social'. Instead his account is comprehensively cultural. What it emphasises are 'certain peculiarities of the German cultural tradition' (56). Fascism is explained by the interplay of sets of ideas. Germany's

deviation from the teleology of rationality is accounted for by reference to the relationship between that process and German tradition. This relationship is mediated by the category of anomie. Rationalisation produces anomie and German culture produces a reaction in the form of fascism:

'relative to Western Europe and the US it (Germany) has been more 'conservative' ...One significant symptom of this fact is to be found in the conspicuously greater tendency of German social thought to repudiate the primary rationalistic and emancipated ideological structures which have dominated the intellectual traditions of France and England' (57).

In short, fascism appeared in Germany because Germany was conservative. The deviation from one set of ideas is accounted for by the presence of another set. The conditions which determine the presence and effects of that set, remain of course unaccounted for. Germany, rather than the USA, became fascist because of the particular qualities of German culture. Where America had the Enlightenment, Germany merely had a tradition of conservatism.

The problems with this position are apparent enough not to require detailed comment. Far from constituting a 'social structural' explanation in Parsons' sense of that term, it falls in line with the extreme idealism which Parsons criticised in much of his earlier work. Apart from this, it cannot provide an adequate explanation of fascism. He is correct to recognise that the presence of anomie cannot explain the specific presence of fascism. But can an explanation in terms of conservative traditions do any better? The argument is clearly self-perpetuating. How is one to account for the social conditions of these ideas, for the conditions of their conditions and so on? In treating political ideologies, Parsons is not concerned with examining their conditions of production, nor their subsequent

forms of organisation and effects. To argue that anomie enables individuals to be 'mobilised around' 'various kinds of symbols' is really to miss the point. What is it that determines the presence of particular kinds of symbols and the absence of other kinds? Parsons is unconcerned with such crucial questions. He ignores the problem of the social, political and economic context of ideology, being concerned only with its relationship to the teleology of rationalisation. From this it is but a short step to reducing all 'deviant' ideologies such as fascism and communism to more basic orientational forms, which is precisely what Parsons does. In the last resort then, we can look for the key to analysing such ideologies by seeing them as fundamentally religious<sup>(58)</sup>.

It is interesting to note in conclusion the significance with which Parsons views the fascist movement. In 1942 he draws parallels with Weber's view concerning the battles of Marathon and Salamis, where the latter saw the fate of the West as hanging in the balance. Such a sober mood has well and truly disappeared by the 1970's. Fascism may have been an 'acute socio-political disturbance' but it was 'not a source of major future structural patterns'<sup>(59)</sup>. In other words, fascism can be granted the same position in social evolution that was given to the bat in organic evolution. Neither has, in Parsons' view, given rise to 'important evolutionary developments'.

Now it may be suggested that this criticism of Parsons' account of German fascism is an unfair one. Could not a more sophisticated account be given by the application of the more up-to-date Parsonian model of exchange relations? It will be suggested below that there is no justification for this view. Indeed there is good evidence to suggest that Parsons' more recent work is subject to the same problems as suggested above, a fact which emerges in his recent analyses



of the Soviet Union.

### COMMUNISM AND THE WEST

Parsons' analysis of the relationship between the USA and the USSR clearly indicates the problems connected with his use of a teleological approach. At several points in the analysis, he is faced with the problem of accounting for variations between the two political systems, in the same terms with which he accounts for their convergence.

Parsons regards the USA as the 'New Lead Society' - the model upon which further social differentiation throughout the world will be based. As a consequence of the industrial, democratic and educational revolutions, a number of Western societies, of which the USA is the predominant example, developed a structure which had universal significance<sup>(60)</sup>. In consequence, the USA has the lead in the current phase of modernisation, being characterised by equality of opportunity, a strong market system, an independent legal order, an absence of ascription etc. Such is its acceptance of the principle of equality that the latter comes to be 'the end of the line'. Indeed a societal community based upon equality will, in Parsons' view 'spread through all modern societies'.

Parsons regards the Soviet Union as having introduced many features of the democratic and industrial revolutions<sup>(61)</sup>. The descriptive elements of the older society have been removed. Monarchy and aristocracy have disappeared. The older identification of church and state has been destroyed. Industrialism has reduced traditional localism and particularism. Urbanisation has increased along with geographical and social mobility and educational provision.

As in the case of German fascism, the most crucial problem in this analysis concerns the relationship between the ideology - in this case communism - and the teleology of differentiation/rationalisation.

It may be noted initially that Parsons regards Russian political ideology as bearing several different relationships to the teleology, a position which is clearly incoherent. In 'Economy and Society' for example, he had suggested that it was out of step with the progressive tendency towards differentiation of political and economic systems. Ideology was said to 'inhibit' the 'natural' tendencies towards differentiation. In 'The Social System' however, the emphasis was slightly different. Here it is suggested that 'reality' will 'force far reaching modifications in the ideology' (62).

In the later work Parsons shifts ground even further. Whereas in the earlier case, Russian ideology had been an obstacle to development, it has now taken on a quite different relationship to it. In the most recent formulations, the ideology, far from constituting an obstacle to rationalisation, has become an element of it:

'Both the United States and the Soviet Union have had ideologies varying from older Western European patterns; some, especially the Soviet, are still partially repudiated by Western European societies. But the value content of these ideologies should, in our opinion, be regarded as primarily 'specifications' of the more general Western value pattern of instrumental activism, rather than as departures from it. In general, the same can be said of the ideologies of 'social criticism' and revolt that are widely current in our time' (63).

It is noticeable that in this example, Parsons adopts the same theoretical strategy as he adopted in the analysis of fascism - if one set of ideas becomes either inadequate, or inappropriate to the argument, one simply conjures up another set. What is of particular significance here is that by subsuming Russian ideology under Western ideology, Parsons is able to propose a convergence towards political pluralism for the two systems.

Parsons argues for the development of Russian pluralism primarily in terms of the concept of evolutionary universal. In the case of politics, the most pertinent universal is the 'democratic association' (64). Parsons' reason for regarding the democratic association as an evolutionary universal is because of its provision of effective administration in a complex, differentiated society:

'the larger and more complex a society becomes, the more important is effective political organisation not only in its administrative capacity, but also and not least in its support of a universalistic legal order. Political effectiveness includes both the scale and operative flexibility of the organisation of power. Power...depends overwhelmingly on a consensual element...' (65)

Parsons regards the Soviet Union as being faced with a dilemma between rigid party control and maximisation of freedom (66), despite the fact that at certain levels the Soviet system emphasises universalistic standards. What is important however, is Parsons' view that Soviet totalitarianism is untenable as an effective political form. He is unequivocal on this point.

'I...maintain that communist totalitarian organisation will probably not fully match 'democracy' in political and integrative capacity in the long run. I do indeed predict that it will prove to be unstable and will either make adjustments in the general direction of electoral democracy and a plural party system or 'regress' into generally less advanced and politically less effective forms of organisation, failing to advance as rapidly or as far as otherwise may be expected' (67).

In 'Communism and the West' Parsons discusses the likelihood of a transformation in Soviet totalitarianism by relating Soviet socialism to the fate of other great 'reform' movements of the past. Both Calvinism in the Reformation and Jacobinism in the democratic revolution

were short lived because, being based on self-appointed elites, their authority could not be legitimated. Since in Parsons' view, Calvinism and Jacobinism both gave way to a more 'liberal' Protestantism, he confidently suggests that:

'it seems a safe prediction that Communism will, from its own internal dynamics, evolve in the direction of the restoration - or where it has not yet existed, the institution - of political democracy... political democracy is the only possible outcome except for general destruction or breakdown' (68).

In his opinion, processes involving the expansion of rights of citizenship, universalism and the many effects of the educational revolution have enabled the Soviet Union to be well on the road to pluralism (69). He follows the conventional pluralist argument with regard to the proliferation of groups providing a basis for a pluralist system, adding that the further such a differentiation of social structure proceeds, the more difficult will a rigid authoritarianism be to uphold (70).

In order to assess the validity of these arguments it is necessary to begin by considering Parsons' claims about the functional superiority of the democratic association. Not only is it suggested that the democratic association is more efficient than all other forms of political organisation, but it is also claimed that other forms are subject to an inherent instability. Parsons in fact offers no theoretical justification for this view and indeed there are good Parsonian grounds for questioning the premises on which it rests. Why should it be assumed that 'totalitarian' forms of politics will not persist in the Soviet Union? If Parsonian concepts of exchange and equilibrium are appropriate to the analysis of Russian social relations, why should not the Russian social formation exhibit those self-equilibrating tendencies enjoyed by its American counterpart? Why should the self-sustaining capacities of one system be denied to another? If Parsons makes such a denial his analysis collapses. If

he seeks to avoid the problem by denying the applicability of the exchange concepts to the Russian case, the entire basis of his conceptualisation of social and political relations disappears. Parsons' attempt to claim the superior effectivity of democratic forms of politics therefore serves only to throw up a number of more general and fundamental problems in his analysis.

There are at least two other arguments through which he tries to justify the claim for a political convergence, but neither of these is convincing. The attempt to legitimate the conclusion by referring to the history of other 'reform' movements does not deserve serious consideration and is merely another aspect of the effect of Parsons' combination of ideal and teleological explanations. His second claim concerning the expansion of political groups through differentiation is a common pluralist argument. Apart from purely empirical questions (71) the explanation is again subject to those problems relating to the equilibrating capacities of systems. There is, in other words, no reason to assume that such a tendency, even if present, should have any necessary effects on Russian political relations.

Fundamentally, Parsons' argument for political convergence rests upon his position with respect to Russian ideology. It has already been shown above that Parsons treats such ideology in a number of ways; it is an obstacle to development, it is an aspect of development and so on. It is his later attempt to incorporate Russian ideology into the teleology however, which constitutes the basis of his explanation of convergence. Because Russian ideology is now a mere 'specification' of Western rationality and instrumental activism, it can be argued that the Russian political system has to develop in the direction of democracy. It is indeed apparent that the treatment of the democratic

association as an evolutionary universal is only possible because such universals and the social processes which condition them are themselves directly dependent on systems of ideas. It is equally apparent however, that such a position has to lead to absurd and contradictory conclusions. Thus, Parsons can maintain that there is a definite distinction between the economic systems of the USA and the USSR because of the difference between their respective ideological positions. In the case of the polity however, the argument is reversed. Here it is said that the two systems converge because of the basic similarity of their ideologies. In the course of a single paragraph Parsons can use his argument on ideology to claim that

'The communist system is not however, basically divergent from the more general normative pattern of Western civilisation...however, it comes into an acute conflict at one major point, namely that of the system of political control over (the economy)' (72).

This type of example illustrates the effects of teleology on Parsons' social analysis. Russian economic and political relations are not examined in terms of the concepts of exchange. The polity and economy (73) are instead conceptualised according to their position along the line of rationalisation/differentiation. A more precise analysis of such relations is both unnecessary and impossible, since the concepts of exchange are themselves subject to the teleology. The mode of analysis which Parsons presents is therefore subject to a variety of problems and inconsistencies due to the fact that particular forms of political relations are incorporated within a general teleology. This holds for all forms of relations including those which Parsons would regard as variations from the direction of the teleology.

Much of this chapter has concentrated upon the work of Talcott Parsons, attempting to show that there are a number of fundamental problems in his mode of political analysis. Parsons' work was chosen for consideration for two reasons. Firstly, because he provides the most rigorous, sophisticated and precise outline of the conditions of existence and mechanisms of pluralist politics. Secondly, because he provides a clear example of the application of the pluralist method in comparative analysis.

Having said that, it should be emphasised that the problems which arise in Parsonian analysis are not peculiar to it alone. The final pages of this section will therefore attempt to show that many of the difficulties outlined above reappear in other versions of comparative political sociology. This fact may be illustrated by examining one or two of the more influential attempts to construct comparative 'typologies' of political development. What will become clear from even a brief consideration of the works of Almond, Coleman, Powell and Apter is that they reproduce, if in slightly different forms, all of the major problems discussed in the above analysis of Parsons. In other words, their theoretical solutions are inherently arbitrary and in consequence their analyses are unable to account for the emergence of specific forms of regime, despite their insistence that an 'empirical explanation' of such developments is the criterion upon which such typologies are to be judged.

All of these authors seek to achieve a greater degree of rigour and realism in comparative analysis by the construction of typologies. That all such typologists generate the same problems as those which have already been discussed earlier in this section is hardly surprising in view of the close similarity in theoretical orientation between them and Parsons himself. In the first place the conceptual basis for typological classification is always grounded in some version of Parsons' 'fusion' of Weberian and Durkheimian constructs. Both

Curtis and Scarrow in standard texts on comparative typological analysis, for example, emphasise that the 'development-under-development' typology is heavily dependent on (Parsonian) sociological theory and the concepts central to it - structural differentiation, rationalisation, functional specificity and so on<sup>(74)</sup>.

Secondly, it is apparent that theorists such as Almond, Coleman and their associates are aiming to reconceptualise comparative political analysis through the concepts of sociology. In Almond's view it is because 'the conceptual scheme of political science gradually lost its capacity' to grapple with the problems of comparative analysis that 'the application of certain sociological and anthropological concepts 'may facilitate such systematic comparison'<sup>(75)</sup>. Towards this end Almond suggests that the terms to be used 'in discriminating the essential properties' of classes of systems' have emerged out of the Weber-Parsons tradition in social theory'<sup>(76)</sup>. Three major concepts are central to realising this project. The first is the category of 'political system' and its associated concepts of 'interdependence', 'changing equilibrium', 'role' etc. The centrality of the concept of system points to the importance of a second cluster of concepts, for in Almond's view

'Without such a sharp definition we will be unable to compare the differentiated modern political systems with the relatively undifferentiated primitive ones, the secular modern systems with the traditional and theocratic ones'<sup>(77)</sup>.

It is clear then that comparative political typologies are to be constructed upon Parsons' fusion of the processes of differentiation and rationalisation. Indeed Almond like Parsons, takes the view that the conceptual 'map' of comparative analysis is to be defined by the fusion of these processes, the analysis of specific systems being reducible to placing them at some point along the 'continuum'



of development<sup>(78)</sup>. One of the principal means for constructing such classifications relates to a third conceptual cluster, again deriving directly from Parsons, that of the 'pattern variables'. It is these which provide a precise means of distinguishing between 'modern' and 'traditional' systems ('specificity' 'universalism', 'achievement' 'affective neutrality' versus 'diffuseness', 'particularism', ascriptiveness' and 'affectivity')<sup>(79)</sup>.

Before making a brief examination of some of the substantive arguments of these authors it is interesting to emphasise the factors which Almond puts forward as criteria for evaluating the utility of comparative typological analysis. Three such factors are distinguished. In the first place, a comparative analysis of development is required to be empirical as well as formal<sup>(80)</sup>. Secondly, such analysis must be capable of 'bringing out the essential differences' between political systems. It must, in other words, be able to outline what is specific to particular systems. Thirdly, 'the ultimate criterion of admission or rejection is the facilitation of understanding'<sup>(81)</sup>; does the typology provide any explanation of the processes which it seeks to specify?

Almond and Powell, following Parsons, place two concepts at the centre of their analysis, 'role' and 'culture'. These are conceived in developmental form so that where the developmental aspect of role is 'differentiation', that of culture is 'secularisation', the latter being the process whereby men become increasingly rational<sup>(82)</sup>. Though Almond and Powell deny any 'inevitable trend' towards differentiation/secularisation in political systems, they insist that one can speak in terms of comparative 'degrees' of both processes.

In accordance with this it is therefore suggested<sup>(83)</sup> that comparative analysis depends upon an examination of the relationship

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between on the one hand, political structures and on the other functions such as 'interest articulation', 'socialisation' and so on. According to this view 'development' takes place when the structure and culture of a political system cannot cope with functional problems without further differentiation/secularisation. That is not to say that in the authors' view all such development has to be progressive. On the contrary they insist that development may in fact be 'regressive' a situation whereby political systems may decline or regress to more 'traditional' patterns.

Now two immediate questions arise with respect to this argument. What conditions account for such regression, and what processes explain the emergence of such conditions at any particular juncture? Take again, for example, the cases of German fascism and Russian totalitarianism. Why did Germany and Russia, both relatively 'modern' systems, 'regress' towards more 'traditional' patterns of political organisation?

Almond and Powell's answer to this is remarkably similar to Parsons', and no less unsatisfactory. Their classification of 'authoritarian-modern systems'<sup>(84)</sup> provides an explanation of Russian and Nazi political development which is at best a form of cultural determinism and at worst a form of tautology. In either case the argument is theoretically arbitrary, for all that we are presented with are terms of explanation, whose only justification lies in their expediency. Instead of advancing the 'facilitation of understanding', Almond and Powell engage in a complex wordplay that defines Russia as 'Radical Totalitarian', Nazi Germany as 'Conservative Totalitarian', Franco's Spain as 'Conservative Authoritarian' and so on. What we have is classification by fiat rather than by concept, since the precise conditions which produce specific forms of 'regression' remain unspecified. At best one is

merely left to infer that German or Russian regression is a product of particular forms of cultural irrationality, though Almond and Powell's view that the development of high capability systems depends on rationalisation<sup>(85)</sup>, like all such views, only makes sense because 'developed' systems are already defined in these terms.

Apter's approach to comparative analysis rests upon a modified version of Parsonian theory and is again concerned with the 'fit' between structural and cultural processes. This approach to the analysis of development enables him to produce a typology of political systems, the most important aspect of which is the distinction between 'sacred collective' and 'secular libertarian' systems<sup>(86)</sup>. According to Apter two things may be drawn from these polar types. Firstly, most other systems tend to fit between them. Secondly, libertarian systems have historically evolved from collective ones<sup>(87)</sup>.

Two things in Apter's analysis are worthy of brief comment. In the first place he considers it possible to draw empirical variations from these polar types or models, a procedure which enables him to make an empirical distinction between 'reconciliation' and 'mobilisation' systems, the former drawn from the libertarian, the latter from the collective type. But the object of empirical analysis again hardly conforms with the developmentalism from which such types are drawn. For it is apparent that Apter, like Parsons and others is unable to reconcile any of the specific conditions of given political developments, with the overall teleology. There are indeed no 'empirical' conditions which are effective in the modernisation process, for that process is given in the construct of the Parsonian fusion. Specific conditions are only effective in 'regressions' from modernisation and Apter is no more able to give an account of such conditions than are his counterparts. It is therefore difficult to reconcile Apter's call for an empirical analysis with the concluding statement of his work:

'I think that in the long run the most revolutionary force in political affairs will be a new form of the secular-libertarian ideal and, more specifically a democratic system of government. Modernisation is a critical step by means of which this ideal will be universalised' (88).

Secondly the similarity of Apter's treatment of ideological conditions in political practice to Parsons' is striking. For Apter communism is a 'political religion' rather than a specific ideology with determinate conditions of existence. Apter, like Parsons, does not define ideology in terms of its conditions of existence and effects, but only in terms of its place within a developmental process (89). Ultimately, it may be argued that what superficially unites ideologies is more important than their specificity. Communism and fascism may then be subsumed under 'religion' rather than treated as specific political ideological conditions with determinate effects.

Finally let us consider what is probably the best known and most influential resume of the comparative method, Almond's article of 1956 'Comparative Political Systems'. What is of most substantive importance here is Almond's attempt to differentiate between specific systems on the basis of the Parsonian theoretical fusion. What this amounts to in broad terms is a distinction being drawn between 'Anglo American' and 'Pre-Industrial' systems, the former being characterised by the features of homogeneity, differentiation, secularity, rationality, bureaucracy, functional specificity, diffusion of power, and the latter by their antitheses. Between these two systems Almond attempts to identify two other political types, the 'Totalitarian' and the 'Continental European'.

What Almond's article in fact reveals, perhaps more clearly than anything discussed so far, is the fundamentally arbitrary nature of the comparative method. For in the case of totalitarianism, apart

from one passing reference to the fact that it is tied to the 'modern' system - a 'tyranny with a rational bureaucracy'<sup>(90)</sup> no other reference is made to the structural features which depict the modern system. Instead the characterisation of totalitarianism rests upon a description of the 'coercive' features of totalitarianism regimes. Here, political 'regression' is accounted for, not by reference to any reversal of the differentiation process, but by reference to an entirely new conceptual category which bears no obvious relation to the conceptual structure of developmental theory. The account of the 'Continental European Systems' is no less arbitrary in form. Here again the similarity with Parsons and others is obvious since Italy and Germany's position between the Anglo American and Totalitarian types is determined not by degree of modernity, but by the characteristics of Italian and German 'sub-cultures'.

These brief examples merely reinforce more clearly what has already been said above. All exponents of the pluralist position regard it as a means of carrying out specific empirical analyses at any level of the political system. Such an objective is however, impossible, precisely because the teleological propositions upon which pluralism and its derivatives - notably modernisation theory - rests are incompatible with the criterion of 'specificity'. The outcome is a form of analysis which is both arbitrary and ambiguous. In spite of its insistence on the specificity of political relations such a mode of analysis is incapable of recognising any of the social conditions of existence of political processes and practices. It is to a further examination of that theme that the following chapter is directed.

CHAPTER FOURSOCIOLOGY AND THE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL ACTION

This chapter is concerned with the question of how sociologists conceptualise and analyse political action. The first section examines attempts to theorise 'power' as a form of such action, looking especially at those writers who primarily regard it as a capacity of human individuals. The major shortcoming of that approach is found to be its failure to examine the conditions of existence of forms of political action. Section Two examines, in detail some of those discourses which have attempted to theorise those conditions by defining them as 'structural' components of political action. The chapter closes by suggesting that these attempts to address the problem of political action through the polarisation of 'structure' with human 'action' are inadequate and that the terms of the problem have indeed to be reformulated.

1. Power as an attribute or capacity of subjects

Sociological discussion of political relations and forms of political action often tends to be directed towards an analysis of human subjects and their capacities. Take, for example, the exercise of 'power'. Sociologists have commonly regarded the relation involved in that exercise as one between ego and alter where 'power' is exerted by one agent at the expense of another. In this context Weber's definition has often provided a starting point for discussion:

'Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests' (1).

This definition is founded upon two broad theoretical assumptions. Firstly, in accordance with the Weberian conception of social action, it assumes that the agents who participate in relations of power are

human individuals, or aggregates of individuals, possessing the essential capacities that enable social action to occur. Secondly, Weber's definition assumes that it is possible to speak meaningfully about 'power' and 'power relations' without any necessary reference to the specific social conditions of existence of such relations. This is clearly what lies beyond Weber's reference to 'power' as a relation which can be identified 'regardless of the basis on which this probability rests'.

That many sociological discussions of power attempt to regard it as involving relations between an essential category of human individuals is apparent from the ways in which the term power is defined by leading theorists. Dahl's famous definition is not unlike Weber's: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do' <sup>(2)</sup>. In presenting this definition Dahl insists that power is a relationship between people, and although he accepts that 'actors may be individuals, roles, offices, governments (or) nation states' he is adamant that all such categories of agent are ultimately reducible to 'human aggregates' <sup>(3)</sup> and their capacities.

A similar view is of course adopted by many other writers on the topic. For example, Chapter Three showed Mills' version of 'ruling elite theory' to be one which saw psychological propensities as an insufficient but nevertheless necessary condition of the power elite's existence. Other writers, despite their adoption of different theoretical views on power from either Dahl or Mills share the belief that power relations, however conceived, are necessarily intersubjective relations. Hunter, the major 'reputationalist' writer on power claims that 'power is a word that will be used to describe the acts of men going about the business of moving other men to act in relation to themselves or in relation to organic or inorganic things' <sup>(4)</sup>. Other examples will be referred to presently.

The fact that sociologists of quite different theoretical persuasions tend to locate power in inter-subjective relations suggests that there is a wide consensus regarding the question of how power is to be analysed. It is to this consensus which Wrong has recently pointed when suggesting that most contributors to the power debate in sociology, whether 'reputationalists', 'elitists', 'pluralists', 'decisionists' or 'non-decisionists', 'are all prone to locate power in the resources of individuals rather than in impersonal organisations' (5). Indeed, Lukes has rightly suggested that the view that power is to be 'attributed to (individual or collective) human agents' (6), is one which has been virutally unquestioned in social sciences.

The assumption that power is an inter-subjective relation underpins the second aspect of Weber's definition - that power relations may be referred to without any reference to their social 'basis' being strictly necessary. It is precisely this assumption which lies behind the various attempts to construct formal typologies of power and its variants ('influence', 'force', 'manipulation' etc). One of the most detailed and recent attempts to undertake such an exercise is that of Wrong, who tries to retain a rigorous distinction between the 'forms' and 'bases' of power, despite his realisation that such a task is not without its problems. Indeed, after admitting that his own taxonomy, though more detailed than is customary, is hardly novel, he recognises that attempts to construct classifications of the 'forms' of power are invariably confused and confusing:

'The formal definitions and distinctions made by different writers scarcely succeed in dispelling...confusion, for they reveal at least as much diversity as uniformity. Power is regarded as a form of influence, or influence as a form of power, or they are treated as entirely distinct phenomena. Power is held to rest always on consent, or it must always confront and overcome resistance. Authority is a sub-type of



power, or power and authority are distinct and opposite. Persuasion is a form of power; it is not a form of power at all' (7).

Wrong continues at some length to give what is, in fact, a very accurate synopsis of the confusions and disagreements concerning the relationship between 'power', 'manipulation', 'force', 'competence' 'charisma' and the like, as formulated in a variety of texts. Such confusions derive from the very rationale of formalism, which sanctions both the project of taxonomy, and the attempt to construct abstract typologies of power on the basis of an examination of projected relations between ego and alter. That project shows both the problems of formalism, already referred to in Chapter Two, and subjectivism. After all, it can only be maintained that power may be analysed independently of the social conditions which provide its 'basis' because those conditions are conceived as inessential, transient and variable, in contrast to the essential, enduring subjective capacities of human actors. The confusions arising in formalism therefore relate to the attempt to derive variable types of social relations from an invariable and essential capacity of human subjects.

It is suggested then that subjectivism underpins those attempts to separate the formal classification of power 'types' from the substantive social basis of power relations. But that same subjectivism also serves to justify a failure to theorise the social conditions of existence of power even in those discourses which make no claim to model-building, and indeed, profess to carry out 'empirical' studies of power relations.

The Dahlian methodology for the analysis of power relations discussed in Chapter Three is clearly inseparable from Dahl's view of political agency described above. Given the argument that the occupants of power positions are individuals, an analysis of power must consequently depend upon an examination of the 'concrete decisions'

of those same individuals. In accordance with the emphasis on an analysis of decision making, Dahlian pluralists therefore maintain that 'power' does not in fact exist outside its 'exercise' in such decisions. Here then, one has one of the factors which differentiates Dahlian analysis from that of elite theory or 'non-decision theory'; emphasis is placed on the 'exercise' of power rather than its 'sources'.

Nevertheless pluralists clearly have to recognise that the possession of certain resources is both necessary to, and an influence upon the decision making process. Significantly however, these resources are again seen in individualistic terms. In Dahl's view, 'a resource is anything that can be used to sway the specific choices or the strategies of another individual'. A list of such resources might include 'an individual's own time; access to money, credit and wealth; control over jobs, control over information; esteem or social standing; the possession of charisma; popularity, legitimacy, legality... the right to vote, intelligence, education, and perhaps even ones energy level'<sup>(8)</sup>.

Two assumptions are prevalent in this argument. In the first place, the essential agent of political relations is deemed to be 'homo politicus', an agent who utilises his available resources rationally<sup>(9)</sup>. In the second place, such resources are said to be distributed diffusely. In short, resources are regarded as 'non-cumulative'; though one individual may have 'more money' another may have 'more time' and so on. Both of these assumptions have been shown to be problematic in previous discussion. Chapter Two has shown the inadequacy of the individualistic conception of agency. Chapter Three has shown that pluralism's individualistic account of power offers no coherent explanation of the social conditions by which power is produced and reproduced in a given ('diffuse') social

form. That problem is one which is not resolved by 'empirical' accounts of individual decisions, for such accounts combine the continual assumption that certain social processes are effective, with the persistent inability to account for them.

The same problem reappears in a variety of other empirical approaches to the study of power which take positions diametrically opposed to pluralism - notably 'ruling elite', 'stratificationist' and 'reputationist' positions. Despite their specific differences all of these positions place emphasis on the view that power is conditional upon the possession by individuals, of certain key facilities, or resources (income, prestige, political position etc). Though all of the theorists associated with these positions continue, like pluralists, to conceive power in inter-personal terms, they dispute the claim that power relations are inevitably embodied in 'concrete decisions' (Dahl) or the 'decision making process' (Polsby).

Hunter's work provides a good example of what is involved here. In the first place, it suggests that 'Regional City' is ruled by a cohesive self-conscious elite, membership of which is almost wholly defined by position in the business community. Hence it is suggested that in that community 'most institutions and associations are subordinate.....to the interests of the policy makers who operate in the economic sphere of community life'<sup>(10)</sup>. Secondly, it insists that the elite dictates city policy, even though its members may not necessarily intervene overtly in formal decision making processes. This emphasis clearly bears some similarity to Mills' argument regarding the 'power elite'. In both cases, one has a view of the overt processes of popular democracy being circumvented by those who occupy the 'higher circles' and who have 'real' control over decisions of local, national and international consequence.

Positions of this sort have invariably been subjected to serious criticism. Many have, for example, pointed to the vague and speculative arguments of writers like Mills, Martin, for one, noting the tendency for elites to be only vaguely defined and variable in composition, and for arguments to involve an infinite regression of 'manipulators behind manipulators' <sup>(11)</sup>. What lies behind criticism of this sort is a suggestion, similar to Dahl's comment on Mills, to the effect that most of these theories are unable or unwilling to specify the 'scope' of power. What this suggests - if one in fact extends Dahl's own rather narrow definition of 'scope' beyond its individualistic limits - is that any theory of power which is to specify the boundaries of power relations has, at the very least, to provide an accurate designation of the agents participating in them, and the nature of such participation. But when considered in that light it is clear that positions like Mills' or Hunter's are unsound precisely because of the indeterminacy of the elite concept. This failing is clearly apparent in Mills' case. Why for example, is there considered to be one power elite instead of three? If each elite is based around a different institutional complex, what conditions guarantee their overall unity?

To a large extent many of the failings of the various 'elite' responses to pluralist theory derive from the inability of writers in that tradition to tackle the problem of how power is produced, reproduced and distributed in a given form. As in the case of pluralism that failure is largely due to the attempt to regard power as a capacity of individuals, an approach which sanctions a type of analysis which is not only speculative, but unable to account for the social conditions of given power relations.

Having said that however, one contribution to the debate on power which has so far not been mentioned - the so-called non-decision making approach of Bachrach and Baratz - might at first appear to provide a

solution. For what is most apparent about that analysis is the presence of a clear conception of power being subjected to definite social conditions and processes which affect the practices of the incumbents of positions within power relations. There is then, at least in principle, a recognition of the need for a theory of the social production, reproduction and distribution of power in Bachrach and Baratz's work.

To this end 'Power and Poverty' begins by attempting to elucidate the 'two faces of power'. Although it is accepted that power may clearly be exercised in situations where A and B undertake 'concrete' decisions, the authors question whether power as a social relation is totally embodied in such processes. Instead they propose that power may also be said to apply to situations where 'a person or group - consciously or unconsciously - creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts'<sup>(12)</sup>. To support this contention they call upon Schattschneider's claim that

'All forms of political organisation have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organisation is the mobilisation of bias. Some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out'<sup>(13)</sup>.

The concept of 'mobilisation of bias' is crucial to the authors' attempt to conceptualise the process of non-decision making in specific contexts. What they suggest initially is that

'Political systems and sub-systems develop a 'mobilisation of bias' a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures ('rules of the game') that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others'<sup>(14)</sup>.

In referring to this 'mobilisation of bias' then, Bachrach and Baratz are clearly making at least an implicit reference to wider

notions of how power is produced and reproduced in a social setting. Indeed, by the end of the third chapter of their book, that suggestion has become more explicit, for they say that in posing the question of which groups are 'disfavoured' under the distribution of resources in the community, a wider problem will be posed:

'To what extent does the utilisation of power, authority and influence shape and maintain a political system that tends to perpetrate 'unfair shares' in the allocation of values; and how, if at all, are new sources of power, authority and influence generated and brought to bear in an effort to alter the political process and in turn lessen inequality in the value allocation?'<sup>(15)</sup>

It would appear, then, that one of the issues with which Bachrach and Baratz are concerned is that of the 'generation' (and regeneration) of power sources in community politics. Certainly those chapters of their book dealing with the anti-poverty programme in Baltimore in the late 1960's purport to deal with issues relating to that matter. But, in fact, the study of poverty and race in Baltimore is largely one which emphasises how certain political and economic leaders successfully incorporated black radicalism until a riot swayed the political balance more in favour of the blacks. In effect, as Lukes has quite rightly commented, Bachrach and Baratz's account of the processes which generate 'the mobilisation of bias' is one which confines itself to studying how these processes can be traced back to individuals' decisions<sup>(16)</sup>.

In consequence, 'Power and Poverty' fails to give an adequate account either of the social conditions of existence of white political domination, or of those conditions which gave rise to the limited success blacks had in redressing the political balance in the late 1960's. The first of these - the political domination enjoyed by whites - is explained in terms of the capacities of particular individuals, such as the Mayor, whose 'quick action'<sup>(17)</sup> was, in one case, said to

account for the blacks' failure to achieve effective mobilisation and organisation. Apart from this, there is virtually no account of any of the wider conditions which might have generated white power and domination, apart from vague reference to 'established institutions and procedures' (18).

As for the limited acquisition of power which blacks achieved during the period in question, Bachrach and Baratz present two causes. One was the provision of federal funds and programmes for reform, 'the main means, directly and indirectly, by which the black power have (sic) gained a foothold in Baltimore's political system'. Such grants and programmes reputedly helped to raise the expectations of a large proportion of those experiencing conditions of poverty 'thereby causing them to develop a set of interests and to make use of the political system in furthering their interests' (19). The second factor was the incidence of riot: 'More than anything else...the riots apparently signalled the beginning of the end of the existing biased political system in Baltimore. No longer could blacks be excluded from... key centres of decision making' (20).

But neither of these arguments is convincing. The first hardly fits in with the prior explanation of white domination, for if individual political leaders were so adept in utilising the 'mobilisation of bias' why were they unable to direct the federal programme into ineffectual channels, by virtue of the same processes of co-optation, incorporation and guile which they had used to emasculate previous programmes? The second explanation is even more problematic, for not only is the theory of transformation by riot open to the same problem as above (why were the leaders not co-opted?) but, it can give no account of how riots, as a 'new source of power' (21) provided the specific means of access to institutional bureaucratic, legislative and administrative practices which constituted the means by which the

mobilisation of bias' was operated.

Despite its intentions, Bachrach and Baratz's analysis therefore fails to show how specific sources of power are generated and regenerated. In their early theoretical comments on power as a concept, they are critical of those who equate 'the possession of the instruments of power' with the 'possession of power itself' <sup>(22)</sup>, suggesting that because power is a relation, it cannot be possessed. However, all that this argument justifies is a refusal to theorise any of the means whereby power is produced and reproduced. This follows as a consequence of the view that the 'relational' character of power has to be considered inter-subjectively. Power relations are therefore regarded as resting on value conflicts in the 'minds' of subjects <sup>(23)</sup>, irrespective of the social foundations of such relations.

What has been suggested so far is that writers from a variety of theoretical persuasions, whether presenting formal classifications or empirical studies of power, generally fail to confront the question of its social conditions of existence. This failing has in fact been raised before, though in a more specific context by Parsons. In his critical review of Mills' 'Power Elite', Parsons suggests that elite theorists invariably omit a crucial step from their analysis of power. In concentrating on the question of how power is distributed, writers such as Mills ignore the fact that it has first to be produced. In order to illustrate this Parsons draws an analogy with wealth. Wealth can be distributed, and indeed such a distribution may be a focus of political conflict, but 'even apart from the question of what share each gets, the fact that there should be wealth to divide, and how much, cannot be taken for granted as given except within a very limited context' <sup>(24)</sup>. In speaking of wealth then, one has first to consider the question of its conditions of production. Likewise, the same has



to be said for political power. As Parsons emphasises, power indeed 'has to be divided or allocated but it also has to be produced' (25).

It is for this reason that Parsons' essay 'On the Concept of Political Power' is highly critical of attempts to construct 'diffuse' classifications of the 'forms' of power, and for that matter of abstract definitions such as Dahl's. In his view, such approaches make it 'logically impossible to treat power as a specific mechanism operating to bring about changes in the actions of other units, individual or collective, in the process of social interaction' (26). In other words, Parsons is concerned to show power as a specific relation (rather than a general capacity of actors) subject to the effects of particular social conditions of production, reproduction and distribution. Clearly, this approach to power distinguishes him not only from elite, reputationalist, and non-decisionist writers, but also from mainstream pluralists such as Dahl.

In the context of what has been said earlier, it should be apparent that Parsons' argument provides an accurate synopsis of the theoretical shortcomings of much of the conventional sociology of power. Irrespective of the strength of Parsons' argument however, it should not be inferred that his own attempt to theorise the social conditions of existence of power is successful. For that position is subject to at least two major theoretical failings; on the one hand, he equates the 'specificity' of the conditions of production of power with their alleged 'functionality'; on the other hand, he attempts to ground the concept of power upon relations of 'legitimation'. The effect of this is to transform the structure of the above argument; the claim that power is a relation subject to specific social conditions of existence, is translated into the view that power is a 'functionally' specific social relation subject to the effects of 'consensually' generated social conditions.

However, given a rejection of the functionalist 'version' of Parsons' argument, its significance to the present discussion should be clear. For what Parsons' critique opens up is a means of reformulating the way the problem of political power in particular, and political action in general, is posed in theoretical discourse. To put it simply, one can avoid some of the problems mentioned above by posing the question of 'political relations and their conditions of existence', rather than 'political actors and their subjective capacities'. This approach has one obvious advantage, for once power/action is seen as a property of social relations/conditions it is no longer reducible, in the short term, or long term, to a capacity of subjects.

Though the full implications of that statement will become apparent later in this work it should not be inferred that sociologists have been entirely unwilling to pose the problem of political action and its conditions of existence. The second section of this chapter will direct attention to several of the more important and influential attempts to address that question. The three authors selected for consideration here, though adopting a variety of theoretical stances, share a number of common points of reference. Each is concerned with addressing the question of what categories of agents participate in political practice. By way of providing a solution to this question, each places emphasis upon the significance of collective agents (classes, elites) in the performance of political action. Each is therefore concerned with specifying the conditions of class or elite formation and action, as well as with formulating a theory of the relationship between class and non-class power. Most important of all, each takes the view that a resolution to the problem of the conditions of existence of political action depends upon a correct theorisation of the relationship between such 'action' and social (especially economic)

'structural' conditions. This attempt to pose the problems of political analysis through the polarisation of 'structure' and 'action' will be assessed in what follows.

## 2. SOME SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL ACTION AND ITS CONDITIONS OF EXISTENCE

The matters to be discussed in the following section can be best introduced by referring briefly to Lukes' article 'Power and Structure'. What Lukes attempts to present in this piece is a justification for the view that both social life in general, and political life in particular, may be conceptualised as a 'dialectic' of structure and action. In the case of power we are told that

'Power....presupposes human agency. To use the vocabulary of power (and its cognates) in application to social relationships is to speak of human agents, separately or together, in groups or organisations, through action or inaction, significantly affecting the thoughts or actions of others. In speaking thus, one assumes that, although the agents operate within structurally determined limits, they none the less have a certain relative autonomy and could have acted differently' (27)

This 'opposition between structure and agency' is, in Lukes' view basic to many, if not all, areas of social life, including class, politics, kinship and language. In the case of political power the crucial problem in any analysis is therefore an examination of 'where structural determinism ends and power begins' (28). According to Lukes' then, the key problem for consideration is that of the 'dialectic of power and structure' (29).

Although 'the problem of structure versus action' has dominated sociological debate for the last century, the clearest indications of what is involved in the dichotomy of structure/action may be found in some of the more recent writings on politics and class. The three writers to be discussed below - Dahrendorf, Parkin and Giddens - have all contributed to that debate, and all adopt an approach which is, in varying degrees, 'neo-Weberian' in emphasis (30).

Two themes in fact dominate 'neo-Weberian' political discourse, and both of these are in some respects derived from the imposition of the structure/action dichotomy on political debate. The first of these themes concerns the attempt to establish political action as autonomous, or 'relatively autonomous' (Lukes) from the conditions imposed by economic class structure. In neo-Weberian discourse, therefore, politics is conceived as a free or relatively free sphere of 'action' vis-a-vis class 'structure'. Theoretical debate therefore centres upon the question as Lukes quite rightly says, of where 'structure' ends and 'action' begins (or vice versa).

The second theme more or less follows on from the first, for as Lukes suggests 'to investigate the structural constraints on the power of agents is, at the same time, in part, to enquire into the nature of those agents'<sup>(31)</sup>. Given the centrality of the structure/action dichotomy to neo-Weberian political debate, it is hardly surprising then, that all of the authors considered here give substantial attention to the question of the nature of political agents, the conditions of their formation and action, and so on.

(a) Dahrendorf and the 'structural' account of 'class conflict':

In theorising 'class conflict' as a form of political action Dahrendorf places two emphases at the centre of his analysis. Firstly, his intention is to reject the view of society as an integrated system where conflict can be reduced to a product of 'deviations of a psychological nature', and put in its place 'an image of society that permits the explanation of conflicts in terms of structural, not individual conditions'<sup>(32)</sup>. One of the obvious assumptions behind this project is the view that a genuinely sociological account of those actions which constitute 'social conflict' is absent. Indeed Dahrendorf goes as far as to suggest that there has been a conspicuous neglect of

any 'systematic analysis of the dynamics of social action by sociologists' (33).

Secondly, much of Dahrendorf's analysis is based upon a critique of Marx, which argues both that Marx's concentration on 'property', classes was 'narrow', and that because of such narrowness, his theory is unable to account for empirical changes in the character of 'post-capitalist' societies.

Dahrendorf attempts to produce a structural theory of conflict through an analysis of class formation and action. At the most general level, classes are to be understood as 'interest groups emerging from certain structural conditions which operate as such and effect structure changes' (34). What distinguishes Dahrendorf's concept of class from others, with which this general definition might seem compatible, however, is the attempt to base it on the analysis of authority relations. Dahrendorf is of the opinion that such an approach provides a solution, both to the 'class conflicts' described by Marx, and to those of contemporary society. By adopting the Weberian concept of 'imperative co-ordination' then, he is able to define classes as 'social conflict groups the determinant...of which can be found in the participation in, or exclusion from, the exercise of authority within any imperatively co-ordinated association' (35). Analytically therefore, class is independent of property, stratification, or economic condition.

Dahrendorf chooses to define classes in authority terms, not only because he believes that concept has causal priority over the concept of property, but also because he seeks a specifically 'structural' account of class action. This becomes apparent when he discusses Weber's definitions of power and authority, suggesting that the important difference between the two 'consists in the fact that whereas power is essentially tied to the personality of individuals, authority is always

associated with social positions or roles' (36). What is suggested here, then, is that since authority relations alone are part of social structure, only an analysis based on such relations can provide a genuinely 'structural' account of class action and conflict. By adopting this strategy it is apparent that Dahrendorf attempts to place class analysis firmly within the confines of sociological role analysis. In his view this has the advantage of enabling authority structures to be analysed independently of the motives and actions of their particular human representatives. This, he suggests, is an indication of the 'admirable instinct' displayed in Marx's attempt to theorise social agents as 'personifications' of structural forces.

However, it is important to note that Dahrendorf also insists that Marx's view should be 'supplemented' by granting adequate recognition to the fact that 'the second and equally important step of structural analysis is concerned with the relation between social roles and their personnel' (37). In other words, despite the attempt to provide a 'structural' account of action, it is argued that any theory of class formation and action has to concentrate both on authority ('structure') and personnel ('action').

Precisely what is involved in this attempt to analyse class through the polarisation of structure and action can be seen in the second half of Dahrendorf's study. The question to which attention is here directed concerns 'the conditions of class formation and class conflict in industrial society' (38). The discussion of class formation is based upon the adoption of two assumptions concerning the nature of authority. Firstly, it is suggested that the differential distribution of authority which is inherent in any form of organisation or association invariably becomes the determining factor in the generation of social conflicts. Secondly, it is suggested that the conflict which is so generated is necessarily dichotomous in form. According to Dahrendorf, in any situation there are 'but two contending parties',

such a dualism indeed being 'implied in the very concept of conflict'. Furthermore, although there 'may be coalitions...as there may be conflicts internal to either of the contenders...from the point of view of a given clash of interests, there are never more than two positions that struggle for domination' (39). What Dahrendorf assumes then, is that authority is a 'zero-sum' concept where a finite amount of authority is competed for by mutually exclusive groups or classes.

It should be apparent from the above that Dahrendorf's theory of class formation is, in fact, a very uncomplicated one. Classes are formed, and class conflicts arise from the differential distribution of authority in associations. This distribution is therefore the 'ultimate cause' (40) of class formation. In Dahrendorf's view this statement is a logical assumption whose validity is proven by its usefulness in explanation. It is also clearly a 'structural' explanation, but one which, in accordance with Dahrendorf's stated view on the structure/action connection is, in itself, insufficient as an explanation of class formation and action. Though class formation is explained in structural terms, such an explanation, has therefore, to be supplemented by non-structural means. Dahrendorf attempts to achieve this by a discussion of the concept of class interest.

His initial argument with respect to the concept of interests is that they are conceived not in psychological terms, but as 'structurally generated orientations of the actions of incumbents of defined positions' (41). In other words interests attach to positions as 'role interests' rather than to individuals. From the point of view of the individual player of roles, Dahrendorf insists, these interests are 'latent'. They are, in effect, behavioural undercurrents which are predetermined for the individual and which are independent of his conscious orientations and actions.



Under certain conditions however, it is suggested that such structurally defined latent interests can become manifest. These manifest interests are conscious goals which are experienced by individuals as both psychologically and empirically real. They both appear as 'realities in the heads of individuals' and constitute at the same time 'the programme of organised groups'<sup>(42)</sup>. This argument bears a close similarity to Marx's distinction between the two forms of class consciousness. Whereas the incumbents of dichotomous positions within associations are merely to be regarded as 'quasi-groups' with accompanying latent interests ('class in itself') genuine class formation is realised when such latent interests become manifest, giving rise to the generation of true 'interest groups' ('class for itself'). These interest groups are therefore regarded as 'the real agents of group conflict' since they have 'a structure, a form of organisation, a programme or goal, and a personnel of members'<sup>(43)</sup>.

What is striking about this analysis however, is Dahrendorf's failure to make any adequate reference to the social and political conditions of existence of class formation and action. Although he does actually attempt to specify certain 'social', 'political' and 'technical' conditions of political organisation, it is apparent that they merely serve to 'fill out' the characteristics of ready-constituted class agents:

'The specific substance of manifest interest can be determined only in the context of given social conditions; but they always constitute a formulation of the issues of structurally generated group conflicts...'<sup>(44)</sup> Social conditions are not effective, then, in the constitution of class formation and action; they merely affirm and express (as 'substance') those essentially contradictory interests which inevitably arise from the structure of authority relations.

So far it would appear that Dahrendorf adopts a relatively rigid

structural position, whereby political conflicts may be regarded as manifestations of dichotomous struggles over the distribution of authority in specific contexts. According to such a view, particular conflicts would comprise mere examples of the ubiquitous effects of that universal social relation termed 'authority'. One can indeed find many instances in Dahrendorf's work where such a view is presented. For example, in arguing that conflict may assume many forms he suggests that this 'implies and is supposed to imply, that civil war and parliamentary debate, strike and negotiation are essentially motivated by the same type of relationship and are therefore but different manifestations of an identical force' (45)

Such a view produces obvious difficulties. The most serious of these concerns the tendency of neo-Weberian writers such as Dahrendorf and Parkin to produce an analysis which conflates a wide range of social and political relations. More will be said on this when Parkin's work is discussed, but in Dahrendorf's case the attempt to prioritise an essentially universal concept of authority, raises specific problems which call his overall analysis into question. One clear instance concerns a distinction he seeks to make between 'capitalist' and 'post-capitalist' societies, the coherence of which is fundamental to his subsequent argument. The basis upon which that distinction is drawn concerns the claim that, whereas capitalism was characterised by a super-imposition of authority and property, post-capitalism features their separation. Leaving aside the question of the validity of that argument, the example indicates how difficult it is for Dahrendorf to employ the notion of 'authority' in the explanation of particular social relations. For the question immediately arises, given that authority is universal and ubiquitous, why was it super-imposed upon property in the 'capitalistic' era? Astonishingly Dahrendorf never presents a coherent account of the conditions which gave rise to that superimposition, preferring to regard the combination

of the two as an 'incidental phenomenon' of the industrialising societies of the nineteenth century<sup>(46)</sup>. But the view that that combination was 'incidental' hardly provides an account of why 'authority relations' took the particular 'form' they did at a particular period in time.

Given the fact that Dahrendorf's 'structural' account of action produces both conflation and theoretical indeterminacy in specific instances, it is hardly surprising to discover that his commitment to 'structural' forms of explanation is to say the least inconsistent. Indeed, reverting to his discussion of the concept of 'interest', it is significant that he adds a crucial qualification to his original argument. Having previously suggested that class formation and action are a product of the realisation of structurally generated 'latent interests', and that such interests are always dichotomous in form, he then implies that both assumptions may, in fact, be problematic. For he suggests that in principle the same 'quasi-group' can provide a basis for the formation of different 'interest groups'. To take one case to which he refers, it is obvious that 'competing trade unions of, say, christian and socialist description (may) originate from the same quasi-group'<sup>(47)</sup>.

Now there is clearly a serious problem in Dahrendorf's attempt to formulate a structural account of action if it is to be suggested that the connection between quasi-group and interest-group is open ended. For without a consistent and regular symmetry between structurally generated 'latent' interests and their 'manifestation' in action, such a theory of action cannot be maintained. What is particularly interesting however, is that Dahrendorf, whenever confronted with the problem of 'where structure ends and action begins' tries to reduce that difficulty to a mere 'empirical' one. Hence he tries to dismiss the question of the indeterminate relationship between

structure and action by conceiving it as quality of the 'gap' between 'theory' and 'reality'; whereas quasi-groups are a 'theoretical construction', interest-groups are 'real phenomena' which, like all such phenomena can never be completely explained by one attribute.

In fact a great deal of the substance of Dahrendorf's analysis is constructed upon repeated references to a somewhat precarious conception of the 'empirical'. One of the most obvious examples of this concerns the claim that despite the multiplicity of associations and conflicts arising from them, some are of more significance than others. Dahrendorf's justification for this is again an 'empirical' one: 'empirical evidence suggests that different conflicts may be, and often are superimposed in given historical societies, so that the multitude of possible conflicts is reduced to a few dominant conflicts' (48). But the issue at stake here is not the 'empirical validity' of the statement so much as the extent to which it can be made compatible with Dahrendorf's previous arguments. In particular, if conflicts can only be explained by reference to the specific associations in which they arise (49), and if the generation of political interests is specific to particular associational contexts, how is one to account for the 'empirical' coalescence of conflict groups, without contravening much of what has been said before.

This basic difficulty occurs time and again throughout Dahrendorf's analysis, particularly with regard to his attempt to justify his concentration upon industrial conflicts. Though he insists that there is no necessary connection between industrial and political power a concentration on industrial conflicts (rather than say, those in churches or chess clubs) is justified, in his view by 'considerations of empirical significance', given that some groups 'clearly have more significance than others' (50). But despite 'empirical' support for such a position - the size of production, the

severity of sanctions at the disposal of industrialists and so on - that argument clearly depends upon a theory of the social distribution of authority upon which Dahrendorf is silent.

More than this, what is particularly significant is that insofar as he presents any justification for claiming the coalescence of conflicts and conflict groups, it is in terms of an examination of individual personnel. Thus, if class conflicts involving different associations appear to be superimposed it is only because 'the personnel of the conflict groups of different association is the same'. In any 'empirical' situation, therefore, it might be commonly found that 'the dignitaries of the church are in some ways connected with the rulers of the state and possibly even with the owners or managers of industry'<sup>(51)</sup>. In other words, despite Dahrendorf's attempt to construct a structural theory of action, much of the substantive content of his position is ultimately dependent upon an argument which covertly places an analysis of individuals and their capacities, back at the centre of discussion. This is borne out no more clearly than in his attempt to define the concept of 'structural change' itself: 'In the present context, all structure changes will be understood as changes involving the personnel of positions of domination in imperatively co-ordinated associations'. According to this view, a 'structure change' involving a 'revolutionary' overthrow of a regime would involve not, a transformation of ('structural') positions but 'an exchange of the personnel of positions of domination'<sup>(52)</sup>. What is at issue here is not the validity of the view of politics presented, but the conception of agency on which it rests. For Dahrendorf's overall view of political action is based precisely upon the assumption that in the last instance such action is to be theorised in inter-subjective form.

Dahrendorf's attempt to produce a structural account of class formation and action has been shown to be problematic in a number of respects. It is worth listing the major difficulties which arise in his argument, since they provide a useful background for the discussion of Parkin's work. The first of these problems concerns the conflationary effect of the attempt to analyse political conflicts through classes, defined in 'authority' terms. Once authority is prioritised as a ubiquitous and universal relation, it is difficult to explain the particular 'forms' it takes. Added to that is the problem of 'class' itself. The 'dualistic' view of class conflict has an obvious tendency to reduce diverse forms of conflict to dichotomous types. More than that, Dahrendorf nowhere defends the contention that 'classes' comprise the cohesive political agents that he maintains, and his passing reference to conflicts within classes raises obvious questions which he never addresses. In a sense, this is merely another way of pointing to his failure to specify the conditions of class formation and action, a failing which becomes particularly blatant with his own grudging recognition of the 'empirical' gaps between structural determination and action. This, coupled with the failure to theoretically justify a textual concentration on industrial and political conflicts - due to the absence of a theory of the conditions of social distribution of authority - leads Dahrendorf to adopt what is essentially an individualistic and subjectivist account of action and conflict.

(b) Parkin: Social Closure and Collective Action

Parkin's work is characterised by three related facets. In the first place, it is intended to provide a critique of Marxian forms of structuralism in the sphere of political analysis. Secondly, it seeks to resolve the issues raised by that critique through a transformation

of the 'structure/action' dichotomy. Thirdly, in so doing, it attempts to address the general question of the 'political character of collective action'.

The initial impetus for Parkin's work derives from the view that Marxist political analysis, by reducing 'action' to 'embodiment of structural force', makes any coherent political calculation impossible. This argument is based upon his observation that 'structuralism' becomes difficult to justify once groups act in 'blatant non-conformity' with the structural expectations of their assigned social positions.

'The most damaging weakness in any model of class structure that relegates social collectivities to the status of mere incumbents of positions, or embodiments of systemic forces, is that it cannot account for those complexities that arise when racial, religious, ethnic, and sexual divisions run at a tangent to formal class divisions' (53).

Parkin insists from the outset that such complexities of social condition have to be analysed in Weberian terms - as forms of a subjective 'action' where conscious agency and volition are placed at the forefront of discussion. The primacy which Parkin chooses to attach to human action has serious implications for the way in which he addresses the question of the relationship of structure and action. To some extent his analysis has the considerable merit of recognising a problem which Dahrendorf and others ignore; once the problem of the relationship of structure and action is posed, one invariably seems to end up with a loose end, or discrepancy between the two, which can only be resolved by fiat (e.g. Dahrendorf's empiricism). What is required therefore, is some strategy which enables one to circumvent the problem of the discrepancy between structural or positional definitions of classes of political agents, and their actual behaviour. Parkin's solution to this is strikingly simple; instead of defining classes in structural terms one defines them in terms of the forms of

collective action which they exhibit: 'If the mode of collective action is itself taken to be the defining feature of class...problems of this kind do not arise. There is no independently defined structure of positions for class action to be discrepant with'<sup>(54)</sup>. It can be seen therefore why the major preoccupation of Parkin's work is with the question of the 'political character of collective action', a theorisation of which he seeks to achieve by basing his analysis around the Weberian concept of 'social closure'. Before considering this concept let us look further at Parkin's reasons for approaching the question in this way.

His initial adoption of the Weberian position leads him to argue that if classes are to be considered as bases of collective action, they must be understood, to use Weber's phrase, as 'phenomena of the distribution of power'. Classes are therefore to be defined in distributional terms as entities which emerge around the various structured inequalities in society. In Parkin's view, then, classes have a variety of bases all of which have to be granted recognition, especially 'now that racial, ethnic and religious conflicts have moved towards the centre of the political stage'<sup>(55)</sup>. According to him it is Marxism's failure to deal with these issues which signifies its inadequacy. What is required is a 'general model of class', based upon a recognition of the effects of distributional inequalities. In contrast to this, Parkin suggests, Marxism merely reduces racial, communal and other conflicts to secondary or derived aspects of the 'fundamental' division between labour and capital; it regards 'intra-class divisions' of race and the like as less significant than 'inter-class divisions' of an economic nature. But this, he says, becomes impossible to defend in a



situation where 'the political character of collective action is conditioned by the social and cultural make up of the groups involved'.

In Parkin's view

'This suggests not only that ethnicity and communal conflict should be taken at least as seriously as class and class conflict, but that the two sets of phenomena should be closely integrated at the conceptual level' (56)

Parkin finds the theoretical basis for such a general model of class conflict in Weber's concept of 'social closure'. By social closure Weber refers to the processes whereby collectivities seek to restrict access to rewards and resources to a limited circle of eligibles. This involves the selection of certain attributes to justify exclusion from group membership - religion, language, race, sex, and so on.

What Parkin attempts to do is to expand Weber's original notion to make it relevant to the study of a variety of forms of structured inequality. One of his principal means of doing this is by including within the concept of closure not only exclusionary strategies, but also strategies adopted by those subjected to processes of exclusion. This enables a distinction to be drawn between 'exclusionary' and 'usurpatory' forms of closure, these being the 'two main generic types' of collective political action. More specifically 'exclusion' refers to 'the attempt by one group to secure for itself a privileged position at the expense of some other group through a process of subordination', whilst 'usurpation' represents 'countervailing action' by the negatively privileged involving 'collective attempts...to win a greater share of resources' (57).

In Parkin's view, the concept of social closure has two distinct advantages over other conceptions of political practice. Firstly, by conceiving power 'as a built-in attribute of closure', one can

avoid fruitless searches for its location in the 'ubiquitous struggle between contending wills',<sup>(58)</sup> a tendency characteristic of conceptions of power discussed in the first section of this chapter. The second advantage concerns, as we have already said, its implication for the traditional mode of posing political action as a dialectic of structure and action. According to Parkin, the closure concept draws attention to the issues of class formation and action, and away from the question of 'class structure'. This is made clear in Parkin's earlier formulation of the closure argument, where he suggests that the distinction between classes may be conceptualised 'in terms of contrary principles of social action, rather than as differences in the formal attributes of collectivities'. The concept of closure refers then, to the processual features of class, thereby directing attention to the principles underlying class formation',<sup>(59)</sup>.

But what, it may be asked are the precise characteristics of the 'classes' which are 'formed' and which 'act' as the fundamental agents of collective political practice? For Parkin himself recognises that the closure perspective itself, might seem to imply such a multiplicity of conflicts between the various groups over the question of resource distribution, that no identifiable 'classes' might be formed. Yet he also insists that to retain the perspective of 'class' at all it is 'necessary to suggest some line of demarcation and conflict that is more fundamental, socially and politically, than other sources of division and antagonism'. The need for such a means of demarcation leads him to the following conclusion:

'For definitional purposes....the dominant class in a society can be said to consist of those social groups whose share of resources is attained primarily by exclusionary means; whereas the subordinate class consists of social groups whose primary strategy is one of usurpation, notwithstanding the occasional resort to exclusion as a

supplementary strategy',<sup>(60)</sup>.

Given that Parkin in fact suggests that 'property as capital' is the single, most important form of closure in industrial societies because it 'confers the right to deny access to the means of life and labour',<sup>(61)</sup> what we are left with is a view of the dominant class which is not entirely dissimilar from that taken by many Marxists: 'the dominant class under modern capitalism can be thought of as comprising those who possess or control productive capital and those who possess a legal monopoly of professional services',<sup>(62)</sup>. In other words, the basic 'line of demarcation' is one between labour and capital.

According to this view then, 'internal class divisions' involving the exercise of exclusionary strategies by one section of a class against another - say white, versus black manual workers - may be regarded as 'for the most part, secondary or supplementary strategies',<sup>(63)</sup> that is actions taken in addition to the attempt to bite into the resources of the dominant class. This view is defended on the grounds that, in this particular case, white workers gain more from usurpationary strategies aimed at the dominant class, than they do from exclusionary strategies aimed elsewhere. Once that ceased to be the case, such workers would no longer practice 'usurpation' as a dominant strategy and would become part of the dominant class. An empirical instance of such a development would, in Parkin's view, comprise the white 'working class' in South Africa, who now should be regarded as part of the dominant class.

Any attempt to evaluate Parkin's argument must begin with the two themes which dominate it. The first of these concerns the view that the racial, religious and other conflicts which Marxism fails to recognise, have to be theorised in terms of the Weberian concept of 'action'. What is involved in this is the view that any position which seeks to grant effectivity to racial and other practices has to do so

by differentiating them as specific examples of a general category of 'action'. Such 'action' is to be regarded as 'autonomous' vis-a-vis the conditions under which it operates, here conceived as 'structures', the most notable of these being economic class structure. What is apparent then, is that Parkin is less concerned with investigating the conditions surrounding particular forms of collective 'political action', than with establishing their 'autonomy'. This has two consequences which will become apparent. In the first place, it leads to problems of conflation similar to those found in Dahrendorf's work. Secondly, despite Parkin's intention to theorise the 'specificity' of forms of political practice, the attempt to establish their 'autonomy' draws attention away from any reference to the specific problems or issues posed by such practices. Put simply, one is uncertain of what Parkin himself considers to be the problems posed by 'class relations', and why they are regarded as worthy of consideration.

In part an answer is given to this question by Parkin's insistence that political practices have to be theorised through a 'general model of class'. Now the view that a 'class' model is necessary might seem questionable given Parkin's prior critique of Marxism, since that critique was based upon showing Marxist conceptions of class unity to be undermined by the cultural and political differentiations within the 'major' classes. Rather than pursuing the possibility that 'class' might be an inadequate concept for theorising political action however, Parkin attempts to incorporate all such political and cultural differentiations into the class concept, by referring to them as 'intra-class divisions'. The justification for this relates to the view that classes have to be defined in distributional terms. The clue to what this implies is given in Parkin's claim that any attempt to 'bifurcate' class analysis and the analysis of race, religion, gender and so on, is unacceptable. What is required is 'a single framework of ideas and

a common vocabulary with which to conduct the discourse on structural inequality in all its familiar guises' (64).

What is suggested then, is that 'class' is the pertinent category for the analysis of political practices because all such practices (racial, religious, communal etc) are merely particular examples of 'general' class-distributive struggles around 'inequality'. Here then is Parkin's answer to the question of what problems 'class' poses. What is politically significant about racial and other practices and conflicts is not the character of the particular issues, demands, ideologies and organisations generated by each, but the fact that all are facets of that type of action concerned with relations of inequality.

The conflationary implications of that suggestion apart, it should be clear that Parkin's attempt to found a political analysis upon the question of the distribution of resources and the powers associated with them suffers, like Dahrendorf's, from precisely those difficulties outlined by Parsons. In other words, one cannot meaningfully theorise problems of inequalities of distribution without making reference to the conditions under which they are produced, reproduced and in some cases transformed, the categories of agents partaking in such relations, and so on.

This failure to address a number of serious theoretical problems is shown no more clearly than in the conceptualisation of class conflict, for it is apparent that one of the questions that accompanies the problem of the conditions of political practice concerns the nature of the agents involved in such practices. Parkin's decision to define all such agents in class terms is however, highly problematic. For one thing, whatever the merits of trying to specify the 'processual' features governing the formation of political agents, the attempt to pose that problem as one of 'the principles underlying class formation' raises a number of difficulties.

The most obvious of these concerns the fact that a basic contradiction runs through Parkin's argument; on the one hand, 'class formation' is deemed problematic, because of intra-class divisions of race, religion and the like; on the other hand, Parkin insists that such political and cultural practices have to be subsumed under the 'class' heading. In other words he never makes a convincing case for showing why 'intra-class divisions' should be regarded as class divisions at all, and therefore never justifies the view that closure practices result in class formation, rather than in the production of diffuse political groupings.

Such attempts as Parkin makes to defend that position are both inadequate and arbitrary. Two examples are particularly notable. The decision to claim that 'property as capital' is the single, most important form of closure in modern societies, is an arbitrary one, given the prior dismissal of economic determination. The strategy is strikingly similar to that of Dahrendorf. Economic power is said to be, analytically, no more important than other powers, but that view is contradicted without theoretical justification, in substantive argument. In Parkin's case, one can only conclude that the strategy is undertaken to enable some continuity of definition to be attached to a concept of class which would otherwise be entirely nebulous.

Moreover, Parkin's later attempt to justify the retention of the class perspective by distinguishing classes in terms of which form of closure they 'primarily' adopt is based on assumptions which are hardly consistent with his stated position. By establishing a line of class demarcation he is attempting to suggest that it signifies conflicts which are somehow more fundamental socially, and politically than other sources of division and antagonism. But that hardly fits in with the critique of theoretical 'primacy' in Marxism. In addition to that, the outcome, of that argument - that some political practices are 'supplementary' -

creates results whose similarity to the forms of Marxist 'reductionism' which he has criticised are, to say the least, embarrassing.

More than that however, Parkin's argument leads to the conflation of a range of social relations under the 'class' heading. This is partly due to the gradual inclusion of more and more within that concept as for example, when the definition of 'capital' is extended to include 'cultural capital' and 'party membership'. In Parkin's opinion this benefits the general model of class, since it makes it possible to show how 'class formation and political domination' may be generated by a variety of exclusionary processes, from those 'exercised by the communist party apparatus in socialist states' to 'the legally supported exclusion of blacks by whites under the apartheid system'.<sup>(65)</sup>

All this example does, of course, is conflate the practices of two political systems without providing any means of differentiating between distinct forms of 'political domination'. The source of that problem lies in Parkin's attempt to classify political practices as facets of an inequality and exploitation which is universal. This is made apparent in the claim that 'Exclusion practices justified by reference to faith, pigmentation or language are generically similar to those sanctioned by property rights or credentials in so far as they represent exploitative forms of social action in the sense already defined'<sup>(66)</sup>.

This view is later given substantive support in the attempt to apply the closure concept comparatively. One particularly striking example of this occurs when Parkin discusses the applicability of the model to socialist states, suggesting that it enables one to avoid semantic disputes about whether workers in these states are exploited or not, and whether, if so, they are exploited by property owners or bureaucrats:

'It is not of overriding importance to know whether these exclusionary powers are exercised by the formal owners of property or

by their appointed agents, since the social consequences of exclusion are not demonstrably different in the two cases' (67).

Three things stand out in this example. In the first place, this is a discourse of moralism. Parkin, though referring to 'social' consequences really means 'individual' consequences. The intention is really to show that the effects of exploitation are constant from the subjective viewpoint of the 'active' recipient. Secondly, that mode of analysis not only conflates a variety of forms of 'domination' but produces a sociology of the banal, whose only conclusion is that exploitation is universal. Thirdly, the example provides a clear instance of Parkin's lack of concern with the conditions which accompany specific forms of domination. An analysis of these is 'not of overriding importance', precisely because his concern is with the effects of exploitation on subjective actors.

It is hardly surprising that one of the consequences of this concentration is that Parkin's analysis eventually reduces, like Dahrendorf's, to one which is essentially inter-subjective in form. This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the discussion of the state. In Parkin's view, there is no 'conceptual problem' regarding the state, since issues concerning it are only of interest 'when framed as questions about the nature of the social group that monopolises the offices of state'. The analysis of the state therefore reduces to an analysis of who controls its various instruments, the state's apparatuses having no power of their own (68). Here again, then, is a view of power as an essential quality of human 'action', a capacity which is set apart as autonomous from its social condition of existence. But Parkin's attempt to resolve the problems generated in the structure/action dichotomy by simply prioritising political action is untenable. For it is the assumptions behind that position which enable him to persistently refer to 'modes' of action without any reference to the



social conditions that render those modes effective.

(c) Giddens: The Concept of 'Structuration'

By far the most sophisticated attempt by a contemporary sociologist to resolve the issues raised by the dichotomy of structure and action whilst retaining the essential features of that dichotomy is found in the work of Giddens. Like Dahrendorf and Parkin, Giddens shares the view that previous sociological attempts to theorise that relationship have been inadequate. Indeed, in his view 'the theory of structuration begins from an absence: the lack of a theory of action in the social sciences', (69).

What most distinguishes Giddens' analysis are two related propositions which, at least in the first instance, appear to meet some of the difficulties raised above. Firstly, it is suggested that 'structure' as a concept, cannot merely be identified with constraint, but has also to be regarded as a means ( condition ) which enables action to occur. Secondly, and in consequence of this, it is suggested that because structure is 'involved in the production' of action, the two poles of the dichotomy are interdependent. It is impossible, if not meaningless to prioritise one at the expense of the other. Giddens tries to encapsulate these ideas in the concept of 'duality of structure': 'By the duality of structure I mean that the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems', (70).

An attempt is made to illustrate what is involved in this by reference to the concept of power. Power, suggests Giddens, is understood by sociologists in one of two ways: either as a capacity of actors, or as a property of collectivities (structures). Neither, he says, is appropriate in isolation, nor have the various attempts to reconcile the two sides of the dichotomy been successful. What is required is

an approach similar to that suggested by Lukes - but one which in Giddens' view Lukes fails to achieve - where priority is placed upon 'attempting to overcome the traditional division between 'voluntaristic and 'structural' notions of power'<sup>(71)</sup>. According to Giddens, Lukes fails to overcome that division when he raises the issue of 'where structural determinism ends and power begins', since to pose the question in these terms is precisely to reproduce that division, and obscure the 'duality of structure'.

In principle then, Giddens seeks to replace the dualisms which have dominated sociological debate (structure-action; subject-object) by a theory of action which places a notion of 'duality of structure' at its centre. A further comment on that term gives a clearer indication of what is involved:

'By the duality of structure I mean the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution'<sup>(72)</sup>.

More specifically, the concept of 'structure' refers in Giddens' view to two types of social conditions, 'rules' and 'resources'. These he suggests, must be regarded as both the media through which social relations are produced and reproduced, and as themselves a product of such activity. This suggests that 'structure' only exists as 'rules' and 'resources', organised as properties of social systems, while systems themselves - those relations which are reproduced as regular social practices - only exist in so far as they are produced and reproduced. The concept through which Giddens tries to link these structural and systemic processes is that of 'structuration':

'To examine the structuration of a social system is to examine the modes whereby that system, through the application of generative rules and resources, is produced and reproduced in social interaction.

Social systems, which are systems of social interaction, are not structures, although they necessarily have structures. There is no structure in human social life, apart from the continuity of processes of structuration' (73).

Though Giddens proposes the theory of structuration as an attempt to dispense both with 'structuralism' and 'subjectivism' it is significant that his argument is still dependent upon the 'necessary centrality of the active subject'. Giddens' criticism of functionalist and Marxist structuralism is therefore directed primarily at their 'derogation of the lay actor', and in view of this, his central proposition is that the theory of structuration has to be, first and foremost, connected to a theory of the subject, and grounded in the analysis of forms of consciousness' (74).

It should be apparent that the position outlined above is, in certain respects, less problematic than those of Dahrendorf and Parkin. Giddens is quite correct to insist that attempts to prioritise either structure or action are subject to difficulties and that the dichotomy itself reinforces a misrecognition of the necessary interdependence of action and its conditions of existence. Having said that however, the recognition that action cannot be separated from its conditions does nothing to resolve the question of how such action is to be theorised, and certainly does nothing to justify the view that it has necessarily to be conceived in subjective terms. To return to the example of power, Giddens' claim that 'resources' are both structural elements of social systems, and a medium whereby action ('transformative capacity') is employed as power, (75) still leaves open the question of how those capacities are to be theorised, what categories of agents may possess them, and so on.

Moreover, despite the relative merits of his argument Giddens' claim for its superiority resides in the simple distinction he tries to

establish between his own position and those which might be categorised as 'structuralist' or 'voluntarist'. What he is unwilling to recognise is that such a distinction is itself open to doubt, because most sociological and Marxist positions are, in varying degrees and contexts, both 'structuralist' and 'voluntarist'. In support of this, one need only refer to Dahrendorf (above) or those versions of Marxist structuralism to be discussed in Chapter Five, all of which share a conception of agency which is necessarily subjectivistic in form. But once that fact is recognised, Giddens' position is revealed as just another version of the attempt to reformulate the structure/action dichotomy whilst retaining its essential characteristics. What gives Giddens' position merit over those of Dahrendorf, Parkin and others is his recognition that 'structure' not only imposes constraint on action, but also provides a condition of it. In itself, this recognition would have genuine merit were it not for the fact that Giddens' own insistence on the essentially subjective nature of agency undermines it. For once it is suggested that social action is necessarily inter-personal, the effectivity of the conditions of action is subjected to arbitrary limitation. That is to say, one immediately forecloses the possibility that those conditions may be effective in the production and reproduction of social agents and relations in a form which is not essentially subjective and inter-personal.

So far the discussion of Giddens' work has concentrated solely on his attempt to produce a general theory of 'structuration' in sociology. He has however, also attempted to pose the specific problem of 'class structuration' as a mode of political analysis and although no attempt will be made here to discuss that work in detail, a brief reference to one specific aspect of it indicates some of the problems that arise.

Given the outline of Giddens' theory presented above it should be apparent that a theory of 'class' structuration places emphasis on two propositions; classes are neither 'structures' nor are they 'subjects'. In view of this it is perhaps predictable that one of Giddens' first suggestions is that we should not speak at all of the 'existence' or 'non-existence' of classes, but only of their forms of structuration<sup>(76)</sup>. Such structuration, has two forms. The first of these, 'mediate structuration' comprises factors that intervene between the existence of market capacities, and the formation of classes into identifiable social groupings. The major factor here concerns the degree of 'closure' of mobility chances in relation to given market capacities (property ownership, qualifications, ownership of manual labour power). The second, 'proximate', form of structuration involves those 'localised' factors such as the division of labour or authority relations in industry which shape class formation. The extent to which these bases of structuration overlap determines how far classes will exist as 'distinguishable formations'. In capitalist societies, according to Giddens, a three-fold class structure is produced, though the mode in which the various elements merge to form a specific class system differs from society to society.

Though that summary hardly does justice to the complexity of Giddens' position, it is sufficient to raise a number of issues. Firstly, the concept of 'structuration' is clearly intended to suggest the essential fluidity, of classes and class relations, emphasis being placed upon the fact that there is no class structure as such 'apart from the continuity of processes of structuration'. Like Parkin and Dahrendorf, Giddens recognises the complex differentiations within classes, but equally as with those authors the problem arises of why 'classes' are the end product of 'structuration' at all. Indeed Giddens

combines the peculiar view that class formation is by no means unproblematic, with the assumption that classes are sufficiently coherent to 'express' themselves in definite political practices<sup>(77)</sup>.

This ambiguity about the concepts of class and class structure is paralleled in the other pole of Giddens' concept of structuration - that classes should not be regarded as 'subjects'. This is apparently what lies behind his lengthy synopsis of 'what class is not'; class does not refer to a specific entity or bounded social form; it has no publicly sanctioned identity; since classes are not groups they have no 'membership'; and most important of all, in speaking of class, **one** should not attach 'action' or 'perception' to it<sup>(78)</sup>.

But Giddens' substantive analysis rests almost solely upon a complete disregard of these methodological principles. Not only are classes conceived as bounded 'realities' with definite political attachments but the principle mode of analysing them is through the extent of their 'class awareness' and 'class consciousness'<sup>(79)</sup>. To this end, it is significant that much of Giddens' analysis is one in which an essentially subjective consideration of class and politics is mediated by an examination of elites - as if that somehow enabled him to endow classes with subjective capacities in a more indirect manner. Either way, the effect of Giddens' decision to define action in essentially subjective terms is much the same as Parkin's. For once action is so regarded, it has to be conceived as being effected and mediated through consciousness. In the case of Giddens that has the consequence of producing an analysis of politics which is no less speculative than that of the elite theorists referred to in Section One of this chapter. More generally, the decision of all the writers previously mentioned here, to regard action in inter-personal terms, has the effect of isolating certain categories of practice from the social conditions which give them effect. For once action is conceived as necessarily

'conscious', 'subjective', volitional', or 'inter-personal' what is implied is that these capacities or qualities are essential and therefore immune from some or all of the conditions which surround them.

The second section of this chapter has shown that attempts to theorise the conditions of political action through an analysis of the 'dichotomy of structure and action' are unsuccessful. What characterises the various attempts to reformulate that dichotomy is an assumption that 'action' has to be conceived at some level, as essentially subjective in form. But the effect of this is to foreclose the analysis of the effectivity of the social conditions of existence of action. Put simply, the view that certain categories of action are essentially subjective in form, has to presume that they can only be explained through an analysis which is wholly, or partly inter-subjective. The result of that is invariably a result which is speculative and indeterminate.

Some of the themes which have arisen in the present chapter reappear in the second section of this work. To a great extent the three chapters which comprise that section are linked by an examination of Marxism's attempt to pose the problems of political action, its forms, limitations, and possibilities. Again Marxism seeks a solution to these problems by attempting to analyse the relationship of 'structure' and 'action', though in a manner which, at least in principle places emphasis upon the 'objective' and structural component of that relationship.

**SECTION TWO: MARXISM, CLASSES AND POLITICS**



CHAPTER 5: MARXISM AND CAPITALIST POSSESSION

This chapter is concerned with evaluating Marxist attempts to identify a 'class of possessors' under capitalist relations of production. Much of the literature under discussion here is formed in response to the theories of 'separation of ownership and control' and 'managerialism' described in Chapter Two. The aim of these responses has been to show that, contrary to those aforementioned theories, capitalism has neither been transformed nor superseded. To this end, the Marxist analysis of capitalist possession has a dual purpose. On the one hand, it is intended to show that capitalist relations of production still exist and that one can identify a definite class of possessors. On the other hand, such identification serves the function of defining such a class of agents which, whatever its divisions, enjoys a fundamental unity of purpose. Such a unity not only guarantees its capacity to exploit at the economic level, but also gives it the ability to dominate the sphere of politics.

It will be suggested here that Marxist conceptions of capitalist possession are problematic. In particular, it will be argued that the following problems render a coherent account of possession impossible.

1. Marxism consistently and of necessity seeks to establish the agent of possession as an individual, or aggregate of individuals, subject to certain forms of conduct, most notable of which is said to be its accumulation of profit. In searching for a class of possessors, Marxism is searching for a class of exploiting individuals, because classes, to use Lenin's phrase, are 'large groups of people'. It will be suggested here that the equation of agent of possession with appropriating individual - the 'Our

Friend Moneybags' of Marx's 'Capital' is untenable. This theoretical equation is a particular problem of course, in economies where corporate forms of possession, rather than individual ones, are the norm.

2. The main Marxist response to the sociological and managerialist teleology of 'post-capitalism' has been to reassert the alternative teleology of historical materialism. What this amounts to is the claim that society, far from being 'post-capitalist' is in fact 'monopoly capitalist'. Indeed in its identification of the agents of possession which are said to 'personify' capital, Marxism has a definite view of such agents fulfilling the historical mission of the materialist teleology. In consequence, the particular economic functions and roles of those agents which realise teleological processes are of only superficial importance. Since capitalists and their functionaries are mere 'character masks' there is no real commitment to investigating the nature of the functions of possession and direction. Marxism is less concerned with these matters than with affirming that 'monopoly capitalism' is synonymous with 'decaying' and 'irrational' capitalism.

3. In accordance with the materialistic premises upon which such a position depends, Marxism also seeks to assert the priority of capitalist relations of production over and above their conditions of existence. In particular it is suggested here that Marxism's denial of the effectivity of the legal conditions of existence of possession, together with its concern to identify appropriating individuals, causes it to misrecognise current corporate forms of capitalist possession.

This chapter argues that because of the problems outlined above, Marxism fails to coherently identify a 'class of possessors' under

capitalist relations of production. There are however, two issues which need to be distinguished. The problems described above relate particularly to Marxism's reduction of classes of economic agents, to groups of individuals who 'personify' certain processes. But there is a second question which the concluding part of the chapter will pose. Can possession/separation be adequately analysed in class terms at all? This issue will be considered in further detail throughout the following chapters. For the moment let it merely be said that the identification of a class of possessors necessarily assumes the unity of possessing agents at some fundamental level. That is to say, whatever particular differences of interest may divide possessors, they are fundamentally united by their common character as possessors (as parts of total social capital). It will be suggested here that such 'class unity' is open to criticism. One consequence of claiming this is to call into question the coherence - and not least the political utility for socialists - of the class concept itself. One other consequence is to direct the attention of Marxists to problems of economic calculation and action, problems which previously have been ignored by virtue of Marxism's insistence upon the subsumption of such action under concepts of 'capital in general' and the 'laws of motion' that direct it.

This chapter comprises three sections. The first of these is a critical examination of Marxism's attempt to analyse capitalist possession by solving the problem of the 'class position of managers. It is argued that this approach is subject to a range of problems which render the proposed solution impossible. It is also suggested however, that the problem which is posed is itself misconceived. Such a misconception necessarily derives from the

effects of Marxian teleology and ontology and in particular the double essentialism which they generate, whereby human agents are said to realise teleological processes. This matter is examined in Section Two which is divided into two parts. The first of these deals with the Marxian view of economic agency and the second with its conception of the development of monopoly capitalism. Some of the criticisms made here are developed in Section Three, which concludes by calling into question Marxism's attempt to analyse capitalist possession in class terms.

## 1. THE CLASS POSITION OF MANAGERS

Chapter Two has shown that the major counter-weight to Marxist theories of the economy has been provided by the theory of 'separation of ownership and control'. The view that a diffusion of ownership and control has been initiated by the emergence of joint stock companies and embodied in the person of the manager has justified a variety of conceptions of the twentieth century economy, ranging from 'people's capitalism' to 'post-capitalism'. Because management has provided the main conceptual prop to post-capitalist theory, a great deal of the Marxist analysis of possession has been directed to its analysis. What is most significant is that discussion has concentrated not on managerial function in the production process, but on the 'class position of managers'. The precise reason for this, and its significance will be made clear in what follows.

In the Marxian view, capitalism is a system of commodity production involving a category of agents possessing the means of production and a category of agents separated from such possession. The fundamental precondition of capitalist relations of production is the purchase and sale of labour power. Such purchase and sale is dependent upon the availability of labour power, which in turn rests upon the presence of certain legal conditions that sanction the existence of 'free' wage labour and private ownership of the means of production<sup>(1)</sup>. Though this characteristic form (purchase and sale of labour power, involving a set of agents of possession and a set of wage labourers) and its conditions of existence, are recognised as fundamental to the analysis of capitalist relations of production, Marxist analysis of management does not always grant them centrality. Although it might appear evident that managers constitute a category of wage labourers, separated from possession of the means of

production, Marxists commonly seek to establish 'class divisions' within managerial wage labour, assigning certain sections to a 'new middle class' and other sections to the class of capitalist possessors. In this latter respect Braverman is not untypical.

'We must consider the possibility of the same form (purchase and sale of labour power) being made to conceal, embody and express other relations of production...the fact that the operating executives of a giant corporation are employed by that corporation and in that capacity do not own its plant and bank accounts, is merely the form given to capitalist rule in modern society. These operating executives by virtue of their high managerial positions, personal investment portfolios, independent power of decisions, place in the hierarchy of the labour process, position in the community of capitalists at large etc etc. are the rulers of industry, act 'professionally' for capital and are themselves part of the class that personifies capital and employs labour' (2).

To a certain extent Braverman's statement amounts to a synopsis of the Marxist approach to management and direction. Such an approach attempts to identify the manager as 'capitalist' by precisely the sort of characteristics Braverman identifies; wealth and connections; behavioural motivations; domination of the labour process; appropriation of surplus value or profit from the production process; performance of the function of 'non-labour'; ownership of shares. In all of this then, Marxism accepts that the relevant agent of capitalist relations of possession, under current conditions is 'the manager', but that contrary to managerialism, this agent is fundamentally 'capitalist'. A short critical examination of these positions will follow, after which the debate will be set in the

context of more general aspects of the Marxian analysis of economic agency.

(a) Management as a capitalist elite or stratum of capital

Managerialism is principally characterised by its claim that the motivations of the manager are less geared towards simple maximisation of profit than those of the classical entrepreneur. The most simplistic Marxist response to this view of 'soulfulness' is a retort to such motivational analysis which rests, more or less, on motivational categories. Thus, it is claimed that managers do in fact exhibit a 'profit motive' no less severe than capitalists. To this end it is frequently considered necessary to establish the 'social backgrounds' and 'connections' of managers in order to show that as a group, they act relatively cohesively in the interests of capital, property and wealth. Indeed, much of this type of analysis converges with the sociological analysis of elites.

Typically, such an analysis would reject the view that managers exhibit social responsibility. For Miliband, the structural imperatives of capitalism render it inherently 'selfish' so that 'the single most important purpose of businessmen, whether as owners or managers, must be the pursuit and achievement of the 'highest possible' profits...that 'selfishness' is inherent in the capitalist mode of production '(3)'. The manager will then, irrespective of his personal motives, be directed by the 'economic logic of the market' (4) and the imperatives of accumulation.

Along with this, an emphasis may be placed upon the fact that managers attract high salaries (5) or are employed in positions where perquisites and tax advantages predominate (6). In addition, it

is emphasised that managerial shareholding is itself a characteristic of modern business corporations, a fact which causes some to look with disdain upon managerialism<sup>(7)</sup>. All of these factors may then be said to contribute to the existence of a managerial stratum which 'is the most active and influential part of the propertied class'<sup>(8)</sup>.

Perhaps the clearest exposition of this type of argument appears in Zeitlin's influential article. Zeitlin insists that a coherent analysis of the modern business corporation has to be rooted in an examination of its class structure<sup>(9)</sup>. Corporate action will therefore be investigated by concentrating on phenomena such as interlocking directorships, networks of shareholding, the characteristics of those who control banks etc. Such an approach will employ the family as its unit of analysis, looking in particular at kinship relations between officers, directors and principal shareholders in corporations. In short, this type of investigation will be based upon exploring the relationships between 'concrete interest groups or classes'<sup>(10)</sup>.

As can be seen from the latter statement, this form of Marxist position is very much based upon the notion of 'social class' analysis, an approach which leads to a very considerable convergence with the sociological analysis of elites. In both cases the project is to identify members of a stratum of the capitalist class. By arguing that the capitalist class has a membership united by inter-marriage, similar educational backgrounds, comparable patterns of socialisation and frequent social interaction, two things may be maintained. Firstly, that managers are capitalists: 'Far from being a separate class, they constitute in reality the leading echelon of the property owning class'<sup>(11)</sup>. Secondly, that the



capitalist class is united:

' whatever the situation within the corporation as the predominant legal unit of ownership of large scale productive property. the 'owners' and 'managers' of the large corporations, taken as a whole, constitute different strata or segments - when they are not merely agents - of the same more or less unified social class' (12).

Though the type of argument described here has provided the basis for much Marxist discussion of senior management and direction it is clearly subject to severe difficulties if it is to be judged as a piece of Marxist theory. Some of these difficulties are obvious. Firstly, Marxism is adamant that distributional factors, such as income cannot define class position (13). Secondly, Marxists frequently contend that multiple or factorial definitions of class are sociological rather than Marxian. Thirdly, it is usually suggested that the analysis of motivation and social interreaction is foreign to Marxism, since the latter places priority upon structural factors in the determination of action.

The validity of these types of arguments need not concern us. What is more important is that they have caused Marxism to seek a more rigorously materialist definition of the manager's class position. For some Marxists this has involved trying to integrate class analysis in general, and the examination of management in particular, into the conceptual structure of the labour theory of value.

(b) Managers as appropriators of surplus value or profit

In this respect, one approach to the problem has been to define managers, not as wage labourers, per se, but as appropriators of surplus value or of profit, and therefore as capitalists. For

Poulantzas this has the added advantage of pre-empting any speculative discussion of managerial motivation: 'For Marx, profit is not a motivation of conduct - even one imposed by the system - it is an objective category that designates a part of realised surplus value<sup>(14)</sup>. According to Poulantzas then, higher managers 'are essentially paid out of the profits of the enterprise'<sup>(15)</sup>. This view is echoed by Westergaard and Resler, who regard managers as having a capacity to demand payment from profits by virtue of the fact that they 'have their hands on the till'<sup>(16)</sup> and by Braverman who also regards them as gaining a share of surplus<sup>(17)</sup>.

There is, unfortunately little to support this argument. In the first place, none of these authors specifies the mechanisms whereby such appropriation takes place, nor how managerial payments are separated off from those of other wage labourers. But apart from that, Marx himself explicitly argues against the view, for he claims that 'the salary of the manager is, or should be, simply the wage of a specific type of skilled labour, whose price is regulated in the labour market like that of any other labour... (the wages of a manager) are entirely divorced from profit'<sup>(18)</sup> Managers cannot therefore be designated appropriators of surplus value in any sense consistent with Marx's meaning of that term.

Both of the attempts to theorise the 'class position of managers' discussed so far have been shown to be subject to theoretical difficulties. There are however, two types of difficulties which appear in both forms of explanation, which have not been mentioned. It is necessary to make a brief reference to them here, since they will provide a recurrent theme throughout the chapter.

The first of these concerns the general denial by all authors of the legal conditions governing possession and appropriation. Each of the positions described above denies the effectivity of the law. Each assumes that the manager's status as employee is a mere legal formality, hiding his true character as member of the capitalist class and appropriator of profit. But to argue this, one has to assume that possession and appropriation are built upon no legal foundations whatsoever. It will be suggested here that this position is without justification and that its adoption has been a barrier to the coherent analysis of possession.

The second problem concerns Marxism's total lack of concern with the question of economic calculation and direction. This follows as a consequence of its critique of post-capitalist theory and its attempts to show the continued existence of capital accumulation by a capitalist class. Analysis of the processes governing economic decision is dismissed as irrelevant. This is indeed the basis of Westergaard and Resler's claim that managerialism should be rejected because 'it assumes that decisions are actually made on a matter which is not a subject for decision...the aim of profit is simply taken for granted'<sup>(19)</sup>.

Now it may be true that capitalist enterprises do take the aim of profit for granted, but it is no less true that that aim will be subjected to definite forms of decision by economic agents. Moreover such decision, will have definite effects on 'profitability' etc. Marxism refuses however, to regard calculation and decision as a relevant issue, being concerned only to establish the 'class position' of agents of such calculation and decision. This emerges most clearly in its discussion of management.

(c) Management as 'non-labour'

Though the two issues mentioned above will be discussed elsewhere in the chapter, they both arise in Carchedi's analysis. This analysis attempts to give an account of the manager's class position, using the labour/non-labour distinction of Marx's theory of value. It is based upon a particular conception of the 'capitalist production process' which is said to derive from Marx. In 'Capital' Marx says of the production process that 'considered...as the unity of the labour process and the process of producing surplus value it is the capitalist process of production' (20).

In Carchedi's view then, the capitalist production process involves two distinct sets of relations of production:

- (a) those of the labour process involving producer and means of production in 'labour'.
- (b) those of the surplus value producing process involving producer, means of production and non-producer or 'non-labourer'.

It is Carchedi's view that the 'functions of capital' (those functions performed either by managers or capitalists) are non-labour. That is to say they are functions performed 'outside the labour process but inside the capitalist production process'. The theoretical justification for this view is again derived from Marx, this time from his discussion of the 'double nature' of the labour of supervision and management (21). In this discussion he claims that on the one hand, any cooperative form of labour requires coordination and unification, a job which is productive. On the other hand, however, such labour also necessitates a role of supervision to be performed, the more it is characterised by an antithesis between producer and owner of the means of production.

For Carchedi, the former category (coordination and unity) is an aspect of the relations of production of the labour process, nowadays carried out by a collective labourer. The latter, on the contrary, is an aspect of the relations of production of the surplus value producing process a 'function of capital' characterised by the performance of 'non-labour'.

Carchedi uses this distinction as a means of designating certain managers as 'capitalists' and others as 'new middle class'. The way in which this position is reached can best be illustrated by considering the way he distinguishes classes in a more general sense. In doing this, he draws upon Lenin's famous definition, where classes are described as

'large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently by the dimensions of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of organising it. Classes are groups of people, one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy'.<sup>(22)</sup>

Leaving aside the question of the adequacy of this definition what is important is that Carchedi uses the concepts of value theory to simplify it. For example, 'place in a historically determined system of social production' is reduced to a distinction between producer and non-producer; 'role in the social organisation of labour' is reduced to one between labour and non-labour. This type of argument enables Carchedi to define the two major classes of the CMP by a dichotomy.<sup>(23)</sup> Capitalists are non-producing

exploiting non-labouring, owners. Workers are producing, exploited, labouring, non-owners. In consequence, the 'new middle class' can be defined by a combination of these factors.

In the case of management, the argument may be very simply stated as follows. In so far as the individual capitalist of private capitalism performed both labour (work of coordination and unity) and non-labour (work of control and surveillance)<sup>(24)</sup> he had a dual class determination. He was both proletarian and capitalist ('old middle class') only being capitalist in the last instance, because of his ownership of the means of production. In the current stage of capitalism, the functions of capital are now performed by a 'bureaucratic structure' rather than by individuals. This structure may itself be divided up on a class basis, along the same dichotomous lines described above. Thus, that segment of the managerial-bureaucratic structure which performs non-labour and owns the means of production, is the 'new capital personified'. That segment which performs both labour and non-labour and does not own the means of production has membership of the 'new middle class'.

Enough has been said above to show that this analysis shares some of the problems that have been pointed to in earlier discussion. Three problems are particularly apparent. In the first place, Carchedi is entirely unconcerned with the legal foundations of possession. Like most contemporary Marxists he is rightly concerned to draw a distinction between 'legal ownership' and 'real ownership'<sup>(25)</sup>. But like many other theorists he uses that distinction to justify a blanket dismissal of the law. There may well be a distinction between 'legal ownership' (as it is understood by Marxists and non-Marxists alike) and 'real ownership', though more will be said on that later. But it does not follow from that, that possession is subject to no legal conditions nor that such conditions do not have substantive effects.

Secondly, a real tension exists between on the one hand, concepts of possession or 'ownership' (relations of production or class relations in the strict Marxian sense) and on the other hand, the concepts of value analysis. Though that tension is inherent in Marxist analysis (see Chapter 7) an adequate examination of it requiring detailed discussion, some of its effects appear very clearly in Carchedi's position. In particular, the essentialism of labour that dominates his argument, makes any analysis of ownership redundant. Indeed, what most characterises Carchedi's discussion is his complete failure to address the question at all. Those references which do occur to any matter relating to ownership are without exception arbitrary<sup>(26)</sup>. It is not without significance therefore that we are told the relation connecting the three elements of the production relations (ownership/non-ownership; productive/unproductive labour; labour/non-labour) 'cannot be discussed here'<sup>(27)</sup>. It cannot be discussed because Marxism has consistently failed to elucidate the relationship between value analysis and class analysis.

A third serious problem follows from Carchedi's essentialist position with regard to labour and in particular his reduction of the social division of labour to a distinction between labour and non-labour. Despite the fact that a substantial part of the text is devoted to the analysis of the 'function of capital' one gains no insight into what managerial functionaries actually do. This is not surprising because Carchedi's concern is only to assign them to class positions and to justify such assignment by the essentialism of labour. In the last instance Carchedi's proudest boast is to claim that 'it is now possible to prove scientifically that the manager, even though he expends human activity does not work'<sup>(28)</sup>.

Apart from the fact that this can hardly be regarded as the discovery Carchedi feels it to be - functionaries of capital never work because that is precisely what defines them as functionaries of capital - the conclusion points again to Marxism's failure to concern itself with the question of direction and economic decision. Carchedi provides one of the clearest examples of Marxism's attempt to reduce this issue to class and value terms.

Moreover, it has to be said that the conception of the capitalist production process as a dualism of two sets of relations of production is untenable. It is this initial premise which relegates discussion of relations of 'ownership' to a secondary level, since they become relations of production which merely intervene after production has occurred. It is clear therefore why Carchedi only introduces discussion of 'ownership' as an afterthought. But the position is clearly an impossible one. There cannot be a production process taking place under no determinate relations of possession<sup>(29)</sup>. In addition to that, the view that agents of possession or their 'functionaries' do not perform a function in the labour process is absurd. The dualistic view of the capitalist production process is untenable. There is only one labour process and capitalists or their functionaries perform definite functions in it, functions which have a definite effectivity and which Marxism therefore needs to theorise.

So far it has been argued that Marxist attempts to resolve the problem of the 'class position of managers' are unsuccessful. But in order to show that the problem is itself misconceived, it is necessary at this point to link the present discussion with the general comments made at the beginning of the chapter. Three issues



were raised there. Firstly, the effects of the equation of agent of possession with individual. Secondly, the effects of teleological argument. Thirdly, the effects of the materialist ontology, with particular regard to its view of the legal conditions of existence of possession. Section Two will discuss these questions in much more detail, concentrating especially upon the connections between materialist ontology and teleology and their effects upon the Marxian theory of capitalist possession. The section is in two parts, the first dealing with the Marxian conception of economic agency, the second with the development of the corporation and so-called 'monopoly capitalism.'

## 2 (a) Economic agency in Marxism

Where sociology has primarily defined its subject matter as 'social action' and insisted upon the priority of 'action' over 'structure', Marxism presents a quite different position. In the Marxian view 'individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personification of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests'<sup>(30)</sup>. According to this view individual agents are merely 'bearers' of social relations, relations which have both temporal priority and causal primacy over and above individual actions.

One of the clearest accounts of this position may be found in the work of Althusser. Beginning from Marx's initial proposition that 'My analytical method does not start from Man but from the economically given social period'<sup>(31)</sup>, Althusser rightly argues that Marx's entire conception of political economy rests upon a rejection of the "Man" of philosophy, or the 'homo oeconomicus' of classical economics. Rather, the analysis of individual economic behaviour is displaced and concentration instead centres upon the 'mode of production' and the contradictory unity of forces and relations of production that constitutes it<sup>(32)</sup>. For Marx, it is these concepts that enable the subjectivism of classical political economy to be challenged.

The implication of this is that not only does the structure of the social totality given in the mode of production determine the character of the agents which function in social relations (as 'personifications'); ultimately it is the structure of that totality, and the processes which give it its direction and momentum that constitute the 'true' agents of social relations. For Althusser,<sup>(33)</sup> the 'true subjects' are the relations of production,

the class relations which individuals merely personify. One of the most lucid accounts of this view occurs in Althusser's discussion of ideology<sup>(34)</sup>, when he examines the ambiguity surrounding the concept 'subject'. This ambiguity is shown very clearly in Christian religious ideology, where the subject (individual) is subjected to a Subject (God): 'the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject ... in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection ... There are no subjects except for and by their subjection'<sup>(35)</sup>. This example gives an account of social relations remarkably similar to some of Marx's own pronouncements, several of which will be discussed presently.

For Marxism, classical political economy merely concentrates on the 'outward appearance' of economic relations and one aspect of this, is its emphasis on 'economic man'. In Marx's view, the error of classical economics is to begin analysis at the wrong point. The rationale of 'Capital' is to pierce the 'outward appearance' and gain access to the 'inner essence' of capitalism, to the 'laws of motion' which explain the development of economic relations. In accordance with the view that society consists, not of individuals, but of social relations, individual action is merely that which realises the imperatives of determinate social processes. This is shown clearly in Marx's analysis of competition. In the case of capitalists, competition exposes 'the inherent laws of capitalist production in the shape of external coercive laws having power over every individual capitalist'<sup>(36)</sup>.

In this respect, the analysis of particular capitalists or units of capital is secondary. Individual capitals are to be regarded as mere fragments of 'total social capital' each one being

'an individualised fraction...of the aggregate social capital, just as every individual capitalist, is but an individual element of the capitalist class' (37). At the level of 'capital in general' then, the actions of individual capital units are only important for the results they necessarily produce. Marx maintains that the actions of units are the means by which the 'laws of motion' are worked out on the concrete terrain. This much is made clear when Marx distinguishes the manifest motions of capitalist competition from the 'real motions', not perceptible to the senses - the so-called 'inner nature of capital' (38). Competition then, is 'none other than the inner nature of capital, its essential character realised as the reciprocal interaction of many capitals with one another, the inner tendency as external necessity' (39). In consequence, the individual capitalist's freedom is no less circumscribed than that of Althusser's Christian.

'It is not individuals who are set free by free competition; it is rather, capital which is set free...the movement of individuals within the pure conditions of capital appears as their freedom' (40). But this sort of individual freedom is effectively 'the most complete suspension of all individual freedom, and the most complete subjection of individuality under social conditions which assume the form of objective powers' (41).

Marx makes it clear then, that the individual capitalist's participation in 'free' competition is simply the means for recreating the conditions of capitalist production, such conditions being already extant in the CMP as structured totality. Competition is therefore the visible manifestation or realisation of laws of motion. But it is only a 'form of appearance' wherein

social relations are inverted, so that 'everything appears reversed in competition',<sup>(42)</sup>

Now it is clear that for Marxism the most fundamental concept in analysing capitalist social formations is that of 'CMP'. The 'CMP' constitutes a contradictory unity of forces and relations of production, a totality whose effects are manifested in the structure of capitalist social formations. Capitalism then, is a totality' the effects of which are contained within itself'<sup>(43)</sup>. At the level of social agents, these effects are realised by virtue of the fact that such agents, though 'inessential' in that they merely embody or personify 'structural' processes, are in fact endowed with essential capacities. It is because agents are 'persons' that they can personify. It is because they are humans that they have the subjective capacities of experience and consciousness, necessary for capitalist economic relations to be effected in definite practices. Marx, himself makes it clear that

'the laws imminent in capitalist production manifest themselves in the movements of individual masses of capital, where they assert themselves as coercive laws of competition, and are brought home to the mind and consciousness of the individual capitalist as the directing motives of his operation'<sup>(44)</sup>.

The implication of the Marxian view of agency is therefore clear. Economic agents of possession ('capitalists') or their functionaries ('managers') merely obey the imperatives of the laws of motion of the CMP. On the one hand, capitalist economic relations are essentially relations between persons. But on the other hand, the content of their action is given in the structure of the CMP.

The precise significance of the two sides of this dichotomy will be discussed below. But before this matter can be adequately considered, it is necessary to investigate more fully the teleological processes of capitalist laws of motion which economic agents are said to personify. In the context of the present discussion, this question can best be examined by a consideration of the historical materialist analysis of ownership, management and the joint - stock company.

## 2 (b) Monopoly capitalism and possession

The same teleology which specifies the lawful constraints on the actions of economic agents, also influences the treatment of ownership. Marxism has always borne an ambiguous relationship to the theory of 'separation of ownership and control' arguing on the one hand, that Marx was the first to theorise such a separation, but objecting strongly to the connotations which have been placed upon it by non-Marxists. Where non-Marxist theorists argue that the emergence of the joint - stock company has given rise to 'post-capitalism', contemporary Marxists claim that it is a characteristic of 'advanced', 'late', or 'monopoly' capitalism.

Marx's own treatment of the joint - stock company is inseparable from the general perspective of historical materialism and in particular his view of the transitional process between capitalism and socialism. Just as the 'Manifesto' gives a dramatic account of the structural contradictions of feudalism that led to the emergence of bourgeois society:

' the feudal organisation of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no

longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst assunder; they were burst assunder' (45)

so Marx points to the inherent contradictions of capitalism which make the transition from capitalism to socialism inevitable. This inevitability follows from the fact that capitalism contains within itself, not only the seeds of its own destruction, but also the relations of production of the emerging socialism. Socialism is the 'negation' of capitalism contained within capitalism. That is the meaning of the claim that 'Capitalist production begets with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation' (46).

The real barrier to capitalism then, is capitalist production itself. The more capitalist forces of production are 'socialised' the more they come into contradiction with private property relations. This general process defines the inherent contradictions which shape the laws of motion of capitalism. For example, the more productiveness of labour is improved by technical means (the rising organic composition of capital and relative surplus value production), the greater is the tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

The fact that the relationship between capitalist productive forces and relations not only defines capitalism as contradictory but also itself constitutes the structural preconditions of socialism, has an important influence on Marx's view of the joint - stock company. For Marx, the capital upon which the emergent joint - stock company rests, implies a truly 'social mode of production' (47) where capital no longer takes the form of 'private capital' but is genuinely 'social capital'. The joint - stock company manifests the inherent contradiction between socialised productive forces and private relations of production and appropriation which Marx regards

as signifying the 'bursting assunder' of a determinate mode of production. The joint - stock company is still a form of capitalist enterprise, but it is both 'the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself' (48) and a 'transitional phase' in the development towards 'outright social property'. It is the transference of capitalist functions in the process of reproduction into 'social functions'. In effect it is 'the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself, and hence a self-developing contradiction, which prima facie represents a mere phase of transition to a new form of production' (49).

A number of the themes which appear in Marx's analysis require emphasis. In the first place, there is a degree of moralism in the commentary. It is argued that the emergence of the contradictions of capitalism in an explicit form will reveal that mode of production as not only economically bankrupt, but as ethically so. In Marx's view, the joint - stock company brings with it speculation, swindling, cheating and financial parasitism.

Secondly, and of much greater significance is the fact that Marx's analysis points to the emergence of monopoly. The centralisation of capital leads to the development of cartels and monopolies in both specific spheres and more generally. Their general development is yet another indication of the intensification of the contradictions of capitalism for 'the monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has sprung up and flourished along with it and under it' (50).

For later Marxists of course, the crucial question has been that of when those intensifications of contradictions that constitute the so-called 'monopoly stage' will bring about the promised



transition. But questions of time scale apart, all are agreed that the stage is 'transitional'. Though Lenin, for one would admit that the monopolist-imperialist stage does not preclude the rapid growth of capitalism, he is none the less emphatic that we are witnessing capitalism in transition, or 'moribund' capitalism<sup>(51)</sup>. This conception of a 'monopoly stage' of capitalism has in fact provided the chief Marxist response to managerialism and has constituted the theoretical core of its theory of the enterprise.

Of equal significance is a third factor. Marx's view of the emergence of the joint-stock company and monopoly as a 'mere phase of transition to a new form of production' involves a particular conception of the distinction between the 'social' and the 'private'. The joint-stock company represents the beginnings of a new 'socialised' mode of production because in both its composition as a form of capital and in the typical form of 'cooperative' factory that develops with it ('a social concentration of the means of production and labour power')<sup>(52)</sup> it signifies the demise of the individual as agent of economic processes. Joint-stock companies and 'cooperative' factories represent transitional forms of capitalism, because for Marx, the socialisation of the forces of production which is involved in the centralisation of capital is synonymous with 'the expropriation of the means of production from all individuals'<sup>(53)</sup>. Marx believes that because the capitalist disappears from the production process capitalism is being socialised. .

Like managerialism then, the 'separation' between ownership and management which Marx recognises is one which leads in his view to the supersession of capitalism<sup>(54)</sup> though not in the way that

managerialists have argued. For Marx, capitalist production in its transitional form involves a process where 'only the functionary remains and the capitalist disappears as superfluous from the production process' (55).

It is that 'separation' which is the site of socialised production. The demise of the individual capitalist signifies transition; a transition not towards the 'soulful' society of managerialists, but to a parasitic, decaying, rentier capitalism, involving functionless capitalist speculators and swindlers acting in a way which only serves to underline the moral bankruptcy of the entire edifice. This state of affairs signals the germination of socialism (56).

It should now be possible to draw some conclusions from the two areas considered in this section and if possible relate them to the earlier discussion of the 'class position of managers' which has been so central to the Marxist discussion of business enterprise. In this respect, a number of specific problems in the Marxist analysis may be identified.

In the first place, Marx conflates the 'agent of possession' under capitalist relations of production with the 'capitalist'. This is an inevitable consequence of the view that agents 'personify' class relations and embody the structural processes inherent in the structure of the CMP. In turn, this conception of agency is a necessary consequence of the theoretical structure of the materialist teleology itself. The realisation of teleological processes is only made possible by the existence of individual subjects with the essential capacities of 'persons'.

In consequence, it has to follow that if no individual agents exist to 'personify' capitalist relations of production, capitalism is being superseded (socialised). Marx's analysis of the joint-stock company is therefore entirely consistent with his conception of capitalist economic agency and with the teleology on which it rests.

But there is nothing in the initial distinction that Marx draws between employer and wage labourer (see Note 1, above) that necessitates the agent of possession being conceived as an individual - even if Marx chooses to do so. It is because of the conflation of 'possessor' with individual that Marxists have subsequently failed to theorise corporate forms of possession.

If this theoretical failing constitutes one area of problems for Marxist analysis, its recognition as a problem has obvious consequences. In particular, once the equation of economic agent with individual is rejected and the teleology which underpins it (the laws of motion to be 'personified') dispensed with, economic relations can no longer be conceived as effects of the structure of the CMP, in the way that Marxism has argued.

Secondly, Marx's failure to theorise capitalist possession in a coherent form is partly due to the theoretical consequence of the materialist ontology. Marx argues that the 'mode of production of material life 'determines the character of the 'legal and political superstructure' and the 'forms of social consciousness' appropriate to any set of productive relations. Marxism's denial of the effectivity of the legal conditions of existence of possession accounts for much of its failure to theorise possession in its corporate form. For Marx, 'juridical relations

reflect "real economic relations". It is the economical relation that determines the subject matter comprised in each such juridical act<sup>(57)</sup>. Legal forms merely comprise a reflection of economic structures and class forces. In Marx's view, the joint-stock company is simply an effect of the process of socialisation of the forces of production. As an institution, it is merely a reflection of the structure of the CMP, and a transitional one at that. Marx fails to consider that it is an effect of the existence of certain legal conditions; conditions which are in no way an effect of developments of the productive forces; conditions which are moreover, an outcome of political struggles between competing forces over the precise constitution of such conditions<sup>(58)</sup>.

Thirdly, there is the problem of management and direction. It has been seen that Marxism in fact ignores this question, devoting itself instead to the problem of 'the class position of managers'. Its concentration on this latter problem arises as a consequence of Marx's theory of the joint-stock company. Marx does argue for a separation of ownership and management, but the managerialist interpretation of such a separation is rejected by all Marxists. Such a rejection, in turn requires a degree of 'modification' of Marx's position. Whereas the latter is concerned to show the developing disintegration of capitalism, contemporary Marxism's main retort to managerialism, is to show capitalism to be alive and kicking (if not particularly 'well').

Since these theorists share the view of agents as 'individuals' and 'personifiers' of class relations, it is incumbent upon them, given this conception of agency, to identify as the appropriate agents of possession of capitalism, individuals or classes of individuals who 'personify' capitalist relations. Managers in short,

have to be 'classified' as capitalists. Because Marx offers no theoretical means for the analysis of non-individual/corporate forms of possession, it follows that such possession can only be established if managers can be defined as 'capital personified'.

Marxism is not then, concerned with the problem of what managers do. It can after all, reassure itself that in the last instance, managers, like entrepreneurs, obey the external laws of the CMP. Marxism is only concerned with confirming the manager's class location, for it is only by virtue of identifying managers as capitalists, that the persistence of capitalist relations of production can be maintained<sup>(59)</sup>. The conceptual structure of the materialist teleology makes this analysis possible and necessary. Classes of individuals are essential to the teleology. The latter is inevitable in its effects, but these effects can only be realised by such essential agents. For Marxism, the absence of a class of individual possessors has to signify the demise of capitalism.

Fourthly, it is clear that the Marxian analysis of the joint-stock company not only fails to provide an adequate basis for theorising capitalist relations of production, it also fails to specify the political preconditions of socialism. The analysis is problematic in two respects. There is no incompatibility between the so-called 'socialised' productive forces of corporate capitalism and capitalist relations of production. Indeed the corporation, far from being a merely transitional phenomenon, is the dominant form of capitalist enterprise in the current period<sup>(60)</sup>. Moreover, the suggestion that corporate capitalism signifies embryonic socialism denies the fact that socialist transformation depends upon the creation of definite political conditions,

conditions, which will not follow from the development of the productive forces in a certain direction.

It should not be assumed that the failings noted above are peculiar to Marx's analysis alone, a consequence of some supposed historical aberration on his part. It has been suggested above that Marx's conflation of economic agent and individual, together with his denial of the effectivity of legal conditions in the constitution of corporations as economic agents, leads to his misrecognition of possession under capitalist relations of production. What is equally significant however, is that contemporary Marxists reproduce the same failings in an age where corporate possession is almost totally dominant. This is especially apparent when one looks at some of the debates with managerialism concerning shareholding and its relationship to 'ownership' of the means of production.

It is often contended by Marxists that top managers may be assigned to the capitalist class because they constitute the major shareholding group within the enterprise. Their 'ownership of substantial amounts of shares' combined with their 'action on behalf of capital' is said to justify this view<sup>(61)</sup>.

Now clearly Marxists do not claim that ownership of shares is a sufficient criterion for membership of the capitalist class. If this were so many wage labourers would themselves be 'capitalists' by virtue of their direct or indirect (pension fund investments etc) holdings of shares. In view of this a distinction is usually drawn between the following aspects of ownership:

- (a) 'possession' - the ability to put the means of production into operation,
- (b) 'real economic ownership' - the real control of the means of production; the power to allocate the means of production to given uses; the power to dispose of the products so obtained,
- (c) 'legal ownership - legal titles to ownership, belonging to the superstructure' (62).

According to interpretations based upon this view (63),

'economic ownership' rests upon control of the voting system to which legal ownership entitles participation. It therefore depends upon the holding of an amount of shares large enough to avoid a defeat at stockholders meetings. But legal ownership does not automatically confer this power. That is to say, some legal owners do not own sufficient shares to have economic ownership. This, it is claimed, justifies the view that dispersal of stock leads, not to diffusion of economic ownership as managerialists claim, but to a concentration of it. Marxists, from Hilferding onwards, have claimed that the dispersal of stock leads to its antithesis - a concentration of control into fewer hands. The greater the number of shareholders the smaller the size of the average holding and the smaller the proportion of total voting stock needed for control of the enterprise. Top managers it is said, thereby commonly occupy the place of capital by virtue of their large concentrations of shares. According to this position then, legal ownership of shares cannot guarantee 'economic ownership' but it is a necessary condition of it.

This position however, conflates two distinct processes, the legal ownership of shares and the legal conditions of existence of possession<sup>(64)</sup>. Legal ownership of shares not only has to be distinguished from possession, it is generally not a condition of existence of possession at all<sup>(65)</sup>. The argument is unsatisfactory because it fails to identify the typical agent of possession under modern capitalist relations of production. What needs to be distinguished is the joint-stock company as an entity apart from its shareholders. Marx failed to achieve this distinction and subsequent generations of Marxists have reproduced that failing. Contemporary theorists, like Marx, conflate agent of possession with individual, by confusing legal conditions of possession with individual forms of legal holding. This in turn sanctions the search for a class of individual appropriators of profit hiding behind legal forms. This is strongly suggested by Colletti's view of the modern corporation.

'The progressive depersonalisation of property brought about the development of the great modern 'limited liability' company, implied the emergence as a subject of the object of property itself, i.e. the complete emancipation of property from man himself, with the result that the firm seemed to acquire an independent life of its own as though it were nobody's property'<sup>(66)</sup>. This analysis in fact recognises the true nature of corporate possession but denies that recognition, regarding it as a mere fetishised appearance of social reality. According to this position the legal form of the joint-stock company hides the social (i.e. inter-personal) relations that lie behind it. The legal conditions of existence of corporate possession are fetishised relations which obscure the true relations of production. They are the 'appearance' behind the essence, and in their very appearance they are effective only as a form of ideological gloss over reality. At the level of relations of production, they are entirely



ineffectual (because superstructural), those relations of production securing their own conditions of existence.

Colletti then, like other Marxists, is ultimately concerned with the identification of groups of persons who appropriate profit; He fails to appreciate that capitalist relations of production really do involve forms of corporate possession which are 'nobody's' property. The joint-stock company is legally defined as a 'corporate personality', quite separate from its shareholders, which can partake in certain specific dealings. A registered company in company law, is a continuing legal entity distinct from its members or shareholders. Laws of property cause it to be recognised as legal possessor of the means of production. No individual or group of shareholders can alienate those means of production. Shareholders have access only to dividends and then only under certain conditions<sup>(67)</sup>.

These facts justify a distinction being made between legal ownership of shares and the legal conditions of existence of possession. Corporate possession is sanctioned by definite forms of legal recognition. Such legal forms cannot be conceived as 'superstructural' as Marxism has conventionally argued. They do not reflect relations of production, but may satisfy certain of the conditions of existence of those relations. In doing so, they will have definite substantive effects, including the separation of shareholders and functionaries, such as directors and managers, from possession. It is because Marxists have failed to give recognition to the effects of legal conditions that the characteristic form of possession under contemporary capitalism has remained untheorised<sup>(68)</sup>.

### 3. CLASS ANALYSIS AND POSSESSION

It has been suggested here that capitalist possession cannot be coherently analysed in terms of the figure of the 'manager' as occupant of the role of the 'capitalist'. It is because the Marxian teleology has required the erroneous equation of agent of possession and individual, and its parallel ontology has denied the effectivity of the legal conditions of existence of possession that it has been unable to theorise corporate possession.

The corporation itself constitutes the dominant form of possession in contemporary capitalism. Since the existence of corporate possession requires the function of direction to be carried out by a managerial apparatus, management comprises a delegated functionary of capital. But it is crucial to clarify what is at stake here.

It may be asked, if managers direct capital, and managerial actions constitute the decisions of enterprises, how can the latter be conceived as economic agents of possession? What one would appear to have here is a confirmation of the managerialist position. Management, a category of wage labour, separated from possession of the means of production, makes decisions which constitute direction ('control') of the means of production. Effective control of the enterprise would appear then to be in the hands of separated agents.

But the managerialist position also misrecognises the effectivity of legal conditions. The corporation is an agent, not because it 'takes' decisions but because the decisions of its managerial employees are recognised by other agents as being decisions of the enterprise. Managerial decisions are the

responsibility of the enterprise and are binding upon it.

Management cannot however, be regarded as an element of the capitalist class because of the decisions it takes. No amount of decision making by managers grants them powers of possession of the means of production, nor any of the powers of appropriation associated with it.

But this view of management and possession is very different from the Marxist one. Marxism may well recognise the manager as delegated agent, but it does so in a particular way. In De Vroey's view, for example, the separation between ownership and management refers only to 'whether the bourgeoisie itself does the job of making capital function, or whether this is done through a delegation of power'<sup>(69)</sup>. The crucial issue here however, is the nature of 'capital' conceived and the relationship of managerial action and decision to it. In this, Marxism is quite insistent. One may regard managerial actions within individual enterprise as constituting the unit of economic decision, but the basic unit of economic analysis is quite distinct from this<sup>(70)</sup>. The Marxist view of economic calculation and direction is inevitably wedded to its general conception of economic agency and the fundamental concepts on which that in turn depends - the CMP, its laws of motion, 'capital in general', the distinction between 'essence' and 'appearance' etc. Marxism argues then, that the agent of decision ('the manager') is a delegate of a capital unit, but that direction of units involves managerial agents realising (as 'personifications') the dictates of the laws of motion of total social capital. Whatever may divide or distinguish individual capitals is therefore peripheral, for the basic unit of analysis is the unity of 'capital in general'. Agents direct capitals which

are mere parts of total social capital and their actions follow the dictates of its laws of motion.

The general problems of the materialist position, the above argument providing one example of that position, have already been indicated (see Introduction). Some of the specific inconsistencies within materialism are discussed more fully in Chapters 6 and 7, where it is concluded that the position is fundamentally incoherent - that is to say there can be no theoretical resolution to its problems by a reworking of the classical concepts. General questions apart, what is important for the present discussion is to consider what implications a rejection of the Marxist position has for analysing possession under capitalist relations of production.

The immediate consequence of a rejection of teleology and ontology is to deny the validity of the concept of mode of production. Two aspects of this concept are of particular relevance. In the first place the concept is conceived as a 'structure in dominance', with economic determination' in the last instance. But once this is denied, the conventional materialist analysis of social relations becomes problematic, as do the debates on the precise form of such determination ('relative autonomy' etc). More will be said on this matter in subsequent chapters. A second aspect is more relevant to the present discussion, since the concept of mode of production is also regarded as constituting a unity or totality of levels, again with the economic level determinant in the last instance. This assumes that the mode of production as unity, operates according to an inbuilt, if 'contradictory' unifying principle. This principle applies not only

(10)

to the mode as totality, but also to its constituent 'levels'. The mode of production is a unity of unities. The economic, political and ideological instances are structured by the teleological principles of the CMP. They are placed in a conceptual hierarchy of causal relations (economic determination in the last instance), the existence of each being governed by its place in the whole and its role in realising the processes which direct the totality. 'Capital in general' comprises one such unitary element of the greater totality. Its antithesis, the working class, comprises another. At the economic level then, capitalism comprises a totality of possessing and separated class unities.

But once the principles of structure (the materialist ontology) and process (teleology) are questioned, the argument collapses. In particular, if teleological laws of motion are denied, there is no case for reducing economic agents to individuals or groups of individuals who can 'personify' class relations. This in turn, has at least two major consequences. In the first place, the question of economic calculation becomes a serious problem for Marxism. Cutler et al have already shown the inadequacy of the Marxist analysis of economic action and demonstrated the need to theorise the effectivity of calculation by economic agents. This issue has more general implications with respect to the analysis of social agents which will be considered in the concluding chapter of this work.

The second consequence of rejecting such principles is to call into question the actual objective of identifying a 'class of possessors' under capitalist relations of production, for once the conception of 'unity' is denied, the Marxian view of class becomes problematic.

To say that Marxism regards 'capital in general' as its unit of analysis is not to say that it entirely fails to recognise divisions and variations within possession. But what is significant is that in so far as it does recognise such variations within the 'unity of capital' it does so only within the context of attempts to assert the effectivity of capital as unity more rigorously. Two brief examples will suffice to illustrate this.

Wright's argument<sup>(71)</sup> is interesting because he does in fact recognise two issues of importance. In the first place, he accepts that possession/separation are not 'all-or-nothing' categories involving mutually exclusive polarised groupings. Secondly, he realises that possession may in fact be problematic - that is to say it is frequently the subject of political struggles between possessors of given means of production and those who are separated from some or all of such means.

Realisation of this causes Wright to recognise possession as a relation of production which is beset by a variety of divisions. However, the direction of his analysis is in turn governed by the fundamental theoretical assumption of the Marxist analysis of capitalist relations of production - that classes of possessing and separated agents comprise unities at root. Wright therefore sets variations within possession/separation in the context of the political objective of class analysis. In this view, the bourgeoisie and proletariat may be designated as agents of possession and separation in a relatively unproblematic way. Variations of possession/separation may then be fitted into a continuum between these polarised unities. The fact that the majority of positions in the social division of labour are placed within the continuum does not alter the fact that Wright's assumption is consistent with

the view that classes are unities, for it is their relation to one or other class unity which defines them as 'contradictory class locations'. Wright's recognition of variations within possession is undermined by the political project he sets himself ; to establish variations as locations within polarised class unities. Such positions can only be considered 'contradictory' because of the assumption that at the most general level, classes are unities and that their unity is expressed in polarised forms of politics. Thus 'contradictory class locations' are positions in the social division of labour which are more or less bourgeois (capitalist in political orientation) or proletarian (socialist).

Though Poulantzas' examination of 'contradictions within the bourgeoisie' <sup>(72)</sup> also recognises divisions within capital, it is based upon the same theoretical assumptions as Wright's position. Divisions within the class of possessors represent divisions within a fundamental unity of classes for 'the forms of contradiction among the dominant classes and fractions always depend on the forms of the principal contradiction, which is that between the bourgeoisie as a whole and the working class' <sup>(73)</sup>.

A large part of Poulantzas' discussion is directed towards an historical examination of the 'dissociations' between the elements of capitalist relations of production (economic ownership, possession, legal ownership) in the context of the transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism. There are a variety of political purposes behind this discussion. For example, Poulantzas' stated intention is to reject both those political positions which regard capital as an 'integrated totality' and those which regard non-monopoly capital as sufficiently divorced from its monopoly counterpart to constitute a political ally of the working class.

Political considerations apart, the discussion is a lengthy one and for present purposes a brief example will suffice<sup>(74)</sup>.

Poulantzas argues that in the current phase of monopoly capitalism there has been a progressive (though by no means uniform or unilinear) loss of 'economic ownership' and 'possession' by non-monopoly capital vis-a-vis monopoly capital. Behind the 'legal facade' of retained independent ownership, the boundaries of enterprises are being dissolved. Many enterprises are in effect dependent production units that form part of more complex units. Under such conditions, conglomerates determine many of the conditions of production of subsidiaries.

Poulantzas rightly indicates that there are considerable variations within possession, some possessors being separated from certain of their conditions of production. This underlines the fact that possession is not in fact an all-or-nothing category and that it may be subjected to political challenges in the way that Wright suggests.

What is most notable about Poulantzas' approach however, is that the importance of such 'dissociations' resides in the fact that they are derived from the teleology of monopoly capitalism. Whatever particular significance such dissociations may have for Poulantzas, the crucial point in his view, is that they are divisions within capital, rather than between capitals. They are in effect a necessary consequence of the fact that 'capital in general' realises monopolistic tendencies. Divisions within capital are only possible then, because of the unity which constitutes capital. They are forms of appearance of an inner essence, the laws of motion of the CMP. Such laws of motion are effected by 'capital as unity'.



What is significant in both examples is that in neither case is the unity of capital considered to have any determinate conditions of existence. The basic unity of classes of possessing and separated agents is given in the structuring mechanism of the capitalist totality. 'Capital' has a unity which derives from its position within the structure of the CMP. The unity or 'general interest' of capital, is not a product of political compromises between capitals, nor of organised alliances with political agencies. It has no political conditions of production. The mere existence of economic classes guarantees their constitution as unities at the most basic level. This in turn, sanctions a reading of politics, ideology law and culture in 'class' terms.

Once teleological and ontological propositions are rejected, 'capital as unity' can no longer provide a basis for the analysis of possession. The relevant unit of analysis has to be capitals, not capital, since the unity of capitals cannot be assumed. If such unity exists between determinate possessions, it is a consequence of definite conditions of production. It is not inevitable and its existence implies no necessary destiny for capitalism. Moreover, in the absence of a conception of unity, the adequacy of analysing possession in class terms becomes questionable. The notion of a 'class of possessors' has to imply some degree of unity between constituent possessions and it is the conditionless nature of this unity which makes it problematic. The full implications of this argument will be reconsidered in the concluding section, though the following two chapters explore aspects of the same problem, the most notable of which is the pertinence of 'class analysis' in the examination and identification of political forces and institutions relevant to socialist political practice.

CHAPTER 6: THE MARXIST THEORY OF THE CAPITALIST STATE

This chapter concentrates on the Marxist theory of the capitalist state, outlining some of the major issues and problems arising in it. State theory will be examined with particular reference to its strategic relevance in socialist political analysis. The theme of socialist political analysis will also provide a basis for the discussion in Chapter 7.

A correct analysis of the state is of obvious importance for Marxism, because the state constitutes one of the objectives towards which socialist political practice is inevitably directed. This can be verified by considering the problems which Marxism has continuously posed. What is the effectiveness of 'reformist' strategies towards the state? What are the characteristics of state action with respect to capital? For Marxism then, the state has always comprised a crucial strategic object for analysis. Indeed in Lenin's words 'The key question of every revolution is undoubtedly the question of state power'<sup>(1)</sup>.

This chapter will suggest that although state theory is regarded as a crucial strategic exercise by Marxists it fails to give any clear direction to socialist strategy vis-a-vis the state. Indeed it may be said that it fails to provide even the preconditions for such a strategic analysis. This failure may be said to derive from Marxism's inability to identify the 'state' as a specific set of apparatuses which provide a potential objective towards which socialist politics may be directed.

Proponents of Marxist state theory might retort that it is precisely this project with which that theory is concerned, and indeed may claim that such a project is more or less successfully realised by much of the literature which has emerged in the last decade. What is suggested here however, is that that literature,

and the classical formulations on the state which preceded it are fundamentally incoherent. This incoherence arises as a necessary consequence of the 'materialist conception of politics', variations of which all Marxists adopt. According to this conception 'politics' is an element of the social formation whose structure is an effect of its place in a material hierarchy of 'levels' or 'forms'. Ultimately politics may be regarded as a process of 'class conflict', the basic agents of political practice being classes which have objectively defined and antagonistic 'class interests' (2). These interests constitute the basis of different forms of political structure and practice. Marxism's insistence on the priority of such a materialist analysis is combined however, with a 'recognition' of the irreducibility of political apparatuses and practices. On the one hand then, the state has to be regarded as fundamentally an 'expression' of capitalist relations of production, and in that sense reducible. On the other hand, because it is recognised that a realisation of the 'specificity' of politics is of crucial strategic and practical significance, such 'reductionism' has to be theoretically tempered. Marxist theory attempts to make these differing views of politics compatible by subjecting materialist forms of determination to 'complexity', so that the relationship of economic classes and politics may be regarded as 'relatively autonomous', 'dialectical' etc.

It is suggested here that these arguments are incoherent. Indeed the real issue that has escaped Marxist discussion concerns not whether Marxism is 'reductionist' but whether it is coherent. Marxists have only been able to make (in some cases) effective interventions in politics because of their non-reductionist 'recognition' of the specific conditions of political 'conjunctures'.

That Marxism has generally 'recognised' ideological, cultural and national economic conditions in political calculation is not a matter of dispute. The problem is the theoretical status of such 'recognitions',<sup>(3)</sup>. Can one, in other words, make the theoretical concepts of materialism compatible with the 'non-reductionist' forms of recognition that Marxists give to politics?

This chapter suggests that the fundamental incoherence of the materialist position rules out an affirmative response to that question. The problems which arise in particular theoretical positions - Marx, Lenin, Poulantzas, etc - are not due to the particular weaknesses of individual theorists. They are a product of the general incoherence of the materialist conception of politics, which all such theorists, whatever their real or pretended differences, collectively adopt. Once this view is accepted, it has to follow that an effective socialist political analysis must be based upon a clear and systematic rejection of the materialist position.

The first section of this chapter will examine the view of the state presented by the Marxist 'classics'. It is not intended that this discussion should be in any sense comprehensive. The intention is merely to outline the 'classical' position on a number of issues, some of which will be reconsidered in more detail in Section Two. This second section will also examine the particular theoretical differences which supposedly distinguish Poulantzian analysis from 'State Derivation' theory, suggesting that whatever specific differences may divide them, both positions are subject to the basic problems associated with the materialist conception of politics.

## 1. CLASSICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CAPITALIST STATE

The beginnings of the materialist analysis of politics can be traced to the formulations of the 'German Ideology' of 1846. Though Marx had written on politics and the state before this, the earliest views were abandoned - notably the Hegelian conception of the 'ideal state' - and even where the earlier writings tried to establish connections between the state and class relations, this was done in a relatively simplistic manner. For example, the 1842 articles on the 'wood thefts' suggest a strong connection between private interests and state legislation, but at this stage the problem is considered to be the 'prostitution' of the state to private interests, a proposition which is still considered to reveal the gap between the state as reality and the state as ideal<sup>(4)</sup>.

The attempt to link the state and politics with class domination in a more rigorous and systematic way emerges in the 'German Ideology'. Here Marx and Engels attempt to set politics in a materialist context of determinate production (class) relations.

'The social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life - processes of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will'<sup>(5)</sup>.

Above all else, the theme of the historical specificity of such 'material conditions' and thus of their corresponding state forms, is crucial to the Marxian analysis, distancing it from other theories of the state. In contrast to the sociological theories of politics discussed in Chapters Three and Four, Marxism denies that there are any 'universal' political or state functions, and

rejects the view that the state has to be conceived as an inevitable product of progressive social differentiation and complexity<sup>(6)</sup>. Instead, in Engel's view, it is emphasised that the state is a product of society at a 'certain stage of evolution', the stage of the beginnings of the social division of labour, private property, the emergence of classes, and the antagonisms which accompany such an emergence<sup>(7)</sup>. Each state is specific to a determinate historical class structure and form of extraction of surplus labour, in this view. In ancient times it is 'the state of the slave owning citizens; in the middle ages, the feudal lords; in our own, the bourgeoisie'<sup>(8)</sup>.

The important point for Marx and Engels then, is that the state far from being universal, is a 'special' institution, one which appears in conjunction with the emergence of classes. It is because materialism maintains that the emergence of classes inevitably gives rise to antagonistic class interests, that the state is considered to be a special coercive apparatus for the maintenance of the interests of the dominant class. Whereas coercion and public order in 'primitive communism' is regarded as a function of the community as a whole, in a society based upon classes with mutually antagonistic interests the conflicts which arise can only be resolved by the formation of a special apparatus that is both 'an expression of the social power'<sup>(9)</sup> of the dominant class, and a condition of its continued dominance. In Engels' view:

'In order that these contradictions, these classes with conflicting economic interests, may not annihilate themselves and society in a useless struggle, a power becomes necessary that stands apparently above society and has the function of keeping down the conflicts and maintaining 'order'.. this power is the state'<sup>10</sup>.

Though the rudimentary elements of the materialist theory of the state are contained in the writings referred to above, two other aspects are worthy of mention. In the first place, it is assumed that modes of production have definite laws of motion and that such laws are realised 'independently of the will' of individual agents. In other words, social agents merely 'personify' class relations. In the second place, this view of social agency relates closely to the important distinction between 'essence' and 'appearance'. One of the most crucial arguments of 'The German Ideology' concerns the view that the reproduction of class relations is itself dependent upon the essential processes of production being 'estranged' by the act of misrecognition on the part of social agents, so that they appear as '..an objective power above us, growing out of our control<sup>(11)</sup>. Essential relations in other words, have not only to be 'personified' but also 'misrecognised' by appropriate categories of agents for class relations to be reproduced. Here we have in embryonic form the theory of fetishism which is central to 'Capital' and which has become a crucial component of some of the varieties of contemporary state theory to be discussed below.

Though classical Marxism views the state as a 'superstructure' it nevertheless recognises that it provides certain of the conditions of existence of the dominant class's capacity to 'dominate'. To this end, the state has definite functions to perform. It is, for example, involved in the 'organisation of the particular class, which was pro tempore the exploiting class for the maintenance of its external conditions of production'<sup>(12)</sup>.

This does not however alter the view that institutional forms of politics merely obscure (as 'appearances') the fact that the state is only a site of class struggles: 'all struggles within the state, the struggle for the franchise, etc. etc, are merely the illusory forms in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another' (13).

Two things may be noted in this 'class domination' view of politics and the state. In the first place, if the state is a mere form of representation of class interests, it follows that the state apparatus cannot be regarded as a politically neutral medium vis-a-vis the interests it represents. There is therefore a persistent injunction in the political writings of classical Marxists which demands the 'smashing' of the state apparatus in any serious revolutionary initiative. At the same time however, even though the state comprises 'a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (14), the particular differences of interest which arise within such 'common affairs' are deemed to rule out the view of the state as a simple 'instrument' of capital. It is to these two issues that attention will now be turned.

The earliest verification of the need for any successful revolution to smash the existing state apparatus is, in the view of Marx and Engels, offered by the experiences of the commune, which showed that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes' (15).

This same imperative for a successful socialist revolution to smash the state apparatus is at the centre of Lenin's position; indeed he takes the view that such an imperative necessarily follows from the materialist analysis. It is the adoption of this political position which, for him, distinguishes Marxism from the 'reformism'



of those who seek to achieve a socialist transformation via parliamentary means, a position which in Lenin's view fails to identify 'bourgeois democracy' as a form of state which, whatever benefits it might offer to the working class, provides the 'best possible political shell for capitalism'<sup>(16)</sup>. Contrary to this view, and in accordance with the pronouncements of Marx and Engels, Lenin argues that a transformation of capitalist relations of production requires a destruction of the very conditions of their existence, which are provided by the class powers embedded in the state. He rightly points out that this much is asserted in Marx's letter to Weydemeyer of 1852, which argues '(1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular phases in the development of production, (2) that class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat'<sup>(17)</sup>. In other words, it is asserted that the transition period between capitalism and socialism will itself be characterised by a 'class struggle' and the imposition of a new form of state, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', an act which will itself involve the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus.

A clear account of what this view might imply for socialist strategy in parliamentary democracies is contained in Lenin's 'Left-Wing Communism'. In this pamphlet Lenin rejects the 'ultra-leftist' denial of all parliamentary political activity, and argues instead for a severely restricted utilisation of parliamentary democratic institutions, one which uses them for purposes of agitation and propoganda. This view rests upon the suggestion that parliamentary democracy is politically 'obsolete' and ineffectual<sup>(18)</sup>, but that because its obsolescence is not fully recognised by the masses, it must be 'supported'. Lenin however, conceives this 'support' of parliamentary institutions and reformist politicians in a particularly

restricted sense. 'I want to support Henderson (parliamentary democracy) in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man'<sup>(19)</sup>. The political objective of this strategy of support and participation is to expose and discredit the institutions of the bourgeois state, and by doing so, to reveal them as bourgeois, whilst simultaneously raising the consciousness of the masses. Lenin therefore advocates the utilisation of parliamentary means to 'disintegrate parliament from within' though without in any sense advocating a 'parliamentary road to socialist transition'.

The fact that the strategy advocated by Lenin for use in parliamentary democracies such as Great Britain was entirely ineffective, is less important than the fact that there are broader problems relating to the coherence of the strategy of 'smashing the state apparatus'. Two of these may merely be noted for the present. In the first place, such a strategy rests upon the view that the state constitutes a unitary totality reflecting the overall unity of capital. Yet both of these assumptions - the unity of capital and the unity of the state - are open to question. Secondly, the assumption that parliamentary democratic institutions are 'obsolete' is merely a piece of wishful thinking which obscures the necessary conditions which such institutions provide for the reproduction of capitalist relations. More will be said on these matters when contemporary variants of the strategy of destroying the state are considered below.

Although the call for a 'smashing' of the bourgeois state rests upon conceiving it as fundamentally an apparatus of class domination, Marxism also consistently maintains that the state is not merely class reducible, but that it possesses a degree of 'independence' or 'relative autonomy'. Though there are attempts to signify this in a general sense<sup>(20)</sup> by far the clearest exposition of the state's 'relative autonomy' is usually considered to be found in Marx's

analyses of the political conditions in France, and to a lesser extent, those in Germany and Great Britain. The argument presented in 'The Class Struggles in France 1848-50' for example, sets out to show that political domination is not exercised by a homogeneous ruling class, but by factions of the bourgeoisie in more or less temporary coalition. In contrast to the July Monarchy of Louis Philippe which was dominated by the financial faction of the bourgeoisie<sup>(21)</sup> the period of the 'Second Republic' is dominated by a coalition between, on the one hand the finance aristocracy and the big bourgeoisie (represented by the Orleanists) and on the other, the landed nobility (represented by the Legitimists). The Provisional Government which emerged after the February Revolution was a compromise between mutually antagonistic interests, but it was a compromise which in Marx's view enabled the factions united in the 'Party of Order' to maintain their 'common class interests without giving up their mutual rivalry'<sup>(22)</sup>. More than this it was able 'to complete the rule of the bourgeoisie, by allowing, beside the finance aristocracy, all the propertied classes to enter the orbit of political power'<sup>(23)</sup>.

Marx follows a related theme in his later text on the period leading up to the coup of 1851 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', when he argues that the Bonapartist state 'seems' to have become independent, though in fact it bears a complex relationship of representation to various classes - a fact which is held to account for the contradictions of the Government<sup>(24)</sup>. On the one hand, Bonapartism represents, or at least appears to represent, the small holding peasantry. On the other hand, the regime effectively functions to 'safeguard bourgeois order': 'it was the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost and the working class had not yet acquired the faculty of ruling the nation'<sup>(25)</sup>.

There is a strong suggestion here, not only that the bourgeoisie is peculiarly incapable of leading its own revolution<sup>(26)</sup>, but also that relative autonomy merely serves to permit the state to obey its 'class role' more effectively<sup>(27)</sup>. This is clearly the suggestion behind Marx and Engels' comments on Britain:

'The Whigs are the aristocratic representatives of the bourgeoisie, of the industrial and commercial middle class. Under the conditions that the bourgeoisie should abandon to them to an oligarchy of aristocratic families, the monopoly of government and the exclusive possession of office, they make to the middle class, and assist it in conquering all those concessions which in the course of social and political developments have shown themselves to have become unavoidable and undelayable<sup>(28)</sup>.

The suggestion is then, that political outcomes inevitably reflect the structural dictates of the materialist teleology - the class interests of 'capital in general', under the direction of the laws of motion of capital. This theme - that the state's separation or 'relative autonomy' only underlines its capacity to represent the interests of total social capital above and beyond particular interests, represents an instance of what Marx refers to in the German Ideology, as the state giving the bourgeoisie 'a general form to its mean average interests'<sup>(29)</sup>

What has been presented so far is a more or less descriptive account of certain general themes in Marxian state theory, themes which reappear as central topics of debate in the contemporary literature to be discussed below. The present section will close by indicating a number of the problems which emerge from the 'classical' analysis; problems, the nature of which might be predicted from the rejection of materialist ontology and teleology in Chapter Five, and all of which will be considered much more fully in Section Two of this chapter.

To begin, Engels' account of the historical emergence of specific state forms claims that the state is 'as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class'.<sup>(30)</sup> It is clear from the statement, and indeed from the entire account of the state's emergence, that political power and domination are conditional upon access to the 'medium of the state'. That medium is the condition of the dominant class 'becoming' politically dominant. Without an appropriate means, without the conditions of production of political power provided by the 'medium of the state' there can be no power. The Marxian view of the state's historical emergence rests precisely on the claim that such political means therefore have effectivity. It is the effects of such means which ensure the very existence of determinate forms of 'class domination'.

Yet at the same time Marxism can consider the state to be an agency of 'class domination', only because it expresses definite class powers. It has already been said (note 9 above) that in Marx's view, a class whose 'social power' derives from its property 'has its ... expression... in the form of the state.' This claim rests upon a denial of the effectivity of all political means, since these means are merely 'superstructural' reflections of already constituted 'class powers'. The assumption behind this - that capital possesses a unity and power which derives from its place in the structure of the CMP, rather than from any determinate political conditions - has already been indicated in Chapter Five. State theory merely takes this assumption one step further, by arguing that such unconditional class powers are 'expressed', 'reflected' or indeed 'personified' in the structure of the state.

'The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital' (31)

This central dichotomy of state theory has raised the problem of whether it is necessary to call into question the concept of 'class power' as having a meaning, distinct from its conditions of production. Consequently one of the major debating points in contemporary state theory has concerned the possibility or necessity of drawing a distinction between 'class power' and 'state power'. Milliband (32) for one, has rightly recognised that the drawing of such a distinction is, essential for any discourse claiming the 'relative autonomy' of the state. But elsewhere (33) it is significant that his own analysis merely replicates the 'classical' dilemma; on the one hand, the state is the agency through which the dominant class seeks to ensure its domination; on the other, such power is merely 'exercised' through many institutions and agencies.

The ambiguities deriving from the materialist attempt to theorise state power' (as distinct from 'class power') are only part of a more general problem concerning Marxism's attempt to deal with specific political conditions. All Marxists who have engaged in practical political struggles have regarded a recognition of such conditions as fundamental to effective political intervention. Lenin for one, insists that it is imperative for socialism to establish the specificity of political conditions in determinate national social formations:

' the task consists in learning to apply the general and basic principles of communism to the specific relations between classes and parties, to the specific features in the objective development towards communism, which are different in each country... To seek

out, investigate, predict and grasp that which is nationally specific<sup>(34)</sup>.

But the problem is that such specificity of condition is always circumscribed by the materialist ontology and teleology that surrounds it. Marxism has tried to temper the effects of that ontology (politics as 'superstructural') and teleology (political outcomes as determined rather than determinate) by applying the concepts of 'relative autonomy' and 'dialectics'. But two questions arise with respect to these solutions. Firstly, are they theoretically coherent? Secondly, are they of any political utility - to put it bluntly, is it strategically helpful to know that 'political parties' are the 'more or less adequate expressions' of classes? It is suggested below that the answer to both questions is in the negative.

The basic contradiction that is signified by the examples above will be examined more fully in the following Section. The central question at stake for Marxism however, is the status of political conditions in the constitution of the purported 'unity' of classes. Marxism's failure to theorise such conditions rigorously will be indicated clearly throughout the following analysis. In particular it is significant that time and again one gets an implicit distinction between 'politics' as essence (class struggle) and 'politics' as appearance (political institutions and organisations). The effect of rejecting such a position and arguing for a rigorous theorisation of the effectivity of such institutions and organisations is to render 'class unity' problematic. The Marxian position regards such unity as ultimately conditionless, a necessary effect of the structure of the CMP. For political institutions and organisations to be theorised as effective however, it is necessary for the materialist ontology and teleology to be rejected and once this is done the unity of classes is dissolved.

## 2. ASPECTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE ON THE CAPITALIST STATE

The suggestion that the materialist conception of politics is incoherent and that an effective socialist political analysis must be based upon a rejection of it, stands in stark contrast to current debates on the state. Here increasingly it has come to be asked, which of the various contemporary theoretical positions is more 'truly' materialist, the assumption being that only a truly materialist theory will be an effective one.

Holloway and Picciotto<sup>(35)</sup> present a characterisation of state theory which has become particularly influential in Britain and this characterisation provides a useful introduction to the positions to be considered. In their view, state theory has tended to feature either 'economism'/'fundamentalism' which regards politics as a simple reflection of the 'needs' of capital, or 'politicism', a facet of the Gramscian tradition, which sets out to establish a Marxian theory of politics. In the view of Holloway and Picciotto both approaches fail to achieve a rigorously materialist analysis, since the latter does not draw a distinction between 'economics' and 'politics' but regards both as 'forms of the capital relation'.

More will be said on these matters subsequently, but for the moment let it merely be said that this characterisation of state theory is highly misleading. That is not to say that it entirely fails to describe real differences in approach to the state on the part of particular authors. What it obscures however, is that specific differences apart, the major protagonists in the state debate all adopt the theoretical principles of the materialist conception of politics described in this work<sup>(36)</sup>, and more to the point reproduce in remarkably similar form its attendant theoretical problems and strategic difficulties.



( 17 )

This section will concentrate attention on two variants of state theory which Holloway and Picciotto would regard as strictly distinct, Poulantzas' analysis and that of 'State Derivation Theory'. For reasons of space, the latter will be represented by the works of Altvater, Hirsch and Holloway and Picciotto themselves. Both of these approaches in fact exhibit similarities, some of which are uncontroversial. Each, for example emerges as a critique of the 'economism' and 'reformism' of European Communist Parties, regarding state theory as having a central strategic importance in correcting the political miscalculations and errors of communist politics. Each seeks to theorise the specificity of the state vis-a-vis capital. What will be emphasised here however, is that their adoption of the materialist conception of politics produces similar substantive arguments and common strategic problems.

(a) Poulantzas' theory of the state:

Poulantzas' stated aim is to establish a theory of the political level of the complex totality that comprises the social formation<sup>(37)</sup>. Simultaneously, this exercise is an intervention in practical socialist politics, and the concepts which emerge from this theory, notably that of 'power bloc' are 'concepts of strategy'<sup>(38)</sup>. Poulantzas shares with state derivation theory the view that the state is fundamentally a capitalist state and that it cannot be the objective of an effective reformist politics, as social democrats, or 'Eurocommunist' proponents of the 'state monopoly capitalist' thesis have argued. He justifies this view by the claim that the state is an 'expression'<sup>(39)</sup> of class contradictions and powers. It has no power of its own and is therefore rigorously class reducible: 'by state power one can only mean the power of certain classes to whose interest the state corresponds'<sup>(40)</sup>. Since it lacks power of its own, the

reformist view that state power can be won for socialism is said to be an illusion, there being nothing in Poulantzas view 'to 'win'. In accordance with this he, like the state derivationists, concludes that 'class struggle' rather than 'reformism' has to be placed at the top of the socialist political agenda<sup>(41)</sup>.

The state is an expression of class conflicts and contradictions on two fronts; those within the bourgeoisie, and those between the bourgeoisie and the working class. In this respect, the forms assumed by the capitalist state depend upon ' the precise relations between the dominant classes and fractions which are themselves the effects of the principal contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the working class'<sup>(42)</sup>. Poulantzas however, pays particular attention to the former conflicts, considering the manner in which the state expresses contradictions within the bourgeois 'power bloc', the latter signifying a phenomenon which is peculiar to capitalist formations, and being one whose emergence is said to be indicated in Marx's analysis of the 'plura lity' of dominant classes and fractions in mid 19th century France.

Despite the fact that the capitalist state is a product of contradictions within the bourgeoisie, it is claimed that it condenses such contradictions into a 'specific internal unity'<sup>(43)</sup> which enables it to carry out the functions of providing order within the social formation. In Poulantzas' view then the state is ' the factor of cohesion of a social formation and the factor of reproduction of the conditions of production'<sup>(44)</sup>. Such cohesion is established by the state's organisation and representation of the interests of the 'hegemonic fraction' within the power bloc. In the current phase of capitalism, the hegemonic fraction is monopoly capital, the state comprising the political unifier and organiser of monopoly capitalist

hegemony within the bourgeoisie.

Although the state predominantly represents the interests of this fraction it enjoys a 'relative autonomy' with respect to it and other classes and fractions. This does not mean that the state's autonomy derives from its own institutional form. 'Relative autonomy' is itself a class-based concept which 'stems from... the contradictory relations of power between the different social classes' (45). Moreover the state is not 'relatively autonomous' from capital, but from specific fractions of capital.

In consequence of this, it is claimed that the state is not a 'thing' but a 'condensation of a balance of forces' (46). Because state policies take account of the need for cohesion of the 'power-bloc', non-hegemonic classes and fractions can find political expression in certain 'pertinent effects'. The state's autonomy 'is concretely manifested in the diverse, contradictory measures that each of these classes and fractions, through its specific presence in the state and the resulting play of contradictions, manages to have integrated into state policy' (47).

The state therefore overwhelmingly serves the interests of the hegemonic class or fraction, but its 'specific internal unity' guarantees that the dominant class remains the bourgeoisie as a whole. The state ultimately expresses the class powers and interests of the entire bourgeoisie, but the 'relative autonomy' it enjoys prevents it, in Poulantzas' view, from constituting a simple 'tool' of capital. On the one hand, it is not the mere instrument of the fraction which dominates. On the other, its unity enables it to serve the general interests of capital in the long term. Indeed such unity gives it an effectivity as organiser of the dominant class, so that it is involved in 'formulating and openly expressing the tactics required

to produce its power<sup>(48)</sup>.

The view of the state as an expression of class powers is intended to provide a corrective to those theories which see it as either an 'instrument' without autonomy, or a 'neutral subject' with total autonomy. According to Poulantzas, the common problem with both positions is that they conceive the relationship of state and classes as one of externality, where one subdues the other. It is precisely this conception of 'externality' that Poulantzas rejects<sup>(49)</sup> in claiming that the state 'expresses' class relations

Now this denial of the 'externality of the state' vis-a-vis capital, indicates several serious problems, for in making such a denial, Poulantzas is calling into question the very 'specificity' of politics and the state which his work is intended to theorise. In the first place, it is clearly difficult to make an analysis of 'state-capital relations' if the state merely 'expresses' class powers, for to deny the externality of the state is to deny its constitution as an agent distinct from capital, which can bear a relation to it. In effect what emerges in Poulantzas' analysis is precisely the same contradiction that appears in classical Marxism. On the one hand, the state is class reducible - it expresses 'class powers'. On the other, the functions it performs are a condition of production of class powers. The denial that the state is an agency with specific capacities and powers is nonsensical in the context of Poulantzas' own substantive analysis, for what is crucial to that analysis is the view that the state 'organises' the hegemonic fraction and serves as the 'factor of cohesion' of the social formation.

In Poulantzas' later work, it might seem that he recognises the nature of this problem since, for the first time he pays explicit attention to the 'institutional' aspects of the state, any consideration

of which he had previously rejected as 'structuralist'. The state is now considered to be

'a specialised and centralised apparatus of a peculiarly political nature, comprising an assemblage of impersonal, anonymous functions whose form is distinct from that of economic power; their ordering rests on the axiomatic force of law-rules distributing the spheres of activity or competence and on a legitimacy derived from the people-nation. In the modern state all these elements are incorporated in the organisation of its apparatuses' (50).

Here the state is seen to have a specifically political membership, a capacity for delegation, hierarchies of competence; it is given legal and cultural recognition, legitimation etc. In short, it might appear that the state is a specific agent, set apart from capital in a relation of 'externality', which enables it to perform certain necessary functions towards the maintenance of capitalist relations of production. Poulantzas, it would appear, is forced to recognise the state's institutional structure.

But this recognition is a grudging one, forced upon him by the dictates of practical politics. Theoretically his position remains unaltered, a fact which is underlined in 'State, Power Socialism'. Here, for the first time, Poulantzas poses questions which he has never posed before. In particular, he questions the view that the state's emergence can be regarded as class reducible, an effect of classes 'founding the state'. Instead, it is suggested that state apparatuses 'are no mere appendages of power, but play a role in its constitution'. But, fearful of the theoretical consequences of such a position, he immediately qualifies it:

'But in the relationship between power and apparatuses...the fundamental role is played by the class struggle, whose field is none

other than that of relations of power...struggles always have primacy over...apparatuses or institutions...the state is....a site and a centre of the exercise of power, but it possesses no power of its own' (51).

This replicates the position Poulantzas has argued for the last decade, a position based upon the primacy of class relations and 'economic determination in the last instance'. This position reproduces all of the problems of the classical materialist view of the state. The state is only fundamentally capitalist because it is reducible. Yet it also provides certain conditions of existence of capitalist relations of production and can only do so in so far as it is constituted by institutions and apparatuses which are irreducible.

Poulantzas' continued theoretical emphasis on the primacy of class struggle over institutions and apparatuses leads to his failure to consider the possibility that institutions and apparatuses may provide conditions of existence and 'means' of struggle. Struggle, in his conception of it, is basically conditionless. This strategic failing is compounded by his attempts to identify the state both as an 'expression' of class relations and as a 'strategic field' (52). Commendable as the latter project might be, Poulantzas' analysis renders it impossible. If the state expresses class relations, then anything which expresses such relations will constitute a part of the state apparatus, unless one can offer theoretical grounds for arguing otherwise; that is, by granting the state an existence apart from class relations. Poulantzas' analysis leaves one with the impression that the state is simply everything and everywhere. It is indeed significant that although he only adopts Althusser's distinction between state 'ideological' and 'repressive' apparatuses with certain reservations, Poulantzas considers that the greatest merit

of that distinction lies in its 'politicisation' of all social relations<sup>(53)</sup>. But whatever merit the politicisation of social relations may have for confronting discourses which Poulantzas would regard as 'bourgeois ideology', it is heavily outweighed by the strategic emptiness of a view of state apparatuses as ubiquitous. Poulantzas is left with an insurmountable problem. He proposes a strategic imperative to 'smash the state', but it is impossible to isolate the strategic field to be smashed. All that this imperative amounts to is a vague call to smash class relations because it is those relations, rather than state institutions, which are the 'strategic field' of socialist politics<sup>(54)</sup>.

Despite Poulantzas' pre-eminence in state theory then, his analysis implies that the study of state apparatuses and institutions is irrelevant. Indeed in accordance with the materialist view 'politics' appears at two levels in the analysis. 'Politics proper' is constituted by class relations and conflicts - in particular those within the 'power bloc'. Politics in its institutional form is a reflection or expression of this. The state is merely a void which 'represents the political unity of this bloc'<sup>(55)</sup>.

But this produces a further problem since it destroys the entire rationale for the study of the state. The functions which the state is said to perform for capital (organisation and cohesion) are superfluous. The political unity of the 'power bloc' (and 'bloc', surely suggests organisation) is already guaranteed prior to the state being called upon, by the mere existence of capital under the dominance of its hegemonic fraction. However, fractionalised it may appear, the unity of capital is reflected in the unified state apparatus. As Poulantzas in fact says: 'the capitalist state always expresses a specific internal unity, the unity of the power of the

hegemonic class or fraction' (56). The bourgeoisie already has a unitary set of political interests and powers, and a capacity for realising them. One is left with the problematic conclusion that capital, being represented by the concept of 'power bloc' as a superficially fragmented political unity, has the capacity to secure its own conditions of existence and reproduction. Poulantzas' claim to examine <sup>the</sup> state as a 'strategic field' and his more recent emphasis on analysing the 'materiality' of the state apparatus, is merely polemical. The central concepts of state analysis (the power bloc, hegemony and the unity of classes and the state) make any genuine analysis of state apparatuses redundant.

(b) State Derivation Theory

(i) Altvater's Capital-Logic Approach

Altvater provides one of the earlier contributions to the German 'state derivation' debate and it is the approach presented in that contribution which offers a good example of the so-called 'capital-logic' perspective. Here the necessity for a 'separate' state is derived from relations between capitals. Though Altvater is concerned to emphasise the effectivity of the 'laws of motion of capital', he accepts that it is not 'total social capital' which undertakes transactions, but individual capital units. Given the effectiveness of laws of motion however, such units are merely 'the unconscious means by which capitalist regularity is achieved' (57).

However in the CMP, certain social relations remain undeveloped. In particular it is argued, capital is unable to produce, through the acts of capital units, the preconditions of capital accumulation that constitute its social conditions of existence. In view of this it is suggested that a separate institution, not subject to the limits



of capital, develops in the form of the state. The state then appears as 'a specific form expressing the general interests of capital' (58). In so far as the state is not a material total capitalist, but an institution expressing the general interests of capital, it may be regarded as a 'fictitious' or 'idealised' total capitalist, rather in the same way that Engels regarded it as an 'ideal personification of the total national capital.'

The state, not being subservient to the necessities of surplus production, is thus considered able to perform the functions necessary to maintain capitalist relations of production. In performing these functions it is geared towards making good the incapacity of private capital to provide the general conditions of existence of these relations - the establishment of a legal system guaranteeing the continued existence of wage labour and capable of regulating conflicts between wage labour and capital, the provision of infrastructure etc (59). Individual capital units are unable to perform these functions because competitive laws force them to utilise resources maximally. Altvater takes the view that capital, left to itself, tends to destroy its own social foundations (wage labour, the environment etc), a view which is partly based upon Marx's own treatment of the Factory Acts. Here it is suggested that the unrestrained competitive passions of individual capitalists threaten the destruction of labour power to such a degree that it is necessary for the state to intervene on behalf of the interests of capitalists. By so doing the state guarantees the continued reproduction and exploitation of labour power.

The view that state intervention is necessary to uphold the long term or fundamental interests of 'capital in general' against the short term or particular interests of individual capitals, has been influential in current approaches, both to the analysis of the state

generally and the welfare state in particular. Altvater's position is however, problematic in a number of respects. Some of these problems may best be illustrated by referring to critical responses to his work by other theorists.

Holloway and Picciotto<sup>(60)</sup> regard the main merit of Altvater's position as being his corrective to the 'state monopoly capitalist' thesis of the 'fusion' of state and monopolies. Altvater, it is said shows two things. Firstly he proves that the state is fundamentally capitalist, rather than just a state in capitalist society. Secondly, he shows that it is necessary to distinguish the state from capital. But it is precisely the latter which Altvater fails to theorise. The problem is as in Poulantzas' analysis. Once the state is conceived as an 'expression' of class relations, one cannot simultaneously argue that it performs effective political functions, nor that it constitutes a form of agent bearing distinct relations to capital. More than this, if one wants to distinguish the state from capital, not only can it not express capital, but the content of its activity cannot be derived from capital's needs, a concept which is itself highly problematic.

A second problem also arises in the context of Holloway and Picciotto's discussion. They consider that the major weakness of Altvater's argument concerns his view of the state as an institution-alisation of the general interests of capital. It is argued that in claiming this, he attributes to the state, a power and a knowledge which it is impossible for it to possess. But this is an absurd claim, since Altvater's position has to rest on precisely the same assumption as that which is explicitly formulated by Poulantzas - that the state has no power at all. For Altvater, the state 'expresses' capital's general interests and its policies have no conditions

of production outside the logic of capital. State apparatuses and institutions do not constitute means of production of policies, but merely serve as filters through which the logic of capital is translated into legislation. Contrary to Holloway and Picciotto, the 'problem' is not that excessive power is attributed to the state, since no power is in fact granted to it at all. The real problem concerns the powers and capacities which are attributed to capital in general. Altvater, like Poulantzas, assumes that the powers, capacities and fundamental interests of capital in general exist independently of any determinate conditions of production. Capital in general exists as a unity for Altvater, just as the 'power bloc' in another context is united in Poulantzas' analysis, despite its fractionalised appearance. In both of these cases, Marxism theorises an area - capital as unity - which is immune from any of the political conditions which normally enable unities of interest to be guaranteed. Both Altvater and Poulantzas assume the existence of an area of 'real' (because conditionless) politics above politics.

A comment by Jessop<sup>(61)</sup> indicates a third source of difficulty. He suggests that 'capital-logic' though subject to a number of problems, does have the merit of showing the state to be an essential element in the social reproduction of capital. But it is by no means clear that 'capital-logic' even succeeds in establishing this much. Capital in general is said to logically dictate ( via its laws of motion ) that certain functions will be performed. Yet the precise nature of the institutional 'expression' which performs such functions is irrelevant. All that is 'logically' suggested is that certain functions will be realised by some institutional form. Nothing needs to be said, nor indeed can be said about the nature of that institution or apparatus. For above all else, two things are indicated in Altvater's analysis

In the first place he comes perilously close to reaching an undesired conclusion - that the CMP can secure its own conditions of reproduction - a problem which arbitrary references to 'contradiction' and 'class struggle' fail to resolve. Secondly his text produces the same failing as that of Poulantzas. If the political content of state activity is defined outside the apparatuses of politics, whether by the logic of capital, or by the structure of class relations within the power bloc, the relevance of state analysis becomes open to question.

The common problems arising in the works of Altvater and Poulantzas derive largely from the fact that state theory is both an aspect of the materialist theory of politics and an intervention in political practice. It is argued here that there is a basic incompatibility between the two. Marxism 'recognises' the irreducibility of the state, but incorporates that recognition into materialist forms of determination which deny the effectivity of state apparatuses. The entire debate is moreover set within the context of the usual dualisms that run through Marxian analysis - abstract mode of production/concrete social formation; capital in general/individual capitals; fundamental interests/particular interests; logic/content etc. These dualisms represent in their political aspect, a distinction between 'politics' as a materially determined class practice and 'politics' as a socially conditioned process involving organisations institutions and ideologies.

The crucial question which dominates Marxist analysis is whether a relationship between the two orders of concepts can be coherently theorised. Poulantzas' work is largely directed towards this end though both the present chapter and to a much greater extent the following chapter, suggest that his solution is untenable. In the

context of the state derivation debate however, it is precisely this question which is central to the 'class-historical' approach, an approach which, in the view of many, provides a new basis for further theoretical work.

(ii) The Class-Historical Approach

Hirsch, the best known exponent of this position bases his analysis of the state upon the claim that it must be founded upon an historical materialist approach, which takes account of the structure and development of capitalism. In doing this, he rejects the logical-functional approach of Altvater, arguing instead that one cannot discuss the actions and functions of the state until its form has been defined.

Though Hirsch accepts the relevance of Altvater's derivation of state functions and his claim that their performance takes place outside the sphere of individual capitals, he suggests that this approach can only show the objective necessity of the state and not its concrete mode of functioning. In Hirsch's view therefore the bourgeois state is 'the expression of a specific historical form of class rule and not simply ... the bearer of particular social functions' (62). The state arises therefore in his view, not from the effects of a class pursuing its 'general will' but as a result of specific class struggles and conflicts. It arises not from the logic of capital, or the structure of a given historical process of development, but as a result of 'political movements and interests' (63) pressing their demands. Functionalism and teleology are therefore denied.

Hirsch further insists that the theory of the state is to be founded upon 'accumulation and crisis', central to which is the concept of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (TRPF). The process of accumulation is to be regarded as a 'social process of crisis' given

that under the impetus of TRPF it is said to constantly feature manifest or latent class struggle. Since the TRPF dictates that crisis will be repeated, it is inevitable in Hirsch's view that accumulation will lead to more and more overt class antagonism.

'Why then', asks Hirsch, 'has capitalism not collapsed'? His answer to this question rests upon the concept of 'counter tendencies' as specified in 'Capital' Vol. 3. The same tendencies that lead to the TRPF, also produce its counter tendencies, and the course of capitalist development depends upon their successful mobilisation by the actions of individual capitalists, and upon class conflict on an international scale. Hirsch therefore concludes that capitalist development is not mechanically determined by general laws. Rather within the framework of general laws that give rise to the TRPF, the actual outcome of development is 'mediated' by empirical conditions and historical peculiarities.

The way in which this argument fits into state analysis become clearer when Hirsch goes on to discuss the historical development of state functions<sup>(64)</sup>. The development of the modern state cannot be logically deduced from abstract laws. It must be understood as part of an historical process in which the objective tendencies determined by the law of value and the capital relation 'assert themselves through the mediation of concrete political movements and processes, class struggles and conflicts between individual capitals and groups of capitals on a national and on an international level',<sup>(65)</sup>

In the view of many state theorists, Hirsch's work provides a fundamental corrective to the functionalist perspective of Altvater, and a strong base for a coherent materialist theory of the state. The overriding strength of the 'class-historical' approach is said to

be its capacity to call into question the thing which Altvater regards as unproblematic - the state's ability to fulfil its functions. Both Gerstenberger<sup>(66)</sup> and Holloway and Picciotto<sup>(67)</sup> suggest that Hirsch's approach is novel because it calls into question the state's capacity to act adequately for capital in general.

In considering whether Hirsch's work provides a basis for a coherent theory of the state, the first question which arises is whether he provides a solution to the dualism of 'form' and 'content' which forms the central problem of Marxist analysis. Though both Hirsch and commentators such as Holloway and Picciotto believe that these arguments offer a solution to the problem, it is clear that this is not the case. Hirsch, like Poulantzas, offers no theoretical account of the relationship between the range of dualisms described above. All that he says is that the structures and laws of motion of the CMP are 'mediated' by class conflict and political struggle. Indeed Hirsch's major theoretical conclusion is mere banality.

'The theoretical investigation of the state cannot be limited to the conceptual development of the law of value and the analysis of 'capital in general' but must embrace the whole of the social, political and national conditions of the production of the social formation, conditions which are subject to certain historical processes and transformations'<sup>(68)</sup>.

The realisation that state analysis requires an examination of social, political and historical conditions hardly constitutes a monumental theoretical advance, particularly if the relationship between such conditions and the structures of the CMP remains untheorised. In this latter respect, Hirsch's only attempt to offer a theoretical account of that relationship is through the application of the term 'mediation' a term which conveys nothing at all.

If Hirsch's analysis fails at this level, it also fails because of the class-historical approach which is meant to be the means of salvation from functionalism and reductionism. Hirsch sets out to argue that the structural constraints of the CMP provide a framework within which empirical and historical conditions have an effect. But what is critical about this claim is that these empirical and historical conditions are conceived in class terms. By making this reduction Hirsch necessarily determines the character of political and social practices and the range of their possible outcomes. This follows because classes are derived from capitalist relations of exploitation in Hirsch's view, so that they constitute contradictory and antagonistic political forces. Political practices by the state, or for that matter those directed at the state, are therefore doubly structured (a) by the structural constraints of the CMP (b) by the 'logical' structure of interests that constitute classes as contradictory political forces. The theoretical advance of the Frankfurt school over Berlin's functionalism and teleology is therefore illusory. There are no specific 'possibilities' or 'limitations' on state action. Since politics is simply a dialogue conducted between two contradictory forces, the outcome will be predictable. Either capitalist relations of production will be reproduced (Altvater) or ultimately they will not (Hirsch). Nothing of any substance can be said about political conditions and situations that exist between these two extremes.

It is also significant that Hirsch tries to draw a distinction between class conflicts and political conflicts (see note 65 above). Thus it is said that state activity develops from 'class conflicts and political struggles mediated through the basic social context of capitalist crisis'. One faces then, not only the indeterminacy of the relationship between laws of motion and class practices, seen in the



term 'mediation' but also a totally untheorised relationship between class struggles and political struggles.

This untheorised distinction cannot be regarded as a mere slip of the pen. what is particularly striking in Hirsch's 'historical materialist' analysis is the fact that he reproduces precisely the same Poulantzian dilemmas which Hirschian advocates consider his analysis to have eradicated. This emerges not only in their common untheorised recognition of a form of political conflict distinct from class conflict, but also in the substance of Hirsch's conclusion. Here Hirsch's 'historical materialism' verges on Poulantzian 'politicism'. When Hirsch comes to make an intervention in substantive political issues he has to admit that state action is the outcome of specifically political processes. Thus we are told that materialist state theory in Germany has to confront the heterogeneity of the state apparatus and theorise its 'bureaucratic governing cliques, party apparatus and bureaucratic mass organisations' (69).

Like Poulantzas, Hirsch combines a thoroughgoing theoretical reductionism with substantive claims that demand the theorisation of the irreducibility of political apparatuses, parties, institutions, ideologies and the like. The crucial difference between Hirsch and Poulantzas does not relate to their degree of faithfulness to 'true' materialism. The difference is merely one of emphasis within a common set of theoretical assumptions (70).

Holloway and Picciotto's refined version of the 'class-historical' approach has had considerable influence in British Marxist circles in recent years, the authors considering that their position resolves some of the 'politician' problems in Hirsch's analysis which so offend their own materialist sensibilities. Two aspects of their

work are relevant for the present discussion. Firstly, they claim that their approach to state analysis manages to resolve more effectively the theoretical pitfalls that are a product of the 'dualisms' which characterise Marxist political debate - and in particular the problem of the relative weight which is to be granted to 'base' vis-a-vis 'superstructure'. Secondly, and to their credit, they have made a much more deliberate attempt than the German writers to outline some of the strategic implications of the state derivation approach. An attempt will be made here to evaluate these two areas of their work.

Following Hirsch, the most fundamental premise of Holloway and Picciotto's work is that the analysis of the state, and particularly the state under conditions of crisis, must depend upon a rigorous theorisation of the relationship between 'capital accumulation' and 'class struggle'.<sup>(71)</sup> Capital accumulation is to be understood here to have two basic aspects. Firstly, it is a process beset by the inherent contradictions of capitalist laws of motion, such contradictions being reproduced in the state. In the second place, it is not to be equated with economics as a sphere set apart from political class struggle. Contrary to authors such as Poulantzas, Holloway and Picciotto reject the view that the social formation can be divided into discrete economic political and ideological 'levels', occupying places within hierarchical relations of determination. This rejection depends upon the claim that a truly materialist analysis of the state must mirror the critique of political economy contained in 'Capital'. The possibility of such an analysis hinges upon Marx's theory of 'commodity fetishism' being applied to the analysis of 'forms' other than the 'commodity form'. It is argued then that the state is manifested as a 'fantastic form' or 'thing' which conceals

(as 'appearance') its essential constitution as a social relation, in exactly the same way that social relations of production are hidden in the commodity form. It follows from this that the analysis supplants the conventional problem of the relationship of the 'economic' ('base') and the 'political' ('superstructure') to ask instead: 'what is it about relations of production under capitalism that makes them assume separate economic and political forms?' (72).

The state then is not conceived as a level of the social formation, nor merely as an historically specific vehicle of class domination, but is considered to be a form of appearance of the development of the 'capital relation'. There is in effect quite a different conception of social totality at work here. The social formation is not considered as a unity of constituent 'levels' in a relation of hierarchical determination - a 'structure in dominance'. It is rather the case that the totality is the 'capital relation' itself, together with its particular 'forms of appearance'. Politics and the state does not constitute a 'relatively autonomous' level of the social formation, but a separate, fetishised form. The view of the capitalist totality as a 'structure in dominance' gives way to a conception of it as 'unity in separation' (73). According to this position, one does not polarise 'economics' and 'politics' as discrete spheres. Instead it is maintained that in order to understand the relation between two such 'things' it is necessary to comprehend their unity in the 'capital relation'.

Holloway and Picciotto take the view that the twin problems of 'politicisation' and 'economism' - problems which derive from the very theoretical indeterminacy of the postulate of 'in the last instance' - can be avoided by accepting the theoretical primacy of the 'capital relation' as constituting element and organising principle of the

capitalist totality. The problem of the relationship between the separate 'levels' of this unity is supplanted by the view that the unity is already and always a unity, but one which gives the illusion of separation. In this respect, for example, capital accumulation is not considered to be an economic process which conditions political class struggle, but rather is itself a process of class struggle which merely takes the 'form' of a separate 'instance'. The theoretical significance of this conception of capital relation/unity should therefore be apparent. By refusing to grant a special existence to politics, ideology, law etc, one does not have to face the problem which has dogged generations of Marxist political and cultural theorists, of positing relations of 'determinacy' between them and the economy<sup>(74)</sup>. In short one avoids the problem of assigning relative weight to 'structure' over 'conjuncture', 'logic' over 'history' by fusing such dualisms into the 'capital relation' as constitutive totality.

In fact, Holloway and Picciotto's attempt to demonstrate this solution succeeds no better than Hirsch's. Its validity rests upon the capacity of the 'class-historical' approach to transcend the polarising of the traditional dualisms. It is with this end in mind that the authors claim it is a mistake to draw a distinction between 'form' (logical) analysis and 'historical analysis'. Instead they maintain that Marx's categories are always and already 'simultaneously logical and historical categories'<sup>(75)</sup>. It is for this reason then that class struggle in its specific historical forms is considered in the 'class-historical' approach to be the constitutive element of the capital relation. For in the view of these authors, it is the essence of the 'logical' and lawful structure of capitalism, as well as the agency of political struggle. As such, it provides a common linkage or bridge

which purports to supplant the distinction between the sides of the traditional dichotomy.

It is with this end in mind that Holloway and Picciotto place the concept of the 'tendency of the rate of profit to fall' at the centre of their analysis of the state. This concept is regarded as epitomising the fusion of 'logic' and 'history' the laws of motion which give rise to it also producing the 'counter tendencies' which constitute the political process of 'restructuring'

If the analysis produced avoids Hirsch's politicism, it is only by the adoption of a relatively rigid economism,<sup>(76)</sup> for despite their emphatic denial of the polarisation of logic and history and their refusal to posit causal relations between them, they are insistent that the restructuring process is a product of 'form determined class struggle'<sup>(77)</sup>. Indeed, class struggle is 'bounded by the exigencies of accumulation' to such an extent that the 'political conditions' which affect restructuring are simply 'left aside for the sake of exposition'. They are merely 'myriad extraneous circumstances which affect the way in which the crisis presents itself'<sup>(78)</sup>. This then is the crux of Holloway and Picciotto's analysis. Such is the effectivity and inevitability of capitalist laws of motion that crisis 'presents itself', its political conditions of existence being relegated to external effects.

Despite the attempt to avoid the attendant problems of positing causal relations between 'levels' of the social formation by rethinking the concept of unity, that concept merely reproduces the traditional dichotomy in a new way. The 'capital relation' is an essence with causal priority. Politics and ideology are forms of appearance or effects without effect. Ultimately Holloway and

Picciotto re-enter the sphere of theoretical haggling over causality reproducing the same circularity and incoherence of discourse that characterises other Marxist positions. Instead of 'relative autonomy' of levels however, one is presented with an indeterminate conception of causality which is 'form determined' yet 'dialectical'.

If Holloway and Picciotto's concept of social totality is ultimately as incoherent as that of the Althusserians, the effects of that incoherence are seen most clearly in their attempts to theorise that totality in class terms, and apply such a view in strategic analysis. The concepts of class and class struggle are particularly crucial in their view of political strategy, a strategy which again has its theoretical basis in the theory of 'fetishism'.

The conjunction of the theory of fetishism with an emphasis on class struggles in strategic discussion is by no means accidental. On the contrary such a conjunction is a necessary effect of the adoption of the theoretical structure of 'Capital'. Chapter Five has already described how Marxism views economic and social relations as 'personifications' of class relations. It is classes which are the effective agents of social relations in this view. In the case of capitalist 'forms' of politics then, their reproduction is a consequence, not of the actions of determinate agents, organisations or apparatuses, but of agents having the capacities to 'personify' form determined functions, functions which are mere reflections of the underlying effectivity of capitalist laws of motion. This view of economic and social relations depends to a large extent upon the concept of 'fetishism', that being the process whereby empty subjects are endowed with the necessary capacities to recognise or misrecognise the structure of social relations and in so doing reproduce the capitalist totality of forms.

Holloway and Picciotto's merit over the German writers lies in their attempt to outline the strategic implications of such a conception. That strategy begins again from the concept of 'form', it being argued that since historical materialism is a 'science of forms' (79) socialist strategy must be the product of such a science. Considered in this light then, the state may be regarded as an apparatus which serves to reproduce social relations as 'things', achieving this end by literally 'fragmenting class relations' and reproducing them in non-class 'forms'. By way of example it might be argued that the welfare state confronts problems of poverty and deprivation by denying their relationship to class exploitation and domination, and processing them as 'individual' issues (80). The socialist strategic response to such a situation places a new meaning on the concept of socialist 'transformation'. The task for socialist politics is

'not to work through bourgeois forms to gain positions of 'power' and 'influence'...but to work against these forms, to develop through practice, material forms (Sic) of counter organisation which express and consolidate the underlying unity of the resistance to class oppression...'(81).

The socialist solution is to mobilise a variety of organisations (unions, shop steward committees, anti-racist organisations, women's groups, campaigns against expenditure 'cuts' etc.) around a strategy which raises the 'real' issues of class domination and oppression. In short, the strategy is one of 'total class struggle' (82).

There are however, serious problems with this view of politics. In the first place, there is a real question mark about the effectivity of the state, and therefore about the purpose of analysing it. In fact Holloway and Picciotto merely produce another variation

of the theoretical economism which they pretend to criticise. Although some 'recognition' is given to the fact that the state does 'exist' as an institution and indeed that its administrative structure has a place in the constitution of the politics of 'fragmentation', in the last resort state apparatuses merely 'express' and 'materialise' the 'development of social relations as 'forms'. There are in other words no political conditions in the reproduction of fetishised social relations or none which can be coherently theorised. That reproduction follows as a necessary effect of class relations being 'personified' in appropriately fetishised ways. This is merely another case of the structure of the CMP producing the necessary effects to guarantee its own reproduction. Despite tenuous attempts to recognise the state as a set of apparatuses then, for Holloway and Picciotto the state is really only a 'form process' a mere appearance or expression of that process of reproduction<sup>(83)</sup>.

This view of politics however, leaves the authors with another serious problem. How is one to evaluate those 'forms' of left wing politics which are not 'true' socialism - that is, types based on strategies other than 'total class struggle', which do not reject the state 'form' in toto? On this the authors are, to say the least, ambivalent. They are loathe to reject forms of politics such as unionism, or social democratic 'reformism' out of hand, arguing that their purpose is not to 'belittle the importance of such struggle but to underline its essential limitations'<sup>(84)</sup>. Yet there is a problem here with regard to the calculation of such limitations, for given their theoretical position, all one can say is that 'reformism' and unionism are not socialism proper (total class struggle). One cannot gauge the particular effectivity of either in given circumstances



and since there are no specific limitations to such forms of politics, one can only offer a blanket rejection of them. Despite protestations to the contrary, this much is indeed suggested in Holloway and Picciotto's view of both the Factory Acts and post-war welfare reforms. 'Class struggle (within bourgeois forms) merely acts as mediating factor in the establishment of the interests of capital in general' (85). What this boils down to is the view that anything which is not 'total class struggle' is a form of 'bourgeois' politics. Here we are confronted with a 'see-saw' conception of politics which regards all political practices as either capitalist or socialist, a view which recurs in the Marxist classics and which will <sup>be</sup> further criticised in the following chapter.

This dualistic view of politics under capitalism rests upon another problematic conception which will also be considered more fully below. It is clear that Holloway and Picciotto, in common with other positions previously discussed, adopt a view of political practice as fundamentally conditionless. The state thus 'fragments' (cf Poulantzas 'disorganises' and Engels p.191 above) an already constituted working class unity which is considered to be a necessary effect of capitalist relations of production (86). Given this view, socialism simply amounts to the production of counter organisations which 'express' such underlying unity and in this respect are no less ineffectual (as merely efficient expressions of working class unity) than the state is (as an expression of 'form determined' processes). The strategic imperative of the class-historical approach therefore amounts to a strategy of allowing the teleology of 'form determined' class struggle to take its course. It is a sophisticated and complex form of awaiting the inevitable.

Holloway and Picciotto's attempt to derive strategic conclusions from the state derivation debate therefore amounts to a strategy of no strategy. The call for a 'total class struggle' whatever its propagandist virtues raises wider problems with respect to classes as the constitutive agents of political practice which will provide much of the subject matter of Chapter Seven. Apart from the problem however, of whether 'class struggle' as a political strategy has any coherent meaning, Holloway and Picciotto's political strategy leaves us with a final major problem, for their variation of 'smashing the state' raises difficulties no less serious than those mentioned in the case of Poulantzas or others.

It has been noted that in various ways Marxism negates the very effectivity of political apparatuses and institutions which the project of state analysis is intended to elucidate. The consequences of this emerge very clearly in Holloway and Picciotto's call for a politics of 'transformation' by class struggle. Such a strategy rests upon the possibility of carrying out political practices outside bourgeois political forms. But two things have to be noted here. In the first place, this view, is based upon exactly the same conception of a 'real' and unconditional politics 'outside' political organisations, institutions and apparatuses criticised above. But if state theory is to have any justification at all, its purpose must be to identify state apparatuses and institutions as potential objectives of socialist political practice. The state is not a 'form' but provides conditions of existence of capitalist relations of production through the effectivity which resides in its apparatuses. In this respect, it is a necessary terrain of socialist political practice and one

which is by no means inherently limited. Whatever specific limitations such 'form' directed politics might have, are defined not by reference to the self reproducing structure of the 'capital relation' but by a consideration of political objectives, ideologies and forms of organisation<sup>(87)</sup>.

Secondly, the call for an abandonment of the sphere of 'bourgeois' politics for truly 'proletarian' forms of organisation is vacuous. However justified the view that new forms of political organisation may be required for an effective socialist politics, such forms are necessarily implicated in existing political relations. As such they are subject to the effects of political practices by state apparatuses and organisations. 'Proletarian' forms of organisation will be subject for example to 'bourgeois' legal relations unless they are terrorist organisations and to 'bourgeois' economic relations once they undertake financial activities. The examples merely serve to underline that such 'fetishised' relations constitute the political terrain and provide the political conditions under which socialist political organisations will operate under capitalist relations of production.

CONCLUSION

It should be clear that much of what has been said here parallels the criticism of Marxist conceptions of possession contained in Chapter Five. Marxism conceives the state and politics as a 'level' or 'form' of the social formation, an element of the totality that comprises the CMP. Like its economic and ideological counterparts, the political level or 'form' is structured by the teleological principles of the CMP and its laws of motion. It is part of a hierarchy of causal relations, its place being governed by its position in the totality and the function it serves. The state comprises a unitary reflection of the unity that is capital.

This chapter has tried to show that there is a fundamental theoretical incoherence in the materialist conception of politics. The ontological and teleological propositions of that conception continually come into conflict with Marxism's attempts to recognise the effectivity of specific political conditions. All of the attempts to remedy this problem which have been discussed here lapse into inconsistency and ambiguity.

Theoretical incoherence apart, the substantive effects of materialist propositions parallel those discussed in Chapter Five. Whereas in that case their adoption gives rise to the continued failure to examine the effects of legal relations upon the spheres of 'possession/separation' and 'direction', in the case of state theory there is a persistent refusal to grant effectivity to political organisations and apparatuses. The state, like the capitalist, becomes merely a 'bearer' of processes, the nature of which is determined elsewhere.

Above all else, this chapter has sought to emphasise that despite the massive regeneration of Marxist analysis in the last

two decades, and in particular in spite of the vast output of sophisticated materialist literature on the state, Marxism has entirely failed to theorise state apparatuses and institutions as strategic objects. Marxist state literature provides no guide to how socialists should confront the 'problem' of the state. Nor does it give any indication of what that problem is, nor how the 'state' (as a set of institutions and apparatuses) is constituted. Least of all does it give any indication of what relations pertain between specific parts of the state.

These problems cannot be posed by Marxian state theory because that theory is founded upon the view of capital as a totality. This is clearly what lies behind the major strategic imperative of state theory - 'smashing' the state apparatus. From Marx, Engels and Lenin onwards that proposition depends entirely upon the class reducibility of the state - the fact that the state is 'fundamentally capitalist' rather than just 'a state in capitalist society'. It is not merely that the state provides conditions of existence of capitalist relations of production. That is its entire function. Its sole 'effectivity' lies in its class reducibility, this in turn resting upon its institutional unity, the state apparatus being the unitary expression of the totality which is capital. The strategy of 'smashing' the state apparatus (it is significant that Marxists usually refer to it in the singular) rests upon a view of the social formation as composed of dual unities of 'class' and 'politics'.

Both the present chapter and the one before have called into question the legitimacy of the view that classes may be regarded as unconditional unities, and this conception will be further queried in the following chapter. For present purposes however, the major consequence of rejecting the materialist position and the concept of

totality on which it rests, is that it can no longer be maintained that 'the state' comprises a unitary structure. State policy does not constitute a unified reflection of the interests of capital. It has definite conditions of production which reside in state institutions and apparatuses. Such institutions and apparatuses have a real effectivity and cannot be regarded as expressions of 'class powers' - a concept which is in any case untenable. Contrary to the view that the state comprises a unity, and in contrast to the strategic imperatives which follow from it, it is suggested here that the unity of state apparatuses and institutions is problematic. It is precisely because such unity is problematic that it provides a potentially fruitful terrain for socialist political practice. Marxism in contrast, by denying the effectivity of state apparatus abandons (as 'reformist') a possible sphere of socialist political intervention.

CHAPTER SEVENCLASS ANALYSIS AND SOCIALIST POLITICAL CALCULATION : THE PROBLEM  
OF THE WORKING CLASS

Chapters Five and Six criticised Marxism's attempts to resolve certain political and theoretical problems - the issues of capitalist possession and the capitalist state. In each case, the solution to these problems and for that matter, the very form in which they are posed, depends upon the validity of a set of inter-dependent theoretical assumptions. In the first place, it is claimed that there can be some sort of 'general' solution to such questions. This postulate of generality is dependent upon a second proposition - the view that a successful resolution to the problems of socialist politics has to be based upon a correct analysis of the 'class - politics relation'. In this latter respect, for example, the entire content of Marxist state theory rests upon the attempt to construct a coherent theory of the relationship of 'capital' and the 'state'. Such a posing of the problems of socialist politics through the medium of the class-politics relation, in turn depends upon the view that the constituents of that relation (classes and political structures or practices) comprise 'unities or 'totalities'. Once that assumption is questioned however, the terms of Marxist political debate are undermined. For one thing, the role of 'class analysis' in political calculation is called into doubt. In particular, the concept of 'class interest' becomes problematic, a fact which has enormous repercussions for Marxism's attempts to theorise forms of political practice such as 'socialism'. It is to these and other related issues that the present chapter is directed.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: Firstly it will query the relationship of class analysis and political calculation. Secondly, it will open up discussion of the 'problem of reductionism'. Both of these issues will be taken up again in chapter 8 where the question of the 'class-politics relation' and the problem of reductionism will be reassessed in the light of the conclusions drawn from Section 2.

The problem which has received most attention in Marxist political analysis in recent years is the 'problem of reductionism'. This issue concerns the interpretation of Marx's statements on the relationship between politics and economic class relations<sup>(1)</sup>, a reductionist reading of which is said to produce an erroneous view of politics. 'Reductionism' is said to lead to a denial of the specificity of political structures, ideologies and practices and to a tendency to 'read off' the political from an analysis of the economy in general and of economic class relations in particular. Marxist political debate has therefore concentrated on the establishment of a correct theory of 'the class - politics relation'. Such is the centrality of the debate that the two areas which have most dominated Marxist political analysis in the last decade - the problem of the state and the definition of the working class and its politics, have in turn been dominated by it. This latter area provides the subject matter of the present chapter.

One issue which is central to what follows concerns the relationship which has been posited in Marxism between 'structures' and 'practices' - in particular the connections that are said to exist between the analysis and determination of class structure and the



practices of the agents so identified. Marxism argues that the most crucial component of political analysis is a recognition of the primacy of economic class structure. This serves to justify the project of 'class analysis', the analysis of political ideologies, institutions and practices being correspondingly based upon the analysis of class relations. This follows because of the necessary connections that are drawn between structures and practices. Knowledge of class structure is said to give us knowledge of the political practice or potential political practice of classes.

So stated, this class-based conception of political practice is itself open to the charge of reductionism, if by that we refer to the attempt to reduce politics to class relations. Most work in Marxism over the last decade has therefore concentrated on attempting to retain this class - based conception of politics whilst simultaneously avoiding the charge of reductionism. In crude terms this amounts to the view that class relations do determine political practice - but only 'more or less'. Politics then is 'relatively autonomous' vis-a-vis class relations.

By virtue of this strategy Marxism is able to give seeming theoretical recognition to the existence of a gap between class determination and political practice. Apart from this sham recognition however, Marxist political practice does give real recognition to the irreducibility of politics vis-a-vis class relations. Nevertheless, such recognition is invariably translated back into the terms of the classical reductionist theoretical view of politics.

What most characterises Marxist political analysis is a continuous ambivalence regarding the question of class analysis and political calculation. On the one hand, it is claimed that class location defines the limits of political practice. On the other hand this is consistently denied. On the one hand, it is claimed that the working class comprises a definite agent of politics, whilst on the other it is also recognised that no such agent exists in any political conjuncture. Finally, it is claimed that political ideologies such as socialism, are class-based but that equally they are subject to the effects of conditions of existence outside class relations.

It will be suggested here that the theoretical evasions which characterise the debate on 'relative autonomy' only indicate the need for Marxism to reassess its conception of politics. In particular, it must work out many of the implicit propositions which it recognises in practice but denies in theory. Such a genuine recognition of the irreducibility of politics will, in the long term, require an examination of the concept of 'class' itself and its pertinence in political calculation.

This chapter has the following structure: Section 1 presents an outline and brief discussion of some of the aspects of the materialist conception of politics. Section 2 analyses some of the issues surrounding the debate on the working class. Section 3 presents a critical discussion of the view that classes comprise agents of political practice organised around definite 'class interests'. Section 4 criticises Marxism's attempt to theorise political ideologies in class terms. Section 5 attempts to utilise some of the implications of these criticisms in examining the concept of 'reductionism' itself. This latter issue provides a link to the issues to be considered in Chapter 8.

## 1. THE MATERIALIST CONCEPTION OF POLITICS

Marxism distinguishes itself from other political discourses by its materialist mode of analysis and the insistence that knowledge of the political can only be gained from an examination of the structure of definite modes of production. Most Marxists would maintain that political relations are a more or less complex representation of economic class relations. This view of politics rests upon a number of propositions.

1. Classes are the fundamental agents of political practice. Politics may therefore be conceived as 'class conflict'. The agents of political relations are classes which face each other in antagonistic economic relations. It is the exploitative relationship between classes of owners and producers which is the basis of social and political structures and processes.

2. Politics then, is not conceived as a necessary or functional component of social structure. It only exists where antagonistic class relations exist. Without classes there would be no state and no political structure.

3. It is both the existence and particular form of class conflict which defines the history and politics of 'all hitherto existing society'. The centrality of the economic relation between classes means that class structure provides the key to all social and political analysis. It 'reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short the corresponding specific form of the state<sup>(2)</sup>'.

These first three characteristics reveal Marxism to be a genuinely 'class-historical' view of social structure and practice. Such a view is based on Marx's analysis of production as a 'socio-

historical' process involving historically specific (class) relations of production. The presentation of history as 'class struggle', far from being a rhetorical flourish, is therefore the essential core of the historical materialist position. It is significant in this respect that Marx emphasises, not the fact of exploitation but its particular historical form, as the key to social and political analysis. The priority given to the analysis of the form of extraction of surplus labour is crucial in several respects. In the first place, such an understanding reveals 'the corresponding specific form of the state', of law, culture and ideology. Such an analysis therefore indicates the nature, limits and forms of political conflict which are possible in any society. Secondly, it reveals the protagonists involved in political conflict to be classes, for Marx's principle claim is that relations of production are simultaneously relations of exploitation, and that it is the irreconcilable antagonisms and contradictions of that process which give rise to the class conflict that constitutes the political sphere.

Marx and Engels persistently emphasise that this discovery provides a rigorous basis for socialist politics. In Engels view, 'the twin discoveries of the materialist conception of history and the 'secret' of exploitation in the form of surplus value production establish socialism as a science whose laws are enacted by classes.

'From that time forward Socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes - the proletariat and the bourgeoisie' (3).

4. This linkage between the existence of classes in conflict and determinate forms of political practice rests in turn upon the view that classes possess objectively defined 'class interests'. By structurally locating classes then, one is said to be identifying such interests and the forms of political practice associated with them. Class interests serve to mediate the relationship between class structure and political practice in the sense that a knowledge of class structure and of the interests so identified is a pre-condition of political knowledge, calculation and strategy.

According to this view, political forces, practices and ideologies more or less represent class interests. Consequently, Marxist political analysis is fundamentally concerned with the problem of class analysis. A 'correct' analysis of classes provides a knowledge of the nature of practices and ideologies, as well as an identification of the forces which undertake such practices.

This is not to say that Marx always claims such objective interests to be effected in actual forms of class conflict. Nor does Marx in fact argue that class conflict always takes a manifest form. Indeed he is ready to recognise that some form of political organisation may be required to play a role in the actual generation and constitution of 'interests'. But it is important to be aware of the way in which this process has been conceived by Marxism. For Marx the problem of political organisation and the constitution of political interests is subsumed under the category of 'class consciousness' and particularly in the distinction between class 'in itself' and class 'for itself'. The clearest exposition of what this involves is contained in 'The Poverty of Philosophy':

'The combination of capital has created for this mass (of workers) a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests' (4).

Two things are noteworthy about Marx's attempt to site political organisation and its associated features within the confines of the category of consciousness. In the first place, the exercise is clearly connected with the equation of economic agent and human subject already discussed in Chapter 5. The problems associated with that conception are indicated there. More important than that, it has to be recognised that Marx's subsumption has definite theoretical and political effects. The most serious has been to supplant the problem of the organisational conditions of production of interests and to replace it with an entirely different 'problem' - the conditions of existence of 'becoming' class conscious. Almost without exception, followers of Marx have placed that problem, in some form or other, at the centre of their analysis (5), concentrating attention upon discovering the conditions necessary for the realisation of a genuinely objective working class consciousness. The realisation of these conditions may be regarded as synonymous with the realisation of socialist political practice. Such practice is inherent in that class which, in Marx's words, is 'alone a really revolutionary class'. In this respect at least, Lukacs' view is not untypical of mainstream Marxism:

'only in the class consciousness of the proletariat do we find that the correct view of revolutionary action is so deeply anchored and so deeply rooted in the instincts that this attitude need only be made conscious, for it to provide a clear lead' (6)

The absence of these same conditions serves to account in Marxism's view for the failure of the working class to achieve its socialist mission.

What will be suggested in this chapter is that the 'problem' Marxism has set itself is in fact misconceived. If there is a problem for Marxism it concerns, not the conditions of existence of class consciousness, but rather the coherence of the category of 'class interest' which underpins it. Marxism erroneously assumes that the mere existence of capitalist relations of production gives rise to a necessary antagonism and conflict between particular agents (bourgeois versus proletariat) around the issue of contradictory class interests (capitalism versus socialism). But it is the unconditional<sup>(7)</sup> nature of these 'interests' which is problematic, a fact which once recognised causes the Marxian view of political calculation to be called into doubt.

## 2. THE DEBATE ON THE WORKING CLASS

In the context of the above view of politics it can be seen why one of the most central debates within Marxism has concerned the question of locating the boundary of the working class. The identification of this boundary is not regarded as an abstract exercise but rather involves political questions of the greatest importance concerning the role of the working class and of alliances in the transition to socialism<sup>(8)</sup>.

In this view, questions concerning the structure, size and composition of the working class have direct strategic implications for Marxist politics. For example, the problem of the breadth of definition of the working class has in the view of some, a direct effect on strategies; a broad definition posing the problem of working class unity, a narrow definition, one of alliances<sup>(9)</sup>.

In the view of Wright: 'Above all it matters for developing a viable socialist politics how narrow or broad the working class is seen to be and how its relationship to other classes is understood<sup>(10)</sup>'.

That a 'correct' identification of the precise boundary of the working class is crucial to Marxist political debate should be obvious from what has been said in the above account of the materialist conception of politics, for in identifying such a class one is attempting to isolate the fundamental core of socialist politics, the form of agency whose class interest provides the potential mass base for socialist political organisation.

Two issues arise with respect to this conception of political analysis. In the first place, it is obvious from what has been said already that the entire project of 'political class analysis' rests upon a coherent theoretical connection being maintained between two orders of concepts; those associated with the labour theory of value



and those associated with the 'class' concept. This has to follow from the fact that the 'objective' basis for contradictory class interests is contained in the inherent conflicts generated by the structure of the exploitation process itself. For Marxism, class interests and conflicts are constructed upon the irreconcilable antagonisms that arise in surplus value production. Thus, if the materialist conception of politics is to have theoretical coherence, it must be possible for 'class analysis' to identify classes, both as groups with conflicting political interests and as groups occupying different positions in the process of surplus value production. In the particular case of the working class, one should, if one is to be consistent with the materialist view of politics, be able to designate it an 'exploited' class, in the strict sense of that word. In Marxism's view it is because one can posit the existence of 'exploiting' and 'exploited' classes, that one can theorise the fundamental political ideologies and practices of determinate societies. Without such a connection being consistently maintained between the concepts of 'class' and 'exploitation' then, much of the explanatory power of the materialist conception of politics disappears, since any consistent basis for an 'objective' concept of 'class interest' is removed. In fact, Marxism has never been able to maintain such a coherent theoretical connection - nor has it in fact, for reasons of political pragmatism always sought to do so - a fact which is no more clearly indicated than in contemporary debates on the boundary of the working class.

Secondly, the debate on the boundary of the working class raises serious questions regarding the relationship between class analysis and political calculation. In particular, it is necessary to examine Marxism's view of what class analysis is meant to realise in political calculation and whether such expectations are legitimate. Though a considerable amount of work has been produced by Marxists addressing the 'boundary question',<sup>(11)</sup> what follows is not an attempt to intervene substantively in that debate. It is much less concerned with an evaluation of the competing arguments than with a discussion of the rationale behind them. Indeed, it will become apparent from what is said in the remainder of the chapter that any such substantive intervention would serve no purpose, since one of the things suggested here is that the 'problems' posed by that debate, let alone the 'solutions', are without any coherent foundation. Instead, this section will attempt to raise pertinent questions by concentrating largely on the work of Poulantzas and to a lesser extent Wright. Such selectivity is justified by the general problems and issues which their works generate.

Though Marxism defines classes as agents which possess or are separated from possession of the means of production, the debate on the boundary of the working class is concerned with investigating the additional attributes of separated agents of wage labour. The problem then concerns whether the possession of certain of these attributes justifies inclusion in or exclusion from the working class. The rationale behind this involves asking whether or not the possession of particular attributes by given categories of wage labour furnishes them with political interests which make them

sympathetic towards truly 'working class' forms of political practice.

The entire discussion of the boundary of the working class may be seen in the context of developments in Western class structure and in sociological and Marxist responses to such developments. One particular area of debate has concerned the increase in salaried white collar workers throughout Western industrial societies, a common sociological response to which has been to propose the progressive decomposition of the class structure itself. Marxian discussion of the boundary of the working class has arisen as a response to positions of this type and to claims concerning the reduction of class conflict which is said to accompany such supposed changes in class structure. Poulantzas' work in this area has been influential and a discussion of his position provides a suitable introduction to some aspects of the debate.

The problem of class determination is especially crucial for Poulantzas, for whom politics is synonymous with class conflict in a literal sense, there being no social groups 'outside' classes which participate in class struggle<sup>(12)</sup>. In his view, it is necessary for the problem of salaried workers to be posed in class terms, rather than in terms of stratification. One should recognise the specific class determination of white collar workers and the political consequences of such recognition - that they possess specific class interests distinct from those of the working class. The PCF and other Communist Parties it is said, by denying the class membership of such employees ignore this latter fact. In Poulantzas' opinion, a recognition of the class determination of such groups

suggests that they have to be won over by the working class through alliance and that because of their specific class interests, they may at any time be lost.

Poulantzas insists that classes have to be defined in 'structural' terms. In other words they are defined principally but not exclusively by their place in the production process. The view that a definition based on production relations alone is not sufficient to define classes is supported by the claim that Marx, Lenin and Mao always recognised political and ideological factors in their discussions of class<sup>(13)</sup>.

Poulantzas' initial definition of the working class derives from economic criteria associated with the labour theory of value and surplus value production. The crucial 'economic' factor which intervenes in the definition of the working class is the concept of 'productive labour', a concept which has been at the centre of much debate on the definition of the working class. The view that the concept of productive labour is crucial for this definition derives from Marxism's need to establish an unproblematic connection between Marx's writings on value and exploitation and the concept of class.

Though Marxists would define classes according to determinate relations of production, many including Poulantzas, regard such relations as fundamentally relations of exploitation, emphasising that it is a recognition of this fact which above all else provides the basis for a rigorous theorisation of working class interests. In view of this, many writers place an analysis of 'exploitation' at the centre of their identification of classes.

For Braverman ' the discussion (of productive and unproductive labour) is in reality an analysis of the relations of production and ultimately of the class structure of society... '(14). Hodges goes even further: ' class is a group defined by its function in an historically definite system of production as a relatum not of social relations of production in general or of property relations in particular but of specific relations of exploitation' (15).

In all such views, the productive labour criterion may be said to provide the basis for a fundamental difference of class interest between the class which produces surplus value (a process quite distinct from the mere 'realisation' of it in 'unproductive labour') and that class which exploits it. However, when an attempt is made to apply this view in actual class analysis the result is often unsatisfactory. Hodges for example, argues that commercial workers may be excluded from the working class. Being non-productive labourers, they are exploited differently from productive labourers, and because of this it may be said that they belong to a different class. In this instance the form of exploitation (extraction of surplus labour only) 'suggests' for the writer a particular class location. But elsewhere in the same text, the argument is contradicted. When Hodges identifies the 'intermediate class' he suggests that it contains both productive and unproductive labour. In this case the 'form' of exploitation would appear to 'suggest' nothing at all for class location, since certain categories of productive labour such as managers and supervisors are excluded from the working class and placed in an 'intermediate' position.

Poulantzas' structural approach to class determination constitutes a more sophisticated attempt to deal with this type of problem. His initial justification for the view that the production of surplus value is the decisive criterion in the definition of the working class rests upon a particular interpretation of Marx's claim that 'Every productive worker is a wage labourer, but not every wage labourer is a productive worker' (16). In Poulantzas' opinion this may be used to justify the argument that all members of the working class are wage earners, but that not all wage earners are members of the working class. Rather, it is only those wage earners who perform productive labour who may be so included and indeed some of these may be excluded on the grounds of the intervention of political and ideological criteria in the overall 'structural determination' of class.

Take first the intervention of political factors in such 'structural determination'. Supervisors and lower managers, it is said, are economically exploited by the performance of productive labour, but they also participate in the political domination of the working class. The supervisors' main function in Poulantzas' view is to extract surplus value from the working class and on this basis they have to be excluded from that class. Consequently, they may be assigned to the 'new petty bourgeoisie'. In a similar fashion it may be argued that ideological factors also intervene to produce class divisions within productive labour. Engineers and technicians are usually productive labourers, but they ideologically dominate the working class through the mental-manual labour division. Likewise they may also be placed in the 'new petty bourgeoisie'.

It is not my intention to evaluate Poulantzas' argument in any detail. The position adopted however, enables him to forestall the more obvious problems that arise in using the productive labour criterion in class determination. For example, if the working class is equated with productive labour, where is one to place those productive labourers whose political position is frequently opposed to manual labour, such as managers, supervisors and the like? Poulantzas seems to offer a theoretical basis for deciding class location compared with Hodges' classification by fiat.

In fact, Poulantzas' position is no less arbitrary than Hodges'. The term 'structural determination' does not establish any criteria for claiming the primacy of political or ideological factors in any particular circumstance. That is to say we are told, quite arbitrarily, that in some cases they are decisive, but we are given no theoretical justification for this<sup>(17)</sup>.

But let us return for a moment to the question of productive labour in the context of class interests. Poulantzas, we have said, regards it as a necessary but insufficient condition for membership of the working class. All members of the working class are productive labourers, but not all productive labourers are members of the working class. In practice this amounts in Poulantzas' case to a definition of the working class based on industrial manual labour, a view which rests upon his equation of productive labour with labour that produces material commodities. In fact this indicates a site of difficulty in the Marxist definition of the concept of productive labour itself.

Poulantzas' justification for this view in fact rests upon an ambiguity which arises in Marx's analysis. Generally, Marx defines productive labour in the CMP as a specific social relation of production: 'the notion of productive labour implies not merely a relation between work and useful effect, between labourer and product of labour, but also a specific social relation of production' (18). More often than not then, Marx is adamant in his rejection of those such as Smith who conceive the productiveness of labour in 'vulgar materialist' terms.

Marx however, fails to argue this view with consistency. Indeed a second conception of productive labour emerges in a number of contexts. Perhaps the clearest instance of this second conception occurs in 'Theories of Surplus Value' where Marx provides a 'Supplementary Definition of Productive Labour as Labour which is Realised in Material Wealth' (19). Here Marx argues that there is an historical tendency for productive labour in the CMP to take on a material form.

Two conclusions may be drawn from what has been said. In the first place, it is apparent that the concept of productive labour is by no means defined consistently in Marx's work. (For further comment on the ambiguities involved here see footnote 19.). Secondly, it is evident that there is no clear and unambiguous connection between the concepts of productive and unproductive labour and the definition of classes. Marxists may speak of the working class as a 'productive class', or 'exploited class', but there is no rigorous attempt to specify the connections between the two orders of concepts.



Though Marx and Engels never resolve the theoretical question satisfactorily<sup>(20)</sup>, the inconsistencies they exhibit do not pose serious or immediate political problems for their work. Contemporary Marxists are however, not only faced with the same theoretical difficulties but also with their practical implications given the vast expansion of 'unproductive' employment in modern capitalist economies. In this context, even some of those Marxists who see a need to found a theory of the working class on the concept of 'exploitation' recognise the difficulties that that implies for Marxists politics - a shrinking proletariat for one. It is interesting that Braverman, having put the productive/unproductive labour distinction at the centre of his class theory is eventually obliged to regard that distinction as merely 'technical':

' the two masses of labour are not otherwise in striking contrast and need not be counterposed to each other.'<sup>(21)</sup> The implications behind this claim is that different forms of production relation (extraction of surplus value/extraction of surplus labour) can generate common class interests and it is this same assumption which provides a basis for Wright's analysis of 'contradictory class locations'.

Accordingly Wright begins by questioning the view that productive labour represents a class interest distinct from unproductive labour. In his view, assuming that ' the fundamental class interest of the proletariat is the destruction of capitalist relations of production and the construction of socialism, then the question becomes whether productive and unproductive workers have a different interest with respect to socialism.'<sup>(22)</sup> Wright notes that some Marxists claim unproductive labour to have a 'stake' in exploitation since such labour is said to live off surplus value.

He suggests however, that the problem is not whether such divisions of 'immediate interest' exist within the working class, but whether such divisions generate 'different objective interests in socialism'. In his view, none of these divisions of immediate economic interest within the working class 'changes the fundamental fact that all workers by virtue of their position within the social relations of production, have a basic interest in socialism'<sup>(23)</sup>. Contrary to Poulantzas, for whom the differential form of exploitation constitutes the basis for a difference in interests, Wright argues that whatever the form of economic exploitation, the crucial fact is that socialism is a prerequisite for ending it.

Wright also disputes Poulantzas' use of political and ideological criteria in class determination. He rightly calls into question some of the criteria chosen and also objects to the fact that deviation from any of the structural criteria that define the working class leads to a positive exclusion from membership. In his opinion this has two problematic consequences. Firstly, it goes against Marxist forms of determination, making political and ideological criteria equal in importance to economic ones. Secondly, it makes for a numerically small working class. This in particular is a serious problem for Wright, who views the question of the size of the proletariat as an issue of 'considerable political importance'.

Rather than excluding 'ambiguous' positions within the class structure from the working class, Wright suggests that they should be regarded as 'occupying objectively contradictory locations within class relations'<sup>(24)</sup>. His own analysis is concerned with elucidating such contradictory locations. Class relations under capitalist relations of production are accordingly analysed in terms of three historical processes; control of labour power; control of the physical means of production; control of investments and resources: The two

main 'class forces' in capitalist society, bourgeoisie and proletariat, represent polar class positions within each process. Thus the bourgeoisie control investment, labour power and the means of production and the proletariat do not. The petty bourgeoisie is defined by the possession of the first and last of these processes within simple commodity production. 'Contradictory locations' exist where these processes do not correspond to the basic forces within capitalist relations of production or to the petty bourgeoisie in simple commodity production. This enables Wright to propose three contradictory locations within class relations. First, managers and supervisors occupy such a location between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. They have varying degrees of control (partial, minimal, total, or none at all) of the means of production, investment and labour power. On the basis of a similar argument small employers occupy a contradictory location between bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Lastly semi-autonomous employees occupy such a location between petty bourgeoisie and proletariat. One of the immediate consequences of this position is that it produces a proletariat, numerically much larger than that of Poulantzas - something like half of the population of the USA for example. Indeed in the case of America: 'The total potential class basis for a socialist movement consisting of the working class and those contradictory locations closest to the working class, is thus probably somewhere between sixty per cent and seventy per cent of the population'<sup>(25)</sup>.

Poulantzas and Wright have been selected for consideration because of the clear differences between them. However, rather than pursue those particular differences it is the nature of their common purpose which needs to be considered here. In both cases class analysis is intended to provide a rigorous specification of the 'class basis' for socialism. Towards this end, a correct

definition of the working class is crucial, though it is also important to investigate the nature of the groups (classes or contradictory locations) which surround the working class. Building socialism depends on finding a means of drawing such groups into alignment with the working class, without ignoring their differences from that class. It is the validity of this class based view of political calculation which here needs to be considered.

In this respect, two issues are of particular significance. Firstly, there is the question of how 'class interest' is considered to be constituted. Poulantzas tries to provide a rigorously materialistic - objective base for such interest by linking it with the performance of productive labour. Usually this argument asserts that unproductive labour, whilst having surplus labour appropriated from it, nevertheless 'lives off' and gains advantages from, capitalism's continued exploitation of surplus value. Wright along with many others, rejects this view, claiming instead that productive and unproductive labour possess a complementarity of class interest by virtue of their common exploitation. Supporters of this view often refer to Marx's claim that unproductive labour itself contributes to the expansion of surplus value and, is in this respect, a necessary component of the exploitation process: 'The commercial worker produces no surplus value directly.... but adds to the capitalist's income by helping him to reduce the cost of realising surplus value inasmuch as he performs partly unpaid labour' (26).

Judging that claim in conventional Marxian terms however, it is highly dubious whether one can suggest, as Wright does, that the mere fact of exploitation can generate common class interests,

irrespective of the effectivity of the particular form. For in the Marxian view it is precisely the form of exploitation which is decisive in revealing the 'hidden basis' of political and ideological structures and practices. Wright's attempt to gloss over that, like Bravermans, has therefore to be considered a dubious piece of materialism

There remains a far more serious aspect to this question however. Is either solution to the question of the constitution of class interest satisfactory? Later parts of this chapter will reconsider that question and subject the concept of class interest to further criticism.

The second issue concerns the relationship which is said to exist between class analysis and political practice. Wright is unequivocal in arguing that ' it is impossible to deduce any political lessons simply from the analysis of class positions' (27). In his view the whole question is much more complicated. The analysis of class structure may indicate possible limits and constraints on forms of political practice by particular agents, but there can be no simple and unproblematic knowledge of political practice from an analysis of class structure.

However, this view hardly fits in with what Wright has already told us about the working class, whose fundamental class interest ' is the destruction of capitalist relations of production and the construction of socialism' (28). Here it would appear we can draw political conclusions from class analysis. Some classes adopt political ideologies that derive from their class location - the working class and socialism. Some classes are indeed constituted as (political) class 'forces' adopting forms of practice which follow from such location. After all, that is

why it is so important to define the working class - the 'class basis' of socialist politics. That is also why it matters how broadly or narrowly the working class is defined. There is in fact no suggestion of class analysis providing us with a means of gauging the limits or possibilities of forms of political practice. Rather, that political practice is directly deduced from class analysis and determination. In other words there may be complexity somewhere in the class structure, but it is known that the working class is fundamentally socialist and that its opposite class 'force' the bourgeoisie, is its natural political adversary.

Wright's position is in fact remarkably similar to that of Poulantzas. The latter argues that class analysis is basic to political calculation because politics is class conflict and only classes partake in it. Yet, like Wright, he is uncertain about the precise relationship between class analysis and the political conclusions which one can draw from it. On the one hand political calculation depends on class analysis. The analysis of class structure is the key to the investigation of practices and ideologies. On the other hand there is a basic distinction between structures and practices and between the structural determination of classes and the political positions they may adopt. This relationship is one of irreducibility<sup>(29)</sup>.

In view of this, it is suggested that a class may take up a political position which does not correspond to its interests as given to it by structural determination. A typical example of such an occurrence would be the labour aristocracy's adoption of a bourgeois class position. Poulantzas is adamant that the adoption of such a position does not alter the fact that the labour aristocracy remains working class. The intended political relevance of this view

is made clear when Poulantzas refers to the problem of the white collar and salaried employees. If such 'new petty bourgeois' class fractions adopt proletarian positions in any particular circumstance, this still does not make them working class. They remain petty bourgeois and in consequence, their political position vis-a-vis the working class is unstable. In Poulantzas' view then, it is imperative that Marxism does not abandon the distinction between structural determination and position, opting merely for an analysis of political positions in any conjuncture. To do this would be to throw away the objective basis that class analysis gives to political calculation. (30)

Now there are two basic problems arising from this argument. In the first place the recognition of a gap between class determination and political position, immediately calls into question the entire basis of Poulantzas' critique of the PCF, about which 'Classes in Contemporary Capitalism' is so concerned. Once it is recognised that a class's political position cannot be derived from its class determination, the *raison d'etre* of class analysis is called into question. More specifically, as Hirst has pointed out, Poulantzas' criticism of the PCF falls apart. Even if the PCF's class analysis is erroneous, as is claimed, this cannot constitute a critique of its political programme. Moreover, the irreducibility of the political position of classes has to imply that such positions have conditions of existence outside class determination. Poulantzas has nothing at all to say about the possible conditions which might account for the gap between a class's structural determination and the political position it may adopt in any conjuncture (31).

Secondly, what are we to make of the argument that class analysis provides us with some objective basis for making political calculations? The nature of this problem is made clear in Poulantzas' discussion of the politics of the new petty bourgeoisie in the final pages of 'Classes in Contemporary Capitalism'. He refutes any simple reductionist conception of petty bourgeois political practice when he discusses the fact that certain fractions of that class are 'objectively polarised' towards the working class. Such polarisation is of political significance, but he insists that 'we must rid ourselves once and for all of the illusions that have often affected the revolutionary movement throughout its history, to the effect that an objective proletarian polarisation of class determination must necessarily lead in time to a polarisation of class positions'<sup>(32)</sup>.

Apart from the fact that this merely underlines what has been said above - Poulantzas recognises the non-class conditions of existence of forms of political practice, but has nothing to say about them - there is a more serious problem. The final recognition of the non-congruence of class determination and political position begs the question of what the detailed class analysis of the 'new petty bourgeoisie' has in fact told us. When considered in these terms, far from presenting us with an objective basis for political calculation, it is clear that the analysis produces only a strategic impasse. At best, class analysis does direct political calculation - we 'know' that fundamentally the working class is socialist. At worst however it tells us precisely nothing - the petty bourgeoisie is a distinct class with determinate interests, but even when polarised in one or other direction its politics is unpredictable. Moreover, even in those cases where class analysis 'does' provide us with political knowledge, there remains a loophole - after all



there are sections of the proletariat such as the labour aristocracy which adopt non-proletarian practices.

Nor can it be claimed that the recognition of the lack of congruence between class determination and practice is meant to suggest that class analysis can provide concepts for the investigation of political possibility. Neither Poulantzas nor Wright has any intention of employing class analysis in this restricted sense and in this way they are typical of Marxists generally. After all, it is the conception of the major political ideologies and practices as reducible to the actions of the two main 'class forces' which provides the rationale for the project of class analysis in the first place.

It will be suggested below that this project of 'class analysis' ultimately stands in the way of any attempt to theorise the nature of political practices and ideologies, But first it is necessary to look at two areas in more detail. Firstly, let us consider the way in which Marxism conceives classes as agents of political practice and the problems which arise from this view. Secondly, let us examine how forms of political ideology and practice are regarded as class based and the consequences which follow.

### 3. CLASSES AS AGENTS: THE WORKING CLASS AS AGENT OF POLITICAL PRACTICE

The theoretical assumptions of the classical Marxist conception of politics and in particular the view that classes constitute the fundamental agents of political practice, produce a number of problems for political calculation. The conception of the working class as agent of political practice is subject to a persistent ambiguity due to the attempt to retain the classical assumptions in the context of political conditions which render them untenable.

One of the most significant forms which this ambiguity takes concerns the nature of the working class itself. Is it to be conceived as a unity, or is it to be regarded as beset by heterogeneity and division? If the latter is to be given credence, what theoretical status may be given to such heterogeneity? Marxism's answer to this has been entirely unequivocal: 'since Bernstein, the opportunists have striven constantly to portray the objective economic stratifications in the proletariat as going so deep and to lay such emphasis on the similarity in the 'life situations' of the various proletarian, semi-proletarian and petty bourgeois strata that in consequence the unity and the autonomy of the class was lost'<sup>(33)</sup>.

In the orthodox view, the working class is to be regarded as a fundamental unity which possesses a coherent class interest and which therefore constitutes the basis for socialist politics. How successful then is Marxism in theorising the real divisions which it recognises as cutting across such working class unity? An answer to that question can be given by considering some examples.

One of the central debates of Marxist politics concerns the question of class alliances. It is argued, particularly by the European Communist Parties, that a necessary condition of effective

socialist politics is the establishment of alliances between the working class and other popular classes and class fractions. Clearly, for any conception of 'class alliance' to be proposed, one has to assume that the working class possesses minimal capacities as an agent; it must be organised, able to make calculations according to conditions, recognise issues etc. This conception of working class as agent is however subject to serious problems, a fact which becomes apparent if one examines current debates.

Balibar, for one, discusses the question of alliances, directing critical attention in particular to the PCF notion of 'unity of the people' against monopoly capital. Contrary to PCF views, he argues that there is no evolutionary necessity leading to such unity. Rather the outcome is dependent on 'practical struggle'. The way in which he conceives this struggle is significant, since he regards it as being between '...the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces in which the revolutionary forces - proletariat, peasantry and those manual or intellectual workers who are in the course of being absorbed into the proletariat must exploit the contradictions of the class enemy<sup>(34)</sup>. Here Balibar adopts the view which fits in with the classical conception. This assumes that the working class has certain capacities at the very least those mentioned above.

However, Balibar is also forced to recognise that this conception is problematic. In a postscript to 'On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' Balibar raises the question of alliances with particular reference to the petty bourgeoisie. Unlike Poulantzas for whom the petty bourgeoisie is a distinct class, Balibar does not recognise it in this way at all. In his view there is no 'third class'. Only the proletariat and bourgeoisie are distinct classes

with interests. The term 'petty bourgeoisie merely refers to the internal division of the two major classes which appears to give rise to a third class.

Balibar proposes a quite different strategy of class alliance from that of the PCF, arguing that the class alliances the proletariat needs are with fractions of the bourgeoisie which have turned against their class. According to this view then, alliances are not spontaneous and do not derive from any simple convergence of interests such as the PCF claims. Indeed they can only come from the positive destruction of the bourgeoisie's system of class alliances which extends to within the proletariat itself, providing the bourgeoisie with its mass base. In sum, it is to imply

that the fundamental condition of this process, and in part also its result, is the class unity of the proletariat itself, which can never be spontaneously created<sup>(35)</sup>.

What is interesting here is the relationship between this position on alliances and the premises with which Balibar began. It appears here that working class unity is a central political problem. It cannot be assumed to exist and has to be created. But in the context of his previous assumptions it is not really a problem at all. Indeed he has already told us that the proletariat like the bourgeoisie, is a united entity by virtue of its unambiguous class interests. Such is the degree of its unity that it constitutes in his own words a 'revolutionary force' just as the bourgeoisie is its antithesis. What Balibar's political strategy amounts to is a circular proposition; the condition of working class unity is the destruction by it of bourgeois class alliances. In a real sense then, the working class is assumed to be a unity (an 'it') already. Moreover, to make this point is not merely to be

pedantic or over scrupulous about terminology, since Balibar does conceive this class, which has to be unified, as a definite and effective political force. Indeed, such is its capacity of organisation and its degree of cohesiveness as an agent, that it can 'exploit the class contradictions of the enemy'. Because it is already a 'revolutionary force' then, it has the capacity to undertake definite strategies.

The strategic conundrum that Balibar produces - the class unity of the proletariat is realised by the actions of the proletariat as a unity - is a manifestation of Marxism's general dilemma over the nature and capacities of the working class as agent. The basic ambiguity that the working class is both united and dis-united appears throughout Marxian literature, deriving from the gap which characterises the relationship between class structure and its analysis and political practice. On the one hand it is recognised that there is no politically unified agent with general class interests called the working class. On the other hand, Marxism continues to pursue a political strategy of class analysis based upon the project of correctly identifying such a mythical unity.

One or two similar examples of such ambiguity from within current debates may be mentioned. For example, Reiner's discussion of the police is set in the general context of class analysis, since he is concerned with the question of why the police consistently fail to adopt political positions sympathetic to the working class. He begins by adopting the by now familiar pose of relative autonomy as a solution to the gap between class determination and political practice. The place of the police in class relations does not determine their political position but ' suggests the extent to which there is a basic identity of interests between the police and

the working class. The question of identifying the class location of the police is not intended as a pigeon - holing exercise, but an exploration of political possibilities<sup>(36)</sup>. This passage replicates the ambiguity already identified elsewhere. On the one hand it appears that class determination should define political practice. Hence, working class unity is given and the 'deviant' practice of the police is a 'problem' with respect to such unity: 'if the police are essentially part of the working class it becomes hard to explain why they have been so much more consistently hostile to realising their unity with it than almost any other section'<sup>(37)</sup>. On the other hand the recognition of such practice merely underlines the fact that class location does not define it. Again we have the same contradiction that emerges in Balibar. The 'problem' can only be posed if the working class is regarded as a unity, but recognition of the problem simultaneously denies the fact of unity.

As in the case of Wright and Poulantzas, Reiner equips himself with a get out clause. Class analysis, it seems, only indicates political possibility. Yet Reiner, like these other authors is entirely unconcerned with specifying concepts which would enable this seemingly crucial analysis of political possibility to take place. In fact his entire mode of approach denies this limited conception of class analysis. Like Poulantzas and Wright, Reiner, in the last resort conceives all political ideologies and practices as manifestations of the dominant class relations under capitalism. In this he almost directly echoes their view of politics: 'The position a group takes up in a concrete conjuncture must always be on one side or the other...'<sup>(38)</sup>.

A final example will illustrate the ambiguities surrounding the conception of working class as agent. Allen argues that the working

class has to be treated as a unity or totality, but that at the same time it is subject to internal variations in both structure and practice. Here again we have the same dichotomy of unity - disunity. Allen however, adds a conceptual flourish. By recognising the internal differentiation of the working class, he hopes to understand the 'contradictions' that exist within wage labour. For example, the practice and consciousness of dockers is a 'contradictory' phenomenon. They are solidaristic and militant yet commonly racist. Other examples of such contradiction are noted. The Shotton steel managers have, in recent times, supported workers in plants threatened with closure, despite a long identification with their employers. Allen concludes that this illustrates: 'All groups... adopt positions in the class struggle which are contradictory over time', (39).

Two things may be noted about this argument. Firstly Allen's introduction of the notion of 'contradiction' functions both to recognise and deny the fact of disjunction between class determination and political practice and the corresponding ambiguity between working class unity and disunity. On the one hand classes do adopt forms of political practice congruent with their class interests - dockers are solidaristic. On the other hand they do not - dockers are racist. He seeks to offer a solution to this problem by regarding it merely as a 'contradiction'. This serves two purposes. It gives some form of recognition to 'deviant' forms of political practice without requiring any theorisation of their conditions of existence. It also enables the concept of working class as agent of politics to be salvaged. Here the idea of contradiction is doubly useful. It can recognise that in the real world of politics the notion of working class as agent or unity is a fiction, whilst simultaneously

emphasising that this fact is really unimportant, such realities being merely 'contradictions'.

Secondly, it can be seen that the concept of 'contradiction' is merely another aspect of the dualistic conception of politics contained in Marxism of which I will say more later. The idea of racism and industrial militancy as somehow 'contradictory' to one another has to imply a view of politics as class based and therefore 'two-sided'. Why else should these two forms of politics be regarded as 'contradictory' at all?

It is apparent that all of the positions outlined here are subject to serious problems. These problems derive from the attempt to conceive classes in general and the working class in particular as basic agents of politics. Such a conception produces strategic absurdities - notably in the entire discussion of working class unity as discussed by Balibar and others. More seriously it may be noted that all of the examples cited deny, in various ways, the specific conditions of existence of forms of political ideology and practice.

Not surprisingly Marxists consistently seek ways of denying the existence of any such difficulties. Hall, for one, has sought to divert attention away from such problems by a 'symptomatic' reading of Marx's work which, like other such readings places a developmental construct on its subject matter. In Hall's view, Marx supercedes the Marxism of the 'Manifesto', where the proletariat is endowed with an objective destiny, and through a series of intellectual progressions, produces a complex theory of class - or as he puts it 'a complex simplification of classes and the logic of class struggle' (40).



Enough has been said elsewhere about the problems of Marxian teleology and ontology in theorising classes and the social totality, to show that Hall's version of 'relative autonomy' is mere verbiage. His claim that the 'later' Marx acknowledges the heterogeneity of classes, though empirically correct, is irrelevant because of its very misrecognition of the problem. Far from resolving the question, Marx's acknowledgement merely accentuates it, for that recognition of heterogeneity is itself coupled with a simultaneous insistence on the unity of classes and class interests. Marx's work is by no means the coherent totality which Hall and others make it out to be, for it is beset by contradiction, ambiguity and inconsistency. Later Marxists merely reproduce the same inconsistencies in different substantive contexts.

More than that, the phenomenon of the unity and disunity of the working class is merely one other aspect of the general problem of the relationship between class analysis and the calculation of political practice. Materialist theory continually asserts that 'class interest' constitutes the unity of classes at some 'fundamental' level, whilst political reality persists in denying that assertion.

One consequence of recognising this fact is that the conventional Marxian way of posing the problem of socialist politics is rendered inoperative. All Marxists approach that question by equating socialist political practice with the attainment of genuine working class interest, and defining the 'problem' as one of developing the conditions which might make that possible. Though the specific characteristics of particular 'Marxisms' may vary when this issue is addressed, the underlying assumption of an unproblematic, ready constituted working class interest (to be realised) is common to all. At that fundamental level, a conception of class unity

is peculiar to all Marxist discourses on politics.

But once the unity of classes in general, and the working class in particular, is called into question, it follows that the concept of 'class interest' itself, rather than the problem of the means of its attainment, has to be called into doubt. The next section will try to justify that suggestion by considering the problems arising from Marxism's attempts to utilise the concept of class interest in the analysis of particular political ideologies.

#### 4. CLASS ANALYSIS AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

It has been seen that the materialist conception of politics conceives political practices and ideologies as a 'representation' of class interests, whatever attempts are made to qualify this view. The example to be considered here - Marxism's attempt to deal with unionism and socialism as class - based forms of politics - illustrates some of the problems which this view produces.

Unionism and socialism are placed together here for a particular reason. They are both regarded by Marxism as working class forms of politics. Because of this it is assumed that there is a necessary connection between them as types of political practice, the analysis of each being based upon the investigation of particular forms of working class interest and consciousness.

This is made apparent in both classical and contemporary accounts of the two political forms. Lenin regards them as necessarily related by virtue of their common mediation by working class consciousness. In this respect trades union 'spontaneism' represents nothing more than an 'embryonic form' of political consciousness proper<sup>(41)</sup>. Each form of politics is here equated with a variety of working class consciousness. The problem for Marxism is to translate one form into the other.

In a similar vein, Wright bases his analysis of political forms on the concept of class interest. Two forms of working class interest may be distinguished, an 'immediate' form which provides a basis for market based struggles such as those over wages and a 'fundamental' form which causes the working class to query the very structure of the mode of production. The first defines unionism, the second socialism. As with Lenin, the task is to make the working class conscious of its fundamental interests, as well as its

immediate ones. The product of such a consciousness is socialist politics.

In view of this distinction between forms of class interest and corresponding forms of political practice, Marxist discussion of unionism tends to concentrate on its inherent limitations vis-a-vis socialism. Unionism has to be conceived in its necessary relationship to socialism, because the fundamental agent of both is the working class. Unionism is however, a lesser form of working class politics. It is 'an incomplete and deformed variant of class consciousness',<sup>(42)</sup> The world of unionist political practice is 'an arena of limited class conflict'<sup>(43)</sup>.

In sum then, unionism and socialism represent the conscious recognition by the working class of distinct forms of working class interest. They are necessarily related because of their incorporation within class categories. Both are forms of working class politics dependent on different degrees of attainment of working class interests. The effectivity of each political form is circumscribed by the quality of such class interest within which it is contained.

It could of course be claimed, in contrast to this view, that Lenin above all else, emphasised the decisive significance of non-working class agents in the development of socialist political ideology. After all, he suggests that: 'The spontaneous working class movement by itself is able to create only trade unionism and working class trade unionist politics are precisely working class bourgeois politics',<sup>(44)</sup> The fact that the working class participates in political struggle then, does not make its politics socialist. Working class 'spontaneism' or consciousness of its 'immediate interests' does not produce socialist politics but something else entirely.

In fact Lenin's analysis of unionist spontaneism involves an examination of the relationship between class struggle and socialism. In this, he denies the view that class struggle itself creates socialist political consciousness, citing Kautsky with approval. In the latter's opinion, the view that socialist consciousness is a direct result of proletarian class struggle is 'absolutely untrue . . . Socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions' (45).

Lenin and Kautsky emphasise on the contrary that socialist political ideology arises from outside the working class and its struggles. The theoretical conditions of existence of socialism derive from the knowledge produced by intellectuals. What is significant however, is the fact that although such conditions come from outside the working class, socialist politics is still seen as being necessarily effected by the working class. The analysis of unionism presented in 'What is to be Done'? therefore involves a strategy of consciousness - raising. Socialist theory, produced by intellectuals, can only be translated into practical politics by the mediation of working class consciousness. Such theory remains within the bounds of the interest and consciousness of the working class. Despite all else, that class remains the only true agent of socialist politics.

The conception of unionism and socialism as class based political forms rests upon a number of propositions. Firstly, that the working class is a political agent with class interests and a capacity for conscious realisation of them. Secondly, that there is a form of practice called 'working class politics', unionism and socialism being variant types of this. Thirdly, it is implicit that working class politics is ubiquitous, because class conflict is itself

ubiquitous. Thus, Lenin argues that the unionist form of class conflict is inevitable,<sup>(46)</sup> this being a corollary of the basic Marxist proposition that 'as long as there are classes...there will be class conflict'<sup>(47)</sup>. In this view then, the mere existence of the working class guarantees at least union struggle. At best of course it produces socialism<sup>(48)</sup>.

All of these propositions are however, problematic once the materialist conception of politics is questioned. It has been seen that that conception rests upon definite ontological and teleological priorities. In the first place, the primacy given to economic production enables it to be assumed that certain essential agents (classes) are ready constituted as repositories of given forms of politics. This premise is given a processual twist by virtue of the teleology contained within historical materialism. Whereas ontology defines the agents of political practice as classes, teleology designates the parameters of their political activity; the problems which some classes pose; the solutions which others provide. It is easy to see how Marxism therefore operates with a view of essential processes (e.g. socialism) being realised by essential agents (the working class). The working class's capacity to realise its true political interests at some future (unspecified) historical juncture is built into the structure of the materialist teleology - a teleology which generates its own necessary effects. The effects of that supposition are continually present in the concept of class interest, a fact which has definite consequences for Marxian political analysis and calculation.

Once the materialist position is rejected however, several things follow. Firstly, the view that politics comprises essential processes and agents dissolves. Secondly, it follows that there can be no essential political problems or solutions outside those defined in accordance with definite political ideologies, programmes and the like.

Thirdly, without the ontological and teleological assumptions of materialism, the conception of class unity, which is so necessary to the Marxist view of politics, has no justification.

This latter consequence has serious repercussions for Marxist approaches to political calculation, for it has been seen in this and previous chapters, that such a conception of unity underpins the entire Marxist project. The reduction of politics to 'class conflict' and the project of 'class analysis' which Marxism accordingly sets itself is only meaningful if a conception of unity can be retained. Indeed Marxism's incarnation of socialism in the working class is only possible because the unity of that class is ultimately considered to have no determinate conditions of existence. For although Marxists may give practical recognition to the effectivity of political organisation and ideology, materialist theory is constructed upon the assumption that class relations have priority over their political and ideological conditions of existence. In consequence, working class 'interest' or 'unity' can never be politically and ideologically called into existence. Instead it has to be given as a necessary effect of capitalist relations.

One can find numerous examples from the Marxist 'classics' to support this view. It is not surprising, for example, that Marxists have never resolved the thorny problem of the relationship between class and party. Marx himself appears uncertain of how to tackle the question in the 'Manifesto'. There, it is argued that the aim of the Communists is the 'formation of the proletariat into a class'. This would seem to be a clear indication of the effectivity of political theory and organisation in the constitution of 'class interests' and 'class unity'. But then it is immediately added that Communist theory '...merely expresses...actual relations springing from an existing class struggle'<sup>(49)</sup>, a definite

suggestion that working class action is subject to no such conditions of existence. Despite the fact that most sympathetic commentators interpret this inconsistency as merely another example of the convolutions of Marxian 'dialectics', it is clearly more than that. For one thing, the same inconsistency is reproduced in Lenin - that much can be inferred from what is said above. More than that, this particular uncertainty is clearly part of the general incoherence of Marxist theoretical discourse referred to in Chapters Five and Six.

Lastly, it is also obvious that once the premise of class unity is rejected, the view that classes comprise agents of political practice is thrown into doubt, since it can no longer be maintained that they possess the necessary minimal cohesion to 'act as classes'. This raises several subsidiary problems for Marxism. Firstly, the reduction of politics to class conflict becomes impossible<sup>(50)</sup> and it becomes necessary to recognise and theorise political and ideological forces, issues and conditions in their own right. Secondly, it has to be granted that such forces are effective in the constitution of political 'interests'. Forms of political practice such as socialism cannot be deduced from the structure of class relations. It is necessary to specify the conditions of existence of socialist politics, the issues around which it may be mobilised, the forms of organisation it requires and so on. In that project, one question which needs to be asked is whether the concept of class is pertinent to socialist political calculation - a question to be considered in the next chapter.

All of this stands in stark contrast to Marxism's mode of theorising forms of political practice. What is most striking about the Marxian form of analysis is its reduction of all political forces, organisations, issues and ideologies to one of two essential types.



In Marxisms view, since there are two basic classes, there are two basic forms of politics, capitalism or socialism. This view is adopted in some form or other by all Marxists and indeed, in the present context, is implicit in Lenins claim that unionism is working class 'bourgeois' politics. That is to say anything which is not proletarian politics proper (socialism) has to be bourgeois. In fact, any deviation, however slight, from socialism, strengthens bourgeois politics: '...to belittle socialist ideology in any way to turn away from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology'<sup>(51)</sup>. In this respect, Lenin's comment on the limitations of British unionism: 'There are politics and politics'<sup>(52)</sup>, has an unintended, but none the less appropriate inference in the context of his overall argument. There really are only two forms of politics in capitalist societies.

This dualistic conception of politics is held by all of the authors already mentioned. Balibar views politics under capitalism as being between classes which are 'revolutionary and counter revolutionary forces'. No form of politics outside capitalism and socialism exists. There is no petty bourgeois class with a distinct political ideology which might come between the two major ones. All such ideologies and practices are reducible to the two major class-based ones. Poulantzas ultimately adopts a similar view. Despite the extensive discussion of the new petty bourgeoisie, its politics depends upon 'the strategic relationship of the two main forces'<sup>(53)</sup>. Here again the major classes comprise antagonistic political agents with forms of political ideology corresponding to their class interests. In the last instance, despite the denial of correspondence between class determination and position, it is assumed that the two major classes adopt political ideologies given to them by class determination. It would seem that only in the case of the

petty bourgeoisie is the relationship of determination and position regarded as problematic and the resolution to this is ultimately to dismiss the 'problem' of the petty bourgeoisie from further consideration. The petty bourgeoisie has a distinct class interest, but in the last instance, this amounts to little. In the long run it has no autonomous political position of its own because there is only a bourgeois or a proletarian road. There is then, no 'third way', (54).

In effect it can be seen that Marxism is only able to theorise specific forms of political ideology and practice - by situating them vis-a-vis capitalism or socialism and treating each by reference to the allegedly necessary relationship it has to one or other 'side' in the political arena. This view denies the specificity of particular forms of politics and precludes any analysis of their conditions of existence. Unionism, for example, is largely regarded as a failure to realise socialism, rather than as a specific form of political practice. Far from having determinate conditions of existence and effects, unionism is analysed in its necessary relationship to socialism through the concepts of class consciousness and interest. In this respect little is said about the nature of unionism at all.

It is hardly surprising then, that Marxism has astonishingly little to say about socialism as a political ideology. It is more often than not theorised as a conjunction of structurally defined working class interest with working class political practice, through the mediation of class consciousness. Indeed this theoretical assumption provides the rationale for class analysis itself. If the working class is indeed the incarnation of socialism, then a correct definition of that class will itself constitute socialist political calculation. Here class analysis stands directly in the

way of political calculation, for what is most significant about all of the positions discussed in this chapter is their failure to examine current political conditions in the social formations to which they direct attention.

## 5. THE 'PROBLEM OF REDUCTIONISM'

Conventionally it has been assumed that the 'problem of reductionism' discussed in this and the previous chapter is a straightforward one to identify. But much of what has been said here suggests that this assumption is far from correct. Take a simple example from Lenin. It has been shown above that he, in conjunction with other Marxist theorists, defines politics under capitalism in essentially dualistic terms. But the same writer - again in conjunction with other theorists - is by no means consistent on this score, for one can find cases where he in fact criticises that same conception: 'So an army lines up and says 'We are for Socialism' and another somewhere else and says 'We are for Imperialism' and that will be a social revolution. Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it' (55).

Such statements should be regarded as more than mere individual inconsistencies. What they in fact suggest is a more basic problem, regarding the relationship between Marxist theory and practice. For what should be apparent from the discussion of Marxist politics contained in Section Two is the fact that Marxism frequently does not regard political and ideological practice as reducible in any rigorous sense to class relations. Frequently, some form of 'practical (i.e. non-theoretical) recognition is given to the effectivity of specifically political apparatuses and organisations, ideologies, legal and cultural processes and so on. In this sense at least, Marxism does not commonly exhibit what might be termed 'reductionist practice' (56).

Two comments need to be made with respect to this suggestion. Firstly, it is evident that once the effectivity of social, political

and ideological conditions is granted, it has to follow that political practices cannot be a product of levels of recognition of 'class interest' through 'class consciousness'. They have rather to be considered a product of political ideologies operating under the effects of determinate social conditions.

Secondly it is evident that Marxism, whatever the character of its 'recognitions', does not adopt such a view. Instead it attempts to re-incorporate the recognition of 'irreducibility' it makes into the materialist conception of politics. This may be done in a sense which is hardly theoretical at all<sup>(57)</sup>, or it is justified through the notions of 'determination in the last instance by the economy', or 'relative autonomy'. But given the basic incoherence, not to say downright dishonesty, of these concepts, it becomes apparent that there is a basic ambiguity in the relationship between the materialist conception of politics and Marxist political practice, using that term in its broadest sense to include for example, the practical discourses considered in this chapter. For the critical point is that to whatever extent such practice has definite theoretical conditions of existence, these cannot be a product of the theoretical propositions contained within the materialist conception. Such practical recognitions which Marxism gives to the 'specificity' of politics and ideology, are a product of a range of implicit presuppositions which, simply cannot be fitted into the materialist conception.

Though Marxists do undeniably give some form of recognition to an irreducible sphere of politics and indeed make political calculations according to such recognitions, they continue to claim that such calculations and strategies are a function of the materialist

conception. It is interesting that both Poulantzas and Wright provide some form of methodological introduction to their work which is meant to be a theoretical source for the substantive conclusions which follow. An examination of these conclusions however shows that this is not the case. Though it is indeed true that the substantive arguments, practices and analyses of Marxism are a function of some theoretical propositions, it does not follow that they derive from the stated sources. It is clear in fact that many of the propositions discussed in this chapter whether coherent or not, cannot be derived from the materialist conception of politics, whatever their authors claim.

The fact that the relationship between Marxist practices and discourses and the classical concepts is problematic, makes the 'problem of reductionism' a complex one. For one thing it is evident that reductionist theory cannot be said to 'produce' a necessary reductionist practice. This calls into question the nature of the 'problem' to be resolved. Contrary to what generations of Marxist theorists have assumed, the problem for Marxism is not 'reductionism' at all but the theoretical incoherence, ambiguity and inconsistency of the materialist conception of politics.

In this respect, the most crucial problem of all for Marxism is the abstention from rigorous theoretical analysis which the adoption of that conception sanctions. The view that socialist political calculation is 'more or less' reducible to class analysis provides the clearest example of this. Even where this 'more or less' indicates a real area of irreducibility, Marxist writers are unconcerned with elucidating it. They remain aloof from any attempt to specify the agents, relations, ideologies and issues which define the politics of any conjuncture in a theoretically rigorous fashion.

This systematic evasion of theoretical work is continually justified by the reduction of such work to a perpetual revamping of a series of empty and circular metaphors - relative autonomy, complex totality and the like.

Marxism must abandon this rigmarole and explicitly specify those propositions to which it gives only grudging recognition, if it is to begin to provide the theoretical conditions of existence of a socialist politics. To those who argue that Marxism can never abandon materialist and class-based forms of analysis without being Marxist<sup>(58)</sup>, it can only be retorted that all of the major protagonists of Marxist politics have carried out such abandonments in practice, if not in theory.

This chapter has ended by suggesting that the 'problems of reductionism' is by no means the obvious one that Marxists have assumed<sup>it</sup>/to be. The following chapter will continue to explore the theme of reductionism, suggesting that there are in fact much more basic reasons for rejecting it as a basic 'problem' for socialist political analysis.

**CONCLUSION**



CHAPTER EIGHTSOCIALISM AND THE 'CLASS-POLITICS RELATION'

Three areas of debate have provided the subject matter for the six preceding chapters. Chapters Two and Five examined attempts to theorise property relations under conditions of modern capitalism. Chapters Three and Six concentrated on several modes of analysis of political institutions, regimes and state apparatuses. Chapters Four and Seven evaluated a variety of attempts to investigate the characteristics of political action in capitalist societies. These three areas have, in turn, been incorporated within a wider theme - that concerning attempts by Marxists and some sociologists to provide a general account of the specificity of politics vis-a-vis economic class structure. It is towards a final discussion of that issue that this chapter is directed.

In attempting to address that question the first thing which needs to be noted is that the 'problem of specificity' can itself only be posed as a problem if certain theoretical assumptions are adopted. In all of the positions so far discussed, two broad, though by no means mutually exclusive, sets of assumptions have been distinguishable. The first of these arises in both structural-functional and Marxian theories of society. The principle behind it may be illustrated by a comment from Durkheim. In describing that form of society characterised by 'organic solidarity', he suggests that in it 'each organ, in effect, has its special physiognomy, its autonomy. And moreover, the unity of the organism is as great as the individuation of the parts is more marked' (1). The similarity between the functionalist conception of social structure and the Marxist one should be obvious, for in each case the following theoretical conditions are assumed:

(a) society is a 'totality' or 'unity' of 'levels', 'instances', 'forms', 'functions' or 'sub-systems'.

(b) each constituent element of the totality is a 'specific' and (relatively) autonomous part, whose very autonomy both underpins and emphasises the unity of the whole.

(c) the structure of any 'society-totality' is governed by general ontological and teleological principles of organisation so that each element has a 'place' given specifically to it. In consequence, a general account can be given of the relationship between any two or more elements of the totality (e.g. economic classes and politics), the 'specificity' of any element being explained by virtue of those general theoretical principles of organisation (e.g. functional specificity, determination in the last instance by the economy).

If society as totality represents one possible mode of theorising the 'specificity of politics', a second method concentrates on the attempt to define it as a 'specific form of action'. According to this view politics may be regarded as a form of human capacity which is either (more or less) unconditional, or (more or less) conditional. In so far as the latter is true and such action is deemed to have 'conditions of existence', these are to be theorised in terms of a dichotomisation of 'objective' structure with 'subjective' human action. In sociology the most obvious examples of this approach are associated with Weberian and neo-Weberian sociology, such positions depending upon a definite ontology (the primacy of subjective action) and teleology (social relations as a product of subjective orientations to action).

It should be apparent from what has been said in Section Two however, that the polarisation of structure and action is by no means peculiar to sociology. Marxism's attempt to analyse the relationship of economic classes and politics is one which operates simultaneously

at two levels. On the one hand, an attempt is made to theorise the relationship between two unitary elements of the social totality (class-politics). On the other hand, that analysis is mediated through the concept of class 'consciousness', whereby the ontologically defined 'objective' interests that comprise class unity are set against the teleological means of their (ever-potential) realisation in 'conscious' political action.

All of the six preceding chapters have shown that the basic theoretical assumptions underpinning sociological and Marxist analysis of class relations, political institutions, and practices, render such analyses problematic. The most general conclusion which can be drawn from these chapters is that the combination of ontology-teleology-subjectivism, produces forms of analysis which are unable to account for, and recognise, the possible effects of determinate social conditions. Chapters Two and Five showed that both sociology and Marxism are unable to recognise the legal or political conditions which are effective in constituting capitalism as a 'corporate' rather than 'inter-personal' form. Chapters Three and Six concentrated upon the analysis of political institutions, apparatuses and regimes. The first of these chapters suggested that the teleological presuppositions of pluralist analysis were incompatible with the attempt to provide an 'empirical' account of specific political processes. In so far as any account was offered, it was invariably of an arbitrary nature. The second concentrated largely on the effects of the materialist ontology on attempts to theorise the 'irreducibility of the state'. The result of all of the versions of state theory discussed here was a theoretical and strategic impasse, by virtue of their attempts to reconcile two incompatible positions - the state as both 'expression' and 'means' of class power.

The theme of class power and action also provided a common link between Chapters Four and Seven, those chapters also being connected by their adoption of the opposition between 'structure' and 'action', as a means of analysing the conditions of political practice. Two things may be said about this mode of analysis. In the first place, it should be apparent that whether emphasis is placed upon giving priority to 'structural' or 'active' components in the structure/action pair, the inevitable outcome is a discrepancy between the two that cannot be resolved by calling upon 'dialectics', in either its Marxian or sociological guise. Secondly, that discrepancy cannot be resolved precisely because the structure/action dichotomy is founded upon those very theoretical assumptions which have already been shown to be problematic. In short, according to that dichotomy an agent with essentially subjective capacities (individual, elite, class) is counterposed with a set of 'objectively' defined 'interests to be realised' in an entirely speculative and unconditional relationship. But in the absence of ontology and teleology the structure/action dichotomy cannot be maintained as a coherent basis for political analysis and calculation. In view of this it is suggested in Chapter Four that that dichotomy has to be supplanted by a view of social and political action as a property of social relations and conditions, rather than subjects and structures.

Given the arguments of these six chapters, three general conclusions may be drawn. In the first place, the claims of ontology, whether materialist, idealist, functionalist or any combination of the three are rejected. No single set of social relations or processes can be regarded as having primacy with regard to political analysis. Nor, for that matter, can it be argued that there are any 'essential' or fundamental political problems deriving unconditionally from such an ontology, whether they be problems of 'goal attainment', the

eradication of 'structured inequalities', or the 'realisation of socialism'. Secondly, in the absence of such ontologies and the teleologies which support them, all essentialist/subjectivist views of social relations have to be rejected. Neither individuals, nor classes of individuals can be regarded as the essential agents through which necessary processes, or forms of action are realised. Thirdly, once ontology and teleology are rejected, sociological and Marxist attempts to theorise social relations in the form of a 'totality' or 'unity' of (relatively) autonomous levels can no longer be maintained.

The latter theme in particular provides a basis for the discussion which follows. Rather than pursue it at a general level however, the remainder of the chapter will consider what implications that suggestion has for Marxist political calculation. In effect the present discussion is returning to some of the issues raised in the last chapter. The one which is of particular concern here however, is Marxism's attempt to address the problem of socialist political calculation through a 'non-reductionist' reading of the 'class-politics relation'. In considering the adequacy of that conception of politics, the present chapter will again pay particular attention to the role of the concept 'class' in socialist political analysis.

Chapter Seven showed that Marxism's attempt to theorise politics as a process of 'class conflict', and what that in turn implies (the project of political calculation via 'class analysis') is subject to serious problems. In particular Marxism, because of the equation of politics and class conflict is called upon to designate classes as agents of political practice, forces with some minimal degree of class unity, in the face of political conditions which deny that fact. Hence the eternal conundrum of 'unity-disunity'. Class analysis is geared to identifying forms of agency which are united at some essential level,

beyond mere appearance and independent of any determinate conditions of unity, but whose unity is not manifested at the level of political practices and relations.

But once it is recognised in theoretical terms that classes do not constitute unified agents, the equation of politics and class conflict becomes problematic. That is not to say that political relations can only occur between 'unities', but that they only take place between forms of agency with at least a minimal degree of cohesion.

Conventional Marxist discourse is unable to theorise 'class conflict' in any coherent or meaningful sense. Miliband's strategy is fairly typical of mainstream Marxist approaches to the question. On the one hand, it is suggested that the concept is central to political analysis; indeed an emphasis on class antagonism and conflict is what distinguishes Marxist political theory from all others. Yet at the same time, it is necessary to make certain crucial qualifications. For one thing in Miliband's view 'class conflict' is not really class conflict at all. One is rather encapsulating reality in a 'metaphor', for it is clear that classes as such do not engage directly in political conflict. Rather, 'for the most part...conflict is fought out between groups of people who are part of a given class, and possibly, though not certainly representative of it'<sup>(2)</sup>. This claim leads to a decidedly bizarre conclusion with respect to the analysis of 'non-class' conflicts such as ethnic, racial or religious conflicts. Such conflicts are in Miliband's view 'directly or indirectly derived from or related to class conflicts'<sup>(3)</sup>.

Now this is clearly an attempt by Miliband to put some substantive flesh on the bare bones of 'relative autonomy', but it illustrates the severe hazards of attempting any such undertaking. There are in fact four possible interpretations of Miliband's claim regarding the relationship of non-class and class conflicts.

- (i) The former is directly derived from the latter.
- (ii) It is indirectly derived from the latter.
- (iii) It is directly related to it.
- (iv) It is indirectly related to it.

Such a range of conclusions is however designed to give comfort to the theoretical propensities of anyone from Talcott Parsons to Josef Stalin and it certainly fails to render the Marxist position any more coherent.

Despite these equivocations and the recognition of the fact that classes do not comprise unproblematic agents of political practice, Miliband insists on conceiving the political forces which do undertake conflict as 'elements' of classes. Such a cavalier approach to the very real theoretical difficulties which he has himself unearthed does little to add to the virtue of his position.

But not all authors are so unwilling to recognise and account for the problems inherent in 'political class analysis'. Hall explicitly addresses some of those questions which Miliband tosses aside. To this end for example, he recognises the 'non-homogeneity' (non-unity) of capital, the fact that it has no unproblematic interest of its own and is therefore unlikely to appear on the political stage as a unified integral force:

'The site of classes does not designate 'whole' classes as integral empirical groups...the non-homogeneity of capital...ensures that it has no singular, unproblematic 'interest', even at the level of the economic<sup>(4)</sup>.

Nevertheless, Hall's project is very definitely set within the historical materialist context, being an attempt to construct a materialist theory of 'the specificity of the political'. In this respect he is quite adamant that such a theory has to suggest some form of correspondence between classes and politics for without this, one is led 'to forfeit the first principle of

historical materialism: the principle of social formations as a 'complex unity', as an 'ensemble of relations' (5). Hall's intention then, despite his 'empirical' recognition of the problematic character of class-agency, is to provide 'non-reducible' concepts to 'fill out' the political 'level' of the social formation and to show the 'complexity' of the representation process of classes at the level of politics. He is therefore firmly in line with other theorists of 'relative autonomy' and all that genuinely distances him from Miliband's more obvious shortcomings is a sophisticated power of expression. Significantly however, despite such rhetorical nicety, Hall is simultaneously capable of lapsing into the crudest expressions of the very reductionism which he is at pains to deny (6). But after all, that is precisely the strength of argument by 'reciprocity', 'dialectics', and 'relative autonomy'. One can have it both ways precisely because complexity is built into the very structure of the capitalist totality in such a way that one need never be pinned down to specifics. There is always a get out clause and some of these are truly artful:

'Once the class forces appear as political class forces, they have consequent political results: they generate 'solutions' - results, outcomes, consequences - which cannot be translated back into their original terms' (7).

It is the unlimited opportunity afforded for such theoretical 'doublespeak' by the dictum that 'the last instance never comes' which has guaranteed the continued sterility and circularity of contemporary debate. This is nowhere more clearly betrayed than in Hall's case, for having begged the question of class unity and agency he unflinchingly ignores the theoretical implications of such a recognition by recalling the master concepts of 'totality' and 'complexity'.

By far the most interesting recent attempt to confront the problems of class-agency from within the materialist position is that of Przeworski (8). The significant advance which he makes on



previous positions is to pose the question of the conditions of class formation. By doing this, he seeks to reformulate the question of class vis-a-vis political action; to get away from attempts to found political and ideological practice on 'objective' economic class structure (as in the 'in itself'/'for itself' distinction) and to suggest instead that class formation be regarded as a problem for consideration.

In particular, it is argued that class formation cannot simply be regarded as given, but is always an 'effect of struggles'. Specifically then, it is suggested that economic, political and ideological conditions structure struggles, which have as their effect, the 'organisation', 'disorganisation' and 'reorganisation' of classes. Przeworski's position rests upon four propositions.

i. Classes as actors are not given uniquely by objective positions (e.g. worker and capitalist), the relationship between classes as actors and relations of production being problematic.

ii. Classes are not so given, because they constitute effects of struggles which are not uniquely determined by relations of production.

iii. Class struggles are structured by the totality of economic political and ideological relations and they have an autonomous effect on the process of class formation.

iv. If struggles do have an autonomous effect on formation, places in the relations of production can no longer be regarded as 'objectively' defining what classes will emerge in struggle.

What Przeworski is leading to in all of this is a quite specific and distinct conception of class analysis, one which no longer derives political and ideological practices from 'objective' class locations,

but instead regards the classification of these positions as 'imminent to the practices that (may) result in class formation'. In other words 'the very theory of classes must be viewed as internal to particular political projects',<sup>(9)</sup>. What this indicates is that positions within the relations of production are not to be considered as 'objective' and 'prior to' class struggle. Instead 'they are objective only to the extent to which they make the particular projects historically realisable or not',<sup>(10)</sup>

Przeworski's advantages over others should be obvious. For one thing he explodes the myth that class interests are an unproblematic objective basis for collective action. He rightly points to the fact that capitalist relations of production provide a number of alternative bases for political action. There is in other words, just as much an 'objective' basis for proletarian hostility to the 'welfare' or 'lumpen' class, as there is for hostility towards capital - and indeed there may be more. At best, he suggests that the fact that wage labourers share the common experience of separation from the means of production, provides them with some communality of interests. But this is by no means sufficient to constitute class interest pure and simple, for within such communality, the basis of such political interests can be broadened or narrowed by a variety of 'strategies of class formation',<sup>(11)</sup>, the important point being that such strategies will be effective in the constitution of class interest and formation. For this reason Przeworski is adamant that class is not a datum prior to struggle. Rather, ideological and political struggles are struggles about class before they are struggles among classes. More to the point he seeks to establish class analysis firmly within political and ideological problems and practices to which its pertinence has to be established by theoretical endeavour rather than derived from ontological primacy.

Any suggestion of a simple link between class analysis and political calculation is totally rejected.

But we have also indicated that Przeworski remains faithful to the materialist conception of politics and it is necessary now to consider what form this adherence takes and what effect it has on his attempt to reformulate the relationship between classes and politics. Broadly speaking, Przeworski's materialism is expressed in two related aspects. Firstly, he suggests that, given his stated position on the fundamentally problematic status of the class concept, an obvious question arises: why should class related questions concerning the membership of collectivities in struggle, the consequence of particular struggles, the interests of those participating, be posed with respect to 'a broadly defined system of production'? Why not race, religion, nationality or any other potential strategic sphere? That is to say, if ideological and political relations are effective and no less 'objective' than relations of production, why not define class in these terms?

His response to this question is, by his own admission, 'rudimentary' and 'incomplete'. What it amounts to is a simple claim that such an emphasis may be justified by the priority which the author affords to historical development as lawfully directed by the development of the productive forces and capital accumulation. The justification therefore rests upon an adoption of materialist ontology and teleology. The theoretical effects of this type of assumption are prominent in a second aspect of the analysis, the adoption of the conception of the social formation as 'totality'.

The consequences of that adoption are by no means as obvious as in some of the authors discussed previously. The clear merit of Przeworski's argument has been seen to reside in his suggestion that

Marxism's conception of class-agency is problematic. Instead of proposing the existence of classes as unconditional forces, it is argued that the question has to be rethought in a number of specific respects. Firstly, class formation has to be posed as a strategy internal to particular political projects. Such formation is not merely 'given' by the presence of any 'objective' social relations. Secondly, given that such formation is dependent upon specific forms of political theory and practice, its existence is clearly subject to the effects of antagonism within these spheres. Class formation is therefore a political practice involving the possible 'organisation', 'disorganisation' and 'reorganisation' of classes. Thirdly, and in accordance with this, class formation is subject to the effects of specific economic, political and ideological conditions, such conditions having effectivity in that same 'organisation', 'disorganisation' and 'reorganisation' of classes.

Now these three propositions appear to be a far cry from the conventional Marxist approach to political class analysis discussed in Chapter Seven. Contrary to such conventions, Przeworski is seeking to designate class formation as subject to the effects of definite theoretical and social conditions - conditions which are genuinely effective, rather than merely 'overdetermined'. But the promise contained within this project remains sadly unrealised.

The reason for this failure can be traced to the author's adoption of the ontology ('priority' of historical production) and teleology ('lawfulness' of development) of classical materialism and his utilisation of these in conceptualising theoretical and social conditions. Such conditions are in fact conceived as instances of the capitalist 'totality of economic, political and ideological relations'<sup>(12)</sup>. This has clear effects at the level of substantive analysis. Take for

example, the attempt to specify the forms of organisation of social relations in capitalist democracies which constitute the 'objective conditions' under which social movements 'develop their practices of class formation' (13). What we are told here is that the totality of economic, political and ideological relations under capitalism, structures socialist politics in particular directions. For example, the bourgeoisie has the capacity to reproduce social relations, in their 'phenomenal' forms so that individuals are socially reproduced as students, Roman Catholics, ... anything other than as occupants of class positions.

But this hardly fits in with the view that class formation is subject to social conditions, for here we have a class-agent or force (the bourgeoisie) that derives its capacities, not from determinate social conditions, but from the structure of social relations in the capitalist totality. In fact Przeworski looks, not at the effects of determinate social conditions but at the purportedly necessary consequences of an unconditional unity of capitalist relations. This has to lead to the peculiar implication that class formation is only problematic for the proletariat. The bourgeoisie, on the contrary, is already and always constituted as an effective political force because of its derivation from the structure of social relations within the capitalist totality. This in turn undermines the proposition that the politics of class formation is dependent on definite theoretical strategies. Theoretical calculation appears only to be necessary to socialist politics. Capitalist politics is without theoretical or social conditions of existence.

It should be clear that Przeworski's attempt to remedy the problems of Marxist class analysis is unsuccessful. Despite his very real recognition of many of the basic difficulties of the classical

position, his continued adoption of the materialist conception of politics renders such recognition ineffectual. All that he achieves is the partial transference of the 'objective' political destiny of classes to the level of the instances of the social formation - totality. But this merely reproduces the same problems which became evident in Chapter Seven. Political practice is still regarded as unconditional; politics is conceived as a polarisation of two mutually exclusive, self contained forces.

The most serious attempt to confront the types of problems which have been mentioned so far is undoubtedly to be found in the two volume work 'Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today' by Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain. That text is of particular significance to the present discussion for two reasons. Firstly it presents a lengthy and convincing critique of Marxism's attempt to conceive economic classes as essential social and political agents. Secondly, it attempts to reformulate (the term is emphasised for reasons which will become evident) the analysis of the 'class-politics relation', in the light of that critique and other critical propositions related to it. In view of the fact that those aspects of the text most relevant to this discussion are systematically related to some of these other critical propositions, it is necessary to give a brief summary of the authors' major pronouncements.

Cutler et al present a detailed critique of the theoretical structure of classical Marxism. (It will be clear that Section Two of the present work has utilised many aspects of that critique.) Two of the most significant and far reaching dimensions of that criticism are contained within the authors' attempts to reject certain of the basic tenets of classical Marxist discourse. The first element to be rejected is the concept of 'mode of production' and certain of the

propositions associated with it - notably the teleological principle of causality that goes with the concept of 'total social capital' and its 'laws of motion'. This critique of teleology is connected to a second rejection - that of the Marxist ontology. In this respect, the conception of 'determination in the last instance by the economy' is refuted, a refutation which is founded upon the rejection of all general conceptions of causality:

'What we are challenging is not merely the economic monist causality of Marxism, but the very pertinence of all such general categories of causality and the privilege they accord to certain orders of causes as against others',<sup>(14)</sup>.

These views enable the authors to cast doubts upon the classical Marxist conception of the social totality. In particular they reject that conception on the grounds that it is founded upon a rationalistic epistemology in which 'a relation between the concept of an economy and the concepts of its conditions of existence is transposed onto a relation of determination between the economy and the political and ideological levels',<sup>(15)</sup>. The solution which they seek to provide to the problem generated by the classical conception is implicit in the above statement. A social formation is no longer to be conceived as a structured totality, but rather as:

'a definite set of relations of production together with the economic, political and cultural forms in which their conditions of existence are secured. But there is no necessity for those conditions of existence to be secured and no necessary structure of the social formation in which those relations and forms must be combined',<sup>(16)</sup>.  
Connections between economic and cultural relations and practices therefore have to be conceived, not by 'determination' and 'causality', but in terms of conditions of existence and the form in which they may be satisfied.

This view of the social formation depends upon the authors' rejection of the 'rationalist conception of discourse' and the epistemological strategies of 'privileging' associated with it<sup>(17)</sup>. In contrast to these views the authors propose to adopt instead the principle of advocating 'discursive primacy' to objects under consideration. In other words, the analysis of social formations cannot be justified by reference to any purportedly essential structure of social relations, but only by virtue of 'the posing of definite problems for theorisation'. Hence, in their view 'the political objectives of socialist transformation of economic class relations pose the problem of relations of production and their political and cultural conditions of existence as primary objects of theorisation for Marxism'<sup>(18)</sup>.

The problems of socialist politics are therefore seen to be constructed, rather than derived from some essential structure of social relations and practices. Cutler et al. firmly reject classical Marxism's attempt to found the analysis of political and ideological relations and practices upon the class relations they are alleged to 'personify' and 'represent'. In contrast to this it is emphasised that 'there are no "socialist" issues and areas of struggle per se, assigned as "socialist" by class interests and experience. Socialism is a political ideology'<sup>(19)</sup>.

Now much of what has been said above provides a foundation for the criticisms directed by Section Two of this work at the materialist conception of politics. More than that, the arguments presented by Cutler et al. also offer a clear basis for rethinking many of the 'problems' of socialist politics. For the specific purposes of the present argument however, it is necessary to subject a particular aspect of their work to critical attention, though such criticism



is in no way directed at the general theoretical conclusions of the text.

Two questions in particular need to be examined; the analysis and critique of class-agency and the posing of and resolution to the problem of 'reductionism'. What will eventually be suggested here is that the authors remain confined within the problematic of 'reductionism' in spite of their provision of the conceptual means of superceding that question. That confinement is, in large part, due to their ambiguous critique of the class concept.

It can be seen above that Cutler et al provide a theoretical means for the rejection of the conception of society as 'social totality', a conception characteristic of all variations of classical Marxism. Such a rejection also casts doubt upon the constitutive elements and processes of such a totality. In the first place, the processual relation between the constituents of that totality (determination in the last instance by the economy) is denied. In the second place, the nature of those elements which are said to constitute the totality (classes, politics and ideology) becomes a matter for consideration. In this respect a considerable part of the first volume of 'Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today' is addressed towards the question of class - in particular towards a theorisation of the agents which comprise classes and to a specification of the limitations of class analysis itself.

With regard to the question of class the authors adopt two critical propositions. The first, and most fundamental, encapsulates the political project of the work. Class relations are to be granted discursive priority in socialist politics: 'The analysis of economic class relations provides the starting point of socialist political calculation'<sup>(20)</sup>. Yet it is simultaneously emphasised that this

prioritising of class relations as a problem for analysis, is only discursive and in no way implies ontological or teleological status to the concept. The second major characteristic of their analysis therefore involves a systematic elaboration of the exact parameters and limitations of the class concept. First and foremost, any commitment to class essentialism in the analysis of political or ideological practice is rejected. Politics and ideology are not to be regarded as processes of class conflict. Indeed it is noted that 'When we examine political and ideological struggles we find state apparatuses, political parties and organisations, demonstrations and riotous mobs, bodies of armed men, newspapers and magazines etc.', but we do not find classes lined up against each other' (21).

But even more significant than this rejection is the fact that the authors refuse to grant ontological status to class even in the analysis of economic practice and calculation. Their denial of economic determination in the last instance and the structural determination of action associated with it, is also applied to the sphere of the economy itself. In this respect, it is perhaps legitimate to argue that the most crucial theme of the entire work, is the attempt to reconceptualise social agency in a manner which avoids the theoretical pitfalls of the structuralism and subjectivism that dominates both sociological and Marxist analysis (22).

To this end, it is argued that social agents/relations are to be conceptualised in terms of their determinate conditions of existence. One of the most fundamental arguments of the text then, is that agents/relations are specific and irreducible. There are no universal or essential agents/relations. Those positions which regard classes as socio-political agents are unacceptable. Equally the classical Marxist view that economic agents personify class relations in their actions is considered untenable. Indeed it is

continually emphasised that it is specific economic agents of possession or separation which take decisions and act. Such action has its own determinate effectivity and cannot be considered an effect of outside 'structural' determinants imposed on the calculating agent: 'If calculation by capitalists does have an effectivity then the capitalist cannot be reduced to the personification of capital',<sup>(23)</sup>. According to this view economic calculation will have determinate social conditions of existence in law, politics, culture etc., but such conditions do not constitute the totality ('structured in dominance') whereby Marxism conceives action and calculation as a personification of the agents class location. That view equally applies to the political, legal, cultural or ideological practices of social agents.

In consequence of this denial of class essentialism, Cutler et al use a particular formula to define classes, for we are told that 'classes are categories of economic agents',<sup>(24)</sup>. Now despite the fact that a coherent and consistent definition of class is obviously crucial for a text which gives priority to the 'problems of class relations', this formula turns out to be something of an enigma. Initially it is said that classical Marxism itself conceives classes in this way<sup>(25)</sup> but this is clearly impossible. Marx uses the term 'category' to convey precisely the opposite meaning from that put forward here. For Marx individuals 'are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests',<sup>(26)</sup>. In this case, class does constitute a 'category', but that category comprises a 'structure' which determines the nature of all social relations ('economic determination in the last instance!') and accounts for all of the specific actions of particular agents. Thus, capitalists are a personification of that 'category' called the capitalist class.

The utilisation of the category formula by Cutler et al turns out to involve a direct rebuttal of such a conception of social agency. Where Marx regards categories of classes as fundamental socio-political agents, they use the term in a quite different sense. Far from implying class-agency, the term 'category' serves as a direct denial of it. It is because classes comprise specific categories of agents that the very specificity and irreducibility of their action and decision can be guaranteed. For Cutler et al it is specific economic agents of possession and separation which act and take decisions. The classes into which such agents are 'categorised' serve as mere repositories wherein they are contained. It is not the class which has effectivity in formulating action and decision, but the specific agent and its social conditions of existence.

But once this is admitted the pertinence of the concept of 'class relations' as a basic 'problem' for analysis and 'starting point for socialist political calculation' become dubious. Classes we are told, are categories of agents, but in a very real sense the term 'category' is intended to convey nothing at all. The category formula serves to deny the effectivity of class at the level of social action whilst reaffirming it as the central problem of socialist politics. The impossibility of this combination of views leads Cutler et al to be continually ambiguous in their theorisation of the object 'class relations'. For example, despite its strictures about Marxism's denial of the specificity of agents in its conceptualisation of classes<sup>(27)</sup> the text still continues to make reference to the 'structure of economic class relations'<sup>(28)</sup>. Precisely what this means in the context of an argument which entirely rejects 'structural determination', is unclear. A further example sites the problem more exactly. It is said that 'economic class relations

presuppose the existence of political struggles whose outcome has differential effects on the precise relations of the classes or particular categories of agents within them...'<sup>(29)</sup>. This comment signifies the ambivalence of the 'category' formula. Are class relations to be conceived as relations between 'classes' or are they simply relations between determinate economic agents? If the former, then the 'category' formula is redundant; if the latter, and if no effectivity is to be attached to the term 'class' in the determination of action, then that term is redundant.

The employment of the 'category' formula is therefore intended to deny class-agency, but the very retention of the 'problem of class relations' has to imply some sort of effectivity to the concept vis-a-vis the agents that occupy places in the 'class structure' or be meaningless. One cannot simultaneously give 'class relations' discursive priority in socialist political calculation and deny these relations effectivity in economic, political and ideological practice. 'Class relations' as a concept is meaningless unless it is able to designate classes as agents. Indeed, this conclusion has to follow from the way that Cutler et al themselves (quite rightly) theorise the concept of agent as a locus of social action in a social relation, emphasising the interdependence of the two: 'The interdependence of the concepts of agent and social relation ensures that no conceptualisation of one is possible without at least some implicit conceptualisation of the other'<sup>(30)</sup>.

The discursive prioritising of class relations in socialist politics reaffirms the interdependence of this concept with that of class-agency despite the authors' attempts to deny that interdependence in the 'category' formula. The fact is then, that if one wants to retain the critique of structural determination and class essentialism and adopt an analysis of social agency in terms of conditions of

existence, one cannot also retain the concept of class relations. If the specificity of economic, political and ideological calculation and practice is to be preserved, the concept of class relations becomes untenable as a 'starting point' for socialist politics. Despite the provision of a rigorous set of concepts for the denial of class-agency and the reconceptualisation of social agents/relations, Cutler et al in retaining the concept of class relations, are forced then to make 'at least some implicit conceptualisation of the other'.

The theoretical consequences of this retention of a conception of class-agency are seen most clearly in the authors' attempt to address the problem of 'reductionism'. Cutler et al consider one of the central problems of Marxism to be that of reductionism and in some respects the dominant problem of the text concerns the question of the correct theorisation of the 'class-politics relation'. In the authors' view, the problem of reductionism in classical Marxism involves 'reconciling a conception of classes as categories of economic agents, and as political forces with a non reductionist conception of politics'<sup>(31)</sup>. Two points need to be made here. In the first place, let us merely observe that since Marxism does not conceive classes as 'categories' in the sense intended here, such a view of reductionism cannot strictly be attributed to Marxism. The second issue is however, much more important. What needs to be considered here is the consequence of the adoption of the 'category' formula of class for the question of 'reductionism'. Let us begin by assuming for arguments sake that classes are 'categories of economic agents' (i.e. that the formula actually has a coherent meaning). For that matter, let us even assume that Marxism conceives classes in this sense. What then are the effects of these assumptions for the posing of and resolution to the problem of reductionism? With

regard to this issue, the authors suggest a general proposition is basic to the understanding of the problem: 'If classes are conceived as categories of economic agent then they cannot also be conceived as political or cultural agents',<sup>(32)</sup>.

But in the light of what has been said already this proposition is decidedly peculiar, for what the category formula has sought to establish is precisely the fact that classes are not agents at all. To paraphrase the above proposition - 'If classes are conceived as categories of economic agent, then they cannot be conceived as agents and in consequence, the 'problem of reductionism' cannot arise'. The posing of the problem of reductionism in the context of the 'category' formula is therefore a non sequitur. If classes are 'categories of agents' there is no 'problem of reductionism'.

It therefore follows from what has been said that the authors' continued involvement with the question of reductionism arises because of their retention of the problem of class relations. Their decision to attach discursive priority to that problem has the effect of conjuring up a necessary conception of class-agency. The 'problem of reductionism' can then be resolved by distancing political and ideological agents from class-agents.

Indeed there is more to it than this, for it is evident that the adoption of an implicit conception of class-agency signals a partial recall of the problematic of society as 'totality'. That this is the case can be shown by indicating the proposed solution to the problem of reductionism. This solution amounts to the attempt to establish 'the field of politics itself',<sup>(33)</sup> by rigorously demarcating politics from class relations. In effect, the specificity of political agents/relations is achieved by an insistence upon their demarcation as phenomena. Anything less than such a demarcation between politics and economic class relations leads in the authors' view to reductionism. The solution to that problem is therefore to replace

the classical Marxist emphasis on the 'correspondence' or 'relative correspondence' of the two spheres, with 'non correspondence' - 'relative autonomy' with 'autonomy':

'There is no necessary general correspondence between economic classes and the forces articulated in political struggle. This general non correspondence does not exclude the possibility of specific relations',<sup>(34)</sup>.

Apart from the semantic confusion presented here - the equation of 'no necessary correspondence' with 'necessary non correspondence' - which may be ignored for present purposes, it is clear that this solution amounts to a simple reversal of the Marxist position; politics is not determined, it is autonomous. But to pose the problem of politics in this manner is simply to re-enter the domain of circularity and speculation which the conceptual structure of 'Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today' has done so much to break down, This solution merely readopts problems and propositions which have already been, at least potentially superseded elsewhere in the text. In particular, claims concerning the autonomy of the 'field of politics' have no place in a discourse which proposes to 'argue that the connections between economic, political and cultural relations and practices must be conceptualised not in terms of determination and causality but rather in terms of conditions of existence and the forms in which they may be realised',<sup>(35)</sup>. Yet what we are confronted with is a false dichotomy: 'Either economism or the non correspondence of political forces and economic classes,...'<sup>(36)</sup>.

Such a conception of the problems of political calculation is however, only feasible in a discourse which continues to pursue the objective of correctly identifying 'general-causal' mechanisms ('no necessary general correspondence'). That policy is itself contingent upon a theory of politics which poses political questions



within a framework of 'society as totality'. For it is only because of that assumption that the 'class-politics relation' (the relationship between two fields/levels of the social totality) can be posed as a problem and 'anti-reductionism' be presented as a general solution to it.

In the last resort, Cutler et al are forced back into a position which simply turns classical Marxism on its head. But the novelty of this new 'general' solution apart, their continued containment within the problematic of the 'class-politics relation', in no way resolves the problems of speculativeness and incoherence which their own analysis shows such 'general' theories to exhibit. Despite the real value of their theoretical endeavours, what this particular part of their analysis produces is an incoherent solution (the establishment of the 'field' of politics) to a false problem (the correct analysis of the class-politics relation).

In sum, it has been seen that the most rigorous attempt so far, to deal with 'reductionism' and the 'class-politics relation' proves unsuccessful. Whereas the authors' theoretical rejection of the conception of social formation as 'totality' should lead to a supersession of those problems, their decision to retain the class concept as central to their political project causes them to re-enter the domain of epistemology, ontology, causality and relative determination. For once the concept of class relations is adopted, two consequences follow. In the first place, some effectivity has to be granted to classes vis-a-vis the actions and decisions of occupants of places in the class structure: in short one re-enters the debate on the relative structural determination of action. In the second place and following on from this, such effectivity has to imply some minimal quality of class unity. Once this view is adopted, class becomes one element in the overall unity that comprises the social totality. It

is then but a short step to being obliged to distance the level of class relations from that of politics and ideology. Whether in resolving this question one chooses to propose a relation of priority between such levels, or not, the fact remains that such a position reproduces all of the problems which Section Two has shown to be associated with the view of society as 'totality'

Despite the fact that a considerable amount of the theoretical work presented by Cutler et al provides a rigorous basis for formulating a coherent socialist political theory, it has been suggested here, that, contrary to the authors' view, the concept of 'economic class relations' does not constitute an adequate starting point for socialist political calculation. The class concept fails to provide a means for analysing social and political agents/relations a fact which has been established in Chapters Six and Seven. Oddly enough, even the most conventional Marxist texts give tacit recognition of this fact. After all, what more is Miliband's attempt to conceive class conflict as a 'metaphor' than to recognise (even if that recognition is subverted by 'economic primacy') that political conflicts have specific organisational, cultural, legal and other conditions of existence? In this respect, the term 'metaphor' serves much the same purpose for Miliband, as the 'category' formula does for Cutler et al. In each case, a term functions to justify the retention of a concept (class), the validity of which has been implicitly (Miliband) or explicitly (Cutler et al.) called into question.

Once the theoretical propositions of the materialist conception of politics are disputed serious repercussions follow for the concept of class. In the absence of materialist ontology and teleology, both the view that classes are the essential agents of

social relations and the view that social practice is structurally determined (to some more or less definable degree) in accordance with capitalist laws of motion, becomes untenable. But without these theoretical bases for a conception of class-agency, the concept of class relations becomes impossible to sustain, for that concept is meaningless unless it is able to designate classes as effective social agents. One is left then, with no alternative but to deny all conceptions of class essentialism, however limited or circumscribed, and to pursue an analysis of specific social and political agents/relations, in accordance with the posing of definite political problems.

Cutler et al provide some of the theoretical means for pursuing such a form of analysis, without recognising the impossibility of the concept of class relations which they seek to retain. What they do provide however, is sufficient conceptual clarification for the analysis of social agency in general and economic agency in particular<sup>(37)</sup>, to suggest that, apart from anything else, the concept of class relations is thoroughly inadequate as a basis for socialist theoretical analysis. Indeed, this much has already been suggested in the three previous chapters. For example, Chapter Five has indicated that 'possession' is subject to a variety of specific influences and variations; it may be the object of resistance from 'separated' agents over the question of the exact parameters of possession, and the conflicts of interest between 'possessing' agents, rules out the possibility of homogeneity within possession. The same sort of examples can be applied to the concept of 'separation' itself. Examples apart, the important point is that once the variability of 'possession/separation' is recognised, the class concept becomes inadequate as a basis for accounting for differences in the possible

forms of agents of possession/separation that may be identified in any economy. After all, the concept of class is predominantly concerned with denying such variability, by homogenising economic and social agents into relatively unified, politically effective forces.

It has also been shown in Chapters Six and Seven that the class concept cannot provide a basis for the analysis of political institutions, organisations and practices. But it may be said, can one not, in accordance with the criterion of 'discursive primacy' revive the concept of class in a more limited sense? For example, both Przeworski and Cutler et al problematise Marxist assumptions about class unity and class formation, yet retain the concept in specific ways. Przeworski sees socialist political practice as effective only in so far as it is able to mobilise popular classes around socialist political issues. Despite their considerable difference from Przeworski's materialistic analysis, Cutler et al also appear to leave open the possibility of some minimal form of class practice - one where class composition and definition are dependent on some determinate form of socialist political ideology. What they suggest in this case, is that 'the composition of classes, the nature of agents involved, and the interests they articulate are not given'<sup>(38)</sup> but may be formed.

But again, this limited utilisation of the class concept, does not avoid the problem that, once defined by political theory, such classes and interests must have effectivity. Such a proposition cannot square with the attempt to pose social relations as specific, irreducible and subject to the effects of determinate conditions of existence. Towards this end, it has been suggested, above all else here, that the main precondition of a coherent socialist theory is not the resolution of the 'problem of reductionism' as generations

of Marxists have assumed, but the rejection of the terms on which that 'problem' rests. What that involves is a refusal to pose socialism as a theory geared to 'the correct analysis of the class-politics relation'. Such a relation has to be dispensed with as a meaningful problem for analysis. This in turn necessitates a thoroughgoing rejection of the essential concepts that comprise the two sides of that dichotomy.

This chapter has dealt in some detail with the concept of class and in particular with one attempt to problematise it in a rigorous fashion, whilst retaining it as an object of analysis. It has been shown that this view is impossible to sustain. The concept of class cannot provide 'the starting point of socialist political calculation'. It should be obvious however that one could equally approach the question from the other side, by calling into question the concept of politics as a 'field', 'sphere' 'instance' or 'level', having a homogeneous, bounded form and a definable general relationship to class relations and practices. It is obvious from what has been said in Chapter Six, that that set of assumptions is precisely what characterises the Marxian view of the state. For Marxism the state is not defined by reference to any legal, social or other conditions of existence. Indeed, it is defined by a variable number of elements, homogeneously structured and politically unified, whose function is to reproduce, in teleological form, a given set of social relations. In its classical Marxian guise the concept 'state', like the concept 'class', serves to deny the specificity of social relations, the analysis of which is a necessary starting point for socialist political calculation.

The criticism of the classical Marxist view of the constitution of political interests and ideologies presented in Chapters Five,

Six and Seven, has to imply a completely new approach to socialist political calculation, one which recognises the effectivity of the conditions of production of such interests and which regards political outcomes as subject to the effects of these and other social conditions. Political interests and practices have, in short, to be regarded as determinate (subject to the relative effects of specific social conditions) rather than determined ('relatively' or otherwise). Political interests are not inherent in 'classes', nor in those 'state' apparatuses which are said to necessarily reproduce the structure of class relations. They are constituted in the practices of a variety of bodies and organisations, institutions and groups and it is no more necessary to conceive these bodies as 'apparatuses' of some essentially unified 'state', than it is helpful to reduce specific agents of possession or separation to elements of 'classes'.

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**REFERENCES: NOTES AND WORKS CITED IN THE TEXT**

CHAPTER ONE: REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Marx, 'Preface' to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', p.503.
2. Meszaros, 1972, p.115.
3. For a discussion of the problems of teleology in sociology, see Hindess, 'Humanism and Teleology in Sociological Theory'. For an account of Marxian ontology and its effects see Cutler et al., 1977/1978.
4. Durkheim, 1964, (a), p.39.
5. *ibid.*, p.41.
6. Weber, 1976, p.13.
7. Giddens, 1973, p.21.
8. Marx, 'Preface' to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', pp. 503-4.
9. Marx, 1938, p.xvii.
10. *ibid.*, p.xix.
11. The term 'effectivity' refers to the capacity of social conditions ( agents, relations, apparatuses etc. ) to give rise to determinate effects. This term is preferred to possible alternatives, such as 'effectiveness', since it avoids misleading implications such as 'efficiency', or 'success'.



CHAPTER TWO: NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Durkheim, 1964 (b), p.81.
2. *ibid.*, p.lvi
3. Durkheim, 1964, (a) p.64.
4. *ibid.*, p.38.
5. Turner, 1975, Chapter 2.
6. Durkheim, 1964 (a), p.49.
7. *ibid.*, p.63.
8. *ibid.*, p.182.
9. Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.6.
10. Weber, 1964, p.88.
11. *ibid.*, p.158.
12. Weber, 1976, p.17. Weber would of course define any economy in similar terms. For example, consider his definitions of a socialist economy:  

'The real empirical sociological investigation begins with the question; what motives determine and lead the individual participants in this socialistic community to behave in such a way that the community came into being in the first place and that it continues to exist?'

Weber, 1964, p.107.
13. Although the most extreme version of the 'convergence hypothesis' is undoubtedly Sorokin's. He argues for the mutual convergence of the USA and USSR towards an 'integral type' society where economy, philosophy, politics, literature, and the arts converge, and where there is an end to 'cold war politics'.  

See Sorokin, 1960, p.143 ff.
14. Kerr, et al., 1962, p.288.
15. *ibid.*, p.289.
16. Galbraith, 1967, p.33.
17. *ibid.*, p.389.
18. *ibid.*, p.323.

19. *ibid.*, pp. 393 and 395-6.
20. Kerr et al., 1962, p.30.
21. *ibid.*, pp. 283-4.
22. *ibid.*, Chapter 2.
23. *ibid.*, p.276.
24. Kerr et al., 1973, p.297.
25. Aron, 1967, p.130, tells us that industrial society has no 'inherent finality', that the 'ideological dialogue' between the USA and USSR will 'differ in the future from what it has been since 1917 and from what it is now', and that such an ideological dialogue will not come to an end in the 'near future'.
26. Feldman and Moore, 1962.
27. 'Political domination', because 'ownership is anchored essentially in the polity', Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.286. See also Parsons, 'Communism and the West', p.394 ff.
28. Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.287.
29. Weber, 1964, pp. 184-5, emphasis added.
30. *ibid.*, pp. 185 and 211.
31. *ibid.*, p.215.
32. *ibid.*, p.215.
33. Marcuse, 1968, p.223.
34. *ibid.*, p.208.
35. *ibid.*, p.223, emphasis added. Marcuse's position is typical of a number of left-wing approaches to the question of rationality. Compare for example Baran and Sweezy's attempt to theorise 'monopoly capitalism' by the polarisation of 'rationality-irrationality':  
  
'The contradiction between the increasing rationality of society's methods of production and the organisations which embody them on the one hand and the undiminished elementality

and irrationality in the functioning and perception of the whole creates that ideological wasteland which is the hallmark of monopoly capitalism'.

Baran and Sweezy, 1968, p.328.

36. Weber's attempt to utilise the concept of 'formal' action produces other problems. Lukacs, for one, notes that Weber's application of the 'formal' concept of bureaucracy causes him to conflate such varied political systems as Egyptian bureaucracy and socialism; Lukacs, 1972, p.392: The problem of 'conflation' is dealt with more fully in the following two chapters.
37. See, for example, the concepts of 'managerial utility function' in Marris, 1961, and 'expense preference' in Williamson, 1974.
38. See Homans, 1961, and Homans, 1964, pp. 809-18.
39. Parsons 'Levels of Organisation and the Mediation of Interaction' p.27.
40. Nichols, 1969.
41. Weber, 1964, p.101.
42. *ibid.*, p.119.
43. *ibid.*, p.119.
44. Parsons, 'Introduction', p.32.
45. *ibid.*, p.35.
46. Parsons. 1949, pp. 739-40.
47. Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.177.
48. Parsons and Shils (eds), 1962, p.190.
49. Parsons and Smelser, 1957. pp. 175-84. In asking this question Parsons is not however, relapsing into his 'Weberian' past. Certainly in the earliest works, despite the principle of 'emergence', Parsons conceived the economy largely in Weberian terms, as an institutional form governed by value patterns (see for example Parsons, 'The Motivation of

Economic Activities', 1940). As Savage suggests, this is no longer the case in Parsons' later work. The value of economic rationality no longer constitutes the 'essence' of an economy, but merely a means of its functioning; Savage. 'Talcott Parsons and the Structural Functional Theory of the Economy': Indeed, economic rationality is simply 'a mode of organisation of the system relative to its values', Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.177.

50. Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.182.

51. Ironically, the only place in which he actually confronts the question is in 'The Structure of Social Action'. Here it is said that systems of action are 'composed' of unit acts. But this

'does not mean that the relation of the unit act to the total system is closely analogous to that of a grain of sand to the heap of which it is a part. For it has been shown that action systems have properties that are emergent only on a certain level of complexity in the relations of unit acts to each other'.

Parsons, 1949, pp. 739-40.

Devereux, in his paper 'Parsons' Sociological Theory', p.14, has rightly recognised that the concept of emergence is 'necessary' to Parsons' argument, but fails to comment on the fact that Parsons never in fact theorises it. Indeed 'emergence' is not strictly a concept but an observation made without reference to any conceptual scheme, a fact which raises further problems, given Parsons' claim that 'there is no empirical knowledge which is not in some sense and to some degree conceptually formed...all empirical observation is in terms of a conceptual scheme',

Parsons, 1949, p.28.

52. See especially Hindess and Savage, 'Talcott Parsons and the Three Systems of Action'. On the effects of that tension for Parsons' theory of the economy, and especially regarding his tendency to 'assign to the mechanisms of the systems capacities he refuses to assign to the systems themselves'. See Savage, 'Talcott Parsons and the Structural Functional Theory of the Economy'.
- Many sociologists have tended to interpret the general problem in moralistic rather than theoretical terms, seeing the 'problem' as a tension between Parsons' systemic analysis and 'free will' or 'freedom of action', an interpretation which fails to raise any questions about the coherence of Parsonian analysis. See, for example, Dahrendorf, 1968; Wrong, 1961; Skidmore, 1975.
53. Weber, 'Socialism', p.260.
54. Parsons, 'Some Principal Characteristics of Industrial Societies' p.27.
55. Dahrendorf, 1959, p.40.
56. Burnham, 1945, pp. 18, 23, 111.
57. *ibid.*, p.103. See also pp. 92 and 96.
58. Nichols, 1969, p.43.
59. Berle and Means, 1935, p.3.
60. *ibid.*, Chapter 5. For criticism of these data see Nichols, 1969, pp. 19-20 and Scott, 1979. Berle, 1960, modifies this classification, reducing it to four categories; absolute, working, management and institutional (especially pension fund) control.
61. Berle and Means, 1935, p.356.
62. Berle, 1960, pp. 90-91, 110.
63. Burnham, 1945, p.89.
64. *ibid.*, p.65.

65. Berle, 1960, pp. 60-1 emphasis added.
66. Berle and Means, 1935, pp. 6-7.
67. Burnham, 1945, pp. 53, 82.
68. Dahrendorf, 1959, p.21 ff. This argument is, to say the least, peculiar, given the direction of Dahrendorf's analysis since one of the aspects of Marx's analysis of which he is most critical is the 'base-superstructure' analogy - an argument which undermines the significance of legal relations. Apart from that, Dahrendorf's argument is as far from the truth as it could be. Marx does not define private property in legal terms but in individualistic ones. That is why he is unable to grant even minimal recognition to the law. (See Chapter 5 below.)
69. Dahrendorf, 1959, pp. 136-7.
70. Berle, 1960, p.164.
71. Berle and Means, 1935, p.352.
72. Nichols, 1969, p.22. Child, 1969, p.36.
73. Hadden, 1972, p.110. Two things should be noted with respect to this point. Firstly, courts do not always push the concept of legal personality to its logical conclusion, occasionally 'lifting the veil' of incorporation to expose situations where individuals are using its protection to carry out frauds. That does not however, alter the fact that in cases other than these, the concept of corporate personality is, as Hadden indicates, effective vis-a-vis managers, directors, and shareholders. Secondly, Hadden, a lawyer like Berle, somehow manages to misrecognise the extent of this effectivity. Indeed, in view of his recognition of the effectivity of legal relations his own book is very strangely constructed. For example, Chapter Two, an analysis of 'The Realities of Modern Capitalism' seems to ignore the effectivity of legal regulation and indeed

precedes discussion of the concepts of company law.

Hadden's subsequent text is therefore strangely contradictory.

For example, despite his claims about the effectivity of law,

he also adopts a version of managerialism (p.81 ff).

74. *ibid.*, p.111.
75. Nicholls and Carr, 1976, p.185.
76. *Bank voor Handel en Sheepvaart v Slatford* (1953), I.Q.B. 248,  
cited in Hadden, 1972, p.112.
77. Scott, 1979, pp. 32-4.
78. See, for example, Berle and Means, 1935, pp. 69, 122, and  
Crosland, 1956, p.37. Dahrendorf's attempt to examine  
authority structures within the enterprise through the concept  
of 'role' is, to a large extent, aimed at avoiding such  
psychologism, though it still faces the problems of being  
individualistic. (See Chapter Four below.)
79. Burnham, 1945, p.134.
80. Hunt, 1936.

CHAPTER THREE: REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Rose, 1967, p.33.
2. Truman, 1971, p.11.
3. Dahl, 1967, p.24.
4. *ibid.*, p.190.
5. Dahl, 1956, p.145.
6. Mills, 'The Structure of Power in American Society', p.125.
7. Mills, 1959, p.11.
8. *ibid.*, p.11.
9. *ibid.*, p.292. Despite Mills' rejection of the 'ruling class' concept (p.277), his analysis clearly bears some similarity to certain Marxian versions of political analysis - notably that of Miliband, where an attempt is made to marry the concepts of elite and ruling class (Miliband, 1969, pp. 47-8).
10. Mills, 'The Structure of Power in American Society', p.117.
11. D. Fairlie, and I. Budge, 'Elite Background and Issue Preferences', cited in Martin, 1977, p.147.
12. Polsby, 1963, p.110.
13. Dahl, 'A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model', pp. 126-7.
14. *ibid.*, p.130.
15. Polsby, 1963, pp. 112-4.
16. *ibid.*, p.119.
17. Dahl, 1961, p.66
18. *ibid.*, p.183.
19. *ibid.*, pp. 227-8.
20. Parsons, 1969, pp. 185-203.
21. *ibid.*, p.199.
22. See *ibid.*, pp. 317-404 for the influence of economic analysis on Parsons' theory of politics.



23. Polsby, 1963, p.100, Note 1.
24. Clearly it is not suggested that Parsons is the only theorist to address this question. Other, more 'mainstream' pluralists could be cited with equal justification. What is suggested however, is that many of them are directly influenced by Parsons, or operate with assumptions similar to his. An example of the former would be Almond, who will be discussed later. An example of the latter would be Easton who, despite his reservations about functionalism, produces a systems model of politics which is in some respects similar to Parsons'.  
(See D. Easton, 1965, pp. 105-6 and p.25 respectively.)
25. See, for example, Cohen, 1968, Chapter 3.
26. Cited in Mitchell, 1967, p.55.
27. Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.247 ff.
28. Parsons, 'Some Considerations on the Theory of Social Change', p.99.
29. *ibid.*, p. 103, emphasis added.
30. Parsons, 1966, p.22.
31. Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.16.
32. Parsons, 1949, p. 730.
33. Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.57.
34. *ibid.*, p.79.
35. *ibid.*, p.79.
36. *ibid.*, p.83.
37. Mitchell, 1967, p.81.
38. Weber, 1976, p.13.
39. Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p. 292.
40. Parsons, 1969, p. 328.
41. For a fuller discussion see B. Hindess and S. Savage. 'Talcott Parsons and the Three Systems of Action'.
42. Parsons, 1964, pp. 339-357.

43. The extent to which Parsons' evolutionism can in fact be traced to Darwin is open to doubt. There is good reason to suppose that Parsons' debt is not to Darwin but to Spencer and Durkheim. For a discussion of this and other issues see Hirst, 1976.
44. Parsons, 1964, p.340
45. Parsons, 1966, p.2.
46. Parsons, 1971, p.26 ff.
47. *ibid.*, pp.27-8.
48. Parsons, 1966, p.28, Table 1.
49. Parsons, 1964, p.347 ff.
50. The writings on fascism may be found in Parsons, 1969, pp.65-124.
51. Cf. Lipset's treatment of fascism in terms of 'adverse historical events' which caused German social structure to deviate from its predicted path, Lipset, 1960, p.46.
52. Parsons, 1969, p.76.
53. *ibid.*, p.67.
54. *ibid.*, p.76 ff, p.84 ff, p.110
55. *ibid.*, p.110.
56. *ibid.*, p.78
57. *ibid.*, p.78.
58. *ibid.*, p.83.
59. Parsons, 1971, p.130
60. *ibid.*, p.130.
61. *ibid.*, pp. 124-5.
62. Parsons, 1951, pp. 532-3.
63. Parsons, 1971, p.124.
64. Parsons, 1964, p.353.
65. *ibid.*, p.355.
66. Parsons, 1971, p.125.
67. Parsons, 1964, p.356.

68. Parsons, 'Communism and the West', pp. 390-8.  
69. Curiously by 1971 Parsons' optimism is slightly more muted.

He is confident that:

'A Stalinist type of dictatorship is apparently no longer possible,

but otherwise only adds that

'...the processes of democratic revolution have not yet revealed an equilibrium in the Soviet Union and...further developments may well run broadly in the direction of Western types of democratic government...'.  
Parsons, 1971, pp. 126-7.

70. Parsons, 'Communism and the West', p.398.  
71. For an empirical criticism of the application of the pluralist argument to the Soviet Union, see White, 1978.  
72. Parsons, 'Communism and the West', p.394.  
73. See Parsons and Smelser, 1957, p.284 ff for a consideration of the historical development of capitalism and its relationship to socialism.  
74. Scarrow, 1969, pp.39-40; Curtis, 1968, p.66.  
75. Almond and Coleman, 1960, p.3; Almond, 1956, p.391.  
76. Almond, 1956, p.393.  
77. Almond and Coleman, 1960, p.5.  
78. *ibid.*, p.12.  
79. Almond, 1956, p.396; Almond and Coleman, 1960, p.63.  
Almond's analysis of the 'functions of political systems' is in fact, entirely based upon the utilisation of the pattern variables and the differentiation/rationalisation pair. See especially the attempt to distinguish specific empirical systems (pp. 431-5).  
80. Almond and Coleman, 1960, p.64.  
81. See Almond, 1956, pp. 393 and 409 respectively.

82. Almond and Powell, 1966, pp. 22-23.
83. *ibid.*, pp. 30-4.
84. *ibid.*, p.256.
85. *ibid.*, p.323.
86. Apter, 1965, pp. 23-4.
87. *ibid.*, pp 25 and 35.
88. *ibid.*, p.463.
89. *ibid.*, pp. 305, 394, 396.
90. Almond, 1956, p.403.

CHAPTER FOUR: NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Weber, 1964, p.152.
2. Dahl, 1957, pp. 202-3.
3. *ibid.*, p.203.
4. Hunter, 1953, pp. 2-3.
5. Wrong, 1979, p.133.
6. Lukes, 1977, p.6.
7. Wrong, 1979, p.65.
8. Dahl, 1961, p.226.
9. *ibid.*, p.225 ff.
10. Hunter, 1953, p.82.
11. Martin, 1977, pp. 47 and 145.
12. Bachrach and Baratz, 1970, p.8.
13. *ibid.*, p.8
14. *ibid.*, p.43.
15. *ibid.*, p.51, emphasis added.
16. Lukes, 1974, p.37.
17. Bachrach and Baratz, 1970, p.78.
18. *ibid.*, p.80.
19. *ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
20. *ibid.*, p.88.
21. *ibid.*, p.88.
22. *ibid.*, p.19.
23. *ibid.*, pp. 19 and 24.
24. Parsons 'The Distribution of Power in American Society', p.200.
25. *ibid.*, p.200.
26. Parsons 'On the Concept of Political Power', p.353.
27. Lukes, 1977, pp. 6-7.
28. *ibid.*, p.18.
29. *ibid.*, p.29.

30. In suggesting that all three writers adopt 'neo-Weberian' perspectives, it is not inferred that they in any way comprise a neo-Weberian 'school', nor that they do not in fact also adopt non-Weberian assumptions. Of the three, Parkin is the most consistently Weberian. Dahrendorf, though basing much of his analysis on Weberian conceptions of 'authority', is also clearly influenced by structural-functionalism. Giddens is without doubt the most problematic of the three and entirely denies that his analysis is, in fact, Weberian (Giddens, 1977, pp. 377-8).
31. Lukes, 1977, p. 25.
32. Dahrendorf, 1959, p.116.
33. *ibid.*, p.126.
34. *ibid.*, p.ix.
35. *ibid.*, p.137.
36. *ibid.*, p.166.
37. *ibid.*, p.145.
38. This statement, defining the project of the book is found in *ibid.*, p.41.
39. *ibid.*, p.126.
40. *ibid.*, p.172.
41. *ibid.*, p.173.
42. *ibid.*, pp. 178-9.
43. *ibid.*, p.180.
44. *ibid.*, p.178.
45. *ibid.*, p.135, emphasis added.
46. *ibid.*, pp. 136-7.
47. *ibid.*, p.181
48. *ibid.*, p.213.
49. *ibid.*, p.213.
50. *ibid.*, pp. 142-3, p.168 etc. See also Dahrendorf, 1964, p.235.

51. *ibid.*, p.214.
52. *ibid.*, p.231.
53. Parkin, 1979, p.4.
54. *ibid.*, p.113.
55. *ibid.*, p.9.
56. *ibid.*, p.42.
57. *ibid.*, p.45.
58. *ibid.*, p.46.
59. Parkin, 1974, p.12.
60. Parkin, 1979, p.93.
61. *ibid.*, p.55.
62. *ibid.*, p.58.
63. *ibid.*, p.93.
64. *ibid.*, p.42.
65. *ibid.*, p.59.
66. Parkin, 1974, p.14.
67. Parkin, 1979, p.55.
68. *ibid.*, pp. 138-9.
69. Giddens, 1979, p.2.
70. *ibid.*, p.69.
71. *ibid.*, p.91.
72. *ibid.*, p.5.
73. Giddens, 1977, p.118. See also Giddens, 1979, p.66. for further definition of the terms 'structure', 'system', and 'structuration'.
74. See Giddens, 1977, p.14; Giddens, 1979, p.2. *passim*.
75. Giddens, 1979, p.92.
76. Giddens, 1973, p.20.
77. Compare for example the general comments on 'structuration' and the 'non-existence' of classes (*ibid.*, *passim*) with the view expressed in the same text that one central problem for analysis concerns the way 'economic classes' become 'social classes' (p.105).

78. *ibid.*, p.106.

79. Compare the statement of 'what class is not' with the view that 'if classes become social realities this must be manifest in the formation of common patterns of behaviour and attitude' or that which says 'the existence of class structuration always presupposes at least class awareness, if not class consciousness, and hence implies the existence of differentiated class 'cultures' within a society' (*ibid.*, pp. 111 and 134).



CHAPTER FIVE: REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Marx, 1938, pp. 146-7.
2. Braverman, 1974, pp. 404-405.
3. Miliband, 1969, p.34; Baran and Sweezy, 1968, p.49 ff.
4. Blackburn, 'The New Capitalism', p.168.
5. Miliband, 1969, p.36.
6. See for example, Blackburn, 'The Unequal Society'.
7. See Miliband, 1969, pp. 35-6; Blackburn, 'The New Capitalism', p.167  
Westergaard and Resler, 1975, p,158 ff. For details on  
managerial shareholding see Scott, 1979, p.112 ff.
8. Baran and Sweezy, 1968, p.46.
9. Zeitlin, 1974, p. 1107 ff.
10. *ibid.*, p.1110.
11. Baran and Sweezy, 1968, p.46.
12. Zeitlin, 1974, p.1078.
13. For example:  
  
    'Vulgar common sense turns class differences into  
    differences in the size of one's purse...the size of one's  
    purse is a purely quantitative difference, by which any  
    two individuals of the same class may be brought into  
    conflict'. Marx, cited in Bottomore and Rubel, 1963, p.208.
14. Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', p.244.
15. Poulantzas, 1975, p.229.
16. Westergaard and Resler, 1975, p.162.
17. Braverman, 1974.
18. Marx, 1974, (b), pp.436 and 386.
19. Westergaard and Resler, 1975, p.164.
20. Marx, 1938, p.179.
21. Marx, 1974 (b), pp. 383-4.
22. Lenin, 'A Great Beginning', p.421.
23. Carchedi, 1977, p.5.
24. *ibid.*, p.87.

25. *ibid.*, pp. 13, 30, etc.
26. For example, ownership is introduced into his discussion of the 'individual capitalist' in a purely opportunistic fashion to establish that figure as 'capitalist' rather than merely 'old middle class' and to avoid the embarrassment of arguing for a CMP without a capitalist class. *ibid.*, p.87 ff.
27. *ibid.*, p.46ff.
28. *ibid.*, Note 56, p.112.
29. The point is further discussed in Cutler et al., 1977, p.257.
30. Marx, 1938, p.xix.
31. Cited in Althusser, 1969, p.219.
32. *ibid.*, pp. 109-10.
33. Althusser and Balibar, 1975, p.180.
34. Althusser, 1971, p.169.
35. *ibid.*, p.169.
36. Marx, 1938, p.255.
37. Marx, 1974 (a), p.355.
38. Marx, 1938, Chapter 12.
39. Marx, 1973, p.414.
40. *ibid.*, p.650.
41. *ibid.*, p.652.
42. Marx, 1974 (b), p.209.
43. Cutler et al., (1977), p.123.
44. Marx, 1938. p.305, emphasis added.
45. Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', p.113.
46. Marx, 1938, p.789.
47. Marx, 1974, (b), p.436.
48. *ibid.*, p.436.
49. *ibid.*, p.438.
50. Marx, 1938, p.789.
51. Lenin, 1970, (a), p.153.

52. Marx, 1974, (b), p.436. Note also that for Marx the 'socialisation' of 'cooperative factory' production leads to a unification of the working class, 1938, p.789.
53. Marx, 1974, (b), p.439.
54. This, in itself, casts doubt on the 'Marxism' of many Marxian criticisms of managerialism.
55. Marx, 1974, (b), p.388.
56. Given the inordinate length of the 'transition stage', many contemporary Marxists try to show that Marx's claim regarding the 'abolition of capitalism as private property' did not really refer to abolition at all. Instead, it is said that 'abolition' ('aufhebung') refers to a Hegelian notion of simultaneous abolition and recreation. (See Zeitlin, 1974, pp. 1113-4; also Howard and King, 1975, p.22, Note 11, who discuss it in another context). Whatever the degree of linguistic accuracy the argument achieves, it remains clear however, that Marx's analysis of the modern business enterprise is dominated by viewing it as a transitional derivative of the materialist teleology, rather than a determinate form of economic organisation. No amount of linguistic or philosophical pedantry can obscure this problem.
57. Marx, 1938, p.56.
58. The 'naively apolitical' implications of Marx's analysis are pointed out by Hirst, 1979, p.137 ff, in his discussion of the political conditions surrounding the emergence of incorporation. See also Hunt, 1936.
59. That is not the only reason for the analysis of managerial class positions however. Marxism also tries to examine the real divisions of political interest which exist within wage labour, in class terms. It is because Marxists deem it necessary to conceive such political divisions in this

way that it is expedient to assign some managers to 'capital' and some to the 'new middle class'. The legitimacy of this view of politics will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

60. See Cutler et al., 1977, p.148 ff, and Hirst, 1979, p.101.
61. Communist Party of Great Britain, 1978, p.20. See also Milliband, 1969, pp.35-6; Baran and Sweezy, 1968, p.46; Blackburn, 'The New Capitalism', p.167.
62. See in particular Bettelheim, 1976, p.68 ff; Poulantzas 1975, pp. 18-19; Althusser and Balibar, 1975, p.212 ff. 'Real economic ownership' corresponds roughly to what has so far been termed 'possession' in this chapter, though with certain qualifications, at least two of which are of crucial importance. Firstly, 'real economic ownership' is always subject to political challenge and depends upon the achievement of relevant political conditions for its maintenance. Secondly, it always has legal conditions of existence. Some of these matters will be raised in the remainder of this chapter.
63. See, for example, De Vroey, 1975, p.3 ff.
64. Marxists invariably equate the two. See, for example Braverman, 1974, pp. 258-9; Carchedi, 1977, pp. 161-2 etc., and especially Wright, 1978, p.76, Table 2.9, where 'legal ownership of capital' is equated with 'stock holding'. Cf. Cutler et al., 1977, p.155: 'Shareholders do not own capital, rather they lend money at interest to a capital'. Shareholding in other words, is a title to wealth under certain conditions not a condition of possession.
65. Poulantzas, 1975, p.120, makes this point very clearly, even though in other respects he is in error:

'...it is not necessary for a banking group to hold the majority of the share capital of (a) firm (legal ownership) nor even to hold any. It is often sufficient for the banking

group simply to be selective in its financing and to differentiate in credit conditions, given the specific circumstances of the flow of profit, for it to impose its real control on the assignment of the means of production and the allocation of resources by this enterprise'.

What Poulantzas ignores however, is that possession always has some legal conditions of existence and these are not merely 'legal fictions'.

66. Colletti, 1972, p.98.

67. The view expressed here, and in Chapter Two, contrasts sharply with writers such as Scott, who denies that the corporation constitutes an agent of possession:

'legal forms cannot have effective possession because they cannot act'; Scott, 1979, p.33.

68. Indeed, the problem is not peculiar to capitalist relations of production. The problems of Marxism's conflation of economic agent and individual together with its denial of the effectivity of the law reappear in Bettelheim's analysis of the Soviet Union. Bettelheim recognises that in the Soviet Union the enterprise is the agent of possession and that such agency is legally ratified. However, he addresses himself to the following question:

'beyond the appearance of legal subjects, 'who' (that is to say what category of agents) is effectively in possession of the means of production'? Bettelheim, 1976, pp. 82-3, emphasis added.

The parallel with Colletti, is striking. It appears that there is a necessary essence (human subjects) behind the appearance (legal forms). This view of an essential agency, coupled with a fetishised/superstructural conception of legal forms is confirmed when Bettelheim considers the possibility of the reappearance of capitalism in the Soviet Union. It is

argued that the system of enterprises constitutes a form of existence of capitalist relations of production under socialist social relations. This raises the possibility of the restoration of economic exploitation by those who control the means of production. In effect, for Bettelheim, the possibility of the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union demands a category of human subjects with the capacity to exploit. Hence, managers, administrators, etc, constitute a 'state bourgeoisie'. This is merely another version of the posing of the problem of the 'class position of managers'.

69. De Vroey, 1975, p.4.
70. *ibid.*, p.6.
71. Wright, 1978, Chapter 2.
72. Poulantzas, 1975, Part 2.
73. *ibid.*, p.107.
74. *ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

CHAPTER SIX: REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Lenin, 1964, p.366.
2. Engels regards 'The Class Struggles in France' as the first attempt at a materialist analysis of contemporary history. Such a materialist analysis involves:
 

'...tracing political conflicts back to the struggles between the existing social classes and fractions of classes created by... economic development and (proving) the particular political parties to be more or less adequate political expressions of these same classes and fractions of classes'. Engels, 'Introduction' to 'The Class Struggles in France, 1848-50, p.187.
3. This calls into question those many texts which set out with great determination and a generous sprinkling of quotations from Marx's political writings to show that Marxism is not a crude 'economism'. See, for example, Swingewood, 1975, especially Chapter 6. Other writers concoct different means of avoiding the real problem. Miliband makes a distinction between Marxists who 'exaggerate' the autonomy of politics and those who 'underestimate' it, without considering the legitimacy of either view; Miliband, 1977, p.83.
4. See Draper, 1977, p.71.
5. Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', n.24.
6. Lenin, writing before most sociological theories of the state were formulated is entirely dismissive of those theories which rest upon
 

'...a few phrases borrowed from Spencer or Mikhailovsky, by referring to the growing complexity of social life, the differentiation of functions, and so forth', Lenin, 1970, (c), p.11.
7. Engels, 'Origin of the Family, Private Property' and the State, p.289.
8. Engels, 'Socialism, Utopian and Scientific', p.138. See also Marx, 1974, (b), p.791.

9. Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', p.40.
10. Engels 'Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, n.289.
11. Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', p.36.
12. Engels, 1975, p.332.
13. Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', p.35.
14. Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' pp. 110-11,
15. *ibid.*, p.99.
16. Lenin, 1970, (c), p.15.
17. Marx, 'Letter to Weydemeyer', p.528.
18. See Lenin, 1970, (b), p.42. The same view is expressed by Trotsky:

'Parliament has become an instrument of falsehood, deception, violence, an enervating talk-show...The centre of gravity of political life has been completely and finally removed beyond the confines of parliament'. Cited in Hodgson, 1977, p.142.

19. Lenin, 1970, (b), p.71.
20. See, for example, Engels claim that:

'On the whole, the economic movement gets its way, but it also has to suffer reactions from the political movement which it itself established and endowed with relative independence'. Engels, 'Letter to Schmidt, p.686.

21. This domination by a single fraction of capital obviously begs the question of Marx's commitment to concepts such as 'relative autonomy' and 'power bloc' as expounded by contemporary authors. Indeed, there would seem to be several dubious claims with respect to the relationship of Marx's political writings and some of the conclusions which exponents of the 'relative autonomy' thesis attach to them. See, for example, Poulantzas, 1973 (b), pp. 236-7, where the author desperately tries to show that Marx's claim that the Parliamentary Republic in France was one in which 'both factions could maintain equal power' really constitutes a hidden reference to the hegemony of one fraction within the power bloc. The present discussion is however, concerned neither with Marx's



consistency, nor with that of commentators upon him, but with showing the 'sources' of the Marxian view of 'relative independence' of the state. The consistency of that position is another matter entirely.

- 22. Marx, 'The Class Struggles in France, 1848-50', p.251.
- 23. *ibid.*, p.212.
- 24. Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', pp. 484-5.
- 25. Marx, 'The Civil War in France', p.470.
- 26. For commentary on this, see Poulantzas, 1973, (b), p.183; Draper, 1977, p.321 ff.
- 27. See, for example, Miliband, 1977, p.87 and Draper, 1977, p.328, who in his account of Engels' view of the Bismarckian state claims:  
     'The autonomy...was strictly relative. For its success was conditional on the fact that its policy was really in the basic interests of the ruling classes and that this fact could be demonstrated before too long'.
- 28. Marx and Engels, 1975, p.112.
- 29. Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', p.77.
- 30. Engels, 'Origin of the Family. Private Property and the State', p.290.
- 31. Engels, 1975, p.330.
- 32. Miliband, 1973, p.88.
- 33. Miliband, 1977, p.55.
- 34. Lenin, 1970, (b), pp. 72, 75.
- 35. Holloway and Picciotto, (eds), 1978, especially 'Introduction';  
     Holloway and Picciotto, 1977, pp. 76-101; Holloway and Picciotto, 1976; Holloway, 1979.
- 36. This is, of course, a quite separate consideration from whether particular authors are 'materialist' in Holloway and Picciotto's sense, that is, whether they base their analysis of the state on 'Capital'. From the viewpoint of this work that question is secondary, though whether distinctions can be rigorously drawn between authors on this basis, is rather more open to question than they suggest.

37. Though Poulantzas' analysis owes some debt to that of Gramsci no attempt is made to discuss the latter's work in this chapter, despite its influence on contemporary discussions of politics and the state. There are two major reasons for this. Firstly, most of the pertinent questions about state theory can be raised by concentrating on the debate which has been prominent in British Marxian circles in recent years - that between 'Poulantzians' and 'State Derivationists' - and it has been decided to restrict discussion to these. Secondly, it should become apparent that Gramsci's position is subject to the same general problems as those discussed elsewhere in this chapter. In particular Gramsci, no less than Poulantzas, would subscribe to the view of the social formation as a 'complex totality', comprising an 'ensemble of social relations', with the state as 'unity'.

'Structures and superstructures form an 'historical bloc'.

That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production'.

Gramsci, cited in Buci-Glucksmann, 1980, p.278.

It is the very conception of society as 'ensemble' which, in fact, enables Gramsci to produce certain basic concepts, notably that of 'bloc'. In the case of the latter, for example, Boggs' comments

'It was a construct that linked history and politics, structure and superstructure within an ensemble of ideas and social relations', Boggs, 1976, p.81. The conception of society as 'complex totality' is criticised in the remainder of this chapter, and in Chapters Seven and Eight.

38. Poulantzas, 1975, p.24.

39. *ibid.*, p.164. See also Poulantzas, 1976, p.71 and 1978, pp. 129-132.

This relationship of 'expression' is represented in a variety of terms in Poulantzas' work, among which are the following;

'condensation', 1973, (b), p.45; 1975, pp. 159, 161; 1976, p.71,  
1978, p.27:

'crystallisation', 1975, p.78; 1978, p.131:

'concentration', 1978, p.27: 'incarnation', 1978, p.27:

'materialisation', 1978, pp.27, 45:

40. Poulantzas, 1976, p.73.
41. See especially *ibid.*, which 'corrects' the previous errors of Poulantzas, 1973, (b), by placing emphasis on 'class struggle' rather than 'state apparatuses'.
42. Poulantzas, 1975, p.98.
43. Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', p.247; 1973, (b), p.255 ff; 1975, p.164.
44. Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', p.246. See also 1973, (b), p.44.
45. Poulantzas, 1976, p.71. See also, 1973, (b), p.256, and 1975, p.97.
46. Poulantzas, 1975, p.98.
47. Poulantzas, 1978, p.135. For the concept of 'inert effects' see also 1973, (b), pp. 79 ff; 237-8 etc. and 1975, p.160.
48. Poulantzas, 1978, p.32. Poulantzas finds it necessary to argue (see especially 1973 (b), pp.255 ff, 264, 288-9 and 1978, pp. 131-3) that the state exhibits both a 'relative autonomy' and a 'specific internal unity' though the relationship between the two is clearly problematic. The postulate of 'unity' is necessary, in Poulantzas' view, to counter the 'pluralistic' views of the state which see it as a set of institutions to be 'parcelled out'. But Poulantzas recognises that such a postulate casts doubt on the 'relative autonomy' of the state. His solution is to regard the state as a unity under the dominance of a 'power bloc', though it is shown below that that solution is unsatisfactory.
49. Poulantzas, 1976, p.74,; 1978, pp.36, 131.
50. Poulantzas, 1978, p.54. Compare the view expressed in 1976, p.73, that any attempt to designate institutions as the field of

application of 'power' is synonymous with 'structuralism'.

51. Poulantzas, 1978, pp.45 and 148. It is significant that when Poulantzas discusses an organisational aspect of state structure, such as the bureaucracy, he defines it via the term 'social category'. This serves the purpose of defining a category of agents whose principal role is defined by its political-ideological function, but which belongs to classes. Poulantzas, 1973, (a), p.40; 1975, p.23.
52. Poulantzas, 1978, p.138.
53. *ibid.*, p.34.
54. It should be apparent that the theoretical problem indicated here parallels that of Weberian and neo-Weberian conceptions of power discussed in Chapter Three. In both Weberian and Marxian examples, categories of power are posited independently of any conditions of production. But it is precisely the effect of determinate conditions which is crucial in enabling one to draw a distinction between types of power. Without such a distinction, the powers of state apparatuses are indistinguishable from those of parents, priests or traffic wardens.
55. Poulantzas, 1976, p.73.
56. Poulantzas, 1973, (a), p.48.
57. Altvater, 1973, p.99.
58. *ibid.*, p.99.
59. *ibid.*, p.100.
60. Holloway and Picciotto, 1978, p.21.
61. Jessop, 1977, p.363. Apart from the erroneous view of capital-logic's merit, Jessop's article is otherwise excellent in several respects. In particular he shows that Marxian state theory is by no means a theoretical unity, but is in fact a 'rag-bag' of varying and often inconsistent emphases. This of course, by implication casts doubt on those such as Holloway and Picciotto who try to distinguish

consistent theoretical positions in Marxism ('politicism' or 'economism' etc.). This chapter suggests that Marxian state theory is often constructed upon a combination of incompatible, inconsistent and incoherent theoretical positions ('politicism' and 'economism' as well as a variety of other 'isms' - 'essentialism', 'ontologism' etc.).

62. Hirsch, 'The State Apparatus and Social Reproduction', p.63.
63. *ibid.*, p.65.
64. *ibid.*, p.81 ff.
65. *ibid.*, p.82.
66. Gerstenberger, 1976.
67. Holloway and Picciotto, 1978, p.25.
68. Hirsch 'The State Apparatus and Social Reproduction', p.82.
69. *ibid.*, p.107.
70. There is a striking similarity between Hirsch's analysis and that of Poulantzas, 1976. In this paper Poulantzas does make specific reference to the laws of motion of the CMP, and indeed presents an argument whereby the structure of the CMP provides a 'framework' within which the 'concrete form' of relative autonomy is determined. This corresponds very closely to the logic/content dichotomy of state derivation and to Hirsch's own attempt to 'mediate' between them. In neither case however, is that relationship coherently theorised.
71. Holloway and Picciotto, 1977, p.76; 1978, p.1.
72. Holloway and Picciotto, 1977, p.78. Such 'form' analysis echoes the question put forward by Pashukanis:

'Why does the dominance of a class not continue to be that which it is - that is to say, the subordination in fact of one part of the population to another part? Why does it take on the form of official state domination? Or which is the same thing, why is not the mechanism of state constraint created as the private mechanism of the dominant

class? Why is it dissociated from the dominant class - taking the form of an impersonal mechanism of public authority isolated from society'? Cited *ibid.*, p.79.

73. Holloway and Picciotto, 1976, p.6. Cf Clarke, 1977, p.3 for whom the 'fundamental premise' of Marxism is that of seeing 'the capital relation as principle of the unity of the social formulation'.
74. The point is most clearly argued in Picciotto, 1979.
75. Holloway and Picciotto, 1978, p.27.
76. It is never very clear why Holloway and Picciotto consider 'fundamentalism' to be problematic, and it is not without significance that they consider an analysis such as Yaffe's to be 'simplified' rather than mistaken. All that supposedly distinguishes the 'class-historical' view from Yaffe's is the doubt that the state can act rationally for capital, and it has already been shown above that Hirsch's demonstration of this is by no means without its own problems.
77. Holloway and Picciotto, 1977, p.92. Though the point will not be pursued here, much of Holloway and Picciotto's analysis depends upon their capacity to theorise the class concept in a rigorous fashion, since that concept is intended to provide the crucial link between 'logic' and 'history'. The 'simultaneous fusion' of 'logic' and 'history' is made possible by social relations comprising class relations. In fact the relationship between 'class struggle' as logical necessity and 'class struggle' as political practice is never satisfactorily theorised. Indeed, there are repeated ambiguities and confusions where accumulation is regarded as both 'producer' and 'effect' of class conflict, and where ultimately the relationship between them is merely reduced to a vague notion of 'dialectics'.
78. *ibid.*, p.93.
79. Holloway, 1979, p.7.

80. See *ibid.*, p.18 ff, for an elaboration of this type of argument.

See also, Holloway and Picciotto, 1977, p.80.

81. Holloway, 1979, p.28.

82. Holloway and Picciotto, 1976, p.4; 1977, p.80.

83. For a description of the state as 'form-process' see Holloway, 1979, p.12. Despite attempts to make a distinction between 'state form' and 'state apparatus' (*ibid.*, p.25) it is clear that the latter can have no real effectivity. It is no less an 'expression' of the effects of capitalist laws of motion and structures than it is for Poulantzas, Altvater or Hirsch. The 'state form' has no conditions of production outside itself, as an aspect of form reproduction:

'As the relation between classes, the capital relation, develops, so the forms in which the capital relation is expressed develop'.  
*ibid.*, p.9.

84. Holloway and Picciotto, 1976, p.6.

85. *ibid.*, p.6. A similar problem arises in the collective work towards which Holloway and Picciotto have contributed, CSE, 1979. Here reference is made to a debate within the group between those who wish to attack the 'state form' per se, and those who wish to do so through the medium of the labour movement's 'Alternative Economic Strategy (p.129). The problem is that in the context of the 'state form' debate there are no theoretical grounds for adopting the latter view unless effectivity is granted to 'bourgeois forms', thereby calling into question the conceptual basis of that argument.

86. Holloway and Picciotto, 1976, p.4; 1977, p.80; Holloway, 1979, p.21.

87. If state theory has to grant a real effectivity to state apparatuses, a whole range of theoretical implications follow. In particular once such effectivity is recognised the easy critiques of 'reformism' put forward by all strands of contemporary state theory collapse.

That is not to say anything about the merit or lack of merit of particular forms of 'reformist' politics. Only that there can be no blanket dismissal of them based upon a coherent state theory.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Two texts are of particular importance:
  - (i) Marx, 'Preface' to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', pp. 503-4, which provides the concepts of 'base' and 'superstructure'.
  - (ii) Marx, Capital, Volume 1, 1938, pp. 53-4, Note 1, where Marx is said to provide a basis for the concepts of 'determination in the last instance' and 'domination'.
2. Marx, 1974 (b), p.790.
3. Engels, 'Socialism, Utopian and Scientific', pp. 124-5.
4. Marx, n.d. (a), p.195.
5. Lukacs provides the most extreme example of this view, dissolving the problem of organisation entirely into that of 'class consciousness'.
 

'party...organisation corresponds to a stage in the class consciousness of the proletariat....' Lukacs, 1971, p.304.

Although Lukacs serves as an extreme case, the attempt to theorise socialist political organisation and practice through the concept of class consciousness has been central to the Marxist project. For an account of some of these attempts see Ollman, 1972.
6. Lukacs, 1971, p.304. It is significant that Lenin's work, though in no way compatible with that of Lukacs, also operates with a concept of 'class instinct'. This, and similar conceptions are almost universal in Marxist analysis - even amongst those who reject the centrality of the concept of class consciousness itself (e.g. (Poulantzas)).
7. More will be said on this later. Marx himself never provides a satisfactory account of the conditions of existence of

'objective' class interests. In so far as any attempt is made to deal with the question it rests upon a combination of factors. Generally, the mere 'fact' of exploitation is said to produce definite class interests and polarised political forces based upon them. As for working class interests these are often presented as a product of the proletariat comprising a 'universal class'. This has a variety of connotations. In its simplest form it may refer merely to the fact that the proletariat is a 'majority' class (See Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', p.118). Alternately it may be argued that the proletariat is the first class whose interests constitute genuinely social interests, an argument usually associated with the proletariat's supposed embodiment of human essence and freedom. In the 'Paris MSS' for example, it is suggested that 'the emancipation of society from private property...(takes) the political form of the emancipation of the workers' Marx, 1975, p.333.

8. Poulantzas 'The New Petty Bourgeoisie', p.113. For a similar argument see Miliband, 1977, p.25.
9. Hunt, 'The Identification of the Working Class', pp. 83-4.
10. Wright, 1978, pp. 30-1.
11. The literature on the working class 'boundary problem' is considerable. Apart from Poulantzas and Wright, the following are amongst the more important contributors: Becker, 1973-4, Nicolaus, 1967; Urry, 1973; Carchedi, 1977.
12. Poulantzas, 1975, p.201.
13. That Poulantzas' claim is justified may be shown by an examination of any 'classical' Marxist discussion of class, such as Mao, 1954. However, this fact neither establishes the validity of the 'structural determination of class' nor for that matter, the coherence of texts such as Mao's.

The problem concerns the nature of Marxism's 'recognition' of politics and ideology.

14. Braverman, 1974, p.411.
15. Hodges, 1961, p.25.
16. Marx, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', p.1041.
17. There are clearly many other problems of a more specific nature which can be identified in Poulantzas' argument. For example, there are serious problems concerning the distinction between 'economic', 'political' and 'ideological' relations. Why, to consider one case, should relations of production between supervisors and other wage labourers be deemed 'political'?
18. Marx, 1938, p.517.
19. Marx, n.d. (b) p.397. Marx's distinction between productive and unproductive labour is by no means consistent. He insists that the definitions of productive and unproductive labour 'are not derived from the material characteristics of labour...but from the definite social form, the social relations of production within which the labour is realised', *ibid*, p.153. This means that the same type of labour may be productive or unproductive according to the particular relations of production which encompass it. There is however, a second conception of productive labour to be found in Marx's 'Supplementary Definition'. Here it is argued:
  - (i) That the entire world of commodities, all spheres of material production are becoming formally or really subordinated to the CMP.
  - (ii) That all labourers engaged in the production of commodities are wage labourers and the means of production confront them as capital.

(iii) That therefore it is characteristic of productive labourers that labour realises itself in commodities, in material wealth.

Now some authors (e.g. Rubin, 1972) have claimed Marx's supplementary definition to be entirely consistent with the initial definitions cited above, but even some defenders of Marx's supposed consistency have noted the peculiar equation of 'commodity' with 'material wealth' presented in the second statement. Gough, 1972, though noting the problem, seeks to gloss over any inconsistency by quoting a further statement in which Marx criticises such vulgar materialism:

'The materialisation etc. of labour is however, not to be taken in such a Scottish sense as Adam Smith conceives it. When we speak of the commodity as materialisation of labour - in the sense of its exchange value - this itself is only an imaginery, that is to say, a purely social mode of existence of the commodity which has nothing to do with its corporal reality; it is conceived as a definite quantity of social labour or of money.

It may be that the concrete labour whose result it is leaves no trace in it', (Marx, n.d. (b), p.167).

This argument is however, unconvincing. In the very passage where Marx illustrates 'concrete labour whose result it is leaves no trace in it' (the labour of transport - *ibid.*, pp. 399-400), the concept of materialisation is used in a quite different sense - to make a distinction between material production (or the contribution to it) and 'mere' service. Marx's use of the category 'material commodity' - and the term can be found as early as page 2 of Capital Volume 1 - constitutes a definite ambiguity in his writing. Whatever denunciations he may make cannot eradicate that ambiguity.

20. For example, are commercial employees to be regarded as 'middle classes', situated between workers and capitalists (Marx, cited in Bottomore and Rubel (eds), 1963, p.198) or 'commercial proletarians' (Engels' footnote 39(a) to Marx, 1974 (b))?
21. Braverman, 1974, p.423.
22. Wright, 1978, p.48.
23. *ibid.*, p.49.
24. *ibid.*, p.61.
25. *ibid.*, p.87.
26. Marx, 1974 (b), p.300. Some writers (e.g. Anderson, 1974) argue quite wrongly that because groups such as commercial workers contribute to the expansion of productive capital they are therefore productive labourers in the Marxian sense.
27. Wright, 1978, p.108.
28. *ibid.*, p.48.
29. For the theoretical background to this see Poulantzas 1973, (b), p.65.
30. Poulantzas, 1975, p.16.
31. See Hirst, 'Economic Classes and Politics', p.132.
32. Poulantzas, 1975, p.334.
33. Lukacs, 1971, pp. 323-4.
34. Balibar, 1977, p.116.
35. *ibid.*, p.230.
36. Reiner, 1978, p.76.
37. *ibid.*, p.76.
38. *ibid.*, p.76.
39. Allen, 'The Differentiation of the Working Class', p.77.
40. Hall 'The Political and Economic in Marx's Theory of Class' p.35.

41. Lenin, 1973, p.36.
42. Anderson, 'The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action', p.264.
43. Beynon, 1973, p.105.
44. Lenin, 1973, p.117.
45. *ibid.*, p.47.
46. *ibid.*, p.117.
47. Anderson, 'The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action', p.272.
48. Indeed the view is often expressed that there is an ever increasing tendency for unionist struggle to itself become truly socialist struggle. Anderson, 'The Limits...' Wright, 1978, and Blackburn, 'The New Capitalism', have all argued that economic conflicts between capital and labour now take on an increasingly political character, to the extent that 'wage bargaining can in itself become a case for the abolition of wage slavery' (Anderson, 'The Limits...', p.278).
49. Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', p.120.
50. Apart from that general point there are clearly a number of specific criticisms that can be directed at the Marxist concept of class conflict. One which is of particular significance concerns its effect on the analysis of particular forms of political conflict. The problem is similar to that discussed in the criticism of neo-Weberianism in Chapter Three. In that, and in the Marxist case, the consequence of regarding conflict as ubiquitous and inevitable - and in the case of Marxism class-based - is to be unable to say anything of substance about particular forms of conflict.
51. Lenin, 1973, p.48.
52. *ibid.*, p.52.

53. Poulantzas, 1975, p.334.
54. *ibid.*, p.297.
55. Cited in Hirst, 'Economic Classes and Politics' p.126.
56. A good example may be found in Lane, 1974, pp. 264-5.

Though adopting Leninist categories, Lane clearly recognises that the unionist form of political practice takes place under definite social conditions which have specific effects. Thus, political outcome and effectivity is not a function of the level of recognition of class interest by class consciousness, but is defined by a variety of social factors - level of employment, extent of legal restriction on activity and on use of funds, mode of organisation etc.

57. For example, Marx and Engels often merely 'hedge their bets' Engels gives himself ample room for manoeuvre between class relations and politics when he tells us that political parties are 'the more or less adequate expression' of classes and fractions of classes, Engels, 'Introduction' to 'The Class Struggles in France, 1848-50', p.187.
58. Poulantzas, 1975, p.16 adopts this view, claiming that Marxism cannot abandon the materialist distinction between structures and practices. The greater part of his own analysis of course, does precisely that.

CHAPTER EIGHT: REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Durkheim, 1964, (a), p.131.
2. Miliband, 1977, p.28.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
4. Hall, 'The Political and Economic in Marx's Theory of Class', pp. 55 and 56.
5. *ibid.*, p.47.
6. See for example, the reference to 'classes and their political forms of appearance', *ibid.*, p.41.
7. *ibid.*, p.47. Admittedly, Hall could still learn from one of his mentors, Poulantzas, for whom:  

'The effectiveness of the structure on the field of practices is thus itself limited by the intervention of political practice on the structure'. Poulantzas, 1973, (b), p.95.
8. Przeworski, 1977.
9. *ibid.*, p.367.
10. *ibid.*, p.367.
11. *ibid.*, p.401.
12. *ibid.*, pp. 368, 373, 377.
13. *ibid.*, pp. 373-77.
14. Cutler et al. 1977, p.128.
15. *ibid.*, p.313. See pp. 211-212 for a fuller exposition.
16. *ibid.*, p.224.
17. See *ibid.*, pp.5, 107 ff., 124 ff. See also Hindess and Hirst 1977.
18. Cutler et al., 1977, p.238.
19. Cutler et al., 1978, p.258.
20. Cutler et al., 1977, p.318.
21. *ibid.*, p.232.
22. See especially *ibid.*, Chapter 11.
23. *ibid.*, p.265.
24. *ibid.*, p. 169 etc.



25. *ibid.*, p.169.
26. Marx, 1938, p.xix. Both editions of 'Capital, Volume I' referred to in the present text (1938 and 1976) translate the passage in this way. Cutler et al., however, suggest that Marxism conceives agents as 'personifications of economic functions', 1977, p.3.
27. Cutler et al., 1977, pp.264-5.
28. *ibid.*, p.318 etc.
29. *ibid.*, p.241, emphasis added.
30. *ibid.*, p.267.
31. *ibid.*, p.183.
32. *ibid.*, p.231.
33. *ibid.*, p.312.
34. Cutler et al., 1978, p.257. For a clearer version of this argument see Hirst 'Economic Classes and Politics', p.130. It is suggested below that because of the retention of the class concept the texts in question are unable to suggest how an analysis of such 'specific relations' might be developed.
35. Cutler et al., 1977, p.131.
36. Hirst, 'Economic Classes and Politics', p.131.
37. See especially Cutler et al., 1977, Chapters 10 and 11.
38. Cutler et al., 1979, p.335.

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