KOLLONTAI • SOCIALIST FEMINISM
THEORIES OF THE CAPITALIST STATE

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IN THIS ISSUE ....

Mavis Robertson writes about Alexandra Kollontai, the Bolshevik leader who played such an important role in the Russian revolution. This communist, feminist and sexually liberated woman's contribution to the socialist movement has received far too little recognition — a situation we hope this article will help to change.

We reprint Bob Jessop's article on recent theories of the capitalist state from the Cambridge Journal of Economics, believing it to be an excellent survey and discussion of this very important area of marxist discussion and debate.

Ruth Connell appraises various socialist feminist theories.

In our regular Comment Eric Aarons discusses the realities behind, and the principles raised by, the current tragic conflicts between Asian socialist states.

Peter Beilharz reviews Knei-Paz's book on the social and political thought of Trotsky and Kathe Boehringer reviews The Deerhunter, one of the current spate of American films about the American experience of the Viet Nam war.

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By any standards, Alexandra Kollontai was an extraordinary person.

She was the only woman member of the highest body of the Russian Bolshevik Party in the crucial year of 1917. She was appointed Minister for Social Welfare in the first socialist government. As such, she became the first woman executive in any government. She inspired and developed far-sighted legislation in areas affecting women and, after she resigned her Ministry because of differences with the majority of her comrades, her work in women's affairs was reflected in the Communist Internationale.

She was an outstanding publicist and public speaker, a revolutionary organiser and writer. Several of her pamphlets were produced in millions of copies. Most of them, as well as her stories and novels, were the subjects of controversy. She was proficient in at least seven languages. She became the world's first woman ambassador.

Not least among her claims to fame was a personal life which defied convention and gave rise to much talk, scandalised or admiring, depending on the point of view.

There has recently been a revival of interest in Kollontai. I believe it can be attributed principally to the modern women's movement. She asked many of the questions we are asking — the fact that we are still seeking some of the answers suggests the difficult terrain she chose and enhances her relevance for us.

After leaving her second husband, Pavel Dybenko, she commented publicly that he had regarded her as a wife and not as an individual, that she was not what he needed because "I am a person before I am a woman". In my view, there is no single statement which better sums up a key ingredient of Kollontai's life and theoretical work.

Many of her ideas are those that are discussed today in the modern women's movement. Sometimes she writes in what seems to be unnecessarily coy language but she was writing sixty, even seventy years ago before we had invented such words as 'sexism'. She sought to solve the dilemmas of women within the framework of marxism. While she openly chided her male comrades for their lack of appreciation of and concern for the specifics of women's oppression, she had little patience for women who refused to face the realities of class divisions in society. She was quite scathing of those feminists who put forward solutions for all women which did not take account of the actual economic and social conditions which do affect women differently.

Because marxism had only an inadequate view or no view at all on questions she considered of fundamental importance, she set out to develop that view for marxism. Hence she wrote about love, about morality, about jealousy, about women living alone, about problems of the family, about being a mother, about women at work, about prostitution, alimony and so on. She
addressed herself to real problems at every level. Her weakness was that in practical politics she often sought maximum solutions and thus could not always point to the next practical step. Like many visionaries before and since she could describe the ultimate solution but could not answer satisfactorily the questions being immediately posed.

In some circles she is best known for her not inconsiderable achievements as a diplomat. This is especially so in Scandinavia where she lived and worked, with brief interruptions, from 1922 until 1945. In others she is identified with the ‘workers’ opposition’ movement of 1921. Her pamphlet was revived in English during the early 1960s, when interest in industrial democracy was rekindled. That movement against bureaucracy and for the independence of the trade unions pointed up many problems which faced the Soviet Union, and will perhaps face every revolution. The solutions offered by the workers’ opposition were, however, an odd mixture of commonsense and naivety, a combination of democracy and authoritarianism. Given the realities of the time, and they were hard realities in 1921, the debate was reasonably fair and open and much of what the opposition said was noted and incorporated in the bolsheviks’ program. That was an achievement even though the gains were soon whittled away and distorted under Stalin.

Alix Holt (1), who is responsible for a recent book which provides a large selection of Kollontai’s writings in English translation, claims that Kollontai is best remembered in the Soviet Union “as the proponent of the ‘glass of water theory’, the theory that sex should be as easy and uncomplicated as drinking a glass of water”. Certainly, Kollontai’s ideas on morality were a source of considerable debate in the early years of the Russian revolution. Later, and even to a degree at the time, they were subjected to distortion and ridicule. Antisocialists were already busy showing that nothing was sacred under the dreaded bolshevism. A woman who believed in freedom for both sexes, who polemised against traditional concepts of family and who encouraged women to work and fight for their rights was an obvious subject for their ridicule. But it wasn’t only the antisocialists. Within the Soviet Union, after the turbulent years of war, revolution and civil war, many yearned for stability and order, which means, among other things, a regulated family life where men and women occupy defined traditional roles. Her political opponents were not above using her controversial views on one matter to help defeat her in debates on other matters. It is still a familiar situation for most women in politics.

Kollontai may be remembered for her glass of water, but she is best known in the Soviet Union as a diplomat. Her diplomatic career is the subject of various books and articles and a film about that part of her life.

She is also known for a specific support she gave to Lenin. When Lenin returned to Russia in early 1917 he presented ten theses to his comrades on what should be done. Known now as the ‘April Theses’, they proposed immediate preparation for the socialist revolution. The bolshevik leaders said quite bluntly that it was far too early to consider revolution. As there was a meeting of the mensheviks in progress on a different floor of the same building, it was agreed that Lenin should present his views to a joint meeting. Only one person in that entire audience spoke up in support of Lenin’s views. Krupskaya, Lenin’s widow, writes in her Memories of Lenin (2) of the ‘fervent’ speech Kollontai made that day. As in other circumstances, Kollontai favoured the ultimate rather than the compromise. In this case, she and Lenin were right. What better way to remember her?

Still others recall Kollontai as a great survivor, implying that she compromised herself to survive. It is true that she lived out her life until 1952, dying in Moscow a few weeks short of her 80th birthday. It is also true that most of her famous comrades, friends and lovers died in front of Stalin’s firing squads, or disappeared in forced labour camps or were sent into exile. There are many speculations as to why she survived, some petty, some malicious, and most not convincing.

What are the sources of our knowledge of Kollontai?

For those who read Russian, there are several fine collections of Kollontai’s work
and now, thanks to Alix Holt, there is a broad-ranging selection in English but we could have been introduced to Kollontai in Australia through her own words as far back as in 1920 or 1921.

At that time Kollontai’s work *The Family and the Communist State*, written in 1919, was published in Melbourne under the title *Communism and the Family*. It was one of the very few writings of the Russian revolution published here, an indication of Kollontai’s place in the bolshevik leadership at the time and some recognition of the importance given to the topic by early communists. Incidentally, that pamphlet was reissued here in January 1971 by the Communist Party of Australia, some time before other publishers in the English language had recognised her relevance to the modern women’s movement.

A large unpublished source is a collection of her papers which was placed in the University of Gottenborg, Western Sweden, some years ago. This collection was made available from the estate of a Swedish medical practitioner and feminist, Ada Lindstrom. The circumstances of the collection seem to be these: when Kollontai was transferred from Norway to the Soviet Embassy in Sweden in 1930, she chose Ada Lindstrom as her doctor, and they became friends. The collection consists of some 300 pieces. Only 4 or 5 items — a section of a letter, several postcards and an invitation — date from before 1935. But beginning with a postcard in March 1935, there are frequent letters and cards, seemingly everything.

In the mid-1930s, when Kollontai went to Moscow for her annual consultation with the Foreign Office, she thought that something might happen to her, a quite reasonable assumption in the time of the purges. It seems that, as a precaution, she left behind in Stockholm in the care of Ada Lindstrom, a collection of her private papers and some of Pavel Dybenko (the man of peasant origin, 17 years her junior, whom she had married in her middle age shortly after the revolution). She said that these were the papers she would use when, eventually, she published her autobiography. Fortunately she escaped the purges. (Dybenko was not so lucky; he was shot in 1938.) Unfortunately or students of Kollontai, she took these papers with her when she retired to Moscow in 1945. According to her letters to Ada Lindstrom, she worked on her memoirs after 1945, revised them and prepared them for publication in 1948. She expected they would be published in America and France, as well as in the Soviet Union that year. In one letter she promised to send a copy to Ada, in others she asks Ada to send her reviews from the foreign press. But the book never appeared. She also refers to documents she had prepared but did not want published for some years.

Further evidence of the missing material has been given by a woman who was Kollontai’s secretary-companion for many years. This woman, a Swedish national, returned to Moscow with her and continued to live there after Kollontai’s death. A Swedish historian, Agneta Pleijel (2A), obtained an interview with her in the early 1970s. She wrote an article stating that the companion, Emy, confirmed what the letters say, namely, that Kollontai had worked for several years on her autobiography and had expected it would be published and that she had also prepared several collections of
documents for publication. She had specified that some should not be published before the 1950s and others should not be published until 1972.

Interestingly enough, her American diaries of 1915-1916 were published in the Soviet Union in 1962 and in 1970 and a body of work appeared about her, by several Soviet historians in the 60s and 70s. Some of these drew on previously unpublished sources.

In the absence of her definitive biography, we must look elsewhere. At least we should not confine ourselves to her short piece, written in 1926 and revised by her but as yet unpublished in the Soviet Union. This is the piece called *Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*. It was published in English in 1972, together with her own revisions which some take as an illustration of how prepared she was to compromise herself for Stalin. We will return to this theory and to the significance of the year 1926 in Kollontai's life.

We can follow Kollontai too through the eyes of Louise Bryant whose book of reportage called *Six Red Months in Russia* (3) was published in 1919. She devotes a chapter to two women, both Ministers of Social Welfare. The first was Panina, a Minister in the Kerensky Government, the second was Kollontai. Bryant tells what I believe to be a quite revealing story. She was present one day when a group of elderly people came to visit Kollontai in her office. They were a delegation from an old people's home. Kollontai explained to Bryant that the old people now had the right to run their institution themselves, to elect their own officers and choose their own menus. Bryant, knowing full well the near-starvation rations then operating in the aftermath of the revolution and the war, expressed considerable doubt that the old people could make a meaningful choice of their menu. Kollontai burst out laughing and then said: "Surely you can understand that there is a great deal of moral satisfaction in deciding whether you want thick cabbage soup or thin cabbage soup". On the basis of this and other examples, Bryant concluded that a secret of Kollontai's undoubted success as Minister of Social Welfare was that she allowed other people to take their own decisions. There are many other examples to illustrate that style. She was committed to self-management and saw that as crucial for workers generally and women specifically.

There are many other contemporary references and some recent pieces on Kollontai. Here I will mention only three.

There is Isabel de Palencia’s book written in 1947. Palencia was the representative of Republican Spain in Sweden. Her gossipy book barely qualifies as politics. Alix Holt calls it 'trivia'. Kollontai refers to it in several letters to Ada Lindstrom as 'amusing'.

There is *Empire of Fear* (5) by those famous Soviet defectors, V. and E. Petrov. They were not known for their accuracy in the Royal Commission held in this country after their defection in 1954. I cannot say if their description of life in the Soviet Embassy in Sweden is accurate: they do claim that some of Kollontai’s personal writings were taken by the KGB, and that may be so, but they also claim that her child was fathered by her second husband, Pavel Dybenko. Since the child was born around 1896 when Dybenko was all of 6 years old, I find that hard to believe.

And there is Michael Body’s work (6) published in an anti-communist journal in France in 1952. Body was a French socialist who worked with Kollontai in Norway in the 1920s. Some of his conclusions are suspect but some are collaborated from other sources.

What, then, do we know of Kollontai?

She was born Alexandra Mikhailovna Domontovich on April 1st, 1872 into a family of the old Russian nobility, the only child of her mother's second marriage. In her own words she was the youngest, most spoiled and most coddled member of the family and she claims to have had an early awareness of the conditions of peasant children with whom she played. She also had a Finnish grandfather, which perhaps explains her lifelong interest in the problems of the Finnish nation, and more generally, the problems of national minorities. She did not go to school but studied at home under a
tutor. As luck would have it, her tutor was connected to Russian revolutionary circles.

In 1893, at the age of 21, she clashed with her parents over an intended marriage of convenience and insisted on her right to marry her cousin, Volodya Kollontai.

The marriage lasted only a few years, during which time her son was born. She wrote in 1926: “Although I personally raised my child with great care, great passion, motherhood was never the kernel of my existence”. She claimed that when she left him she still loved her husband but felt she was in a ‘cage’. Her sympathies and interests were with social questions. It all sounds very familiar, but to situate her reactions in their time it could be noted that Engels’ basic work, The Origin of the Family, had been published for the first time in the year when Kollontai turned 12.

Although she read and studied widely, she says that a turning point in her life came when she visited a textile factory and saw the conditions of work of the 12,000 employees, men and women. In the years after leaving her husband, she studied in Europe, travelled, taught, attended conferences and congresses, met names from the history books — Karl Marx’s daughter Laura, Rosa Luxemburg, Plekanov, among others.

By 1905 she had become an energetic orator for the revolution. She dates her concern for women’s liberation to this time, saying that she became conscious of ‘how meager’ was the interest shown by the workers’ movement in the fate of women. Since she was convinced that women’s liberation could take place only as a result of a new social order, she fought so that the workers’ movement would make women’s liberation one of its aims. She didn’t obtain much support but the first working women’s club was formed in St. Petersburg in 1907.

Soon after, to escape imprisonment, she went into exile. She records how she was accused by male comrades of feminism and of giving too much time to women. That’s familiar, too. In her case, it was hardly just. In the same period, she was very active on behalf of Finland and in developing a theoretical position on the rights of national minorities.

From 1908 until 1917 she lived abroad, mainly in Germany, where she worked as a member of the German social democratic party. She travelled to London to join the suffrage campaign, to Italy to lecture, to Sweden and Denmark on speaking tours, and all the time she was plugging away at the woman question. Her appeals for support were made to the working class parties and against what she called bourgeois feminism.

By 1914 the mensheviks, with whom Kollontai then identified, and the bolsheviks had recognised the importance of women to the extent that they established magazines for working women, celebrated March 8 and raised matters concerning women workers in the trade unions. Kollontai, from exile, was called on to help.

She had strong connections with the textile workers’ union and had become something of an expert on maternity welfare. She studied the then 14 countries which had forms of maternity assistance, specifically praising Australia for its legislation which gave a lump sum payment to all mothers. That lump sum payment is now also history. Later she was to use these studies to draft the first Soviet insurance laws. In Paris in 1911 she organised a housewives’ strike and thereafter placed growing emphasis on the
secondary mode of production in society, housework.

She tells us frankly that despite all the travel, excitement and activity she still found time for personal relationships but she was annoyed by the fact that love affairs consume so much energy, that men try to mould women into willing sounding boards for their egos. She also regrets that, as a woman, she had no space, no welcoming hearth to return to as male comrades usually do. She writes scathingly of double standards, mentioning specifically that men are not judged by whom they marry but women are, particularly if he is less educated, younger and handsome. During some of this time her son was cared for by friends, at other times he lived with her.

At outbreak of war she and her son were arrested in Germany. Later she went to Sweden and served a term in prison there. From Norway in 1915 she contacted Lenin in Switzerland. They continued an exchange of letters and ideas until Lenin's death. She was totally opposed to the war, and shocked at the response of the majority of German social democrats who became enthusiastic supporters of the war. Finding that Lenin took an internationalist position in opposition to the war, she joined the bolsheviks.

Of the differences which developed in the party at that time, she wrote in 1926: “Now began a dark time of my life which I cannot treat of here since the events are still too fresh in my mind. But the day will also come when I will give an account of them.” (7) It seems likely that such an account was written in her unpublished autobiography.

Be that as it may, she felt it necessary to resign from the Ministry. After a short time in the field, the untimely death of Inessa Armand (8) caused her to return to Moscow to head the Central Women's Department. The first post-revolution Women's Congress had taken place in November 1918. Then and more particularly when she worked in the Women's Department, she was involved in forming people's kitchens, day-care centres, drawing women into the educational system and countless other tasks which together, she felt, would lay the basis for women's liberation.

At the start of the civil war she had been in the field where she engaged in propaganda...
work with the troops but more and more it was work among women which had her attention. During the time she headed the Women's Department, abortion was legalised, a women's newspaper founded, and two world conferences of communist women were held.

Her books and articles on morality were only one of the many controversies she was involved in. According to her own words she accepted the position in the Soviet legation in Norway in 1922 because she assumed it would be a mere formality and she would have time to write and think. She did write a little. Perhaps her most controversial pieces were *The Winged Eros* (9) in which she advises young people on attitudes to love, and her three short novels, recently reissued in English under the title *Love of Worker Bees* (10). But diplomatic life, as she found it, was no formality. In 1923 she was appointed head of the mission and by 1924 was ambassador. She became a skilled negotiator in matters of trade as in other areas of diplomatic life. In 1926 she was appointed to Mexico, but stayed only a short time because the climate adversely affected her health.

According to Michael Body, in 1926 when she wrote the short autobiography previously mentioned, she had planned to retire and write. He says she wanted to write about what had gone wrong with the revolution. It is certainly true that in several letters to different people around this time she said she would leave the diplomatic service and 'be free'. But if, in the early part of 1926, that had been her plan, she changed it. Again, according to Body, she agreed to stay on in the diplomatic service and write for history. 1926 was the year of the attempt to develop a united opposition to Stalin. Perhaps she thought it would succeed.

More likely Alix Holt is right. She believes that Kollontai had wanted to re-enter active politics in 1926 after several years as a diplomat, but found that political life had changed considerably in her absence. The debates in the Party had all but ceased. If she had been unsuccessful in putting forward concrete plans to assist women in the period of the NEP (11) — and this is clearly her weakness — what could she do in the situation of 1926? It must be added that while Lenin and Trotsky had not endorsed many of her views, they had encouraged debate and they had been supportive of the rights of women. Now one was dead and the other isolated.

In 1926 she did enter the party political debates briefly on the laws concerning marriage, with particular reference to alimony. She made telling points with considerable humour but there is a certain unreality about her proposals. She knew that the Soviet Union was then much too poor to afford a comprehensive social security system but she balked at the idea that the property of a marriage or a common law relationship (then recognised as valid for the
first time) be divided when that marriage is dissolved and that men be made responsible for the upkeep of their children. She looked at the question through the eyes of the poor workers and peasants. Poor workers had little or no property anyway, a peasant couldn’t really divide a single cow. She was also realistic enough to recognise that many people have more than one relationship in a lifetime. The cow might have to be divided not once but twice. She proposed instead a tax — to guarantee the upkeep of the children of the poor, together with a system of contracts to replace marriage registration for all those who had property and income which could be divided. In a sense, hers was a class comment on alimony and a comment free of hypocrisy. For example, she used the occasion to raise again the need for satisfactory birth control. But she found, as others have found since, that there is no point in having elaborate plans, no matter how just and logical, which answer questions which no-one is asking or which society has no means to solve.

After 1926 her diplomatic life continued but her party political life ceased.

In 1927 she was in Norway. In 1930 she was transferred to Sweden where she remained till her retirement in 1945. Her main achievement, in this period, was the negotiation of the Finnish–Soviet peace in 1940: Lenin’s far-sightedness had paid off. Finland needed a sympathetic negotiator on the Soviet side at that time. She received several decorations and awards from the Soviet, Finnish and Swedish governments. She lived quietly in her Moscow flat, writing and putting her papers in order. She died of a heart attack one day after International Women’s Day in 1952.

Alix Holt gives particular emphasis to another aspect of the period after 1926: she published almost nothing. Indeed, from 1923, when she first retired from active politics, there is nothing recorded at all until 1926 when she again, temporarily entered into debate. Thereafter, until her death there are no more than 15 pieces, covering a period of 25 years. Most of these are non-controversial reportage — about life in Mexico, reminiscences about Lenin and various famous women and stories from her own life. You can find nothing in print where she praises Stalin and this is especially surprising because everyone, Lenin’s widow Krupskaya included, had to sing his praises sometime.

In 1927 her novel, A Great Love, was published. It appeared in English in 1929. There are a few theories about this. Robert McNeal (12) in his biography of Krupskaya, Bride of the Revolution, draws on what Michael Body claims Kollontai had told him of a relationship which had existed between Lenin and Inessa Armand. Both McNeal and Body and some others consider that Kollontai’s A Great Love is a thinly disguised account of that relationship. And McNeal goes further, he claims that the novel was written and published in 1927 as part of Stalin’s campaign to destroy the authority of Krupskaya and, through her, the opposition.

It is true that there are similarities between the content of the book and what is thought to have happened between Armand, Lenin and Krupskaya but the similarities are such that they could more or less be accounted for by the fact that in many affairs there are an older woman — the wife — who is hurt, and a younger woman — the mistress — who isn’t very happy either.

If we are to believe that Kollontai wrote this novel vindictively, we have to believe that she had lost all sympathy with the opposition in the Bolshevik Party, yet everything else points to the fact that she gave less support to stalinism than most. We would also have to believe that she would sacrifice a women friend for a male political opponent. If she did that, it is entirely out of character. It seems more likely that she wrote the novel to carry on her theme that women need to be independent but those of her generation, even the most emancipated, the ‘single women’ as she calls them, continue to seek close personal ties with a man and are usually disappointed. She said over and over in articles, stories and novels that women need to learn to make personal life a part of existence, as men do, and not their whole existence — even temporarily. In an essay on a variety of ‘single women’ as portrayed in literature, she tries to define her new woman, she says:

This new woman brings with her something alien, that at times repels us because of its newness as a breed, so to
speak. We peer at it closely, looking for familiar, agreeable traits of which our mothers and grandmothers were the bearers. But the type who stands before us has broken with the past and harbors within herself a whole world of new feelings, experiences, and demands. Doubt rises in us, we are almost disappointed. Where is the engaging submissiveness and softness of yore?....Before us stands woman as personality....with her own individuality, who asserts herself — in short, the woman who has broken the rusted fetters of her sex.

Her 1927 novel is about such a woman. A Great Love could have been based on any number of women; certainly Armand had left her husband and sought a political life of her own. And Armand, like Kollontai, believed in living her life on her own terms but it is drawing a long bow to claim that A Great Love was written as a key part in Stalin’s struggle for hegemony.

If Kollontai had consciously aided Stalin in 1927, there is no explanation why she did not aid him later, especially in the mid-1930s. Alix Holt is correct to draw attention to the fact that her main writing ended in 1923. This followed her failure to make progress with her policies for women in the NEP period and her subsequent retirement from party politics. It preceded the rigidifying of stalinism as a system. By maintaining a situation where she wrote nothing in later years, she avoided praising Stalin. Even in her many private letters to Ada Lindstrom, she seldom mentions Soviet politics and never mentions Stalin. Sometimes she mentions she is “happy for her country”; in April 1948 she is “happy about the treaties” (a further reference to Soviet-Scandinavian relations), at the end of 1947 she wrote that “the monetary reform is a brilliant act” and not much more. On the other hand, those same letters have quite a few references to everyday life and some unflattering things to say about the inefficiency of the Soviet postal service. Alix Holt comments on Kollontai’s silence as follows:

In view of the fact that she had long considered work among women to be the main area of her political activity, the silence was particularly striking. In the last twenty-five years of her life she appears to have only made two public statements on the position of contemporary Soviet woman. The first occasion was in 1935, when as a member of the Soviet delegation to the League of Nations she spoke in the legal commission on questions of the legal and economic position of women. Kollontai kept to the facts as much as possible, emphasising the impressive legal equalities that Soviet women had won; Pravda considered only one short extract to be worth quoting.

On the second occasion, in her article “Soviet Woman: Citizenship with Equal Rights” which appeared in (the journal) Soviet Woman in the autumn of 1948, she limits herself to a survey of legal benefits, with another long diversion into history. Her only moving bow is the congratulations which she offers the government on having created the conditions for women to be able to ‘fulfil her natural duty....to be a mother, the educator of her children and the mistress of her home’.

I would add that anyone familiar with Kollontai’s views, her commitment to women’s liberation and her use of irony in many of her earlier speeches might have harboured doubts that a tribute couched in such terms was intended as praise.

No one can say with certainty why Kollontai stayed on in the diplomatic service of a country whose leadership was to destroy so many of its early revolutionary gains, particularly the gains made for women, and was to condemn to death or imprisonment many of her closest comrades. It seems most likely that she felt some contribution was better than none — and her diplomatic contribution was both positive and considerable. It is also clear from her letters to Ada Lindstrom that she understood the fascist danger quite early. Since she had a burning hatred of war she must have wanted to contribute to avoiding a new war.

As to why she escaped the purges — the most likely reasons are the obvious ones: that she lived abroad and that she had ceased to be a controversial figure. Her silence may have irritated Stalin but at least she did not give him any new ammunition to use against her.

What then can one say of her contribution?

She developed for marxism a whole body of ideas. She is a pathfinder who shows that the
institution of the family, attitudes to love and personal responses and concepts of morality are not fixed and immutable but socially conditioned and economically based. She understood, if somewhat inadequately, that there is no simple equation between one’s consciousness and one’s social situation, rather that one must struggle for consciousness. Her article, “Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle” (13), is an excellent example of an attempt to grapple with the way consciousness is moulded. While she is, in my view, over-optimistic on the potential of the working class to develop new forms of personal relations, she states the problems in all their complexity and points to some solutions and she is quite clear that we cannot wait until there is a new society to change ideology, rather, “a social group works out its ideology, and consequently its sexual morality, in the process of its struggle”.

Of course she dreamed. In one article she imagines a situation in 1970. The article is called “Soon” (14). It was written in 1922. Sadly, much of what she predicts is far from being achieved anywhere but the vision of the future is important anyway, even if it will come later and not soon.

And there are gaps in her theory — which also includes a certain idealisation of motherhood. But I think if she had done nothing else but write one speech, which she gave to a women’s meeting in 1921, she would be worthy of a place in any collected works of socialists and feminists. It is entitled “On prostitution and ways of fighting it” (15). Without oversimplifying, it’s worth noting her all-sided treatment of the question, that she understood that prostitution, as an institution, is akin to the institution of marriage, that both flourish because women are conditioned by centuries of education to expect material favours from men in return for sexual favours. She sought to change the situation where women are deprived, or refuse, or are prevented from engaging in socially useful work (16). She hated everything which acted against equality, solidarity and comradeship. In her view a man who buys the favours of a woman inside or outside of marriage — and the verb is buy — cannot see a woman as a comrade or as a person with equal rights. I think that is profoundly truthful.

And finally she was committed to the abolition of domestic labour. She well understood the significance of domestic labour in the economy and the sexual division of labour as the source of women’s oppression. She tried to convince the bolsheviks that it was necessary to devote resources to solving this question. The consequences of her failure in this respect represent a warning to us all. She did not invent the slogan, “There can be no socialism without women’s liberation and no women’s liberation without socialism” but that, I believe, is her essential message.

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(3) Six Red Months in Russia, Louise Bryant, George H. Doran Company, New York.
(6) “Alexandra Kollontai” in Preuves, April, 1952.
(8) She died of cholera in September, 1920.
(9) “Make Way for the Winged Eros”, article in Molodaya guardiya, No. 3, 1923.
(11) The New Economic Policy, which followed ‘War Communism’. It was considered a step back by Kollontai (and others).
(13) Appears in Alix Holt’s translations.
(14) Appears in Alix Holt’s translations.
(15) Appears in Alix Holt’s translations.
Socialist—Feminist Theory: An Appraisal

Ruth Connell

The Women's Liberation Movement is nearing the end of its first decade of activity. What has particularly distinguished this second wave of feminism from its nineteenth and twentieth century counterparts is its awareness that a program of democratic rights plus integration into social production is not sufficient to establish full equality between the sexes. This is also what distinguishes the feminist political perspective from the traditional socialist program for women's emancipation.

The traditional socialist program relied heavily on the work of Engels (1884) who argued:

... the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social, scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree. (1)

The first period of feminism was also influenced by classical liberal philosophy such as that of John Stuart Mill. Essentially this projected the granting of certain legal and economic rights to women but with the understanding that childbearing and privatised childrearing was a vocation and one that was necessarily feminine.

Many early feminists argued that women were capable of both home and work; few argued that women were not at least responsible for the home, whatever potential they might develop in addition to this. (2)

Many feminists certainly recognised that the source of inequality was the patriarchal society they lived in. Yet their analysis of this, and their plans for its change was mainly based on economic independence for women.

Alexandra Kollontai, a remarkable feminist theorist and bolshevik, saw personal relationships as an essential part of each individual's experience, and as such, central to the struggle of each individual for a better life.

The three basic circumstances distorting the modern psyche — extreme egoism, the idea that married partners possess each other, and the acceptance of the inequality of the sexes in terms of physical and emotional experience — must be faced if the sexual problem is to be settled.

But Kollontai still held that entry into social production was the answer.

Only a change in the economic role of women, and her independent involvement in production, can and will bring about the weakening of these mistaken and hypocritical ideas. (3)

The position of the early feminists has been summarised by Ellen Du Bois:

We should understand the inability of nineteenth century feminists to develop
solutions adequate to the oppression of women less as a failure of their political imagination or boldness than as a reflection of the state of historical development of capitalism and of male supremacy. (4)

With the examples of several decades of socialist states, contemporary feminists, while recognising the many advantages socialist women have, still point to the many important shortcomings as evidence that economic and legal liberation do not necessarily entail feminist liberation, i.e. full sexual equality.

Barbara Ehrenreich has detailed the three major kinds of evidence of the persistence of sex inequality as:

1. occupational segregation by sex;
2. sexual objectification;
3. low representation of women in positions of political leadership. (5)

The other reason for the dissatisfaction of contemporary feminists with traditional theories of equality has been the “successes” of capitalism — at the time of the emergence of a feminist movement the socialist program of “integration into social production” had been achieved to a significant extent within capitalism.

Thus contemporary feminism began with the realisation that the solutions to sexual inequality lay not only in the realm of political economy, but in an area which had so far received little attention from political movements — the realm of private life. (6)

Betsey Stone (1970) states that in particular,

The rise of black nationalism, with its questioning of every aspect of society, was key in creating a political climate in which ... deep prejudices about women could be unmasked. (7)

What has been important is that marxist theory has been subjected to reappraisal by the feminist movement in its search for strategy for action. Socialist feminists within the women’s liberation movement have seen women’s liberation as an issue which transcends class.

Feminism offers important insights into relations of domination and submission which exist between other social groups, such as classes and ethnic groups. By its insistence on a politics which embraces both the “private” and the political/economic sphere, feminism points the way to a more comprehensive socialist politics for the industrial capitalist countries. (8)

Eisenstein argues that socialist feminism has a political and intellectual commitment to understanding the problems of women’s oppression in terms of a real synthesis between the traditions of marxist analysis and feminist theory.

This doesn’t mean merely adding one theory to the other, but rather redefining each through the conflict that derives from and between both traditions. (9)

From the outset it becomes important for feminists to have a clearly defined analysis of the term ‘patriarchy’. Kate Millett established that ‘patriarchy’ is a universal (geographical and historical) mode of power relationships and domination. According to this thesis, Juliet Mitchell writes,

... patriarchy is the sexual politics whereby men establish their power and maintain control. All societies and all social groups within these are sexist in the fundamental sense that their entire organisation, at every level, is predicated on the domination of one sex by the other. Specific variations are less significant than the general truth. (10)

The term ‘patriarchy’ has been further refined as part of our particular historical/political conjuncture to ‘capitalist patriarchy’ — a term which emphasises the mutually reinforcing dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structuring. (11)

If the division of labor is based in capitalism then the sexual division of labor reflects both this basis and that of patriarchy.

The sexual division of labor and society expresses the most basic hierarchical division in our society between masculine and feminine role. It is the basic mechanism of control for patriarchal culture. It designates the fact that roles, purposes, activity, one’s labor, are determined sexually. It
expresses the very notion that the biological distinction, male/female, is used to distinguish social functions and individual power. (12)

Eisenstein argues that to the extent that the concern with profit and the concern with societal control are inextricably connected (but cannot be reduced to each other), patriarchy and capitalism become an integral process; specific elements of each system are necessitated by the other. (13)

Nancy Hartsock contends that, at bottom, feminism is a mode of analysis. The power of the method feminists develop grows out of the fact that it enables women to connect their everyday lives with an analysis of the institutions which shape them.

By calling attention to the specific experiences of individuals, feminism calls attention to the totality of social relations, to the social formation as a whole. (14)

This feminist mode of analysis makes revolution necessary, leads to an integration of theory and practice, and leads to a transformation of social relations. (15)

This type of assertion makes it imperative that socialist movements/parties re-evaluate programs and strategies which rely only on a class-based analysis of capitalism. Feminist analysis will continue to challenge the traditional socialist formula and insist on a new kind of politics embracing both the ‘private’ and the ‘public’, the cultural and the economic. (16)

This feminist assertion obviously does not go unchallenged by left/socialist groups. Yet socialist feminists believe that until a feminist analysis of patriarchy is part of the marxist analysis of capitalism, any revolution would end much as has already been observed. Feminists are thus developing and refining theory with the goal that to understand the process is to understand the way the process may be changed.

Juliet Mitchell has written that the ideology of ‘woman’ presents her as an undifferentiated whole. Likewise the ‘family’ is presented as a unit that ensures across time and space. Within its supposed permanent structure, eternal women finds her place.

The ‘true’ women and the ‘true’ family are images of peace and plenty: in actuality they may both be sites of violence and despair. (17)

Historically and cross-culturally, women’s mothering has become a fundamentally determining feature of social organisation. Nancy Chodorow argues that just as the actual physical and biological requirements of childbearing and childcare were declining, women’s mothering role gained psychological and ideological significance and came increasingly to dominate women’s lives, outside the home as well as within it. (18)

Chodorow argues that women’s mothering creates ideological and psychological modes which reproduce orientations to, and structures of, male dominance in individual men and builds an assertion of male superiority into the very definition of masculinity. (19)

Talcott Parsons claims that the ‘stabilisation and tension-management of adult personalities’ is a major family function. Chodorow argues that the more correct reading is that the wife/mother does the tension-management and stabilising and the husband/father is thereby soothed and steadied. This focus on women’s social/emotional role leads us away from noticing that this ‘role’ is work. (20)

Even today few recognise that housework as we know it was born in advanced industrial society, reflecting the transformation of women who had been manufacturers, farmers, skilled teachers, and healers into small-scale janitors. (21)

Much analysis has focussed on women in the home, as unpaid worker, socialiser of children, stabiliser of other workers, and as reproducer. The biological function of reproduction has in turn been more thoroughly analysed from the perspective of women’s sexuality and the demand for control over her body.

A large movement has centred on women’s unpaid housework. This has resulted in thorough analysis of women in the family, and political demands for wages for housework. This movement seems to be particularly strong in the UK and North
America, its impact in Australia seems to be slight.

Silvia Federici in arguing the case for wages against housework says that not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depths of the female character. Its unwaged condition has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work. As well, housework involves a peculiar combination of physical, emotional and sexual services which women are performing basically for capital.

Federici argues that to demand wages for housework is to expose the fact that housework is already money for capital:

that capital has made and makes money out of our cooking, smiling, fucking. (22)

Recognition of housework, which is still the primary identification of women, as a moment of capitalist production, clarifies women’s specific function within the capitalist division of labor and, most importantly, the specific forms women’s attack must take against it. (23)

Cox and Federici argue that the family is essentially the institutionalisation of women’s wageless labor, of women’s wageless dependence on men, and consequently, the institutionalisation of a division of power which has successfully functioned in disciplining women and men as well. (24)

One result of this is that women become repressive figures, disciplinarians of all the members of the family, ideologically and psychologically. (25)

The essence of capitalist ideology is to glorify the family as a ‘private world’, the last frontier where men and women ‘keep (their) souls alive’. This ideology opposes the family (or the community) to the factory, the personal to the social, the private to the public, productive to unproductive work. It is totally functional to women’s unpaid work in that it makes it appear as an act of love.
But the way the wage relation has mystified the social function of the family is an extension of the way capital mystifies waged labor and the subordination of all social relations to the 'cash nexus'. (26)

However, Eisenstein doesn't believe that the major argument is whether domestic labor can be squeezed into the pre-existing categories of wage labor, surplus value and 'productive' work. Rather, she argues, women's revolutionary potential emanates from the very nature and organisation of the work as domestic work — both in its patriarchal and in its capitalist elements.

To the degree domestic labor is a sexual organisation of economic existence, it is a cross-class reality that affects all women. This is the feminist, political concern which is left out of much of the discussion of domestic labor when the pre-existing analytical categories of class take priority. (27)

Weinbaum and Bridges introduce another consideration of women's domestic labor when they argue that the emphasis is not on housework as a kind of 'production'. Rather it is that housewives' activity is largely a reflection of the fact that capital organises the manufacture of goods and the provision of services.

Their analysis focusses on consumption:

The work of consumption, while subject to and structured by capital, embodies the needs — material and non-material — most antagonistic to capitalist production; and the contradiction between private production and socially determined needs is embodied in the activities of the housewife. (28)

They argue that housewives' work is scheduled by capital and the state. They must work in relation to schedules developed elsewhere — and unco-ordinated with each other. The consumption worker unlike the wage laborer, has no singular and obvious antagonist, but many: the state, the supermarket, the landlord, etc. (29)

This makes mockery of the oft-repeated cry ‘housewives are their own boss!’

However, women's role in consumption is constructed by capital in complex ways: capital organises the distribution of income to the household, and this largely determines the distribution of households into neighbourhoods; at the same time capital organises distribution of particular goods and services to particular areas.

Weinbaum and Bridges go on to analyse the revolutionary potential of community-based struggles around consumption demands. They view these demands as threatening bourgeois hegemony; although they may be accommodated, they serve as a practice in self-management, an important component in the socialist alternative. They demonstrate that the possibilities of organised action show the constraints on political activity within capitalism. Community and household-based demands, they believe, insist that production and provision of services be oriented to social needs, and thus embody values antithetical to capitalist production. (30)

However, they make it quite plain they are not so naive as to believe that all housewives are politically active, much less revolutionary!

Just as wage laborers may feel ‘inadequate’ because their earnings are low or because they are not promoted, so housewives may internalise contradictions which are structural. (31)

Weinbaum and Bridges provide another alternative to the argument that women must enter the productive sphere to become revolutionary. One feels that their analysis is particularly important because it provides marxists with a necessary link in organising the revolutionary potential of women each locked in her family as the chrysalis in the cocoon that imprisons itself by its own work, to die and leave silk for capital. (32)

Women's involvement in the workforce presents problems or contradictions which are based in women's role in the home. Women have traditionally moved into areas of work which represent extensions of their 'private' life — in service industries and boring, repetitive, low-paid work.

Heidi Hartmann argues that job segregation by sex is the primary mechanism in capitalist society that maintains the superiority of men over women, because it enforces lower wages for
women in the labor market. Low wages keep women dependent on men because they encourage women to marry. Married women must perform domestic chores for their husbands. This domestic division, in turn, acts to weaken women's position in the labor market. Thus the hierarchical domestic division of labor is perpetuated by the labor market, and vice versa. (33)

Hartmann cites the anthropological work of Sherry Ortner: "female is to male as culture is to nature", culture devalues nature; females are associated with nature in all cultures and are thus devalued. This view is compatible with Rosaldo, whose emphasis is on the public/private split, and Levi Strauss who assumes the subordination of women during the process of the creation of society. (34)

Hartmann posits that the ability of men to organise themselves played a crucial role in limiting women's participation in the wage-labor market, i.e. guilds; the rise of male and the elimination of female professions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Through the formative period of industrial capitalism, men appear to have been better able to organise as wage workers, this organisational knowledge growing out of their position in the family and in the division of labor. (35)

This argument has a little of the chicken and the egg in it. However, Hartmann argues that, with the separation of work from the home, men became less dependent on women for industrial production, while women became more dependent on men economically. Men increased their control over technology, production and marketing, as they excluded women from industry, education and political organisation. (36)

Zaretsky also follows this line of analysis but concludes that capitalism exacerbated the sexual division of labor and created the appearance that women work for their husbands. In reality, women who did domestic work at home were working for capital. (37)

All these arguments lead back to a consideration of patriarchal culture, for the reasons why the inequality of the sexes became part of our society. Marxists and feminists have in the past few years turned to a rereading of Freud in their attempts to explain the cultural subordination of women.

Without attempting to present Freud's theories, or those of Lacan, it is relevant to present some marxist-feminist debate on their importance.

Criticisms of Freud's work are probably as diverse as its interpretations. Eva Figes argues that the one serious criticism that must be levelled at Freud is his inability to see beyond the immediate social situation, so that he is constantly confusing cause and effect, and his obstinate refusal to recognise that his own present day was itself transitional. In a very real sense he appears to have subscribed to a view of human progress in which the here and now was the ultimate goal and seems to have excluded any idea of further change beyond his own lifetime. (38)

Campioni argues that the basic tenets of the science of psychoanalysis are without any doubt scientific, and it depends on the interpretation of these how far we can keep these free from the intervention of sex/class interests. She views this task as being pre-eminently one for marxist feminists — to salvage the important scientific concepts from idealist or sexist interpretations. The important scientific concepts being primal repression and the castration complex. (39)

All that can be said is, as women, we cannot accept the specificity of this concept, since it refers to an anatomical destiny and an invariant patriarchal structure, which are clearly determined by economical/political/patriarchal structure, which are clearly determined by economical/political/ideological considerations and which are unacceptable to any feminist. (39)

Campioni insists on a historical materialist perspective in examining the theory of psychoanalysis to come to an understanding of the nature and function of ideology:

It is not psychoanalysis which ultimately explains the oppression of women (in their function of bearers of specific sexed relations, i.e. 'wives' and 'mothers' and 'daughters'), but their social relations which explain their psychology. (40)

While there is still debate over specific resolution of issues for women — both as issues which must be confronted within
capitalism, as issues facing socialist societies, and, ultimately, as questions facing future communist societies — there does exist a feminist consensus on certain principles. These may be summarised as follows:

1. The establishment of women’s reproductive freedom and physical integrity as inalienable rights (this includes the rights to abortion and contraception regardless of population policy).

2. A social commitment to the eradication of male dominance in all its manifestations — authoritarian relations within the family, the sexual objectification of women, stereotyped images of women in the media and culture and so on.

3. Reappraisal of women’s domestic labor, aimed at an increased social valuation of women’s necessary and productive work within the home giving economic security to women, an increased sharing of domestic labor between the sexes, and the socialisation of functions which can be more effectively and satisfactorily performed outside the home.

4. Democratic control over the commodity ensemble produced for domestic and private consumption with regard to quality, intrinsic use value and ideological content. (41)

5. An end to all economic exploitation and discrimination against women, including full access to all occupations, backed up by provision of full community-based childcare.

In attempting to weave together various analyses of society and future demands of a socialist society it is easy to impart the impression of general agreement between feminists. This is far from the truth. Not only do sharp and, at present, irreconcilable divisions exist between various groups (especially along party political lines) but socialist feminists within the women’s liberation movement are divided on strategy proposals.

This in many ways reflects the position women are in through the current economic ‘crisis’, when many of their gains are being eroded and the women’s movement generally is losing its perspective of growth and becoming very diverse.

What must not be lost sight of are the questions of the relationship between the personal and the political, of the importance placed on group process and means, and of the importance of theory being tied to practice. These all reflect the basic issue of how feminism and marxism can be synthesised in practice. (42)

Petchesky sees four critical relationships, and within these, the dynamic interconnections between the public and the private, production and reproduction, are surfacing in a concrete and historically precise way. These are:

1. The relationship between kinship, or the family, and clan structure. The various ways that family and kinship systems both reflect and help to reshape social relations outside the family.

2. The relationship between control over the means of reproduction (specifically sexuality and childbirth) and male power. An important instrument of patriarchal and capitalist/imperialist domination.

3. The relationship between patriarchal ideology and the state, its form and its legitimacy. We are beginning to learn how patriarchy underwrites state power. This involves the functions of dominant anti-woman ideologies such as the ‘double standard’, misogynistic pollution taboos, cults of motherhood, etc., as major legitimations for the ancient and modern bourgeois state.

4. The relationship between all this and women’s consciousness and the nature of revolutionary transformations. (43)

Feminist analysis is an ongoing debate. This debate is critical to the further development of the marxist-feminist analysis of women’s position under capitalism and their position under the socialism that we are yet to achieve.

How the working class will ultimately unite organisationally, we don’t know. We do know that up to now many of us have been told to forget our own needs in some wider interest which was never wide enough to
include us. And so we have learnt by bitter experience that nothing unified and revolutionary will be formed until each section of the exploited will have made its own autonomous power felt. (44)

13. Ibid, p. 27.
15. Ibid, p. 64.
34. Ibid, p. 209.
40. Ibid, p. 35.

Also:
Benston, M., The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation. No publication information.
Matriarchy Study Group, Menstrual Taboos, Community Press, London.
Despite their very different assumptions and principles of explanation, monetarists, Keynesians and Marxists share a concern with the nature and impact of state intervention in capitalist economies. Yet, in contrast to the study of market forces, the state itself is strangely neglected as a field of analysis. This is as true of theories that presuppose an active role for the state as of those that entail a more limited role. Indeed, even though Marxists have long claimed special knowledge of the strategic significance of the state in class struggle, it is only in the last ten years that they have rediscovered the state as a problem in political economy. The resulting discussion has ranged from the most abstract methodological issues to quite specific historical problems and has generated a variety of hypotheses and insights. It is unfortunately true that much of the Marxist debate is esoteric and often inaccessible and/or irrelevant to those working in other traditions. But, in the absence of any comparable reappraisal of the state, this debate merits wider consideration. Moreover, since Marxism has long been concerned with the state as well as with production and exchange, it is surely worth assessing to what extent an integrated approach can illuminate economic analysis. Such an enquiry is particularly germane in the current period of continuing world economic crisis and increasing state intervention to restructure the industrial and financial system.

It should be emphasised that the present survey is not concerned with Marxist economics as such, but focuses instead on some recent Marxist theories of the capitalist state. Nor does it develop a new approach; it simply considers these theories in terms of certain given criteria. These comprise general criteria such as logical consistency and theoretical determinacy, as well as more specific criteria relevant to an evaluation of Marxist theories. The latter can be stated quite briefly as follows. A Marxist theory of the capitalist state will be considered adequate to the extent that (a) it is founded
on the specific qualities of capitalism as a mode of production, (b) it attributes a central role to class struggle in the process of capital accumulation, (c) it establishes the relations between the political and economic features of society without reducing one to the other or treating them as totally independent and autonomous, (d) it allows for historical and national differences in the forms and functions of the state in capitalist societies, and (e) it allows for the influence of non-capitalist classes and non-class forces in determining the nature of the state and the exercise of state power. To justify the choice of these particular criteria would side-track the discussion before it begins; it is hoped that their relevance and importance will emerge as we proceed.

The paper starts with a short review of the approach of Marx and other classical Marxist theorists to the capitalist state. Several different themes in their work are specified and their merits and demerits considered. This provides a framework within which to assess recent developments. Some variations on the themes of the classical texts are then examined and criticised for their failure to advance the Marxist theory of the state. This brings us to the central part of the paper, which deals with recent theories of the capitalist state, evaluated in the light of our criteria. The paper concludes with some general remarks on Marxist analyses of state power in capitalist societies and their implications for other theoretical approaches.

The classic texts on the state

It is commonplace that Marx did not offer a theoretical analysis of the capitalist state to match the scope and rigour of *Das Kapital*. His work on the state comprises a fragmented and unsystematic series of philosophical reflections, contemporary history, journalism and incidental remarks. It is not surprising, therefore, that Marx rarely focuses directly on the complex relations between the state apparatus, state power, capital accumulation and its social preconditions. But it is less often remarked that the same is true of other classical Marxist theorists, such as Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Gramsci. For, although they offer various acute observations on the state in general, specific historical cases, and the nature of ideological domination, they do not confront the crucial question of the differential forms of the capitalist state and their adequacy to continued accumulation in different situations. Indeed, in so far as the classic texts do focus on this issue, they do so in inconsistent ways. There are at least six different approaches, and, although they are often combined with varying degrees of consistency and mutual qualification, they involve different theoretical assumptions, principles of explanation and political implications. They must therefore be considered separately before one can draw any general conclusions about the classical approach as a whole.

(i) Marx originally treated the modern state (at least that in 19th-century Prussia) as a parasitic institution that played no essential role in economic production or reproduction. In his view, democratic government would be characterised by a genuine unity of state and people, whereas the modern state was an expression of the irreconcilable conflicts rooted in the egoism of civil society. In this context, the state and its officials, far from representing the common interest, tend to exploit and oppress civil society on behalf of particular sectional groups. Indeed, Marx argues that, just as corporate organisation enables the bourgeoisie and master craftsmen to defend their material interests, the state becomes the private property of officials in their struggle for self-advancement (Marx, 1970, especially pp. 44-54; see also Hunt, 1975, p. 124). This view was elaborated in his critique of Hegel’s political theories, when the young Marx was still committed to liberal radical political ideas. Nor had he then developed the conception of capitalism as a mode of production and so could not identify the specific characteristics of the capitalist state (Althusser, 1969, pp. 49-86; 1976, pp. 151-161; Mandel, 1971, pp. 52-67 and *passim*). Thereafter, although he retained the basic ideas about the form of the modern representative state and its separation from civil society, Marx treated it as a necessary part of the system of class domination rather than as extraneous and parasitic. The latter view can still be found in his subsequent work on Oriental despotism, however, where Marx sometimes treats the Asiatic mode of production as communal in nature and the Asiatic state as a parasitic body standing
above society (see particularly Marx, 1973, pp. 471-514 passim). But, although the idea that the modern state is essentially parasitic is still held in anarchist circles, it was not long retained by Marx himself.

(ii) Marx also discusses the state and state power as epiphenomena (i.e. simple surface reflections) of the system of property relations and the resulting economic class struggles. This view is again largely confined to the earlier writings, but it emerges occasionally in his later work and occurs frequently in more recent Marxist analyses. It is particularly clear in Marx's early comments on law (in which legal relations are treated as mere expressions of the social relations of production), but is also apparent in more general analyses of political institutions. The most frequently cited illustration of this approach is the 1859 Preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. This appears to treat law and politics as a superstructure based on the economic infrastructure, to view property relations as the legal expression of relations of production, and to ground revolution on the growing contradiction between forces and relations of production. In general, this approach considers the structure of the state as a surface reflection of a self-sufficient and self-developing economic base. And, since classes are defined in purely economic terms, the exercise of state power is seen as a surface reflection of economic struggle. It also implies that there is a perfect, one-to-one correspondence between juridico-political relations and economic relations or, at best, some sort of 'lead' or 'lag' between them. It thus reduces the impact of the state to simple temporal deformation of economic development (typically viewed in terms of the growth of the forces of production) and of economic class struggle (typically viewed in terms of a struggle over the distribution of the product). Thus, although state intervention can accelerate or hinder economic development, the latter is always determinant in the last instance (see particularly, Engels, 1954, pp. 253-254, and Marx and Engels, 1975, pp. 392-394).

(iii) Another common approach treats the state as the factor of cohesion in a given society. This perspective is closely identified nowadays with Poulantzas, but is also evident in the classic texts. Thus Engels views the state as an institution that emerges
pari passu with economic exploitation. He argues that its function is to regulate the struggle between antagonistic classes through repression and concession, and thus to moderate class conflict without undermining the continued domination of the ruling class and the reproduction of the dominant mode of production (Engels, 1942, pp. 154-163 and passim). Lenin adopts the same view in several places (see especially Lenin, 1970, passim). Bukharin also treats society as a system of unstable equilibrium inside which the state acts as a 'regulator' and Gramsci, albeit from a far less mechanistic position, adopts more or less the same argument on several occasions (Bukharin, 1969, pp. 150-154 and passim; Gramsci, 1971, pp. 206-276). The principal difficulties with this approach are twofold. Firstly, it fails to specify the nature of the state as a factor of cohesion and/or to identify the means through which the state realises this function. Hence the state is defined in functional terms and comes to include every institution which contributes to cohesion (see especially Poulantzas, 1973, pp. 44-50). It is impossible to elucidate the class nature of the state in this way. Indeed, far from leading to revolutionary conclusions, it is this view that is most often associated with the idea that the state can 'reconcile' class conflict by acting as a neutral mediator. Secondly, unless one can specify the mechanism of cohesion and its limitations, it becomes difficult to explain the emergence of revolutionary crises and the transition from one epoch to another. In this respect, this sort of approach is so obviously inadequate that it must be complemented and supported with reference to other perspectives.

(iv) The state is also seen as an instrument of class rule. This is the most common approach and is particularly evident in exegeses of Marxism-Leninism. A fundamental problem is the tendency to assume that the state as an instrument is neutral and can be used with equal facility and equal effectiveness by any class or social force. This approach also encounters difficulties in situations where the economically dominant class does not actually fill the key positions in the state apparatus (as cited by Marx himself in the case of the landed aristocracy ruling on behalf of capital in 19th-century Britain). The same problem occurs where the state acquires a considerable measure of independence from the dominant class owing to a more or less temporary equilibrium in the class struggle. This situation is alleged to have occurred in the absolutist state, the Second French Empire under Louis Bonaparte, and the German Reich under Bismarck. In neither case can one explain how the state remains an instrument of class rule even though the dominant class has no immediate control over it. Similar problems occur in the study of 'dual power' in revolutionary situations and in the analysis of transitions between different modes of production.

(v) A further approach in the classic Marxist texts is similar to that of orthodox institutional studies in sociology, anthropology and political science. The state is treated as a set of institutions and no general assumptions are made about its class character. The state is seen as a 'public power' that develops at a certain stage in the division of labour (usually identified with the emergence of a mode of production based on the exploitation of one class by another) and that involves the emergence of a distinct system of government which is monopolised by officials who specialise in administration and/or repression. This theme is evident in Engels (1942) and Lenin (1970). It can accommodate the objections to the approaches reviewed above and yet leaves open the question of their adequacy in specific situations. It implies that the functions, effects and class nature of the state cannot be determined a priori, but depend on the relations between its institutional structure and the class struggle in various circumstances. In the absence of such conjunctural analyses, however, the institutional approach can establish the nature of the state only through a return to more primitive formulations. Thus it tends to be associated with epiphenomenalism (the institutions now mirror the economic base) and/or instrumentalism (the institutions are controlled by capital). Moreover, even when it is associated with concrete analyses, the institutional approach may simply lead to descriptive accounts without any attempt to explain what occurs.

(vi) It is in this context that the sixth approach is especially relevant. It examines
the state as a system of political domination with specific effects on the class struggle. Thus, whereas the instrumentalist approach focuses on the question of 'who rules', this approach shifts attention to the forms of political representation and state intervention. It examines them as more or less adequate to securing a balance of class forces that is favourable to the long-term interests of a given class or class fraction. It is illustrated in Lenin's remark that a democratic republic is the best possible shell for capitalism and that, once this form of state is established, no change of persons, institutions or parties can shake the political rule of capital (Lenin, 1970, p. 296; see also Marx and Engels, 1975, p. 350). And it is central to the discussions of the Paris Commune as the model for working-class political domination (see particularly Marx, 1974, passim, and Lenin, 1970, passim). This approach is most fruitful when used in conjunction with an institutional definition of the state. For, although it avoids the difficulties associated with the other approaches reviewed above, it still needs to be developed and supported by a concrete analysis of institutions. Otherwise it tends to become a sophisticated attempt to establish theoretical guarantees that the state in a capitalist society necessarily functions on behalf of capital. Thus, in opposition to those who argue that the internal organisation of the state can ensure that it functions to reproduce capital (e.g. Offe, 1974, passim), it is vital to insist that state power can be more or less capitalist depending on the situation.

So nowhere in the Marxist classics do we find a well formulated, coherent and sustained theoretical analysis of the state. This is not to deny that they offer a series of acute historical generalisations and political insights nor, indeed, that they lay the foundations for a more rigorous analysis. In particular, the perspective of political domination (the sixth approach) provides an adequate starting point for studying the state and state power. But much of the renewed discussion still reflects the limitations of the other approaches and fails to develop this insight into the nature of political domination. This is apparent in various ways. Although the state is rarely treated nowadays as a simple epiphenomenon with no real influence, its forms and effects are often explained solely in terms of the 'needs' of the economy. Alternatively, the state may be connected to the economy only as an instrument in the class struggle. Both approaches can be found in association with different views about the economic base. Moreover, some recent work concentrates largely on the political struggle between capital and labour and is therefore relevant to economic questions only to the extent that they are influenced by political factors. This is not to argue that these various economic and political approaches are incorrect, but simply to suggest that one should appreciate their limitations as well as their contributions to the theory of the state. Both facets can be illustrated by considering the early work of Miliband and Poulantzas, the views of the so-called neo-Ricardian theorists, and the study of 'state monopoly capitalism'.

Variations on some classical themes

Miliband and Poulantzas both focus on political and ideological struggles without reference to the economic imperatives and requirements of capital accumulation. This reflects their polemical concerns. Miliband is interested in confronting liberal theorists of democracy with the 'facts' about the social background, personal ties and shared values of economic and political elites, and about the impact of government policy on such matters as the distribution of income and wealth. He also argues that socialisation into the ideology of the ruling class is an important source of political power and social order (Miliband, 1969, passim). Because his principal concern is to reveal the distortions and mystifications of liberal pluralism, Miliband does not advance the Marxist analysis of the state. Indeed, he actually reproduces the liberal tendency to discuss politics in isolation from its complex articulation with economic forces. To the extent that he does relate them it is only through interpersonal connections; he neglects their mutual presupposition and interdependence on the institutional level. Thus, Miliband does not succeed in establishing the real nature of the state in capitalist society and its inherent limitations as well as advantages for capital.

Poulantzas is less concerned to disprove liberal democratic theory than to criticise the traditional Communist orthodoxy of 'state
monopoly capitalism'. Thus, in opposition to the argument that the modern state is no more than a pliant tool of monopoly capital, he rejects all forms of instrumentalism and insists that the state is a complex social relation. The latter seems to mean two things. Firstly, classes should not be seen as simple economic forces existing outside and independently of the state and capable of manipulating it as a passive instrument or tool. For the political influence of classes and class fractions depends in part on the institutional structure of the state and the effects of state power. Secondly, class struggle is not confined to civil society, but is reproduced within the heart of the state apparatus itself. He also argues that the state has an objective function to perform in maintaining social cohesion so that capital accumulation can proceed unhindered (Poulantzas, 1973, pp. 44-50, and 1975, pp. 78-81 and passim). Thus, Poulantzas criticises Miliband for analysing the state in terms of the individual human subjects who control it, rather than in relation to its structurally determined role in capitalist society (Poulantzas, 1969, pp. 67-78).

Unfortunately, although his criticisms of Miliband's analysis and 'state monopoly capitalism' theories are both sound, Poulantzas himself does not produce a wholly satisfactory account of the capitalist state. He defines the state as the factor of cohesion but interprets this in two contrasting ways. Sometimes (he suggests that a sufficient condition of cohesion is the successful organisation of a power bloc under the hegemony of monopoly capital (Poulantzas, 1974, pp. 72-88; Cutler, 1971, pp. 5-15). This suggestion completely ignores the fundamental economic constraints on the effective exercise of state power and implies that the state is an instrument of the power bloc rather than the monopoly sector alone. Elsewhere, Poulantzas adopts the reductionist view that the effects of state power are necessarily circumscribed by the dominance of capitalism so that, in the long run, they can only correspond to the interests of the dominant class (see especially Poulantzas, 1969, pp. 67-78, and 1976, pp. 63-83). This claim implies that it is totally irrelevant which class controls the state apparatus, since it must maintain cohesion by virtue of its objective function. In short, although he is closely identified with assertions about the relative autonomy of the capitalist state, Poulantzas actually oscillates between two extreme positions. Either he endows the state with complete independence from the economic base or he denies it any independence at all. Neither of these positions would be satisfactory on its own and together they render his analysis indeterminate.

In contrast to the political focus of Miliband and Poulantzas, the so-called neo-Ricardian theorists are explicitly concerned with the economic dimensions of the state. They focus on the influence of the state on the distribution of income between classes, and attempt to show how it intervenes in the economy to maintain or restore corporate profits at the expense of wages. Such action by the state is generally traced back to the pressures on profitability that stem from trade union struggles and/or international competition. The appropriate response in such situations depends on the specific form of the profits squeeze and the balance of class forces. Capital will generally attempt to manipulate the business cycle to discipline labor and reduce wage costs in the interests of corporate profit maximisation (Boddy and Crotty, 1974, 1975); and/or to redistribute income to the private sector through fiscal changes, subsidies, nationalisation, devaluation, deflation, wage controls and legal restrictions on trade union activities (Glyn and Sutcliffe, 1972); and/or to counter the inflationary effects of tax increases and public borrowing through cuts in public spending on the 'social wage' (Gough, 1975). In contrast, the working class will attempt to resist such offensive actions by capital (Boddy and Crotty, 1974, p. 12) and, hopefully, to transform the wages struggle and/or the opposition to the 'cuts' into a successful revolutionary movement (Glyn and Sutcliffe, 1972, pp. 189-216; Gough, 1975, pp. 91-92). But the dominant position of capital in the state, and especially in the field of economic policy-making, means that it is the capitalist solution to economic crises that is imposed (Boddy and Crotty, 1975, passim).

Such studies certainly have radical overtones and do relate state intervention to the needs of capital. But the neo-Ricardian approach is still limited in its treatment of the nature of capitalism as a mode of production and of the class character of the state. For it neglects the significance of the
social relations of production and the characteristic form of capitalist exploitation through the creation and appropriation of surplus value. This means that it tends to treat the labor process as purely technical and to relate the distribution of income to the price of labour as determined within the sphere of circulation. This places distributional struggles at the heart of neo-Ricardian analyses, rather than the struggle at the point of production and this is reflected in the tendency to discuss state intervention in terms of distributional and to neglect the state's fundamental role in the restructuring of production. Thus, not only does this kind of analysis imply that wage restraint and/or public spending cuts are sufficient to resolve crises, it also fails totally to confront and explain the causes, nature and limitations of growing state involvement in production itself. This is not to deny the importance of the struggle to determine wages (whether seen as the price of labor or the value of labor-power). It is to insist that an exclusive focus on one part of the circuit of capital can never provide the basis for understanding the nature of capitalist crises or state intervention.

Moreover, not only is this approach limited in its conception of the economy, it also has an impoverished view of the state. For most neo-Ricardian analyses treat the state simply as a third force capable of intervention, or as an instrument amenable to manipulation, in the interests of profit maximisation. In the former case there is no attempt to explain why the state intervenes on behalf of capital or why it is able to do so. In the latter case the analysis is plagued by the usual difficulties involved in instrumentalist theories. Likewise, although Gough adopts a more sophisticated analysis of the state and insists on its relative autonomy, his account is based on Miliband and Poulantzas and the concept of relative autonomy is largely rhetorical. In practice he combines an institutional definition of the state with a study of its functions in political struggle. This provides a neat complement to the technicist conception of production and the emphasis on distributional struggles found in neo-Ricardian economics. Indeed, Gough seems to limit political struggle to the incidence of taxation and the allocation of public spending between capital and labor. This means that he neglects the role of the

'cuts' in the restructuring of capital and the continuing struggle to reorganise the state apparatus itself to increase the political domination of capital. But this is a failing shared by the so-called neo-Ricardian approach more generally.

It is in connection with state intervention in the process of production that arguments based on the labor theory of value, the law of value, and, in particular, the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, have assumed real prominence in attempts to construct a satisfactory account of the capitalist state. But, although they play an important role in Marxist analyses of capital accumulation, the logical and empirical status of these principles and laws is quite controversial. Indeed, as will become apparent as the paper proceeds, there are marked discrepancies in interpretation even among those theories that affirm their relevance to economic and political analysis. This is especially clear in the case of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; the labor theory of value tends to be common ground in Marxist economics and the law of value generally serves as a catch-all principle, encapsulating the various tendencies and contradictions of capital accumulation and their mediation through market forces. The tendency of the rate of profit to fall is more controversial and is attacked on abstract theoretical grounds, as well as for its uncertain implications for the concrete development of capitalism. For, even if one accepts the validity of this so-called law, it is only tendential and is also subject to significant counter-tendencies (Marx, 1971, pp. 211-266; Fine and Harris, 1976, passim). It is not necessary to accept or reject this particular law in the present context, however, since we are concerned only to explore the ways in which it has been invoked in analyses of the state in capitalist society.

The laws of motion of capitalism occupy a central place in theories of 'state monopoly capitalism'. These theories take different forms, but share certain assumptions concerning the periodisation of capitalism and the nature of its latest stage. Thus it is argued that the process of competition during the period of laissez-faire capitalism leads inevitably to the concentration and centralisation of capital and hence to a new stage in which monopolies dominate the
whole economy. Moreover, whereas the preceding stage of liberal competition was characterised by the self-regulation of market forces and the progressive self-development of the forces of production, the stage of monopoly capitalism is characterised by the increasing tendency of the rate of profit to fall and thus of production to stagnate. To offset this tendency and thereby maintain the dynamism of capital accumulation requires ever-expanding state intervention in the economy (Afanasyev, 1974; Boccara et al., 1971; Cheprakov, 1969; CPGB, 1977; Sdobnikov, 1971). Such intervention takes many different forms. These include the nationalisation of basic industries, state provision of essential services, centralised control over credit and money, state assistance for investment, the creation of a large state market for commodities, state-sponsored research and development at the frontiers of technology, state control of wages, state programming of the economy, and the creation of international economic agencies (Afanasyev, 1974; Boccara et al., 1971; Nikolayev, 1975, pp. 71-92; Menshikov, 1975, pp. 137-183 and 265-269; Politics and Money, 1974-75). With the growth of such intervention, monopoly capitalism is transformed into ‘state monopoly capitalism’. This is alleged to be the final stage of capitalism and the enormous weight of the state is attributed to the general crisis of capitalism that characterises this stage.

State intervention on this scale and with these effects is said to be possible because the state has become the instrument of the dominant monopolies. Whereas Marx and Engels saw the political executive as nothing but ‘a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’ (Marx and Engels, 1973, p. 69), theorists of this school argue that the state and the monopolies have ‘fused’ into a single mechanism which acts only on behalf of monopoly capital (Afanasyev, 1974, pp. 198-200). This can be seen in the class background and class affiliations of the personnel of the state, the formulation and implementation of state policy, and the dominance of monopoly capital in the educational system and mass media (Aaronovitch, 1956; CPGB, 1977; Gollan, 1956; Harvey and Hood, 1958). The interpenetration of the monopolies and the nation-state means that small and medium capital are excluded from political power, as well as being threatened by the superior economic strength of big capital. This suggests in turn that they share certain interests with the proletariat in the overthrow of capitalism. Thus the theory of ‘state monopoly capitalism’ is often associated with the political program of an anti-monopoly popular front. This would embrace small and medium capital as well as the petit-bourgeoisie and wage-earning class, and would attempt to capture the state apparatus for its own use (CPGB, 1977).

This approach is interesting but inconsistent. For it reduces the state to an epiphenomenon of an economic base and also asserts that it is possible to use this state to transform that base. It derives the nature of the capitalist state from the immanent tendencies of capital accumulation and also endows political class struggle with the ability to establish socialism. Thus the economy is seen as self-sufficient as well as self-expanding in the period of liberal capitalism; this implies an inactive or even neutral state. It is seen as crisis-ridden and self-destructive in the period of monopoly capitalism; this implies the need for an interventionist state to overcome stagnation and maintain profits. There is little attempt to explain the forms of the state and state intervention except in terms of the needs of capitalism in different situations and the economic domination of capital. Yet the very forms of intervention adopted by the monopolies can also be employed by popular forces in the transition to socialism. This is an instrumentalist argument that fits ill with the claim that the state and monopolies have fused into a ‘single mechanism’. Nor can this inconsistency be avoided by arguing that it reflects the fundamental contradiction between the constant expansion of the objective needs for state intervention in the economy and the limits on intervention rooted in the dominance of monopoly capital. For this still leaves in doubt the nature of the state and the nature of transitions from capitalist to socialist formations. In short, although ‘state monopoly capitalism’ theory emphasises the role of state intervention in the reorganisation of capitalist production, it is associated with an inconsistent account of that role and its implications for political action.
The views considered so far involve very different assumptions and principles of explanation, but they do have one theme in common. They all assume that the class nature of the capitalist state depends entirely on factors external to the state itself. Thus a state is capitalist for Miliband only to the extent that it is controlled by representatives and apologists for the bourgeoisie. Similar views occur in many neo-Ricardian and 'state monopoly capitalism' studies. For Poulantzas it is its insertion into a social formation dominated by capitalism that guarantees its class nature. This follows from his functionalist view of the state — since it is the cohesion of a society dominated by capitalism that such a state necessarily functions to reproduce. Finally, there is a related tendency in some theories to argue that the forms of the state are irrelevant, because the economy is always determinant in the last instance. This view emerges most clearly in determinist versions of 'state monopoly capitalism' theory. Thus all these approaches imply that the institutional structure of the state is irrelevant provided that it is manipulated by monopoly capital in general, or a power bloc dominated by capital, or, alternatively, that it is subject to definite economic constraints so that it can never become the instrument of any non-capitalist force at all (Offe, 1974, pp. 31-36).

This means that these approaches ignore the view that the state is a system of political domination, whose forms may be more or less adequate to securing the various requirements of capital accumulation in different situations.

The state as the ideal collective capitalist

It is in this context that the work of certain Marxists in the so-called 'capital logic' school centred on the Free University of Berlin is particularly important. For they have tried to derive the general form of the capitalist state, as well as its principal functions, from the pure capitalist mode of production and its conditions of existence. At the most general level of abstraction they argue that the separation of state and civil society characteristic of bourgeois social formations stems from the nature of generalised commodity production. For, not only is such a separation possible under capitalist production (because surplus labour is appropriated in the form of surplus-value realised through formally free exchange on the market rather than through extra-economic compulsion), but it is also necessary, because an institution that is not immediately subordinate to market forces is required to provide those general preconditions of capital accumulation as a whole that are inappropriate or impossible for any particular competing capital to secure. Thus, to the extent that it is not an actual capitalist but a distinct political institution corresponding to the common needs of capital, the state is an ideal collective capitalist (Altvater, 1973, passim).

The nature of the capitalist state and state intervention has been variously derived in this school. The most abstract general conditions for the existence of capitalism whose realisation is attributed to the state are the legal and monetary systems necessary to facilitate the production and exchange of commodities and the accumulation of capital. Thus bourgeois law involves the creation of formally equal legal subjects with alienable rights in commodities (including labour-power), as well as the development of legal apparatuses able to adjudicate and enforce these rights. The state must also establish a monetary system that facilitates exchange and permits rational economic calculation (Blanke et al., 1974, pp. 75-96). The state is also required to secure the reproduction of wage labour to the extent that this cannot be done through market forces and to ensure its subordination to capital in the labour process. This requirement leads to intervention in areas such as factory legislation, supervision of union activities, education and social welfare (Altvater, 1973; Mueller and Neussuess, 1975).

The necessity for appropriate forms of law, money, labour-power and labour discipline is established through a consideration of capital in general, without regard to the existence of particular, competing capitals (Rosdolsky, 1974, pp. 64-67). But the capital logic school also looks at the problems involved for capital accumulation in the nature and effects of competition. This forces each individual capital to realise at least the average rate of profit and means that the state will have to secure the provision of those use-values which are necessary to capital accumulation but whose private production proves unprofitable. This could involve nationalisation or some form of state
subsidy. The state must also ensure the supply of use-values which take the form of 'public goods' and/or whose production involves a 'natural monopoly' (Altvater, 1973). Lastly, since the total social capital is also divided into different national capitals, the state has to promote the interests of its particular national capital as well as to cooperate with other states in securing the conditions necessary for continued capital accumulation on a world scale (Altvater, 1973).

Now, although these general political and economic conditions are entailed in the very nature of capitalism as a mode of production (and are therefore coeval with it), there is clearly scope for variation in the extent and manner of their fulfilment. This is alleged to depend on the class struggle and the historical tendencies of capital accumulation. The tendency of the rate of profit to fall is especially important here, because it demands political intervention to mobilise counter-tendencies through the restructuring of capital and the reorganisation of the labour process. Thus it is not only argued that the state is essential to capitalism (and so cannot be neutral in the class struggle), but also that the amount and scope of its intervention tend to increase pari passu with the gradual unfolding of the process of capital accumulation (Altvater, 1973, 1976; Yaffe, 1973).

The capital logic school qualifies this view of the state as an ideal collective capitalist by considering its continued subordination to the laws of motion of capitalism. It argues that, whilst the state intervenes more and more to maintain demand and reorganise production, it cannot transcend market forces nor eliminate the tendential fall in the rate of profit. At best it can modify the forms in which these forces manifest themselves and mobilise counter-tendencies to declining profitability. The power of the capitalist state in this respect is necessarily limited, because it cannot directly determine the decision-making of private capital. For state intervention is always mediated through the monetary and legal conditions affecting the operation of market forces and the organisation of production in the private sector. Within these limits, however, private capital is free to determine its economic conduct (Blanke et al., 1977, pp. 92-96). This constraint is reinforced by the contradictions inherent in capital accumulation. Two cases often cited in this literature concern employment policy and state-sponsored industrial reorganisation. Thus Keynesian-style intervention to maintain full employment demand is said to be at the expense of accelerating inflation. This means that such policies must sooner or later be abandoned and the result will be an acute depression and mass unemployment. If the state is to escape this dilemma, it must replace the purgative function of economic crises with state-sponsored capital reconstruction. But such policies also involve definite costs. For they require the expansion of state expenditure, involve the expulsion of labour from commodity production, produce a 'fiscal crisis of the state', lead to the general politicisation of economic class struggle, and so forth (Altvater, 1973; Bullock and Jaffe, 1973). It would therefore seem that the capitalist state is trapped within the capitalist mode of production and cannot escape from its contradictions and crises.

The arguments of this particular school represented a fundamental theoretical advance, through their demonstration that the state cannot be conceived as a mere political instrument set up and controlled by capital. For its proponents establish that the capitalist state is an essential element in the social reproduction of capital — a political force that complements the economic force of competition between individual capitals and assures the immanent necessities that cannot be secured through the latter. This requires, among other things, that the state intervene against capital as well as the working class — especially when individual capitals or fractions of capital threaten the interests of capital in general. Such action illustrates the error of viewing the state as a simple instrument of capital. These studies also claim to reveal the fallacies of the reformist argument that the state can be used to overcome the basic contradictions of the capitalist system and, indeed, to effect a gradual, peaceful transition to socialism through the skilled manipulation of the existing state apparatus. For they argue that the state, precisely because it is an essential element (albeit relatively autonomous) in the total process of capital accumulation, necessarily reflects and reproduces these basic contradictions without ever eliminating them.
There are also serious difficulties with this analysis, however, which are deeply rooted in the basic approach. For, in trying to derive the nature of the capitalist state from that of the capitalist mode of production in its pure form, the 'capital logicians' commit the reductionist fallacy identified above in a more complex form. Whereas simple reductionism treats the political as a mere epiphenomenon of an economic base and denies it any reciprocal influence on the base, this approach postulates the necessity of a political level whose form and effects are determined at the economic level. It demonstrates that an 'ideal collective capitalist' can be constituted theoretically to assure certain general conditions without which capitalism would be impossible; and that this presupposes in turn a particular form of separation between the political and economic aspects of accumulation. But all that this establishes is that capitalism is a possible mode of production and that it involves a specific form of state. As long as the 'capital logicians' remain within this framework, they cannot account for the origins of the capitalist state nor explain how it can function as if it were an ideal collective capitalist. In both cases they resort to the unsatisfactory argument that everything that happens in a capitalist society necessarily corresponds to the needs of capital accumulation. Moreover, even when this complex form of reductionism is apparently avoided, through ad hoc references to crises and class struggles as the motor force behind state intervention, these are still considered in purely economic terms and it is assumed that the interests of capital are always realised in the final analysis (see especially Mueller and Neusuess, 1975). More recently it has been conceded that the 'capital logic' approach can only indicate the probable forms of the state, and specify the broad limits within which variations can occur without fundamentally threatening the process of capital accumulation. But the difficulty remains that the 'needs of capital' still provide the only principle of explanation, rather than becoming the point of reference for a more developed theory. There is little or no attempt to account for the circumstances in which these needs are met. Thus, despite various efforts to introduce class struggles and non-economic variables, it remains true that this school reduces history to an effect of the logical self-realisation of capital (Gerstenberger, 1976A, B; Laclau, 1977, pp. 7-12).

The attempt to introduce historical specificity and class struggle

It is in response to some of these difficulties with the 'capital logic' approach that a more recent school of Marxists, centred this time at Frankfurt (but not to be confused with the Frankfurt school of 'critical social science'), has attempted to introduce a greater degree of historical specificity and a sharper awareness of the role of class struggle into the study of the capitalist state. Thus, although they accept the basic arguments concerning the need for a separate political institution to secure certain preconditions of capitalism, they reject an emphasis on the needs of competing capitals considered in isolation from their antagonistic relation with wage-labour. They insist that the capitalist state can be understood only in terms of its changing functions in the class struggle over the organisation of the labour process and the appropriation of surplus-value. Furthermore, because they concentrate on the historical development of this struggle rather than the logical implications of competing capitals, they are better able to analyse the contradictions involved in state intervention (von Braunmuhl et al., 1973; Gerstenberger, 1975; Hirsch, 1977; Holloway and Picciotto, 1977).

This approach can be illustrated through its analysis of the general development of the modern interventionist state from its origins in the feudal absolutist state in Europe. In this context the first struggles concern the expansion of international trade and the creation of a wage-labouring class. Once the primitive accumulation of capital and a labour force have been secured through mercantilism and related domestic policies, the capitalist state must adopt a laissez-faire role to assure the maximum scope for capital accumulation. But it must still intervene to regulate the self-destructive tendencies of ruthless competition and guarantee the general conditions necessary to accumulation through, for example, factory legislation and control over credit. Moreover, as the process of capital accumulation continues, the socialisation of production and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, require increasing intervention to mobilise counter-tendencies through the
restructuring of capital, the reimposition of capitalist control over the labour process, and the reassertion of bourgeois hegemony over the working class. The internationalisation of capital poses new problems and requires new forms of state apparatus and state intervention, to secure the continued reorganisation of social relations in favour of capital accumulation on a world scale (Gerstenberger, 1976A; Holloway and Picciotto, 1977).

As the appropriate forms of intervention change with the progress of capital accumulation, so do the appropriate forms of representation and legislation. Thus, in the context of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the most adequate form of state is said to be a royal absolutism implementing mercantilist policies. During the period of liberal capitalism, however, this changes to a bourgeois parliamentary democracy. For the latter provides a forum for the representation of the different fractions of the ruling class and for the passage of laws that subject all capitals equally to the same general rules supervised through a bureaucracy of state officials. The transition from absolutism to parliamentarism and, within the latter context, the extension of the franchise to dominated classes, both entail sustained class struggles. Finally, in the period of monopoly capitalism, the form of state must change again. The state must now enter into direct relations with individual capitals and increase the strength and scope of its means of intervention in order to mobilise counter-tendencies to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This requires a transition, from general legislation enacted and enforced according to the rule of law to new and more powerful forms of discriminatory intervention at the discretion of the state bureaucracy. This change is reflected in the declining role of parliament as major capitalist interests seek direct access to the executive and administration; and in the continual reproduction of the conflicts between capitals within the heart of the bureaucracy itself. In short, as accumulation proceeds, there is a growing tendency for the capitalist state to be transformed into a strong state characterised by a weak parliament, a powerful bureaucracy and marked participation by individual capitals and social democratic trade unions (Holloway and Picciotto, 1977, pp. 85-97; Mandel, 1975, pp. 474-499; Picciotto, 1977, passim).

This approach not only introduces some historical specificity into the analysis of the capitalist state, it also develops some significant ideas about the nature and effects of class struggle. There are four main contributions in this respect. Firstly, it is argued that capital accumulation is conditional on the continued ability of capital itself to secure through struggle the many different conditions necessary for the creation and appropriation of surplus-value on an ever-expanding scale. This means, among other things, that the laws of motion of capitalism are not natural and inevitable, but actually depend for their realisation on the balance of forces in the unceasing struggle between capital and labour. Crises are therefore seen as the effect of failure to maintain the domination of capital over labour, rather than as the result of the inexorable logic of accumulation. Secondly, it is argued that capital accumulation is an unplanned and anarchic process that takes place behind the backs of economic agents. Thus, capitalism and its operation are generally seen in more or less distorted, fetishised guise. This means that state intervention is rarely directed towards the actual needs of capital and generally reflects a response to the political repercussions of accumulation. Thirdly, because there is no necessary correspondence between state intervention and the needs of capital, crises play a major role in reshaping its form and redirecting its thrust. For it is during crises that the immanent necessities of capitalism are most likely to become apparent. In this sense it can be said that crises act as the steering mechanism of state intervention. Fourthly, since crises are the complex effect of various contradictory factors and affect different classes in contradictory ways, there will be continuing conflict over their interpretation and resolution. This means that crisis-management will assume the form of trial-and-error responses, whose content is determined by the changing balance of political forces. Moreover, since capitalism is necessarily beset with contradictions, no economic strategy can overcome those barriers to accumulation inherent in capitalism itself (Gerstenberger, 1973; Hirsch, 1976; Holloway and Picciotto, 1976; Lindner, 1973; Wirth, 1976).
The recent work of Claus Offe should also be mentioned here. For, although he starts from different assumptions, Offe has reached similar conclusions on several of these issues. He argues that the capitalist state has four main structural features. Firstly, it is excluded from the organisation of capitalist production and the allocation of private capital. Thus it can affect accumulation only indirectly. Secondly, because the state is separated from capitalist production, its survival and performance clearly depend on revenues that originate outside its immediate control. Thirdly, since capitalism is neither self-regulating nor self-sufficient, the state has a mandate to create and sustain those conditions necessary to accumulation. And, fourthly, faced with this precarious combination of exclusion and dependence, the state can function on behalf of capital only if it can equate the needs of capital with the national interest and secure popular support for measures that maintain the conditions for accumulation while respecting its private character (Offe, 1975, *passim*; Offe and Ronge, 1975).

Offe goes on to argue that the political mechanisms required to reproduce these conditions change with the nature of capitalism. In particular, as the capitalist state is increasingly forced to secure the provision of specific inputs that individual capitals cannot produce profitably as well as to provide the general social conditions required for accumulation, it is necessary to establish 'planning' and encourage 'participation' as well as to centralise the existing administrative system. But all three mechanisms must prove inadequate to the tasks of capitalist reproduction. For bureaucratic administration is alleged to be inefficient in the organisation of social and economic programmes, as opposed to the routine implementation of specific policies according to predetermined rules. Planning is ineffective because it is opposed by private capitals whenever it threatens their individual interests. And participation intensifies the class struggle within the state apparatus and so threatens to disrupt the balance of forces required to implement capitalist policies. Offe therefore concludes that there will be perpetual oscillation between these different mechanisms as the state continually comes up against their different limitations (Offe, 1975).

Because it is premised in part on an internal critique of the 'capital logic' approach, this school has been able to develop concepts and principles of explanation that preserve its theoretical advances and resolve some of its theoretical inadequacies. Above all, it seeks to establish that not only is there no guarantee that the capitalist state can secure all the needs of capital at one time, but it is actually impossible for it to do so. However, it is its very emphasis on historical specificity and class struggle that reveals the limitations of this approach. For it lacks certain essential concepts for historical analysis and operates with an unduly restricted view of class struggle. Capitalist relations of production exist only in specific variant forms and in combination with other forms of social and private labour. This means that class struggles are influenced by other classes and social forces than capital and wage-labour. Moreover, since each particular economic formation has its own distinctive political and ideological relations and conditions of existence, such struggles will also be shaped by the different ways in which economic classes are inserted into the superstructure. The problems involved in periodising class struggle are particularly clear in transitional periods, but they are always present in historical analyses of the capitalist state. Thus no amount of abstract analysis of capitalism, or, indeed, its variant forms, would enable one to determine the changing relations between the feudal nobility and bourgeoisie in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Nor would it enable one to determine the political role of the petit bourgeoisie in the class struggle between monopoly capital and wage-labour in Weimar Germany. Nor again would it help to assess the effects of religious ideology in Northern Ireland. Yet these problems are critical in understanding the nature of state power in particular societies and its effects on capital accumulation.

**The capitalist state and popular-democratic struggle**

It is here that the work of Gramsci and the 'neo-Gramscian' school is most relevant. For these theorists have investigated the problem of political and ideological hegemony and elaborated a number of
concepts and assumptions that have greatly advanced the analysis of class struggles. However, because this school tends to adopt a 'class theoretical' rather than a 'capital theoretical' approach, its analyses frequently underestimate or totally ignore the constraints on the state entailed in the nature of capitalism and also overestimate the autonomy of politics and ideology. Thus, if the arguments of the two 'capital theoretical' schools need to be supplemented with analyses of political and ideological domination, the neo-Gramscian approach must be modified in the light of the economic limitations on state power and ideological hegemony.

Theorists of this persuasion stress that the capitalist state is not a simple instrument manipulated by a unitary bourgeois class. They argue instead that the state plays a vital role in unifying the bourgeoisie and organising its political and ideological domination. For, in opposition to the widespread Marxist view that each class has an essential unity of purpose based on its members' shared position in the economic system, the neo-Gramscian school insists that its unity depends on the existence of particular forms of organisation and representation. The most important problem in securing the conditions for capital accumulation is therefore located at the level of class practices. It concerns the organisation of the dominant class and the disorganisation of the dominated class. This is considered necessary because competition among capitals threatens the unity of the bourgeois class at the same time as its involvement in struggle threatens to unify the working class (Poulantzas, 1973, pp. 188-189 and 256-257). The solution to this problem is found in the nature of ideological hegemony and/or the form of the state.

Ideological hegemony is discussed in terms of the intellectual and moral leadership of the popular classes by the dominant classes or power bloc (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 52-89, 104-113, 130-132, 275-276 and passim; Laclau, 1977, pp. 94-111; Poulantzas, 1973, pp. 130-141, 206-224 and 239-245; Poulantzas, 1976, pp. 134-162). In this context, a power bloc is a fairly stable alliance of dominant classes or class fractions, whose unity depends on a modicum of mutual self-sacrifice of immediate interests and on their commitment to a common world outlook. Examples would include the British 'establishment' and the Unionist bloc in Northern Ireland. For hegemony to exist, then, it is necessary for the dominant bloc to secure the support of dominated classes (such as the peasantry, the urban petit bourgeoisie and sections of the working class), of social categories (such as the military, officials and intellectuals), and of significant social forces (such as ethnic minorities, religious movements, and similar groups capable of intervening with pertinent effects on the class struggle between capital and wage-labour). Such support does not stem from simple 'false consciousness', but is rooted in the incorporation of certain interests and aspirations of the 'people' into the dominant ideology. For the ability of the power bloc to maintain its hegemony depends on its success in articulating 'popular-democratic' struggles into an ideology that sustains the power of the dominant classes and fractions, rather than working to reinforce the revolutionary movement. Conversely, if the working class is to establish its counter-hegemony over the people and so isolate the power bloc, it is essential for it to integrate 'popular-democratic' struggles into a mass movement led by a political party that is organically linked to the people (Laclau, 1977, pp. 94-111).

This school also considers the effects of particular forms of state on the degree of bourgeois domination. Thus, Poulantzas suggests that the coupling of individual citizenship as a legal institution with the nation-state as a juridical subject is particularly effective here. For, not only does the constitution of all members of society as political subjects endowed with equal rights, regardless of their class affiliation, complement their formal equality as economic agents, it also encourages their atomisation and individuation and disguises the substantive inequalities in political rule. In this sense the commodity fetishism, engendered by exchange relations, is mirrored in liberal political and legal institutions. Conversely, not only does the emergence of a nation-state correspond to the need for an 'ideal collective capitalist', it also implies the existence of a national or popular interest that reflects the common interests of
all its citizens regardless of their class membership. This is alleged to sustain the belief in a neutral state able to reconcile class antagonisms and thus to facilitate the rule of capital (Poulantzas, 1973, passim).

Bourgeois political domination is also said to be reinforced by free elections and strong parliamentary institutions. For it seems that electoral competition encourages the power bloc to take account of the interests of the dominated classes when formulating its policies for capital accumulation. This provides the basis for welfare state programmes and other social policies concerned with working-class and popular-democratic demands. It also limits the electoral prospects of any parties that are openly committed to class struggle and revolution, as they will appear sectional and undemocratic. At the same time free elections also provide the means to change government policies and ruling parties in response to shifts in the balance of class forces, without threatening the smooth operation of the state apparatus as a whole. It is also noted that, within this institutional context, parliaments provide an important forum for different capitalist and non-capitalist interests to hammer out common policies in conditions where failure to do so will impair or paralyse effective government. Thus, whereas so-called ‘exceptional’ forms of capitalist state (such as military dictatorship and fascism) may seem strong because they are dictatorial or totalitarian in nature, they are inadequate to the tasks of political rule in capitalist societies. For their apparent strength hides a brittleness of institutional structure which means that they are unable to respond effectively to the changing crises, conflicts and contradictions inherent in these societies. In contrast, since universal suffrage, competing parties, the separation of powers and parliamentary government ensure a measure of flexibility, the power bloc in a democratic system is able to maintain social cohesion and so secure the conditions necessary for continued capital accumulation (Gamble, 1974, pp. 3-10; Jessop, 1977, passim; Poulantzas, 1973, pp. 277-307; Poulantzas, 1976, pp. 90-97 and passim).

Now, if such arguments are accepted, one must ask why capitalism is ever associated with non-democratic forms of state. The solution to this problem is not hard to find. For the neo-Gramscian school stresses that the rule of capital is not unconditional but depends on the ever-changing balance of class forces. The strength of capital appears in its ability to take advantage of economic crises in order to reorganise production and increase capital accumulation (Debray, 1973, pp. 141-142; Poulantzas, 1973, p. 171n). This depends in turn on its continued political and ideological domination (Nun, 1967, p. 99 and passim). However, despite the apparent institutional separation of the economic, political and ideological levels in capitalist societies, they are closely related. Thus economic crises necessarily have repercussions on the other levels (and vice versa) so that a restructuring of the state as a system of political domination may be a precondition of solving an economic crisis. It is in this context that concepts such as crises of political representation and ideological hegemony are particularly relevant. For these signify the dissociation of political struggle from the established organs of representation and the dissolution of hegemony, resulting in the detachment of the masses from bourgeois political and ideological leadership (Poulantzas, 1974, pp. 62-65, 71-78 and passim). In such situations, the bourgeois democratic republic may prove inadequate to securing the conditions necessary for accumulation. Whether it is regenerated or replaced by another form of state depends on the strategies adopted by different political forces and their relative strengths. But there can be no guarantee that new forms of domination will prove more adequate to securing such conditions or, in revolutionary situations, the conditions for a successful transition to a different form of society.

It is the merit of the neo-Gramscian school to have developed certain concepts for the analysis of specific capitalist societies and not just of capitalism considered as a pure mode of production. But its analyses are often vitiated by a systematic neglect of the economic constraints rooted in the nature of capital accumulation. For, though it is well aware of the various forms of class struggle and popular-democratic struggle, it is not as concerned with the general laws of capitalist production. This results in a certain unevenness and asymmetry in the work of the school and points to the need to integrate the different approaches.
Concluding remarks

This review has tried to locate the position of the state in Marxist discourse and to assess the adequacy of various theoretical approaches to its study in capitalist societies. Marxist theories are heterogeneous in approach, but are unified through a common concern with specific modes of production, their conditions of existence and their effects on social formations. They are not concerned to develop a theory of the mode of production 'in general' nor, a fortiori, a theory of the state (or society) 'in general'. It is also debatable whether it is possible to develop a theory of the capitalist state in general. For, since capitalism exists neither in pure form nor in isolation, states in capitalist societies will necessarily differ from one another.

It is in this context that we can best appreciate the above studies. For their overall effect has been to redefine the problem of the state in capitalist society in a way that makes theoretical and political progress possible once more. They have dissolved the orthodox approaches in terms of the state as a thing or a subject that is external to the capitalist mode of production. In their place, they have focused attention on the social nature of capitalist production and its complex economic, political and ideological preconditions. This means that the state and state power must assume a central role in capital accumulation, even in those apparently counterfactual cases characterised by a neutral, laissez-faire state, as well as those where the state is massively involved in the organisation of production. Moreover, because the state is seen as a complex institutional system and the influence of classes is seen to depend on their forms of organisation, alliances, etc., it is also necessary to reject a crude instrumentalist approach. It is no longer a question of how pre-existing classes use the state (or the state itself acts) in defence of capitalism defined at an economic level. Henceforth it is a question of the adequacy of state power as a necessary element in the overall reproduction of the capital relation in different societies and situations. And state power in turn must be considered as a complex, contradictory effect of class (and popular-democratic) struggles, mediated through and conditioned by the institutional system of the state. In short, the effect of these studies is to reinstate and elaborate the idea that the state is a system of political domination.

But the interest of these studies is not restricted to the field of Marxist theory and politics. For the problems with which they have been grappling occur in similar forms in non-Marxist economic and political enquiries. It is not specific points of economic analysis that are at issue here, but the adequacy of certain common assumptions concerning the nature of the state, its role in economic activity, and the relevance of orthodox economic theories in the light of that role. Either the nature of the state is seen as irrelevant to economic theory as such and regarded as a factor that shapes and limits the application of economic principles in given conditions. Or, it being recognised that its exclusion from economic theory is arbitrary and unjustifiable, the state is all too often treated simply as a subject comparable to a firm or household, or as a set of neutral policy instruments applicable to various economic goals, or as the private property of rational, maximising, self-interested political actors. The precise implications of these latter approaches depend on the other assumptions with which they are combined. Thus in its theoretical guise as a subject the state may be seen as a legal sovereign that controls economic activity, as a referee or umpire that intervenes in economic disputes, as one economic agent among others, or as a political agent whose actions may promote or hinder economic performance. The instruments-goals approach is generally associated with technical disputes over the appropriate forms and direction of intervention and with political disputes about the role of the state in the allocation and redistribution of resources. And the model of 'homo politicus' tends to be linked with claims that the self-interest of state personnel is inimical to economic growth. Now, although these approaches illuminate certain aspects of the state, they do not advance political economy in any fundamental way. For they deal at best with the surface phenomena of politics and have no theoretical means to explore the deeper connections between the state and economic development.

It is here that the recent Marxist debate has major implications for orthodox economics. For it establishes that capitalism is a specific mode of the social organisation
of production and has definite historical preconditions and forms of development. It also establishes that the state has an essential role in securing these preconditions and that its institutional structure and forms of intervention must be transformed as capitalism changes and develops. The recent discussion further argues that the economic state apparatuses and their means of intervention are not neutral, but are integrated into the movement of capital and constitute a field of conflict between different interests. This means that state intervention has inherent limitations in securing the conditions for capital accumulation and is always subject to the inevitable influence of various class and popular-democratic struggles. It also means that the adequacy of particular policy instruments and general forms of intervention will vary not only with changes in economic structure but also with changes in the balance of political forces. Related to these arguments is the further point that the forms of political representation also have distinct effects on the efficacy of different forms of intervention. This in turn implies that the failure of specific policy measures or general instruments may be due to the inadequacy of the forms of political representation with which they are linked, rather than to mistaken economic analysis. It means as well that the reorganisation of the state apparatus may be necessary before economic problems or crises can be resolved. The current debate about industrial democracy, the 'social contract' and the development of tripartite or corporatist institutions is particularly germane here.

In short, the overall thrust of these studies is to suggest that the analysis of the state is not an activity irrelevant or marginal to economic theory. It is not something that can be consigned safely to another discipline within an intellectual division of labour, or to a future date in the development of economics itself. It is rather an absolute precondition of adequate economic theorising today. Economics must therefore take up the challenge of the continuing Marxist debate and counterpose its own solutions, if any, to the problems with which the latter deals. It is high time that orthodox economics renewed its traditional role as the science of political economy. Failure to do so will surely be tantamount to a self-declaration of theoretical poverty in a fundamental area of economic analysis and a primary concern of political practice.

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The issues raised by the Viet Nam-China conflict are complex and difficult, and will be long-lasting.

Our starting point has been:

We support Viet Nam, though we may criticise it; we oppose and criticise China.

Ours has not been an even-handed approach, despite the influence of media treatment and even some labor movement and spontaneous mass reactions.

Nor is any one principle, or even a shopping list of principles, a substitute for analysis which relates principles to each other and to the concrete situation.

The key question in the China-Viet Nam conflict is that China refuses to recognise Viet Nam's right to follow a policy decided by Viet Nam itself.

This was a basic factor in the Chinese-backed Kampuchean conflict with Viet Nam as well as with the problems with ethnic Chinese in Viet Nam, and the Viet Nam-China border conflict.

All were designed to weaken and punish Viet Nam for refusing to toe a line agreeable to China.

Marxists have approvingly quoted the German theoretician of war, Clausewitz, who said that war is the continuation of politics by other — that is, forcible — means. China's politics are to make Viet Nam subservient, and the "punishment" by war is aimed to achieve that aim.

But the opposite is also often true — politics may be the continuation of war by other means. Even in retreating to the border, it seems that China may hold on to some territory it now says is in dispute, as a point of continued leverage and threat to Viet Nam. It is also utilising national minorities in the border areas of Laos, and no doubt still wants to try to achieve a regime in Kampuchea which follows its line and harasses Viet Nam.

These particular politics of China are supported by the US and Australian governments, fishing in the troubled waters of the Sino-Soviet conflict, angling for Chinese trade, and still smarting over the defeat Viet Nam inflicted on them.
Viet Nam and Independence

China calls Viet Nam a catspaw of the Soviet Union.

But Viet Nam's credentials in upholding its independence are second to none in the world. It has no history of being a stooge of any other country. Even in the blackest days of the war with the US, offers of troops from other countries were refused, and an even-handed policy followed towards China and the Soviet Union.

That Viet Nam today may see China as the greatest threat to its independence is in part historical, and in part a result of China's attitude towards it, especially since the final victory in 1975.

So, if Viet Nam has gravitated towards the Soviet Union in this period, the causes must be sought in sources other than Vietnamese "subservience".

Viet Nam's dedication to the independence of other countries in the region, specifically that of Laos and Kampuchea, is no doubt less than to its own. But even so, this attitude should not be equated with that of China. Rather, Viet Nam considers that the independent survival of all, via-a-vis their giant neighbour, requires some measure of mutual co-operation.

Viet Nam does not pursue an Indo-Chinese Federation, I believe. In 1951 the CP of Indo-China was divided into its main national components, with mutual promises of co-operation. It is this co-operation it desires, or at the very least settlement of issues through negotiation.

Conflict between Viet Nam and China goes far back into history, including 1,000 years of Chinese occupation, and continued after both countries won liberation. But for the sake of brevity we can begin from direct US involvement.

When the liberation struggle stepped up in 1963, both China and the Soviet Union sought to influence the conduct of the war in a way consistent with their own perceived interests. Much aid was given, but attempts were made to use it as a lever to influence Viet Nam's strategy.

I had the experience of this in Moscow at the end of 1965, when an official of the CPSU's international department, detailing the aid given, clearly hinted that Viet Nam should not allow its conflict with the US to go beyond a certain point where US "face" might be lost, with possible major repercussions for US-Soviet relations.

Nor should we forget that both China and the Soviet Union hosted Nixon at the height of the war.

After the decisive Tet offensive in 1968 — in which Soviet rockets and other weapons played an important role — the Chinese made a strong criticism of Viet Nam's strategy, declaring that it should wage a protracted guerrilla war for 30 years, as China had done.

This was not, I suspect, disinterested advice, nor was it sound as subsequent events showed. It indicated China's concern over a strong Viet Nam emerging at the end of a relatively short war.

If further evidence is necessary, it is contained in Deng's statement in the US in February that the US is a force for peace, the only trouble being that it is not a strong enough force!

We know how much Viet Nam weakened that force, changing the whole international climate and balance of forces in the world, for which we should all be eternally grateful. Yet we find the Chinese reproaching Viet Nam for not being sufficiently grateful for all the aid they gave and for not showing that gratitude in the required manner.

As the victory came, Viet Nam was a bit more cocky than China relished, and Chinese attitudes were indicated by their occupation of the Paracel Islands (then still held by Thieu forces) in January 1974, and claims to the Spratlys.

There was increasing coolness in relations and a progressive reduction in, and finally elimination of, Chinese aid.

Kampuchea

In Kampuchea the course of events was as follows:

In 1970 Sihanouk was deposed and Lon Nol installed by US and South Vietnamese troops, with the aim, in particular, of closing the Ho Chi Minh trail which ran through the eastern forests of the country.

This trail was critical for Vietnamese
conduct of the war. The fact that its construction and use may have been a violation of Kampuchean territory and independence didn’t worry the progressive forces at that time, and rightly so.

The Lon Nol attempt failed, and the small Khmer Rouge progressively established its control in most of the countryside with Vietnamese aid and protection.

After taking Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge set out to expel all Vietnamese from the country, and unsuccessfully tried to seize several islands in the Gulf of Siam.

High level delegations were exchanged later that year, with the two governments saying they would sign a treaty of friendship and co-operation concretising the “special relationship” between them.

From 1976 when Mao died and when more moderate elements in the Khmer Rouge regime seemed to lean to the Vietnamese side, that section led by Pol Pot and Ieng Sary fell in with China’s unease over Viet Nam’s growing strength through reunification and its continuing ties with the Soviet Union.

Old cadres who had largely been trained in Viet Nam were violently purged. Several military risings took place but were put down. One of them was led by Heng Samrin, head of the present Kampuchean regime.

At about the same time, early 1977, utilising Chinese-supplied equipment and up to 20,000 Chinese “technicians”, large-scale assaults were launched along the Vietnamese border.

The Pol Pot government refused all offers of negotiation, including a proposal for a demilitarised zone on the border, and was able to defeat middle-sized Vietnamese efforts to dislodge them from, or defeat them on, the border. Important rice-growing areas of Viet Nam were devastated in the fighting.

At the same time, people of Chinese origin in both North and South Viet Nam were encouraged to oppose Viet Nam’s anti-capitalist economic measures, to claim discrimination, and to become refugees.

Some anti-Chinese sentiments or attitudes may have come from the Vietnamese, but all the information we have, including from our comrades who were on the spot, establishes China as being the main instigator.

These savage pressures, along with economic difficulties due to flood and drought, bureaucracy, inexperience in management, and lowered morale, led the Vietnamese to make the fateful decision to “lance the Kampuchean boil”.

Probably this decision was taken about the middle of last year when Viet Nam joined Comecon, signing the friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in November.

Viet Nam had no easy options. A continued large-scale border war in the west, and the prospect of an even bigger one from the north would have faced her with a situation never experienced even at the height of the war with the United States.

But whatever the strategic and military reasoning, the political decision to go into Kampuchea was a step with fateful consequences.

There was certainly a potential revolt in existence inside Kampuchea, and among the refugees in Viet Nam, numbered, according to some reports, at up to 350,000. But that revolt could not succeed without the prior destruction of the main Pol Pot forces, and a massive assault was launched along the border and through the country.

The Vietnamese speak of two wars — a border war and a revolutionary war of liberation in which they gave “that level of aid which was necessary”. There is probably some substance in the “two wars” theory, though I do not know how much. In practice the two wars merged.

In any case, in giving support to the Vietnamese in the struggle with China we should do so on a principled basis, taking them with whatever warts they may have, not hiding as some do behind the fiction that there are no Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea.

China’s Motives

What are China’s motivations?

History and culture, and especially nationalism do not explain everything, but they are ever-present forces far more
powerful than most marxists have recognised.

The sense of national identity and pride of the Chinese people, in my opinion and observation, the strongest of any country in the world — and that is saying something.

China has been, to one degree or another, a politically unified country for more than two thousand years, with a common culture as advanced, till the last 200 years or so, as any in the world, including Greece, Rome and the Arab world in its hey-day.

The very name "central kingdom" indicates self-centredness and a certain attitude to others.

The overseas Chinese, over hundreds of years, have proved almost unassimilable. (I am not here urging a policy of assimilation, only pointing out that other nationalities have often been absorbed while the Chinese have not).

Although China has often been oppressed or penetrated by conquering nations, it has absorbed or overcome them all, and, when strong, has habitually demanded allegiance and obeisance from its neighbours.

Notwithstanding statements that China and Viet Nam fit together like lips and teeth, full Vietnamese independence has never been really accepted. Successive Chinese leaderships have been unable to come to grips with the fact that times have changed. Perhaps China's recent re-emergence into the world, and reactions to its aggression may help it eventually to face that fact.

Into this past, and into these attitudes, has been injected the felt menace of the Soviet Union.

**Why, then, virtually push Viet Nam towards the Soviet Union by hostile acts?**

It does not make sense unless China's basic attitude is that Viet Nam cannot be permitted "independence" to do anything that China does not want. Or, that China feels it must act now rather than later, to stop "encirclement from the south" by a Soviet ally (though how Viet Nam could "encircle" China or seriously menace China's independence I do not know).

Probably both factors operated to bring on the Chinese invasion. But if so, China has made a political miscalculation far greater than any Viet Nam may have made in relation to Kampuchea.

Chinese aims to make Viet Nam subservient cannot be realised; Viet Nam will not accept Chinese hegemony. Nor is it, I believe, ignorant of the striving of the Soviet Union for hegemony, or desirous of being overly dependent.

But for the time being Viet Nam has few options. Force cannot compel her to abandon any alliance or make her less dependent. A quite different policy from China, and the rest of the world, would be needed to achieve this.

Chinese perception of the whole situation filters through the prism of their obsession with the Russian "social-imperialist" threat, and this lies at the bottom of their progression — backwards — in foreign policy.

They first accused the Soviet Union of not standing up to US imperialism; then moved to regarding the Soviet Union and the US as equal enemies; they now say the Soviet Union is the main threat to the world and that the US is a "force for peace".

I have no doubt that the Chinese action in Viet Nam was in some sense "cleared" with the US during Deng's visit. In the same sense, I believe, the United States accepted the Soviet Union's march into Czechoslovakia in 1968.

**Soviet motives**

What are the aims of the Soviet Union in this region?

There is no doubt about Russian fears of China. It has its historical roots in two and a half centuries of Tartar occupation. It is not so much an immediate fear (though that exists now that China is a nuclear power), but a fear of what 1,000 million Chinese, backed by a modern economy, could do. If there is one thing that President Brezhnev and dissident author Solzhenytsin agree upon it is the "Chinese threat".

In the modern era, the Soviet Union has been more the initiator in Sino-Soviet relations, in that their revolution occurred first. Tensions developed in the Comintern period, with Stalin, and after the second world war.
Further conflict developed over who was to inherit Stalin's "mantle" as world communist leader; hegemony over the world communist movement; differences about the way to build socialism (as the protagonists conceived that system); and, of course and especially, over regional hegemony and conceived national interests which each arbitrarily equated with the future of the "world revolution".

It is hard, in general terms, to hold that one is better than the other. For example, China was right to reject the Soviet Union's hegemony over and manipulation of the world communist movement. But instead of a principled struggle, what China tried to do (and failed), was to establish another "world communist movement" over which it had hegemony and which it manipulated.

What both want, primarily, is a presence in each country through a political formation whose prime function is to unquestioningly advocate what its mentor from time to time demands, in the process also serving to "prove" for home consumption that their "leadership" is recognised throughout the world.

Fortunately — and this is a tribute to Soviet caution among other things — it seems that we do not now have to face the issue of direct Soviet entry into the conflict, with all the dangers that would have had for unlimited escalation towards a world and even nuclear conflict.

But we cannot leave the subject without probing Soviet intentions in aiding Viet Nam. Although that aid is to be applauded, I believe it is not disinterested, but basically relates to the Soviet fears already mentioned, which lead them to want China to be weak and to have, if possible, a government friendly to them.

But the Soviet Union has even less chance of realising such political aims in relation to China, than China has in relation to Viet Nam.

We had to think about how to react if the Soviet Union had intervened. The lines along which our thoughts were running were that we would have supported such intervention against the Chinese invasion insofar as it helped Viet Nam and was a response to Vietnamese requests. But it would be conditional support — conditioned by the degree to which we judged Soviet actions were also in pursuit of other aims, unnecessarily escalated the conflict, etc.

In supporting Viet Nam and present Soviet assistance to it, are we "switching back to the Russians" in allegiance?

Not at all. We maintain our independent position.

Such an independent position does not preclude, but presupposes, support of, as well as opposition to, particular measures taken by various governments and parties, in accordance with our own assessment of those measures.

In recent times there have been some Soviet actions which we have supported, though virtually none that I can recall in the case of China.

But, for all that, this is not necessarily a permanent state of affairs and we will not be joining in the sort of anti-China chorus being raised by Gus Hall of the Communist Party of the United States which talks about China taking the capitalist road and so on.

It is one of the ironies of the situation, which one hopes will not have escaped the notice of the Vietnamese, that some of the most vociferous and "100 per cent supporters" of Vietnam take this stand not because it is the foundation of their position, but because it is for the time being the best lever available for whipping up the anti-China campaign so long promoted by the Soviet Union. If Soviet policy in relation to Viet Nam changes, so will some of today's most effusive friends.

Nor will we compete with anyone for Viet Nam's favors by abandoning criticism when we feel it is justified, or by accepting all their statements and positions, specifically the use of outside military force to help change the government in Kampuchea — to the extent that occurred — and indefinite maintenance of troops in that country.

But our criticism should be measured. It is sometimes said that one should call a spade a spade. But a spade can also be called a bloody shovel; or an implement for digging. The latter description may be more appropriate — especially if the implement is really a trowel. The Chinese digging implement is a
mechanical excavator.

Socialism and war

The extra difficulties the situation creates for us in projecting our vision of socialism and the world’s future will not be lost on anybody; and they will not quickly disappear. One of my Tribune customers said in sorrow, “It’s getting more like 1984 every day”. Another said, “How dreadful to watch communists from different countries seeing how many of each other they can kill”. Yet another, with a shake of the head, said: “Politics is hard to follow these days”.

Even when the internal practices of post-capitalist regimes showed how much was left to be desired, one thing still seemed to stand — that the causes of war between such countries would be done away with.

To their credit, and no doubt flowing from their experience with the Soviet Union, the Yugoslavs faced this problem both practically and theoretically more realistically than anybody else.

In his book Socialism and War, Edward Kardelj (who died in February, sad to say) argued with Chinese theorists who repudiated peaceful coexistence and preached the inevitability of war. (It is another irony of the situation that in those days China completely repudiated in words any coexistence with the US and viciously denounced Yugoslavia for upholding that possibility. Today, Yugoslavia has good relations with China — seeing that country as a counterweight to the Soviet Union — while China goes far beyond coexistence, almost to an alliance with, the US).

Kardelj said:

In circumstances when the socialist system has become a world force, but still possessing vestiges of the old views and egoistic and other such tendencies, the phenomenon is not excluded of some country on the socialist road — because of certain specific inner conditions — yielding to the temptation to make use of the strength of socialism, not only for its own defence but also for an attempt to achieve certain aims which have no connection whatsoever with socialism.

Socialism and War, page 60. Methuen and Co, 1961.)

Nobody can foresee with precision what actual groupings in the relationship of world social forces will appear in the course of further development. Nor can anybody foresee all the numerous instruments or all the multifarious forms in which and through which the future struggle for the final establishment of socialist relationships will unfold, any more than one can foresee the future forms of mutual aid of the socialist forces. But one thing remains, as a sacred principle: the imposition of socialism or of any of its forms by aggression from without will always be alien to socialism, an unacceptable and reactionary instrument. The elimination of that instrument is indeed the long-term purpose of the policy of coexistence.

(Page 67.)

It is in complete opposition to the spirit of marxism to take the fact that a war is waged by a socialist country as the sole criterion of the justness of that war.

(Page 105.)

And in listing one of a number of contradictions in the internal development of social relationships after the overthrow of capitalism while the state still exists:

...the necessity for relationships between one socialist country and another to be founded on interstate relationships, which makes possible tendencies towards a desire to dominate others, to national egoism and like phenomena.

(Page 189.)

Alienation

Later I will return to some of the questions raised in these passages, but want to point out that what is happening is bad for socialism also because it will reinforce the alienation many people feel. For example, many could conclude that there is nothing they can do to stop social disasters. Especially if even those who have proclaimed they can stop them not only don’t, but actually cause some of the worst kind of social disasters — war — themselves. Many could wrongly conclude that this “proves” that “human nature”, not the social system, is the cause of war and other conflicts — a “human nature” that cannot be changed.
The events will also stimulate regrowth of the anti-Asian sentiments never far below the surface in many Australians, and anti-Russian sentiment as well — the latter being deliberately promoted by Fraser and his government.

There is hardly need to point to the new divisions on the left, or exacerbation of the old ones, that the conflict generates.

**Detente and non-alignment**

The events we witness are also defeats for the policies of detente and non-alignment. “The end of this decade of detente” was proclaimed by Peacock in his foreign policy statement, as he lined up with China and with US threats of intervention to save “the west’s” oil in the Middle East.

But we should not take these defeats as being irreversible.

In one sense, the events show that detente must be extended to involve all major powers, and deepened to embrace real disarmament.

Out of their experience of the deadly dangerous situation that could have arisen, both China and the Soviet Union may in time be induced to see for themselves what many others have said and wish for — that they have to find some way of living together with each other, as well as with the United States, without resorting to war which could so easily escalate to a world nuclear war.

This could be the first step in a long march to developing once again a common front against imperialism.

Such a step will not stop sallies by one or another power when conditions look suitable, or prevent mass movements for change occurring in various countries — for example, Iran.

But such an extension and deepening of detente would push back the danger of world war, and restrict the power of the big nations, especially the Soviet Union, China and the United States, allowing the movement for non-alignment to grow as a counterweight and an alternative to having to line up with one or another great power.

This will not occur easily, of course, because the big powers (including China, despite its relative economic backwardness) have the clout, the supplies, the money, while the non-aligned lack these and have all sorts of regimes and allegiances.

Nevertheless, it is clear that lining up with one or another great power makes both peace and independence progressively more difficult to maintain. African countries, for example, which required aid to win their national liberation struggles and independence are finding that they later have to take counter-measures if they are not to fall into a new dependence, even if it is a lighter and less exploitative one than when imperialism ruled.

The broad struggle for peace, non-alignment and disarmament, for a new world political and economic order which respects the independence of all countries, opposes multinational domination and foreign military presences and bases, should receive more attention and support than we have given it.

No easy victories in this struggle are to be expected, any more than in the internal struggles projected in our draft program. But the alternative is the kind of dangerous situation we have seen. As said earlier, it is not just a matter of persuasion of people whose ears are closed. The events themselves may educate. What we need is mass awareness, to bring the lesson home more quickly and deeply, however difficult that may be. The alternative is to do nothing and let events take their course.

China talks of “teaching Viet Nam a lesson”. China herself should be taught a lesson. Not a military lesson, such as the Soviet Union may have had in mind, but a political lesson through mass criticism: the lesson that she must not use her size and strength to dominate, browbeat or attempt to establish hegemony over others.

The Soviet Union should be taught the same lesson, for it has not yet learned it, and both should unite to teach it (again) to the United States.

This will not be easy. The Commonwealth Bank struck a chord when they made their slogan “Get with the Strength”, because many powerless people, and small nations, feel that this is the only way. But really it is they who must exercise their own potential power by uniting with each other for the
purpose.

Problems for Study

We should continue, and deepen, our study of the nature of the social systems in what we have inadequately called the "socialist-based" countries, remembering however that they display considerable variety and that over-generalisation may be a pitfall.

This study should include examination of the compulsions and restraints, and the goals of industrialisation and modernisation, and how this influences social relations, progress towards equality internally in each country and internationally, and what it may do in the decades ahead to world resources, environment and ecological balance.

It should include consideration of the problems of nationalism and internationalism.

We should continue to develop and more forcefully project the kind of vision contained in our draft Party Program, and the principles upon which it is based.

But we should not do it in a utopian and self-defeating way.

Politics is conducted by real people; by real political and social forces; by real nations. All are subject to the weight of their traditions, culture and history, and all sorts of contradictory strivings.

For example, the simple, naive answer to nationalism as a cause of conflicts and wars is to preach internationalism. But this ignores the facts that nationalism is a universal and powerful force in the world, that without that force Viet Nam (for example) could not have defeated imperialism, and that preaching by the enlightened has never of itself brought into existence that which was preached for.

There is no way in which a few internationalists can, any more than King Canute, roll back the waves, in this case of nationalism. All that will happen with that stance is that those who identify, or claim to identify with national sentiment will win the political battle and succeed in turning national sentiment in a reactionary direction.

History, including not least recent history, is full of examples of this.

The dialectic of development is that, to proceed towards internationalism, one must defend and develop that which is positive in national tradition and sentiment, linked with the particular struggles of the day. These include, especially, struggles against the multinational corporations, about which already a widespread feeling exists, and struggle against those who, in the name of the "national interest", play on racism, greed and exploitation.

Australia will continue to exist as a nation for a very long time yet. The real question is what the character and outlook of that nation should be so as to best serve the interests of Australia's working people by overcoming racism, chauvinism and narrowness, by striving for equality in relations between nations, especially those close to us, by developing joint action by national working classes against common enemies, and the like.

Among the difficulties we face is that we bear the name "communist"; our paper carries the line "Australia's Communist Weekly". But what is "a communist"? It is not so clear to people — including communists! — these days. The name has been besmirched, as the designation "social-democrat" was in a previous period. I do not know what the solution to this problem is.

But despite the extra difficulties socialists now face, and the comfort and succour that imperialism derives from conflicts such as those we have witnessed, and from internal defects of post-capitalist states, we should not forget that capitalism's problems are mounting all over the world. Along with those problems, desires are mounting for a new way of life which really expands democracy, liberates from oppression, and lives in harmony and balance with the natural world.

Jack Mundey put it well in a recent letter to the press: we stand for socialism with a human face, an egalitarian body and an ecological heart.

— Eric Aarons.

Trotskyism has always been defined negatively; Trotskyism is non-stalinism. This may well help explain Trotskyism’s popularity: we’re all Trotskyists now. Unfortunately things are not quite so simple. The left’s penchant for name-calling often denies a theoretical analysis: to name a position is thought to be sufficient to explain it. A critical marxism clearly needs to penetrate below the blanket endorsement and the vitriol which are popular currency in contemporary debate.

After the Gramsci boom inspired by 1968 there is now a revival of interest in Leon Trotsky (see list). The central question in this revival is elementary: who is Leon Trotsky? Incredible as it seems, this question has never been answered in terms other than banal: Heir to Lenin, or the Great Renegade, depending on one’s affiliations. It is a sad indicator of the condition of marxism that the best recent analyses have not been the marxist ones. The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky, the most scholarly work to date, is written by a social-democrat attempting to retrieve Trotsky from the mythology engendered by his followers and enemies alike.

Interestingly, the Trotsky revival is largely a response to Deutscher’s famous trilogy, The Prophet Armed, Disarmed, Outcast (Oxford 1954, 1959, 1963). In his memoirs, van Heijenoort suggests that Deutscher’s trilogy has all the defects of a pioneering work — and more. Though attacking excessive partisanship, van Heijenoort also laments the cleft between historians and participants, implicitly begging members of the left to write their memoirs (a request to which we might add our own voices here!).

Irving Howe’s recent Trotsky is also a response to Deutscher: for Howe, Deutscher’s ambivalence toward stalinism and his identification with his subject mar his work. But to proceed to the work under review — Knei-Paz’ complaints are more theoretical in nature. In particular, Deutscher mirrors the radical Trotsky’s self-denial. Deutscher glosses over Trotsky’s early politics to maintain the ‘unity of Lenin and Trotsky’ line. For Knei-Paz, Deutscher definitionally cannot give us an adequate understanding of Trotsky. Deutscher takes on Trotsky’s jacobin morality, portraying Trotsky as a variation on the ‘Ghost Who Walks’, who neither wins nor loses but will be vindicated on the Great Day.

So much for context — what is the content of this tome? In one sense The Social and Political Thought of Trotsky is basically a document, a dossier containing all the important aspects of Trotsky’s thought. All the major works from youth through to exile and murder are summarised, analysed, at least in part criticised. Yet ‘dossier’ implies some disorder; where Knei-Paz organises his subject matter thematically, giving greater coherence and thrust to Trotsky’s thought. Knei-Paz moves from 1905 to combined and uneven development, permanent revolution, Party, the Revolution and its Betrayal, to Trotsky as intellectual and man of letters. What holds this presentation together is the pursuit of Trotsky as the theoretician of permanent revolution. For permanent revolution is Trotsky’s central innovation, and it is on this theory that Trotsky stands or falls. Trotsky cannot be understood as the Man with the Train or as the Prophet: Trotskyism can only be analysed as permanent revolution.

As it widely known, the theory of permanent revolution was produced through the collaboration of Parvus and Trotsky around 1905. Parvus had argued that the internationalisation of capital made the nation-state obsolete. Trotsky deduced from this functional internationalism — the notion that all twentieth century revolutions must be socialist (this was not Parvus’ position — he was closer to Lenin in this regard). In the case of Russia, revolution could begin as bourgeois but could only be completed as socialist — why? because the proletariat would be at the helm and the logic of proletarian power was socialist revolution.

Readers may have noticed already that this theory denies an elementary principle of marxism — ‘men make history but not just as they please’. But Trotsky does not simply impute revolutionary consciousness to the working class or its representative, the Party. He simultaneously theorises automatic revolution via the principle of uneven development. Where for Gramsci and Lenin uneven development explains some of the problems of making socialism, for Trotsky it becomes a levelling mechanism which makes all situations revolutionary. Trotsky jumps from the fact of world market and uneven development within that market and the nation-state to the
teleology of the inevitable prairie fire: he converts uneven development from an explanatory device into the prime mover of world revolution. The world market is a world system therefore the whole caboodle must crash at once — the weakness of the weakest link infects the whole chain. But the logic of uneven development tells us the opposite: that the chain remains rigid though broken in one place.

History runs at different times: but the problem with differential times is precisely that they are differential. When we say that theory lags (all the time), or that politics lags (1929, 1968) or economy lags (1917) we are indicating discontinuity. There is no way that discontinuity can become a motor force. Uneven development implies fragmentation, not teleology. Marx’s classic study of uneven development — The Eighteenth Brumaire — displays precisely this point. More often than not uneven development leads to bonapartism — not to socialism, as Trotsky thought, nor to bourgeois democracy, as the mensheviks thought. Trotsky’s notion that accumulated contradictions necessarily make for social progress reveals something of his shared background with the automatic marxism of the Second and Third Internationals. In politics nothing is automatic, everything is contingent. Certain comrades leap more than History does; and they do not always look first.

The careful reader may glean this much and more from Knei-Paz: reflection on this book and on Trotsky’s works reveals that permanent revolution simply does not follow from uneven development, that combined development is meaningless converted into a kind of socialist domino theory. Instead of analysing national specificities in the manner of Gramsci, Trotsky views all through this theory of automatic revolution, fitting all examples into a socialism or barbarism couple that correlates with ‘the Soviet Road’ or ‘the Nazi Road’. How is this possible? Armed with the all-explanatory scheme of permanent revolution, Trotsky moves into a method which owes much more to Hegel than to Marx. If the world explains itself globally, if the proletariat acts as History’s Agent, the problems of everyday socialist politics dwindle. The tune is familiar — socialism is the proletariat’s only vocation, socialism could have been made many times over were it not for treacherous communist parties, etc.

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Knei-Paz’ contribution may not be as clear as the comments above might suggest. He is not a marxist, his concern is not with promoting marxist criticism or self-criticism. Nor does his book take the form of a clear critique: but we cannot castigate books for not being something other than what they are. The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky is similar in this regard to Liebman’s Leninism Under Lenin. These are the first really good books on the fathers of Bolshevism — if they do not live up to all our expectations it is because they are pioneering works, attempting first to establish the real record. Works of critique will follow after the air has been cleared. Meantime, Knei-Paz has not only given us a clear theoretical presentation of Trotsky’s themes and works, but has also provided us with valuable information. In portraying the Luxemburgist Trotsky, for example, Knei-Paz gives a 22-page precis of the inaccessible 1904 text ‘Our Political Tasks’. Here we see a Trotsky whose existence was regarded by Deutscher as an aberration.

Though we can have few scholarly complaints about this book, some political comments about Trotsky is unnecessary. It would be dishonest to deny that Knei-Paz’ social-democratic predilections show through at times: thus, for example, the hints that the failure of bolshevism indicates the failure of marxism generally. Marxism appears here as a sullied nineteenth century ideal. More painful than this is the attitude toward a hypothetical leninism. Knei-Paz repeats Schapiro’s claim that Lenin set about destroying all opposition immediately. But, for example, factions were not banned until after the NEP. On the ‘totalitarian school’s’ account, there are two possible explanations. Either factions were fake; or Lenin tried to squash internal democracy unsuccessfully. At this point the reader expects either further evidence, or some kind of psychohistory ‘explaining’ the machinations of a power-hungry Lenin. The fact of historical continuity between Lenin and Stalin does not justify any suggestion of reading Stalin back into Lenin.

The point is not that Lenin was not authoritarian after circa 1918; nor can it be disputed that Lenin was no theoretician. The point is that Lenin was rarely dogmatic in his decision-making, that he placed a provisional status on most of his work and only into his last years began to elevate necessity into virtue (e.g. the ‘Twenty-One Conditions’ of the Comintern). Trotsky in comparison habitually justified his turns theoretically. At any rate, these problems make for the least persuasive part of Knei-Paz’ book. Other accounts such as Gerratan’s essay in New Left Review 103, Liebman’s book, Brinton’s Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control go much further toward explaining Lenin.

The last third of The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky falls off — it lacks the impact of the first two-thirds, partly because of the nature of the subject matter (Knei-Paz’ insistence on covering all Trotsky’s work engenders organisational problems), partly because ‘objectivity’ is more easily aspired to than achieved. In one place Knei-Paz cites the suggestion that the historian is a chronicler: but
neither this mammoth work of theoretical scholarship nor those problems just outlined can be explained via the notion of the author as chronicler.

Such quibbles, however, are insignificant in the light of Knei-Paz’ contribution to the task of rediscovering Trotsky as a preliminary to assessing his political relevance to the West today. This book is one of the few which can actually be read instead of the originals — a practice rarely advisable; and there is not now, nor has there ever been, justification in elevating ‘marxist’ texts over others simply on their claim to orthodoxy.

And Knei-Paz’ conclusion? It is, of course, that Trotsky is irrelevant. Most of the recent literature agrees — for rather different reasons. As marxism as critique advances, we can only lament the continuing fascination of so much of the left with figures like Trotsky, intriguing as a great revolutionary and yet so far away from suburban commonsense as lived working class experience, so far away from the forms of everyday life which daily renew bourgeois domination.

Other Writings on Trotsky


Hodgson, G., Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism (Spokesman 1975) gives a rigorous critique of Trotsky’s automatism.

Howe, I., Trotsky (Fontana 1978) is the best cheap introduction to Trotsky. See also his review of Knei-Paz in New York Review of Books, 9/2/78.

Jenkins, P., Where Trotskyism Got Lost (Spokesman pamphlet 59, 1977) analyses the failure of orthodox trotskyism to re-think the post-war world.


Michail, L., The Theory of Permanent Revolution — A Critique (CPGB 1977), and ‘Trotsky’s Revolution Betrayed’, Socialist Europe 3, manages to criticise Trotsky only by elevating Lenin to the status of God.

Red and Lavender Union, Permanent Revolution — A Vindication of Marxism (LRU 1976) — gays groping towards bolshevism. They eventually joined the Spartacists.

Studies in Comparative Communism, special Trotskyism number, 10/1-2 (1977) contains interesting historical material, polemics between Mandel and Dunayevskaya.

Thompson, P. and Lewis, G., The Revolution Unfinished? A Critique of Trotskyism (Big Flame 1977) provides a brief but sharp all-round critique of orthodoxy.


Warth, R., Leon Trotsky (Twayne, 1977) — another biography.

Finally, in ‘Marxism and Trotsky’, forthcoming in Telos, Peter Beilharz attempts a general theoretical assessment of Trotsky’s marxism.

If you ever wondered whatever happened, cinematically speaking, to Vietnam after The Green Berets, don't worry, you're about to find out. Three films on current release (Coming Home, The Odd Angry Shot, and The Deer Hunter) certify that Vietnam has made it as a suitable case for treatment.

Apparently enough time has elapsed for the war to assume what might be called manageable proportions. The day-in, day-out exhaustive television coverage which, arguably, made Vietnam the most reported and least considered conflict in history, undoubtedly rendered contemporaneous movie treatments superfluous. Additionally, the controversies about Vietnam which made it too hot a potato politically for smart money moviemakers to touch, hardly abated in the war's immediate aftermath. Watergate, the decline and fall of Richard Nixon and related matters were safer "political" issues for concerned cinema interests to tackle.

But now the log-jam has broken, the reticence dissolved, and Hollywood is about to fall all over itself awarding Oscars to the biggest, if not the dissolved, and Hollywood is about to fall all over cinema interests to tackle. money moviemakers to touch, hardly abated in the war's immediate aftermath. Watergate, the decline and fall of Richard Nixon and related matters were safer "political" issues for concerned cinema interests to tackle.

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The film focusses on three members of a Russian-American community who volunteer for service in Vietnam. The film's first hour concerns Michael, Nick and Stevie, and their fellow steelworkers, at Stevie's wedding, and on a post-nuptial deer hunting trip. The emphasis is on the personal and cultural ties which bind them together, to their ethnic community, and to their country. The Russian Orthodox Church and the local steel mill are linked symbolically as significant institutions in the town. The local American Legion hall, where the wedding reception is held, is evidently mainly Russian in membership, linking ethnicity and patriotism.

On the hunting trip, the group's boozy camaraderie is shattered. Theirs is a careless, brawling association rather than fellowship, and it is clear that their leader, Michael, feels superior to and distant from the rest. Although therefore somewhat detached from his community, Michael at the same time is seen to be bound to "the land" — he is proficient in Indian lore (shades of the "authentic" Americans!) and he professes a love for his hometown.

It is in Vietnam that Michael, arrogant and innocent, learns real responsibility and commitment. Captured by the Viet Cong, Michael, Nick and Stevie are forced to play Russian roulette. Michael, in engineering their escape, forces Nick to risk his life in the game. Although the escape attempt is ultimately successful, Nick is traumatised by the experience and Stevie is badly injured. Back home, on leave, a chastened Michael attempts to restore the comrades — whose injuries are his responsibility — to their community, exercising a degree of moral force. He finds Stevie, legless and disoriented in a veterans' hospital, and brings him home. He remonstrates with his civilian friends, taking issue with their carelessness with guns. On a nostalgic deer hunting trip he deliberately misses a sure shot at a stag, muttering resignedly "OK, OK", recognising the arbitrariness of the relationship between hunter and hunted. In the film's final scenes, Michael finds Nick, AWOL and a heroin addict, in the back streets of Saigon in the last days before the fall, making his "living" as a professional Russian roulette player. Nick rejects Michael's pleas to "remember", rejects the implicit sanctity of "home", and finally loses the game. After Nick's funeral in the familiar Russian church, the group assemble, comforting each other in small ways: they eat together, they sing "God Bless America" and they toast the dead man. The film ends freeze-framed on their upturned glasses.

So the film's cycle is complete. All the group sits round the table, the absent one present in their minds. The narrative reassuringly folds us back into the film's definition of community (via the repetition of the church ceremonies and the hunting trips) and the film's view that these are the natural verities: small towns, good fellowship, caring and comfort, no matter how inarticulate. It is difficult to get outside The Deer Hunter's
world, to query its view that “community” is the answer to a hostile and random world, that it will make remembering less painful.

Yet, we must query that view. After all, how many Americans live in communities — even ethnic ones — where warm personal ties are a daily fact of life? And, even in the film’s own terms, can we realistically see “community” in the film as positive, as a source of strength? Doesn’t it rather appear as the pitiful refuge of the damaged, a defensive stockade within which the brutalized and bewildered whistle in the dark, trying to keep the unknown barbarians at bay?

This is not to say that a community of self-conscious, “remembering” individuals, creating a just sphere of shared norms and values is either impossible or undesirable. Quite the reverse. But The Deer Hunter’s community is one of despairing resignation, grounded in the film’s assumption that there are no historically specific relationships, only those of pure chance. According to the film, Vietnam simply “happened” to this community; its members can make no sense of it, they can only accept it.

At one level, of course, one can hardly disagree that many Americans did go to Vietnam without any very clear understanding of what they or their country were doing, despite the debates current at the time. But one can argue with a film that elevates such an absence of reflexivity or justification or even inquiry to a principle of personal and national existence. The motif of Russian roulette dominates the film — hazard, chance, the notion that death is just a single shot away. How is politics possible in such a situation? Given the arbitrariness portrayed in this film, how can we even hope? Why, indeed, think? criticize? conclude? act? and, most importantly, remember? This film is social amnesia run amok. Resist.

— Kathe Boehringer
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