

II

The Capitalist State

1. The Problem

INTRODUCTION

We now possess enough elements for examining the capitalist state. Its fundamental distinctive feature seems to be the fact that it contains no determination of subjects (fixed in this state as 'individuals', 'citizens', 'political persons') as *agents of production*; and that this was not the case in the other types of state. At the same time this class state presents a further specific feature: namely, that political class domination is constantly absent from its institutions. It presents itself as a popular-class-state. Its institutions are organized around the principles of the liberty and equality of 'individuals' or 'political persons'. Its legitimacy is no longer founded on the divine will implied by the monarchical principle, but on the ensemble of formally free and equal individuals-citizens and on the popular sovereignty and secular responsibility of the state towards the people. The 'people' is itself erected as a principle of determination of the state, not as composed of agents of production distributed in social classes, but as an accumulation of individuals-citizens, whose mode of participation in a national political community shows itself in universal suffrage, which is the expression of the 'general will'. The modern juridical system, as distinct from the feudal system of rules based on *privileges*, bears a 'normative' character, expressed in a set of systematized laws which starts from the principles of liberty and equality: this is the reign of 'law'. The equality and liberty of the individuals-citizens lie in their relation to abstract and formal laws, which are considered to enunciate this general will inside a 'legal state'. The modern capitalist state thus presents itself as embodying the general interest of the whole of society, i.e. as substantiating the will of that 'body politic' which is the 'nation'.

These fundamental characteristics of the capitalist state cannot be reduced to the *ideological*: they relate to a regional level of the CMP, namely the juridico-political instance of the state, which is made up of institutions such as parliamentary representation, political liberties, universal suffrage, popular sovereignty, etc. It is true that the ideological plays an essential role; but it is a much more complex role which can in

no case be identified with the functioning of the structures of the capitalist state.

The principles of explanation of the capitalist state have posed numerous problems for the Marxist science of the state. The central theme of these problems is the following: what are the real characteristics of the economic which imply this capitalist state? In a whole series of replies, running through nearly all the variants, one invariant is revealed: *the reference to the concept of 'civil society' and to its separation from the state*. This is so, even if no break between Marx's youthful and mature works is accepted: as is the case in the works of e.g. Lefebvre, Rubel and Marcuse, who represent the typical historicist tendency; or even if the break is located at the time of the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State*, as is done by the Italian Marxist school of della Volpe, Cerroni and Rossi.

The invariant theme of these replies is the following: the emergence in the economic level of the CMP, i.e. in capitalist relations of production, of agents of production as *individuals*. Did not Marx, especially in the *Grundrisse*, emphasize the appearance of individuals-agents of production, *bare individuals*, as a real characteristic both of the direct producer (the 'free labourer') and also of the non-producing owner; that is, as a particular form of the two elements which, with the means of production, enter into a combination in those relations which constitute the relations of production? This individualization of the agents of production, *grasped precisely as a real characteristic of capitalist relations of production*, is seen as constituting the substratum of modern state structures; and the ensemble of these individuals-agents as constituting civil society, that is the way in which the economic is somehow present in social relations. Thus, on this theory, separation of civil society and the state indicates the role of a strictly political superstructure relative to these economic individuals, subjects of a society of exchange and competition.

This concept of civil society, borrowed from Hegel and eighteenth-century political theory, refers exactly to the 'world of needs' and implies the anthropological perspective of 'concrete individual' and 'generic man', conceived as subjects of the economy, which is the correlate to the historicist problematic. The examination of the modern state which follows from it starts from the problem of a separation between civil society and the state and is constructed on the schema of *alienation*, i.e. on the schema of a relation of the subject (concrete individuals) to its objectified essence (the state).

Without prolonging our critique of this conception, it will be sufficient to note the following very serious results which follow from it and which make impossible the scientific examination of the capitalist state:

(a) It prevents us from understanding the relation of the state to the class struggle: (i) since agents of production are conceived as originating individuals-subjects and not as supports of structures, it is impossible to constitute social classes from them and (ii) since the state is at the origin related to these economic individuals-agents, it is impossible to relate it to classes and the class struggle.

(b) It results in masking a whole series of real problems posed by the capitalist state, by hiding them under the ideological problematic of the separation of civil society and the state. In particular it becomes impossible to conceive the specific autonomy in the CMP of the economic and the political, the effects of the ideological on these instances, the repercussions of this relation between structures on the field of the class struggle, etc.

Let us try to establish the originality of the relations of the capitalist state (i) to the structures of the relations of production, (ii) to the field of the class struggle.

(i) THE CAPITALIST STATE AND RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

In the first instance, let us examine what Marx means in the *Grundrisse*, especially in the chapter on *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*,¹ by 'bare individual' as a *theoretical presupposition (Voraussetzung)* and as a *historical condition (historische Bedingung)* of the CMP.

It may usefully be pointed out here that contrary to a historicist conception, this 'bare individual', understood as the historical condition of the CMP, does not mean for Marx the *history of the genesis* of this mode, but the *genealogy of certain of its elements*. In fact the prehistory and the structure of a mode of production must be distinguished, since the effective processes of constituting their elements are different. But once these elements are obtained, the same structure always results from their combination.

1. References to the *Grundrisse zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* are from Karl Marx, *Texte zu Methode und Praxis*, Vol. 3, Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1966 (see pp. 40 ff., 47 ff., 65 ff., 127 ff.; and in particular, pp. 132, 138, 150, 154, 157, 167). A complete English translation of the *Grundrisse* will be published, by Penguin Books in association with *New Left Review*, in the course of 1973.

A. What does Marx mean by the appearance of the 'bare individual' (*nacktes Individuum*) as the *historical condition* of the CMP, a term which is linked with that of 'free labourer' (*freier Arbeiter*) in the *Grundrisse* text concerning the direct producer.

This term clearly does not in any way mean the actual appearance in historical reality of agents of production as individuals, in the literal sense of the term. It is being used in a *descriptive* way, so as to show the *dissolution* of a certain relation of *structures*, namely that of the feudal mode of production. In fact, up to and including *Capital*, Marx incorrectly perceives the feudal mode of production as *differing* from the CMP in being characterized by a 'mixedness' of its instances, a mixedness which is based on a purely mythical conception of their 'organic' relation. We know how this *representation* of Marx's of the feudal mode of production should be assessed.² The important point is that 'bare individual' and the 'free labourer' are here only simple words, which exactly describe the *liberation* of the agents of production from feudal 'ties of personal dependence' (*persönliche Herrschafts- und Knechtschaftsverhältnisse*), even called 'natural' (*naturwüchsige Gesellschaft*), conceived as 'mixed' economic-political fetters of the process of production. The dissolution of feudal structures is perceived descriptively as the *stripping* of agents of production, which is only a way of noting a structural transformation, by perceiving it, in an entirely descriptive way, in its *effects*. The term 'bare individual' as a historical condition does not therefore in any way mean that agents, who were previously 'organically' in unities, arise *in reality* as atomized individuals, to be *later* inserted into combinations of capitalist relations of production, and then gradually to constitute social classes.³ It means that certain relations disintegrate (*sich auflösen*), and that this appears in its effects as a 'bareness', 'liberation' and 'individualization' (*Vereinzelung*) of the agents.

B. However, the term 'bare individual' is also used as a *theoretical presupposition* of the CMP. In an equally descriptive way it here covers a reality which is quite different and very precise. Both in the *Precapitalist Economic Formations* and in *Capital* it denotes *the relation of real appropriation*, as a theoretical characteristic of the CMP: its specific characteristic is the *separation of the direct producer from his 'natural' conditions of*

2. See the Introduction, for this and for what follows.

3. Yet this is in fact what Marx *says* in the *Grundrisse*, in connection with the 'mass' of 'free labourers' who are constituted gradually into classes. I have shown how this should be understood on pp. 57 ff. above.

labour. This separation of the direct producer from the means of production, occurring at the historical stage of large industry, and marking the beginning of the expanded reproduction of the CMP, is what is here being descriptively perceived as 'bareness' of the agents of production.

I do not intend to discuss why Marx's terminology fluctuated in this way. The important point to see clearly here is that the term 'bare individual' in the second sense (i.e. of the theoretical presuppositions of the CMP) does not in the least mean the *real emergence* of agents of production as 'individuals'. On the contrary, it is clear that what is really conveyed by this term, the separation of the direct producer from his means of production, leads to completely different results. Namely, it leads to the collectivization of the labour process, that is, to the labourer as an organ of a collective mechanism of production, which Marx defines as *socialization* of the productive forces; while from the viewpoint of the owners of the means of production, it leads to the process of concentration of capital.

So in the scientific Marxist problematic, this famous real existence of 'individuals-subjects', which is ultimately the basis of the problematic of 'civil society' and its separation from the state, cannot be accepted. On the other hand, by considering the capitalist state as a regional instance of the CMP, and so in its complex relations with the relations of production, we can establish its *specific autonomy* relative to the economic. Moreover, without any doubt, the Italian Marxist school has incorrectly identified this ideological schema of the *separation* of civil society and the state with the real problem of the *respective autonomy* in the CMP of the political and economic structures. This specific autonomy of the political and the economic in the CMP, descriptively contrasted by Marx with the so-called 'mixedness' of the instances in the feudal mode of production, relates ultimately to the separation of the direct producer from his means of production; it relates to the peculiar combination of the relations of real appropriation and property where, according to Marx, the 'secret' of the constitution of superstructures is to be found. This separation of the direct producer from the means of production in the combination which governs and distributes the specific positions of the economic and the political, and which sets the limits of intervention by one of the regional structures at another, has strictly nothing to do with the real appearance of agents as 'individuals' in the relations of production. On the contrary,

it reveals these agents as supports of structures and thus opens the way to a scientific examination of the relation of the state to the field of the class struggle.

If we consider in this way the function which has been ascribed, in the Marxist theory of the state, to the concept of civil society, we see clearly that it has been at most a *negative* or *critical* function. Civil society has constituted a notion negatively indicating the specific autonomy of the political, but in no way a concept which could cover the structure of the economic, the relations of production.

The juridico-political superstructure of the capitalist state is related to this structure of the relations of production. This becomes clear as soon as we refer to capitalist law. The separation of the direct producer from the means of production is reflected there by the institutionalized fixing of agents of production as juridical subjects, i.e. political individuals-persons. This is as true of the particular transaction constituted by the labour contract (the buying and selling of labour power), as of the relationship of formal juridical ownership of the means of production or of public-political institutionalized relations. This means that agents of production actually appear as 'individuals' only in those superstructural relations which are juridical relations. It is on these juridical relations, and not on relations of production in the strict sense, that the labour contract and the formal ownership of the means of production depend. The fact that this appearance of the 'individual' at the level of juridical reality is due to the separation of the direct producer from his means of production does not mean that this separation engenders 'individuals-agents of production' within those same relations of production. *On the contrary, our task will be to explain how this separation, which engenders the concentration of capital and the socialization of the labour process within the economic level, jointly sets up agents of production at the juridico-political level, as political and juridical 'individuals-subjects', deprived of their economic determination and, consequently, of their class membership.*

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the fact that there is, corresponding to this particular status of the juridico-political instance, a *juridical and political ideology*, which is dependent on the ideological instance. This juridico-political ideology holds a dominant place in the dominant ideology of this mode of production, taking a place analogous to religious ideology in the dominant ideology of the feudal mode of production. Here, the separation of the direct producer from his means of production

is expressed, in ideological discourse, in extraordinarily complex forms of individualist personalism, in the setting-up of agents as 'subjects'.

The separation of the direct producer from the means of production in the relation of real appropriation (the labour process), which produces the specific autonomy of the political and the economic, determines the setting-up of agents as juridico-political subjects, *in that it impresses a determinate structure on the labour process*. This is what Marx shows in his analyses of commodity and the law of value: 'Only such products can become commodities with regard to each other, as result from different kinds of labour, each kind being carried on independently and for the account of private individuals.'⁴ This, strictly speaking, is a mode of objective articulation of the labour processes, a mode in which the real dependence of the producers introduced by the socialization of labour (social labour) is concealed. These labours are, within certain objective limits, carried out independently one from another (private labours), *that is without the producers having to organize their co-operation to begin with*. It is then that the law of value dominates. This opposition 'dependence/independence', characteristic of the producers but not of the 'private owners' in the relation of real appropriation, is identical to the separation of the producers from the means of production; it therefore indicates that the dependence of the producers poses certain necessary limits to the relative independence of the labour process. This essential question cannot be stressed further here. It must however be emphasized that:

a. It is a matter of an objective structure of the *labour process*. This determines (i) *the relation of property in the economic combination* and thereby a contradiction specific to the economic in the CMP between socialization of the productive forces and private ownership of the means of production; it *thus* determines (ii) the setting up of agents in independent pieces of labour as subjects in the juridico-political super-structure.

b. The agents appear here not as 'individuals/subjects', but as supports of a structure of the labour process, i.e. as agents/producers, maintaining determinate relations with the means of labour.

This structure of the labour process is over-determined by the juridico-political; from its reflection in the juridico-political and from the

4. *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 42. Cf. Charles Bettelheim, *Le contenu du calcul économique social*, unpublished lectures kindly communicated to me by the author.

intervention of this latter in the economic, it leads to a whole series of *over-determined effects* in social relations, in the field of the class struggle.

(ii) THE CAPITALIST STATE AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

We have by no means reached the end of our elucidation of the principles of explanation of the capitalist state. The relation between political structures and relations of production leads on to the problem of the relation *between the state and the field of the class struggle*.

This specific autonomy of the political and economic structures of the CMP in the field of the class struggle (i.e. in the field of social relations) is reflected as an autonomization of socio-economic and socio-political relations, or, as emphasized by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci, as an autonomization of the economic class struggle and the properly political class struggle. Therefore if we temporarily disregard the ideological, the state's relation to the field of the class struggle can be divided into its relation to (i) the economic class struggle and (ii) the political class struggle.

If we begin by examining the economic class struggle (*the socio-economic relations* of the CMP) we note a *fundamental and original* characteristic, to be defined hereafter as the 'effect of isolation'. It consists of the fact that the *juridical and ideological structures* (determined in the last instance by the structure of the labour process), which set up at their level agents of production distributed in social classes as juridico-ideological subjects, produce the following effect on the economic class struggle: the effect of concealing from these agents in a particular way the fact that their relations are class relations. The socio-economic relations are in actual fact *experienced* by the supports as a specific fragmentation and atomization. The Marxist classics have often indicated this by contrasting the 'individual', 'local', 'partial', 'isolated', etc., economic struggle with the political struggle which tends to present a character of unity, i.e. class unity. So this isolation is the effect on socio-economic relations of (1) the juridical, (2) the juridico-political ideology, (3) the ideological in general. This effect of isolation is *terrifyingly real*: it has a name: *competition* between the wage-earning workers and between the capitalist owners of private property. It is in fact only an ideological conception of the capitalist relations of production which conceives them as commercial encounters between individuals/agents of production on the market. But competition is far from designating the *structure of capitalist relations of*

production; it consists precisely in the effect of the juridical and the ideological on *socio-economic relations*.

The fact remains that this effect of isolation is of major importance, particularly in so far as it conceals from the agents of production their class relations in their economic struggle. Furthermore this is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Marx continually locates the constitution of classes *as such* in the CMP at the level of political class struggle. It is not that 'individuals/agents of production' are constituted into classes only in the political struggle. Marx shows, particularly in *Capital*, Volume III, how agents of production, who have already entered the transaction of the labour contract in Volume I, are distributed in social classes. It is because of the effects of the juridical and the ideological on socio-economic relations, on the economic struggle, that this is not experienced as a class struggle.

Further, this 'effect of isolation' on socio-economic relations does not simply appear at the level of each agent of production, i.e. as an effect of 'individualization' of these agents: it appears in a whole series of relations, from relations between wage-earning worker and capitalist owner of private property, between wage-earning worker and wage-earning worker and between private capitalist and private capitalist, to relations between a worker in one factory, branch of industry or locality and workers elsewhere, and between capitalists in one branch of industry or subdivision of capital and the others. This effect of isolation which is designated by the term 'competition' covers the whole ensemble of socio-economic relations.

From another aspect, we can locate an isolation within socio-economic relations among certain classes in a capitalist formation which are dependent on other modes of production coexisting in that formation: this is the case with the small-holding peasants. It must be noted that their isolation is a result of their conditions of economic life, i.e. of their *non-separation* from the means of production, whereas the isolation of the capitalist owners and wage-earning workers is an effect of the juridical and the ideological. Yet the 'effect of isolation' specific to the CMP, by adding itself to the isolation proper to their conditions of economic life, in their relation to the capitalist state, also permeates the classes of the non-dominant modes of production in a capitalist formation, in an *over-determining* way.

The clearest indication that these characteristics of the economic struggle of the CMP are the effects of the juridical and the ideological is

the following: when Marx refers to this isolation of the economic struggle and contrasts it with the properly political struggle, he often uses the term *private* in contrast to *public*, the latter term denoting the field of the political struggle. This distinction of private and public depends on the juridico-political, in so far as the agents, set up as individuals/juridico-political subjects (the private sphere), are opposed to the 'representative' political institutions of the unity of these subjects (the public sphere). So the fact that Marx uses the category of private to mean the isolation of the economic struggle in no way implies a distinction between the private sphere of economic individuals/subjects and the political sphere; rather it indicates that the isolation of the whole series of socio-economic relations is an effect of the juridical and the ideological. It is in this sense that we must understand his remarks:

Be that as it may, we could not attain this end (the limitation of the working day) by a *private* compromise between workers and capitalists. The very necessity of a general political action proves indeed that in its purely economic action, capital is the stronger . . .⁵

With this defeat the proletariat passes into the *background* of the revolutionary stage. . . . It throws itself . . . into a movement in which it renounces the revolutionizing of the old world by means of the latter's own great, combined resources, and seeks, rather, to achieve its salvation . . . *in a private fashion*, within its limited conditions of existence, and hence necessarily suffers shipwreck. . . .⁶

In connection with the bourgeoisie:

The struggle to maintain its *public interests*, its own *class interests*, its *political* power only troubled and upset it, as it was a disturbance of *private* business . . . this bourgeoisie, which every moment sacrificed its general class interest, that is, its political interest, to the narrowest and most sordid *private* interests. . . .⁷

These remarks are important if we are to give an exact location to the relation between the capitalist state and the economic class struggle. It must be re-emphasized that this relation is not identical with that of the structures of the capitalist state to the relations of production, in so far

5. Statutes of the First International, 1864. See also the Resolutions of the first Congress of the First International, 5, concerning the trade unions, and moreover the whole range of Marx's texts concerning the trade-union struggle.

6. 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', *MESW*, 1970, p. 102.

7. *ibid.*, pp. 157, 159.

as this latter relation delimits the way in which the state can be related to the field of the class struggle. *The capitalist state is related to socio-economic relations in the form in which they appear in their isolation, i.e. as an effect of the ideological and the juridical.* This is because socio-economic relations are class practices, i.e. the effective and already over-determined action in the economic of agents distributed in social classes: this practice is itself by no means 'pure', but in its concrete reality, it is always over-determined. Thus, the capitalist state is determined by its function with regard to the economic class struggle, in the form in which it appears by reason of its isolation, as indicated above.

In this way the capitalist state constantly appears as the strictly political *unity* of an economic struggle which is in itself a sign of this isolation. It presents itself as the representative of the 'general interest' of competing and divergent economic interests which conceal their class character from the agents, who experience them. As a direct consequence, by means of a whole complex functioning of the ideological, the capitalist state systematically conceals its political class character at the level of its political institutions: it is a popular-national-class state, in the truest sense. This state presents itself as the incarnation of the popular will of the people/nation. The people/nation is institutionally fixed as the ensemble of 'citizens' or 'individuals' whose unity is represented by the capitalist state: its *real substratum* is precisely this isolating effect manifested by the CMP's socio-economic relations.

A whole series of strictly ideological operations undoubtedly intervenes in this function of the state vis-à-vis the economic class struggle. But we should not under any circumstances reduce these structures of the state resulting from its function vis-à-vis socio-economic relations, to the ideological. These structures give rise to real institutions which form a part of the *regional instance* of the state. The ideological intervenes here *at one and the same time* through its own isolating effect on socio-economic relations *and* in the concrete functioning of the state relative to this effect. This intervention can in no way reduce institutions as real as parliamentary representation, popular sovereignty, universal suffrage, etc. The juridico-political superstructure of the state therefore has a *double function* here, to be clarified under the following two headings:

1. Particularly in its aspect of a normative juridical system (juridical reality), it sets up agents of production distributed in classes as juridico-political subjects and so produces the effect of isolation in socio-economic relations.

2. Relative to the socio-economic relations which show this effect of isolation, its function is to *represent the unity* of isolated relations founded in the body politic of the people/nation. This means that the state *represents the unity of an isolation which, because of the role played by the ideological, is largely its own effect*. This double function of isolating and representing the unity is reflected in internal contradictions in the structure of the state: contradictions between the private and the public, between political individuals/persons and the representative institutions of the unity of the people/nation, even between private and public law, between political liberties and the general interest, etc.

But my chief aim will not be to analyse the organization of these state structures starting from the relations of production or to elucidate their internal contradictions: this would demand a deeper investigation into the relation indicated above between the juridical system and the structure of the labour process. It will rather be to understand their function relative to the field of the class struggle. This entails considering their effect of isolation on the socio-economic relations as *given*, so as to elucidate the state's strictly political role with respect to them and consequently with respect to the political class struggle.

The relation of the capitalist state to socio-economic relations (i.e. to the economic class struggle) has an importance which Marx was at pains to emphasize. Yet his frequent use of terms which are either descriptive (e.g. 'society') or dependent on the youthful problematic (e.g. 'civil society') has led to the misinterpretations indicated above. In fact in his political works, for instance already at the time of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx uses the term 'society' (which elsewhere is a general term covering social relations and the field of class relations) in order to designate socio-economic relations (the economic class struggle) as a manifestation of the effect of isolation. At times he even goes so far as to re-employ the term 'civil society', thus apparently taking up the problematic of a separation of civil society from the state once again:

Instead of *society* having conquered a new content for itself, it seems that the *state* only returned to its oldest form. . . .⁸ The moustache and uniform, which were periodically trumpeted forth as the highest wisdom of society and as its rector were . . . finally bound to hit upon the idea of . . . freeing civil society completely from the trouble of governing itself. . . .⁹ It is immediately obvious that in a country like France, . . . where the state enmeshes, controls, regulates,

8. *ibid.*, p. 98.

9. *ibid.*, p. 109.

superintends and tutors civil society . . . the National Assembly forfeits all real influence when it loses command of the ministerial posts, if it does not . . . let civil society and public opinion create organs of their own. . . .¹⁰ Every common interest was straightway severed from society, counter-opposed to it as a higher, *general* interest, snatched from the activity of society's members themselves, and made an object of government activity. . . . Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent. . . .¹¹ But the parody of the empire was necessary to free the mass of the French nation from the weight of tradition and to work out in pure form the opposition between the state power and society.¹²

These quotations will suffice: we could add many others from *The Class Struggles in France*, *The Civil War in France*, *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, etc.

If we refer back to our earlier remarks, we see clearly that Marx's analyses are not simple echoes or empty reminiscences of a former problematic, nor do they relate to the schema of the separation of civil society and the state. They in fact cover a *new* problem, but in terms borrowed from a former problematic, where they had covered a different problem. In the new problematic, the 'antagonism', 'separation' or 'independence' of the state and civil society (or society) indicates the following fact: that the specific autonomy in the CMP of the capitalist state from the relations of production is reflected in the field of the class struggle by an autonomy of the economic class struggle from the political class struggle. This is expressed by the effect of isolation on socio-economic relations, in which the state assumes a specific autonomy vis-à-vis these relations, in putting itself forward as the representative of the unity of the people/nation, i.e. the body-politic founded on the isolation of socio-economic relations. It is only by disregarding the change of the problematic in Marx's work and by *playing on words*, that this autonomy of structures and practices in Marx's mature works can be interpreted as a separation of civil society and the state.¹³

This has been the interpretation of the Italian Marxist school in particular, whose achievements we should openly acknowledge. In some important works dealing chiefly with the problem of Marxist political

10. *ibid.*, pp. 127-8.

11. *ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

12. *ibid.*, p. 175.

13. In France, this has been the interpretation of e.g. H. Lefebvre, *La Sociologie de Marx*, Paris, 1966 (chapter entitled 'La théorie de l'État') (English translation, *The Sociology of Marx*, London, 1968) and of M. Rubel, *Marx devant le bonapartisme*, Paris-The Hague, 1960.

science, following Galvano della Volpe it has proceeded to attempt to elucidate Marx's thought; and in this has had an important *critical* function. It has radically challenged the vulgarized conception of the state as the simple tool or instrument of the dominant class/subject. Certainly, it has also posed original problems related to the question of the specific autonomy of the structures and the class practices in the CMP. However, it locates Marx's originality relative to Hegel in his critique (in the works on the Hegelian theory of the state) of the speculative empiricism which invariably characterizes Hegel's problematic.¹⁴ But this critique is in fact only Marx's revival of the critique which Feuerbach made of Hegel. The Italian school therefore masks the problems with the theme of the separation of civil society from the state, which leads to a whole series of mistaken results to which we shall have to return when considering concrete problems.¹⁵

These remarks are also important with regard to the capitalist state's relation to the *political class struggle*. This effect of isolation in the economic struggle has repercussions on the specific functioning of the political class struggle in a capitalist formation. One of the characteristics of this political struggle, which has gained a relative autonomy from the economic struggle, is that (as the Marxist classics continually stress) it tends to

14. In particular Galvano della Volpe, *Rousseau e Marx*, 1964, pp. 22 ff., 46 ff., *Umanesimo positivo e emancipazione marxista*, 1964, pp. 27 ff., 57; Umberto Cerroni, *Marx e il diritto moderno*, 1963, passim; Mario Rossi, *Marx e la dialettica hegeliana*; 1961, Vol. 2, passim.

15. E.g. in *Rousseau e Marx*, della Volpe relates the problem of the autonomy and interrelation of the economic and the political to the young Marx's critique of Hegel's 'speculative empiricism'. Marx criticized Hegel for ending in a confusion, intended as a synthesis, of the economic and the political, a confusion stemming from the fact that his 'speculative' conception, particularly of the state, corresponds to the invasion of unmediated empiricism, 'just as it is', into the concept. Marx perceives the economic as 'the vulgar empirical', whose mediations, which in a bourgeois society turn it into the properly political, must be discovered. According to Marx, Hegel's conception of the state results in a parallel coexistence of the economic and the political in the *estates* which compose his model-state; whereas the real task is to discover their modern separation in the 'universal', abstract character of the bourgeois class (the mediation), and then the transcendence of this separation (the abolition of the political) in the 'universal-concrete' character of the proletariat. This concept of 'universality' is transferred from the anthropological model of 'man as a species-being'. The young Marx's critique of Hegel still retains the conception of the economic/political relation derived from the empirical-concrete/abstract-speculative relation. The young Marx considered the political as the economic 'mediated' in an anthropological 'transcendence' of Hegel's 'speculative empiricism'.

constitute *class unity* out of the isolation of the economic struggle. This has a particular importance *in the relation between the practice (i.e. political struggle) of the dominant classes and the capitalist state*, in so far as this practice is specified by the fact that its objective is the conservation of this state and that it aims through it at the maintenance of existing social relations. Consequently, this political practice of the dominant classes has two functions: (i) to constitute the unity of the dominant class(es) out of the isolation of their economic struggle, (ii) by means of a whole political-ideological operation of its own, to constitute their strictly political interests as representative of the general interest of the people/nation. This is made *necessary* by the particular structures of the capitalist state, in its relation to the economic class struggle, and made *possible* precisely by the isolation of the economic struggle of the dominated classes. It is by analysing this whole complex operation that we can establish the relation between this national-popular-class state and the politically dominant classes in a capitalist formation.

(iii) THE CONCEPT OF HEGEMONY

It is precisely in this context that I shall use the concept of *hegemony*. The field of this concept is the political class struggle in a capitalist formation: in particular it covers the political practices of the dominant classes in these formations. *Thus in locating the relation of the capitalist state to the politically dominant classes, we can say that it is a state with hegemonic class leadership (direzione).*¹⁶

This concept was produced by Gramsci. It is true that in his works it is a practical (and not truly theoretical) concept and that because of its wide field of application it remains too vague. As a result, a whole series of clarifications and restrictions must be introduced here, as a preliminary step. Because of his particular relation to Lenin's problematic, Gramsci always believed that he had found the concept in Lenin's writings, especially in those concerning the ideological organization of the working class and its role of leadership in the political struggle of the dominated classes. But in reality he had produced a new concept which can account for *the political practices of dominant classes in developed capitalist formations*. Gramsci admittedly does use it in this way, but he also incorrectly extends it so that it covers the structures of the capitalist

16. For the problem of translating Gramsci's concept of *direzione*, see *Prison Notebooks*, p. 55 n.

state. However, if we severely restrict the field of application and constitution of the concept of hegemony, his analyses of this subject are very interesting. His object is to locate these formations concretely, by applying to them the principles elucidated by Lenin in his analyses of a different concrete object: namely, the situation in Russia.

But Gramsci's analyses pose a major problem, in so far as his thought is strongly influenced by the historicism of Croce and Labriola.¹⁷ The problem here is too vast to be gone into deeply. I shall simply point out that we can locate a clear break between on the one hand the works of Gramsci's youth (e.g. the articles in *Ordine Nuovo*) and even *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, with their typically historicist approach, and on the other the works of his maturity concerning political theory (e.g. *Note sul Machiavelli*, etc.), i.e. precisely those works in which the concept of hegemony is elaborated.¹⁸ This break becomes clear only if we subject to a symptomatic reading those of his texts in which the Leninist problematic emerges: it has been hidden by the (mainly historicist) readings which have tried to discover the theoretical links between Lenin and Gramsci.¹⁹ However, even in Gramsci's mature works we find numerous after-effects of historicism. At a first reading of his works, the concept of hegemony seems to indicate a historical situation in which class domination is not reduced to simple domination by force or violence, but comprises a function of *leadership* and a *particular ideological* function, by means of which the dominant/dominated relation is founded on an 'active consent' of the dominated classes.²⁰ This fairly vague conception seems at first sight to be akin to that of Lukács's class-consciousness world-view, and to be equally located in the Hegelian problematic of the subject. Transplanted into Marxism, this problematic leads to the conception of the class-subject of history, a genetic principle which totalizes the instances of a social formation: it does this by means of class consciousness which assumes in this problematic the role of the Hegelian concept. In this context, it is the 'ideology consciousness world-view' of the class viewed as subject of history, that is of the hegemonic class,

17. On Gramsci's 'historicism', see L. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, pp. 126 ff.

18. On this see L. Paggi, 'Studi e interpretazioni recenti di Gramsci', *Critica Marxista*, May-June 1966, pp. 151 ff.

19. E.g. Togliatti, 'Il leninismo nel pensiero e nell'azione di A. Gramsci' and 'Gramsci e il leninismo' in *Studi Gramsciani*, Rome, 1958; M. Spinella, 'Introduction' to A. Gramsci, *Elementi di politica*, Rome, 1964; and the typical historicist interpretation of Gramsci by J. Texier, *Antonio Gramsci*, Paris, 1967.

20. *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 245 and 257 ff.

which founds the unity of a formation, in so far as it determines the adhesion of the dominated classes in a determinate system of domination.²¹ It is thus interesting to note that, in this use of the concept of hegemony, Gramsci conceals precisely those real problems which he analyses in the schema of the separation of civil society and the state. These problems, which actually imply the specific autonomy of the instances of the CMP and the effect of isolation in the economic, are masked. In Gramsci, as in the young Marx, this 'separation' depends on its contrast with the conception of feudal relations characterized by a 'mixedness' of instances: Gramsci treats this 'mixedness' in his 'economic-corporate' theme. Thus he uses the concept of hegemony in order to distinguish the capitalist social formation from the 'economic-corporate' feudal formation.²² In particular, the economic-corporate indicates the feudal social relations characterized by a tight overlapping of the political and the economic: what Gramsci calls 'politics grafted on to the economy'. Gramsci's analyses of the modern 'national-popular' state are situated in the context of the various Italian Renaissance states' transitions from feudalism to capitalism. It is this context which permits him to analyse the hegemonic function of unity of the modern state, a function related to the 'atomization' of civil society, the substratum of the nation-people. What strikes him in Machiavelli is not simply the fact that he was one of the first theorists of political practice, but above all the fact that he perceived the function of unity assumed by the modern state vis-à-vis the 'popular masses', which are considered here as products of the dissolution of feudal relations. This is particularly clear in his analyses of the initial failure of attempts to form such a state in Italy:

The reason for the failure of the successive attempts to create a national-popular collective will is to be sought in the existence of certain specific social groups which were formed at the dissolution of the Communal bourgeoisie. . . . This function and the position which results from it have brought about an internal situation which may be called 'economic-corporate' - politically, the worst of all forms of feudal society.²³

But this term 'economic-corporate' has a second meaning for Gramsci. It indicates not only the 'mixed' economic/political relations of the feudal

21. From another point of view, Gramsci also used this concept of hegemony in the field of the political practice of the dominated classes, particularly of the working class: we shall return to this later.

22. *Prison Notebooks*, pp. 12 ff. and p. 56 n.

23. *ibid.*, p. 131.

formation, but also the 'economic' (as distinct from the political) element in capitalist formations. This significant fluctuation of terminology is to be understood as being the result of those historicist influences by which Gramsci's analyses are often tainted. The common characteristic found by him in the 'mixed' economic-corporate relations of feudal formations and the 'economic' (as distinct from political) relations of capitalist formations, is that both are distinguished from the 'strictly political' relations of capitalist formations. Although the after-effects of historicism are thus clearly to be seen in Gramsci's analyses of this subject, it is possible to attempt to purify them. It will be seen that the real problems posed bear no relation to any separation of the capitalist state from civil society, which is held to have been atomized as a result of the dissolution of mixed or organic feudal relations. The real problems are concerned with the specific autonomy of the instances of the CMP, with the effect of isolation in the socio-economic relations of this mode, and with the way in which the state and the political practices of the dominant classes are related to this isolation.

The concept of hegemony, *which we shall apply only to the political practices of the dominant classes of a capitalist formation, and not to its state, is used in two senses:*

1. It indicates how in their relation to the capitalist state the political interests of these classes are constituted, as representatives of the 'general interest' of the body politic, i.e. the people/nation which is based on the effect of isolation on the economic. This first sense is for example implied in the following quotation, which should now be considered in the light of the above remarks:

A third moment is that in which one becomes aware that one's own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too. This is the most purely political phase, and marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures; it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologists become 'party', come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society - bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a 'universal' plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups. It is true that the state is seen as the organ

of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the 'national' energies. In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups—equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate interest.²⁴

2. The concept of hegemony is also used in another sense, which is not actually pointed out by Gramsci. The capitalist state and the specific characteristics of the class struggle in a capitalist formation *make it possible* for a 'power bloc', composed of several *politically dominant* classes or fractions to function. Amongst these *dominant* classes and fractions one of them holds a particular *dominant role*, which can be characterized as a *hegemonic role*. In this second sense, the concept of hegemony encompasses the particular domination of one of the dominant classes or fractions vis-à-vis the other dominant classes or fractions in a capitalist social formation.

The concept of hegemony allows us to make out the relation between these two characteristic types of political class domination found in capitalist formations. The hegemonic class is the one which concentrates in itself, at the political level, the *double function* of representing the general interest of the people/nation and of maintaining a specific dominance among the dominant classes and fractions. It does this through its particular relation to the capitalist state.

24. *ibid.*, pp. 181-2.