CONTEMPORARY CURRENTS IN MARXIST THEORY*

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This short paper presents a few of the issues which divide contemporary Marxists and shows how their debates relate to Marx's original work. In the first part, I discuss the family, law and the world system in the light of two notions of social structure. In the second part, I consider the dynamics of capitalism and the struggles between classes, races and genders as potential motors of change. This is followed by an outline of Marx's understanding of the persistence of capitalism; the notion of reproduction of social relations; and how the state becomes involved in the organization of struggles and in the preservation of the conditions of accumulation. In the final part, the past is examined for the light it may shed on the future. Has history a prior purpose, or telos? How did Marx and how do Marxists conceive of the transition from one period of history to another? What can we say about the transition to socialism based on the experience of the last hundred years?

Four convictions inform this essay. First, there is no Marxist alternative. There are only a plethora of Marxist alternatives—the accumulation of over a century of debate, struggle and revolution. Second, Marxism has overtaken Marx. But it still remains true to his methods, his categories and his concerns, and that is what makes it Marxist. Third, Marxism provides total portraits of the world, leaving no arena of social life unexplored. Fourth, Marxism systematically links the practical and the theoretical, the concrete and the abstract. Each particular theoretical perspective within Marxism is reshaped through the exploration of the problems it identifies. In this short paper I can only begin to sketch the basis for these assertions. For reasons of space I shall confine myself to contemporary issues within Marxism, and even then I shall cover only a small number of the current controversies. The paper is divided into four sections. Each section begins with a theoretical introduction, which is followed by one or two illustrations of the concrete research generated by different perspectives. In the first section, I deal with two notions of social structure which produce different Marxisms, and I illustrate these by reference to two very different phenomena—the family and the world system. In the second section, after outlining the implications of the different notions of totality for the understanding of history, I examine class, race and sex as possible agents of change. In the third section, I discuss the idea of "reproduction" and examine it with reference to different theories of the capitalist state. In the final section, I discuss Marx's projection of history into the future and contemporary Marxist notions of passages out of the present.

TOTALITY: STRUCTURED OR EXPRESSIVE?

Whatever else they may be, Marxists are not empiricists.[1] This, of course, does not mean that they do not confront the empirical world. Rather, it means they do

* The ideas and themes of this paper have been influenced by Margaret Cerullo and Adam Przeworski. That they both fit inside the Marxist tradition says a great deal about the diversity of current Marxisms. I should like to thank three anonymous referees for their comments, and the staff of *The American Sociologist* for their patience, encouragement and criticisms of earlier versions of this paper.

[1] Lest there be any confusion, let me say at once this does not mean that Marxists are not positivists. Some are positivists, some are not. Inasmuch as they proceed deductively from certain premises and arrive at certain conclusions which they then attempt to relate to the concrete world, they are positivists. Such theories find their validity in *accounting* for what exists and what does not exist, what has been and what has not been, what will be and what will not be. Inasmuch as critical or any other theory justifies itself by reference to a preordained *goal* or *purpose*, it is not positivist. In contrast to both these approaches, empiricism draws conclusions about the concrete world on the basis of *induction*. It treats the world of appearances as the only world.

not measure for the sake of measuring. They do not mistake appearance for essence, ideology for reality. On the contrary, Marxists make a radical distinction between the two. They try to penetrate everyday experience to its underlying structure. By searching for a totality, they try to show that what appears as common sense—as natural, inevitable, and necessary—in fact rests on the existence of certain conditions which are not immutable but socially produced. The concrete empirical world is not "received" as given or viewed as separate from the apparatus used to understand it. Just as astronomers are not deceived by the apparent movements of celestial objects but seek to transform and explain appearances; just as Freud developed a theory which both transformed and explained the phantasmagoria of dream life; so Marxists following Marx attempt to unveil the hidden secrets behind lived experience, behind common sense, that is, behind the world of ideology. More specifically, they try to advance a *theory* of social structure; they try to show how networks of social relations into which we enter as individuals are produced by an *underlying structure*. This underlying structure then becomes the object of analysis: its dynamics, its contradictions, and its effects on the experience of particular individuals.

Within Marxism there are two distinct notions of how a social structure should be theoretically constructed. On the one hand, there is the idea of a Hegelian totality in which a single "essence" or dominant principle comes to pervade the entire society. Each part of the social structure becomes an expression of the whole, of the defining "spirit." For Lukács (1971) "commodification" or "reification," for Marcuse (1964) "one dimensionality," for Braverman (1974) Taylorism (the separation of mental and manual labor and workers' loss of control over their labor)—these are the dominant principles which both order and are expressed through social relations, not merely within the economic realm, but in leisure, in the family, in politics, in the cultural realm—in short, throughout capitalist society. On the other hand, there is the idea of a structured totality, in which a single part (the economic) determines the *relations* among all parts.[2] The economy, by virtue of its functional requirements (or, as Marxists say, conditions of reproduction), defines the contributions of different parts of society and thus the relations among those parts. Thus, it is a condition of existence of the capitalist economy that the legal system protect private property, that the family reproduce the labor force, that ideology legitimate capitalist relations, that the state enforce law and order, and so forth. The relations among the parts are established on the basis of their distinctive contributions to the working of the whole. Furthermore, the "function" of each part defines its form or structure, and in so doing, endows it with an autonomy and a logic of its own. Three illustrations of the different types of totality follow.

The Law

The "function" of the legal system is to define a set of formal rules which regulates and preserves capitalist relations. But in order to do this its operation must appear legitimate. The law must define and enforce "fair" rules. That is, it must treat all people as though they were equal and not distinguish between capitalists and workers; it must treat all property as though it were the same and not distinguish between property involved in the production of profit, such as machines, and property that is simply consumed unproductively, such as shirts. Moreover, changes in the law must appear to emerge from its own logic and not in response to particular interest groups. In short, the law possesses a coherence and autonomy of its own so it can effectively perform its function. It obeys principles and creates categories of

[2] The notion of a structured totality is most fully elaborated by the French Marxists associated with Althusser. The concept is developed, although not called by this name, in Althusser (1969) and Althusser and Balibar (1970). These writers have also coined the term "expressive totality" for their portrait of the "historicist school" of Marxism, in which they include Gramsci, Lukács and Korsch. They tend to caricature these writers in their attempt to elucidate their own "complexly determined" or "overdetermined" notions of totality.

people different from those in other parts of the totality.

By contrast, in an expressive totality the legal system is regarded as an expression of the single logic or essence that defines capitalism. Thus, if commodification and the universalization of exchange are regarded as the defining essence of capitalism, then the law will appear as an expression of that essence—it will operate on universalistic and impersonal criteria. There is little sense here of the legal system performing particular needs in the maintenance of capitalism. The legal system is not endowed with an autonomy of its own. Rather, its existence embodies the essence of capitalism.[3] Functional interdependence is replaced by a principle of domination. I shall illustrate these differences with two further examples—the family and the world system.

The Family

From the point of view of the capitalist economy the family performs a number of definite and necessary functions. It maintains and renews the laboring population, that is, it reproduces labor power. It sends that labor power off to factories and offices. It prepares youth for the alienating experience of work. It socializes children for their future procreative and reproductive roles. It is a labor reservoir prepared for increased demands for industrial labor, as when women enter the wage labor force. It engages in consumption work, such as shopping. In the structured totality, the family not only changes with the changing requirements of the capitalist economy, but it also possesses a structure of its own and therefore a certain relative autonomy which allows it to engage in the activities mentioned above (see, for example, Mitchell, 1971; Dalla Costa and James, 1972; Weinbaum and Bridges, 1976). Alternatively, the expressive totality may depict the family as a victim of commodification, in which the cash nexus enters the family; of reification, in which members of the family treat one another as objects; of Taylorization, in which domestic work becomes fragmented and deskilled; of whatever is defined as the essence of capitalism. That is, the essence of capitalism, its defining spirit, thrusts itself out from the core to penetrate the entire fabric of social life. Even the family, as one of the last arenas of potential resistance, succumbs, is stripped, and loses what little autonomy it had (for examples, see the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, 1972; Braverman, 1974; Ewen, 1977).

The World System

If capitalism has managed to pervade and incorporate the farthest corners of social life within many Western societies, has it also incorporated the farthest corners of the world? Is the "world system" itself an expressive totality, in which each nation is subordinated to and devasted by the expansion of capitalism (Wallerstein, 1974)? Or is the world system a structured totality, in which different nations exhibit a political independence and an economy constituted out of a combination of capitalist and noncapitalist modes of production (Genovese, 1971; Mandel, 1975)? The answer depends in part upon what is being explained (the origin of capitalism, the dynamics of contemporary imperialism, national liberation movements, etc.) and in part upon the notion of capitalism. (Of course, the two are not unrelated.) Does capitalism refer to the particular relations men and women enter into as they transform nature, that is, a mode of production? Or does capitalism refer to the particular relations men and women enter into as they exchange the

[3] Some works present an uneasy coexistence of both totalities. Thus, Baran and Sweezy (1966) emphasize the functional interdependence of the economy and the state in the first part of their book, while in the last chapters they shift into an analysis which portrays capitalist society as permeated by commodification and irrationality. They switch from monopoly capitalism conceived of as a mode of *production* to monopoly capitalism conceived of as a mode of *domination*. Similar tensions between expressive and structured totality can be found in Max Weber (Rheinstein, 1954). The modern legal system is seen both in terms of its autonomy and contribution to the needs of an industrial economy, and as an expression of the legal-rational spirit which defines the essence of the industrial society. The same ambiguity is found in the work of Talcott Parsons, who tries to stress both dominant values and functional subsystems.

products of their labor, that is, a mode of exchange?[4]

The latter position leads to a discussion of the progressive subordination of peripheral regions of the world to the core regions (Baran, 1957; Frank, 1969; Wallerstein, 1974), and to the examination of the forms of unequal exchange between powerful capitalist nations and the third world (Emmanuel, 1972). What is missing from such analyses is a specific elaboration of the response and possible resistance to the spread of capitalism, or at least to the uneven development capitalism brings in its wake. The underdeveloped world becomes a dependent appendage of the advanced world with little power to resist subordination. Nairn's (1977) analysis of nationalism is one of the few attempts to come to terms with modes of resistance. Nationalism—always a thorn in Marxist flesh—can be understood, argues Nairn, as the attempt of a rising or weak bourgeoisie to simultaneously harness resources for the development of capitalism and resist subordination to a powerful international bourgeoisie. To this end, the emergent capitalist class of the periphery and semiperiphery mobilizes the only resource at its disposal, namely, the people. It does this through the ideologies of nationalism and populism. Nairn convincingly demonstrates the link between the combined and uneven nature of capitalist development, and the appearance of Scottish nationalism and the nationalism of Western Europe in the nineteenth century. Without much effort his ideas can be extended to contemporary Asia, Africa and Latin America. Yet the particular form and content of those nationalisms have still to be examined.

This can be more appropriately accomplished through a vision of the "world system" as composed of a combination of capitalist and noncapitalist modes of production (see, for example, Lenin, 1960). The particular arrangement of modes of production (capitalist, petty commodity, primitive communist, etc.) within peripheral or semiperipheral territories provides a specific material basis for different forms of resistance, particular types of nationalist movements, and so forth. What becomes significant in this structured totality is not the erosion of all precapitalist modes of production by capitalist modes of production, but the political and ideological forms which facilitate the coexistence of precapitalist and capitalist modes of production (Wolpe, 1972; Laclau, 1971) and the transfers of labor and surplus from one mode of production to another through, for example, a system of migrant labor. The second perspective, therefore, emphasizes the *interdependence* of precapitalist and capitalist modes of production whereas the first perspective stresses the *destruction* of precapitalist modes of production.

HISTORY: WITH OR WITHOUT A SUBJECT?

Like social structure, history also has to be constructed. It is not received as a succession of events but rather is constituted out of its premises. And the first premise is that men and women must be able to live in order to make history, that is, they must transform nature into the means of their existence. Therefore, history is conceived as the succession of ways of producing the means of existence, that is, as the succession of modes of production—primitive communist, ancient, feudal, capitalist, etc. Each mode of production is defined by a set of relations into which men and women enter and the corresponding form of consciousness. Accordingly, history has two aspects: (1) the dynamics of a given mode of production—how it changes while remaining the same; and (2) transitions from one mode of production to another. I shall consider the latter in the final section, while this and the following section will be largely devoted to the dynamics of capitalism.

Marxists constitute the history of the capitalist totality out of its essence or underlying structures. Thus, the expressive totality sees the history of capitalism as

[4] A similar issue has gained prominence in the debate over feudalism and the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Is the distinction between feudalism and capitalism to be seen in terms of production for use rather than production for exchange *or* in terms of the extraction of surplus through rent rather than through wage labor? See the classic contributions in Hilton (1976).

the unilinear unfolding of an essence, a single principle (commodification, Taylorism, etc.), as it invades and incorporates ever greater expanses of social life. As portrayed in the works of Marcuse (1964), Lukács (1971), Aronowitz (1973) and Braverman (1974), capitalist domination possesses an ineluctable logic which eliminates resistance, absorbs alternatives and assimilates critique. Because it leaves largely unexamined the *problematic conditions* of domination, this perspective inevitably leads towards utopianism, determinism and pessimism. Therefore, commentators such as Marcuse tend to embrace almost any potentially emancipatory challenge to domination the occasion offers—students, new working class, women, etc.

The structured totality produces a very different notion of social change. Here history is marked by an indeterminacy. It is not unilinear or unidimensional but uneven; it is the combination of the disparate histories of its separate parts, namely the political, the ideological, the economic, and so on. Since these parts move with their own relatively autonomous dynamics, revolutionary situations or conjunctures can appear with a degree of unpredictability. Thus, the expressive totality directs our attention to *arenas of resistance*, that is, to particular places; the structured totality focuses on *times of crisis*, that is, particular conjunctures.[5]

Thus far we have conceived of the history of capitalism as the unfolding of some irrevocable logic or combination of logics. But logics, structures, and principles do not *make* history. Who does? And furthermore, does it matter who does? Does history take place behind our backs, beyond our control, or are there agents who consciously shape the movement of history? This is the terrain of classical Marxist debate expressed through the dichotomies of freedom and necessity, revolution and science, voluntarism and determinism. Is the historical process an unwinding of irrevocable laws inscribed in the structure of the mode of production, such as the falling rate of profit, whose pace may be temporarily halted or even reversed, but whose ultimate direction and destiny is preordained? Or are there no such laws and is history contingent on unconstrained class struggle? Of course, these polarizations are crude, presenting false dichotomies which Marx warned against—men and women make history, but under conditions not of their own choosing. Marx acknowledged these constraints, but he still regarded class as the agent and class struggle as the motor of history. What then has become of Marx and Engels' opening to the *Communist Manifesto:* "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles"? Let us see.

Class: Historical Actor or Sociological Category?

Within the Marxist tradition two notions of class have emerged: class in itself—a sociological *category* designating particular places in relation to the means of production; and class for itself—a social *force* which makes history, perhaps even marches through history. The problem is to connect the two concepts both in theory and in practice. Marx tended to presume some inevitability about the association of particular places in the social structure with particular historical actors. And there have been some brilliant "demonstrations" of the logical and historical necessity for a class in itself to turn into a class for itself. Both Lukács (1971) and Thompson (1963)—one in an abstract theory and the other in a concrete account—identify the proletariat as the subject of history, the subject whose presence comes to dominate all areas of society. The totality comes to be identified with the emergence of the proletariat, in whom science and revolution, necessity and freedom, object and subject, are unified. But history has confounded brilliance and created, if anything, a widening gap between the two notions of class. After all, what happened to the English working class after 1830, where Thompson's account stops? What

[5] I follow Przeworski (1977:39) in viewing crises as ". . . moments of uncertainty, the periods of decision when forms of organization of society become the object of struggles and when relations of organized physical force come to the fore."

happened to its revolutionary consciousness? What has happened to revolutionary proletariats of Western Europe during the last fifty years? Faced with a proletariat which is not revolutionary, or with agents of social change who do not constitute a class, that is, who are not defined by a unique relationship to the means of production, Marxists find themselves embracing one notion of class or the other—hanging from one pole while stretching for the other as it recedes into the distance. Those who vacillated have dropped into the gorge between the two.

Accordingly, some Marxists are beginning to develop different class maps of the capitalist social structure. Erik Wright (1976), for example, treats the United States as a combination of capitalist and petty commodity modes of production, which gives rise to three classes: capitalists, workers, and petty bourgeoisie. By introducing the notion of contradictory class location to represent "intermediary" positions between these classes (small employers, managers, supervisors, etc.), he has begun to forge new tools for illuminating the capitalist social formation.[6] These new Marxist class categories seem to promise a new theory of social structure, that is, of the production, linkages and dynamics of places in that structure which emerge from the tendencies of the capitalist mode of production and its reproduction requirements. For example, how do changes in the labor process (proletarianization and expropriation of skills) and in the economic structure (rise of service industries) create and destroy positions in the social structure (Braverman, 1974)? However, it should not be forgotten that such formulations lead right back to history without a subject. They ignore the fact that the production of places in the social structure becomes the object of struggle. Struggles among classes and other groups must be incorporated into a theory of social structure.

Alternatively, some Marxists cling to class as a historical force (Poulantzas, 1973; Przeworski, 1976; Balibar, 1977). Class in itself drops out, leaving only class for itself. Unfortunately, losing sight of the location of actors in relation to the means of production may lead to lumping together workers and capitalists into a single "class," or constituting women and blacks as a class denuded of its explicit link to the economic. To avoid such a predicament it may be necessary to bring back a weak notion of class in itself. Thus, one possibility is to restrict class as a historical force to politically organized agents of production. But these still may not be the significant historical actors. A second possibility is to regard historical actors as coalitions or alliances of classes defined in terms of agents of production. This would lead to a discussion of the organization and reorganization of relations among classes. The utility of these approaches would have to be explored empirically.

Sex and Race: The Achilles' Heel?

Not surprisingly, some Marxist thinkers (particularly in the United States) have been content to abandon class altogether, although this may have cast them outside the ambit of Marxism. Others, in trying to understand the quiescence of the working class, or at least the absence of revolutionary consciousness, have turned to gender and race as alternative sources of polarization and struggle, and as historical forces in their own right. Marx expected relations between classes to assimilate relations between nations, sexes and races, but for contemporary Marxists this is no longer a viable position. The creation and reproduction of these relations represent a theoretical challenge they have met with varying success. They have posed a number of questions. In what way, if any, can relationships of gender and race be linked to class and modes of production? Or do the social distinctions of gender and

[6] It should be noted that his notion of contradictory class location does in fact smuggle back, however surreptitiously, class as a historical force, and the problem of "class in itself/class for itself." For Wright, the significance of the contradictory class location rests on the ambiguity of the incumbent's relationship to two "fundamental" classes, that is, ambiguity as to which class the incumbents will support in class struggle. This indeterminacy is resolved by the intervention of political and ideological factors. Therefore, Wright's class map is by no means a purely "sociological" map, but contains all sorts of assumptions about historical actors.

race transcend any periodization of history by class and mode of production? Are relations between men and women prior, historically or logically, to the relationship between dominant and subordinate classes?

Of course, this is no abstract issue. With the disappearance of classes under a putative communism, can we also be assured of the disappearance of other forms of oppression based on gender and race? What is the link between class and gender or class and race, not at an empirical level but at a theoretical level? In response to this problem, one avenue of investigation has been to ascertain whether there is male dominance in all precapitalist classless societies: whether there have been societies in which men did not dominate women (see Reiter, 1975 and Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974, for two different sides of the debate over the universality of male dominance). The debate appears inconclusive due to ambiguity in the concept of dominance. Moreover, although such studies may shed light on the relationship between gender and oppression under primitive communism, it is quite another matter to generalize their results to any future form of communism.

Similar arguments can be made with respect to race, although they have been less well elaborated because of the seemingly accidental appearance of racial divisions. Jordan (1968) has traced racism to psycho-social attributes of the precapitalist era and before the emergence of slavery in the United States. But these issues do not broach the question critical to a Marxist understanding of race, namely, is it more helpful to look at the continuity of racial oppression through history and across modes of production, or is it more appropriate to examine racial oppression in terms of the particular mode of production in which it is found, such as slavery (Genovese, 1976)/or capitalism? The question is not whether capitalism is the original source of racism, but whether the form racism assumes under capitalism is sufficiently different from its form under slavery to warrant an entirely separate treatment.

How have Marxists linked racial divisions, oppression and discrimination to the capitalist mode of production? Theorists of the dual economy, such as Harrison (1972), have tentatively suggested that racism may be reproduced through a segmented labor market linked to different fractions of capital (monopoly, competitive and service sectors). There is a tendency, it is argued, for blacks to fill places in the competitive and service sectors, while whites are awarded preference in the monopoly sectors. That the matching of race and labor market is not perfect only serves to obscure the class basis of race relations. Alternatively, race could be viewed in terms of modes of reproduction of labor power. The ghetto represents a particular system of reproducing labor power, just as the Mexican village constitutes a different mode of reproducing labor power. In both instances, ethnic or racial labeling obscures the different ways through which the labor force is maintained and renewed. Yet another possibility is to look at patterns of race relations as the product of the interrelationship among different modes of production. Thus, Wolpe (1972) argues that the apparatus of South African apartheid is a mechanism of reproducing a precapitalist mode of production alongside a capitalist mode of production. Marxism has not, and, I would argue, cannot develop a general theory of race relations. Instead, particular or local theories are generated to explain how different forms of race relations express and conceal the specific conjuncture and context in which they are produced and reproduced.

Therefore, the discovery that racism and male dominance are universal attributes, or at least exhibit a continuity across modes of production, would not of itself deal a death blow to Marxist analysis. But it would mean that two types of analyses would have to be developed: one concerned with understanding the reasons for the generality of the phenomenon irrespective of the historical context, and a second concerned with the particular forms it assumes in relation to any given mode or modes of production.[7]

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[7] Thus Rubin (1975), recognizing the specific subordinate roles that women occupy under capitalism, seeks to explain why it is women rather than men

REPRODUCTION AND DOMINATION

Whatever its dynamics, capitalism both changes and remains the same. How did Marx and how do Marxists talk about the continuity over time of those social relations which define the capitalist mode of production? Unlike much contemporary sociology, Marx did not "solve" the problem of order by focusing on a commitment to capitalism generated by the internalization of certain values and norms.[8] Values and norms are the product of social relations.[9] Capitalists accumulate and workers work because they are enmeshed in a set of social relations indispensible and independent of their will. But once established, social relations do not spontaneously maintain themselves; they do not persist of their accord, but rather have to be continually perpetuated, that is, reproduced. This notion of reproduction of social relations can be illustrated with a simple example. Within the capitalist mode of production there are two fundamentally different places. *Workers,* dispossessed of the means of gaining an independent livelihood, have to sell their capacity to work—their labor power—to *capitalists,* who own and control the means of production. In selling their labor power for a wage, workers renounce their power to appropriate the products of their labor. Instead, the capitalist expropriates the products of labor as commodities and transforms them into (gross) profit and future wages. In other words, as a result of producing a "thing," workers produce (earn) a wage which allows them and their families to survive, but only until the next working day; and they produce a profit which not only keeps the capitalist rich but also keeps him in business, and therefore guarantees the prospect of future wages. The production of things, therefore, produces on the one side the worker and on the other side the capitalist, that is, it *reproduces* the relationship between capital and labor.

This, in fact, is Marx's conception of the reproduction of capitalist relations. Marxists have proposed a number of reasons why it is no longer adequate to look upon the relations between capital and labor as automatically reproducing themselves through the production of commodities. I shall deal here with only two. First, there are relations among capitalists which tend to make the production, circulation and consumption of commodities more and more difficult. Second, there is a tendency for the reproduction of relations between capital and labor to generate different forms of class struggle, which in turn threaten to undermine those relations. These two sets of tendencies towards the dissolution of relations of production give rise to two types of theories of the state: interventionist theories, which attempt to explain how, why, and when the state is able to counteract tendencies toward economic crises; and theories which aim to show how class struggles are organized, contained, or suppressed by the state.[10]

Interventionist Theories of the State

What are the "crisis" tendencies of the capitalist economy which threaten to

who fill those places. To answer this question it is necessary to go beyond capitalism and to seek the source of allocation of women to subordinate positions in their exchange through marriage rules. This, she argues, transcends all modes of production, while the concrete forms of male dominance are linked to a particular mode of production.

[8] This is a juncture where Marxism has frequently parted with Marx. Thus, a major contribution of the Frankfurt School has been the Marxist appropriation of Freudian psychology. It is interesting to note the convergence of the psychoanalytic descriptions of contemporary society as found in Marcuse (1955) and in Parsons (1954). Of course, they differ in their evaluations of the potentiality for transcending the repressive aspects of capitalist society.

[9] This is not to say that values and norms, or, as Marxists would say, ideology, do not have a structure and autonomy of their own. They do. Moreover, ideology is not uniquely determined by social relations. Indeed, ideological struggle reflects the ambiguous relationship of ideology and social relations. Nor does this mean that ideology is unimportant. On the contrary, as Marx wrote and Gramsci continually emphasized, it is ideology that shapes class struggle.

[10] Tendencies toward economic crises and class struggles have been counteracted not only by the state but also by changes in relations among capitalists and in the labor process, both brought about by the emergence of the large corporation. See, for example, Baran and Sweezy (1966) and Braverman (1974). I have commented at length on these changes elsewhere (Burawoy, forthcoming [a] and [b]).

undermine the reproduction of relations of production? The most conventional are the various elaborations of Marx's "tendency for the rate of profit to fall" as a law inscribed in the structure of the capitalist mode of production. However, no matter how sophisticated the mathematics in these elaborations (for example, Yaffe, 1973), it is always possible to discover some empirically untenable assumptions underlying the inferences. The question rests on the relative strength of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall and the counter-tendencies (such as increasing the rate of exploitation, capital saving innovations, cheapening raw materials, etc.), in which the state plays an important role. There does not seem to be any obvious way of demonstrating that the tendencies are stronger than the counter-tendencies, so many look upon the movement of the rate of profit as the product of contingent historical forces (Mandel 1975).

By contrast, Baran and Sweezy (1966) maintain that the falling rate of profit may apply to the era of competitive capitalism, but under monopoly capitalism it is replaced by the tendency for the absolute level of surplus to rise above the capacity of capitalism to absorb it. The problem is not too little surplus but too much surplus. Of course, the two "laws" are by no means incompatible, for the amount of surplus can increase relative to consumption while falling relative to the quantity (measured in socially necessary labor time) of labor and capital employed. Baran and Sweezy argue that the tendency towards over-production brings into play state mechanisms for surplus absorption, such as the expansion of military capacity. Hence, they point to underlying economic imperatives leading towards the warfare state.

Other crisis theories focus on the problematic nature of exchange and circulation, in particular the problem of ensuring that what is required for consumption (productive or unproductive) is also produced in the right proportions (Mandel, 1975). How is this accomplished through the market? When the market fails, as it does under monopoly capitalism, what agencies intervene to assure proportionality? O'Connor (1973) suggests that the state must intervene to provide forms of "social capital" (roads, transportation, communications, research and development, subsidized housing, etc.) to guarantee those prerequisites of accumulation which individual capitalists cannot afford.

O'Connor argues that the state is also responsible for "legitimating" capitalism through the distribution of concessions to the working classes (welfare, social security, etc.). But the costs of social capital and social expenses (concessions) tend to outstrip revenues, precipitating a "fiscal crisis of the state." Although economic in origin, the crisis manifests itself in the political arena. Yet it is not clear how the crisis can be recognized and whether there is an inherent tendency towards its exacerbation.

Habermas (1975) extends O'Connor's ideas to other realms, claiming that there are tendencies towards economic, rationality, legitimation and motivational crises, but he does not explain why, when, how and under what conditions these crises appear. Nevertheless, the idea that contradictions can be displaced or externalized from one sphere to another is a definite advance on earlier formulations of the Frankfurt School, which were based on the assumption of the durability of the capitalist economy, focused on the cultural realm, and chose to ignore the dynamics of the economy.

All these theories assume a similar form. A crisis is identified, a functional gap discovered, a contradiction revealed, and the state is invoked as the agency of restoration. This is an unsatisfactory functionalism. First, each theory of the contradictions of the capitalist economy gives rise to a different theory of the state, which means that Marxists have to direct attention to developing more comprehensive theories of the economy: nothing short of rewriting the three volumes of *Capital*! Second, the conditions under which the state endeavors, or even possesses the capacity, to counter-act crisis tendencies are left unformulated. Such questions revolve around the issue of class struggle, which has yet to be systematically incorporated into these frameworks.

Class Struggle Theories of the Capitalist State

The second set of theories, inasmuch as they examine the relationship between class struggles and the state, complement the interventionist theories. These theories have emerged out of different interpretations of Marx and Engels' celebrated formulation in the *Communist Manifesto:* "the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (Tucker, 1972:337). The conventional understanding of this passage is that the state acts as a coercive instrument for the dominant class (Miliband, 1969). The state is defined in terms of its various branches or "apparatuses"—the military, the police, the judiciary, the government, civil service, and so on. This *instrumentalist* perspective is linked, albeit weakly, to the notion of the expressive totality, in which all arenas of society are subordinated to the power of capital, thereby losing their individual autonomy.

In contrast, theories linked to the structured totality examine the *functions* of the state, that is, they focus on the "common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" rather than on the *institutions* through which those functions are carried out. Poulantzas (1973), for example, translates the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie into the unity and cohesion of the entire social formation. To preserve this unity and cohesion, he argues, it is necessary for the state to assume a *relative autonomy* with respect to individual capitalists or fractions of capital (finance, competitive, monopoly, commercial, etc.). For, in siding with this or that capitalist or group of capitalists, the state may jeopardize the *common* interest of all capitalists, that is the interests of the *capitalist class,* the interest in the reproduction of capitalist relations of production, and in organizing class struggles in ways which do not threaten the capitalist order. This is not to say that the state never sides with a particular fraction of capital. It is often forced to do so to protect the common interest of the capitalist class, for example, in subsidies to agriculture. On the other hand, when the state becomes an instrument of one or another fraction, and this obviously does happen, then the ability of the state to preserve its legitimacy is impaired.

The state must also assume an autonomy vis-a-vis the entire capitalist class. For the state must be in a position to grant material concessions to subordinate classes at the expense of the immediate economic interests of the dominant classes, for example, in the New Deal; to erect a hegemonic ideology which presents the interests of the dominant classes as the interests of all; to constitute the citizen/individual as the essential social category which the state establishes and recognizes in its structure so as to disorganize the dominated classes; and so on. Even individual branches of the state must operate with their own autonomy if they are to secure the consent of the people to the capitalist system, as in the Watergate hearings and the operation of the Watergate Special Prosecution Office. Poulantzas (1974, 1976) extends these formulations to examine the concrete forms the capitalist state can assume under, for example, fascism, dictatorships and parliamentary democracy. In each instance, he tries to identify a characteristic relative autonomy of the state as determined by different arrangements among the dominant classes and the balance of power between dominant and subordinate classes. Then the conditions can be examined under which a relative autonomy breaks down and yields to a state that becomes the instrument of a particular fraction of the dominant economic class. Chile, before, during and after Allende, provides an interesting case study of the ways in which different apparatuses of the state can be "seized" by different classes and of the implications this absence of relative autonomy has for the survival of a particular type of regime.

The weakness of the structuralist view of the state, as it is presently formulated, is its functionalism. How is it that the state does what it is supposed to do? How does it secure and protect its relative autonomy? How does it dispense concessions? What are the mechanisms through which it preserves the hegemony of the dominant classes? Moreover, it is here

that the instrumentalist perspective appears to be strong because it provides an explanation for the policies executed by the various branches of the state. Unfortunately, many of its assumptions are too crude. For example, Miliband (1969) incorrectly infers the existence of a cohesive, class conscious, enlightened bourgeoisie based on a relative homogeneity of attitudes, education, social origins, and so on. Irrespective of their common backgrounds, capitalists, both as groups or fractions, and as individuals, compete and conflict with one another, and thereby continually jeopardize their common interests. Furthermore, the state frequently acts in opposition to the declared and defended interests of the capitalist class or its fractions. The struggles over the Factory Acts, or the day to day commentary in the *Wall Street Journal* are obvious illustrations of the state acting with an autonomy of its own. In an attempt to rescue an instrumentalist perspective, some have followed the theorists of the corporate liberal state, such as Kolko (1963), Weinstein (1968), and Williams (1961) who postulate and try to demonstrate the existence of a hegemonic and enlightened fraction of the capitalist class which directs the state for the preservation of the interests of the whole capitalist class, even where this involves economic sacrifices. A second problem confronting the functionalist formulation is the mapping between function and concrete institution. Are all institutions which promote the functions of the state also part of the state? The family, for example, clearly contributes to the cohesion of the entire social formation, but does that necessarily place it within the orbit of a state apparatus?

Significantly, the two theories—structuralist and instrumentalist—offer very different perspectives on the "transition to socialism" and the current debate over "Euro-communism." In writing about a *state in capitalist society* Miliband implies that the state he describes can be wielded by any economically dominant class (bourgeoisie or proletariat) to protect its specific interests. If the proletariat or its representatives can only seize the state, by electoral or any other means, then socialism can be inaugurated. Poulantzas (1973) and Balibar (1977), by contrast, refer to a *capitalist state* as distinguished from a feudal state or a socialist state. Because of its very structure, because of the social relations of which it is composed and which are independent of the will of those who (wo)man its apparatuses, the capitalist state will continue to protect and reproduce capitalist relations of production even if a socialist or communist party gains power. Thus, conquering or gaining access to the state through electoral means cannot lead to socialism since the working class party, when it takes over the government, becomes a prisoner of the very system it attempts to overthrow. Rather, in the "transition to communism," the capitalist state has to be dismantled and replaced by a socialist state which has the capacity to dissolve itself.

THE FUTURE AS HISTORY

For sociology, history ends with capitalism.[11] For Marxism, history ends with communism. Peculiar to all Marxisms is a vision of the future which is fundamentally at odds with the present. But how is that future to be realized? Marx uncovered a logic or telos to history, to the succession of different modes of production, which made socialism and communism the inevitable successors of capitalism. His logic rested on the development of the forces of production, that is, the increasing capacity of human beings to transform nature. This notion of progress is what linked past, present and future. Marx also sketched the general process by which one mode of production both *made necessary* and *laid the basis* for the next mode of production. As the forces of production—the manner of transforming or appropriating nature—advance, so they enter into conflict with the relations of production—the way surplus is appropriated by a dominant class, or, as Marx wrote, the particular

[11] To refer to the "post industrial society," "post capitalist society," "advanced industrial society," etc., as "socialism" is to denude that concept of its Marxist meaning.

way of pumping surplus out of the direct producers. When the relations of production are no longer compatible with the development of the forces of production they become so many fetters and are burst asunder. A period of social revolution is inaugurated and class struggle becomes the driving force in the transition to a "higher" mode of production. The new relations of production become forms of development of the productive forces until again an incompatibility arises, and another revolutionary period brings forth the next mode of production.

How does Marx apply this theory to the capitalist mode of production? Individual capitalists privately appropriate unpaid labor, or what Marx calls surplus value, in the form of profits, realized through the sale of commodities in the market. Competition among capitalists drives them, on pain of extinction, to the continual transformation of technology and of the labor process, that is, of the productive forces. The transformation of labor increasingly assumes a "social" or collective form with the interdependence of labor increasing at the same time as its homogeneity. The process of accumulation leads on the one side to the concentration and centralization of capital, and thus to the elimination of small employers; and on the other side to the production of surplus laborers as the capital intensity of technology increases. A polarization grows between those who own the means of production and who privately appropriate surplus, and those who own only their labor power and who collectively appropriate nature. At the same time, the productive forces develop a power beyond the capacity of society to consume their products, causing crises of overproduction and hindering further expansion of those productive forces. Crises of overproduction combine with a decline in the rate of profit (linked to increasing proportion of capital relative to labor) to lay the objective basis for the inevitable dissolution of capitalism. In addition, the expansion of the productive forces creates the foundation for socialism because it presents the possibility of a regime of plenitude in which individual and collective talents can be developed to the full through engagement in varied types of work. However, the realization of these potentials (that is, the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of socialism) rests not only on the development of objective contradictions, but also on the level of struggle which is shaped in ideological and political arenas. This was Marx's theory.

The entire corpus of twentieth century Marxism—from Kautsky to Colletti, from Lenin to Althusser, from Gramsci to Habermas, from Luxemburg and Trotsky to Mao, from Lukács and Korsch to Marcuse—can be understood as reformulating and reinterpreting this theory of the transition to socialism. Informed by the ability of capitalism to confound Marx's prognoses, Marxists have increasingly looked upon his optimism with a certain ambivalence. And just as Marx sought to justify his vision of the future in a teleology, a hidden (or not so hidden) purpose of history, so Marxists have returned to history as a means of reexamining passages out of the present. How, then, do Marxists conceive of transitions from one epoch to another? They have questioned the idea of one mode of production being born in another. Anderson (1974) suggests that the feudal mode of production arose out of the catastrophic collision and fusion of two dissolving modes of production, namely the primitive Germanic and the ancient Roman. In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, according to Balibar (1970), the meeting of capital and wage labor, that is, the genesis of capitalism, has to be conceived of as occurring *outside* the decline of the feudal mode of production. In dislocating the genesis of one of mode of production from the dissolution of its predecessor the idea of progress is lost. There is no theoretical reason why feudalism could not have been followed by the ancient mode of production, or even by socialism. Such a position is taken to its logical conclusion by Hindess and Hirst (1975). In their analysis of precapitalist modes of production they argue that while history may offer a sense of alternatives and thus of what is possible, at the same time there is no logical or teleological way of ordering those possibilities. History is

not a fortune teller. What is left is a radical indeterminacy in the transition from one mode of production to another. Outcomes, including socialism, depend on struggle.

Gramsci's (1971) formula—"pessimism of the intelligence and optimism of the will" (taken from Romain Rolland)—resonates not only with historical studies but also with contemporary analyses of capitalism. I have already referred to the gap between class as a sociological category and class as a historical force, and to the capacity of the state to cushion and counter-act crisis tendencies through the organization of politics and ideology. Other critics have invaded Marx's scheme at an even deeper level, arguing that the forces of production develop in ways that reinforce and reproduce rather than threaten capitalist relations. Gorz (1976), for example, shows how the labor process, and even technology, can serve to prevent the formation of class consciousness through the fragmentation, atomization and hierarchization of relations in the factory and office. These factors not only divide the working class into individuals and competing groups, but also obstruct the penetration of immediate experience to the totality of relations which shape people's lives. Gorz (1976), Marglin (1976), and Braverman (1974) are ambiguous in their assessment of capitalist technology—whether or not it has an emancipatory potential and could be used under socialism. Marcuse (1964), on the other hand, maintains that the very technology is tainted. Capitalist productive forces, far from being neutral or innocent, embody a form of domination incompatible with notions of a true socialism. Socialism requires socialist machines and even a socialist science. Capitalist technology is irretrievably contaminated. Responding to Marcuse in a now celebrated debate, Habermas (1970) tries to restore neutrality and continuity to the development of the productive forces. In themselves they are neither innocent nor guilty. Thus Habermas can redirect his attention to the political as the arena of emancipation. His vision of the future rests on a return to genuine consensus politics—what he calls the repoliticization of the public realm.

All these sorties into world history, the dynamics of capitalism and alternative technologies have been prompted by very definite historical experiences of the twentieth century. From among these, attempted transitions from capitalism to socialism hang heavily in the minds of Marxists—in the Marxist collective consciousness. An important lesson of the last hundred years is that it is one thing to speak of alternative futures or even of repressed potentialities in the present; it is quite another matter to move towards such visions even when a revolutionary crisis presents itself. Strong socialist and communist movements in Germany and in Italy led not in the direction of socialism, but in the direction of fascism. Contemporary events also illustrate the precariousness of left wing movements fighting a capitalism constituted on a world scale. The examples of Chile and Portugal suggest the ease with which counter-revolution, restoration or dictatorship can be established.[12] It remains to be seen what will happen in Spain, France, Italy and Greece. Labor governments, such as the one in England, find themselves fighting for the survival of capitalism.

Even if counter-revolution in any of its guises and the social democracy of welfare capitalism are averted, the path to socialism is still filled with daunting and seemingly insuperable obstacles. Some form of capitalist restoration is always possible, even likely. Widespread disillusionment with the unfolding of events in the Soviet Union has made Marxists even more cautious in their speculations and prognoses. In such a historical context, critical theory affords an understandable retreat, particularly in the United States where the future appears so hopeless. By stressing the widening gap between what is and what could be, critical theory aims

[12] The possible resurgence of fascism as a reactionary response to the strengthening of European socialist and communist parties has prompted Marxists to reexamine the origins and nature of National Socialism. See, for example, Mason (1968); Rabinbach (1974); Poulantzas (1974); Abraham (1977); Goldfrank (1977).

to undermine the seeming naturalness and inevitability of everyday life and reveals common sense as ideology. But in bridging the divide between "reality" and potentiality, between the present and the future, critical theory has little to offer.

In nations such as France and Italy, with traditions of revolution and class struggle, Marxist debate takes place on a different terrain than in the United States, and directly confronts the issues of the transition to socialism. Accordingly, new directions in Marxist studies revolve around the reexamination and reinterpretation of the history of the Soviet Union. It is no longer enough to "critique," condemn, or lament the fate of the October Revolution; or to lay the blame at the feet of individuals or accidents of history. However disturbing it is, Marxists have been forced to examine precisely how, when and why it went wrong (see, for example, Bettleheim, 1976). But these reconstructions have to be a real history—a Marxist history—not a crude vindication of the status quo or an apology for the Soviet ruling class. Such endeavors, combined with the recent withdrawal of many European communist parties from beneath Soviet hegemony, can only augur well for the extension and deepening of Marxist discourse on the prospects and nature of socialism. Presumably, that has something to do with its realization.

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