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## States, Ancient and Modern

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*States, Ancient and Modern*

THIS PAPER has a fairly clear overall argument: that the relationship between State and Society in large-scale societies changed dramatically with the advent of industrial capitalism. Prior to that development, the State and the state bureaucracy played a substantially autonomous role *vis-à-vis* the class structure of civil society. After that its autonomy has been negligible: indeed, for most analytic purposes the State can be reduced to class structure. Such an argument is by no means original. For example, its outlines were commonplace among eighteenth and nineteenth-century theorists. In this paper I draw somewhat on Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer. For one particular argument I am indebted to the contemporary sinologist Owen Lattimore. The idea of such a dramatic shift in the history of society is nowadays extremely unfashionable, however. Today theorists usually present essentially the same view of state-society relations throughout human history. Most Marxists reduce the state to being contingent upon the 'determining' categories of 'mode of production' and 'class struggle'. Functionalists present a theory of structural differentiation which occurs so early in human evolution that in all recorded history the relationship between, and relative autonomy of, economy and polity are essentially unchanging. Weberians, in arguing for the autonomy of each element of 'the structure of social action', also give a picture of the mutual independence of state and economy throughout history. In all three cases, the caution and specificity of the theory of the 'founding fathers'—Marx, Spencer and Weber—is thrown to the wind.

However, I shall attempt to do more than recreate the descriptive history insisted on by the classic theorists. I will situate this great transformation in a general theory of social structure and social development—'general' yet actually more concrete than is conventionally the case. If this paper has a claim to originality

it lies in its starting-point. I begin by asking *how is it possible for men to establish and maintain social relationships over specified distances* given their existing level of social and technical development? I argue that, prior to the development of capitalist industrialisation, large areas and diverse peoples could not be maintained in stable interaction by economic means. Among those societies that nevertheless managed to integrate such areas we must look to immediate military and political causes, and we will also find that the concept of mode of economic production and social class are of somewhat limited utility in explaining their origins, structure and collapse. By contrast these must be our key explanatory concepts once capitalist industrialism is established.

The empirical terrain is 'large-scale societies'. I define a society as a network of social interaction at the boundaries of which occur a relative interaction cleavage. This is a conventional definition (see, e.g., Parsons 1971: 8). Obviously once we are past a primary group, an important part of this interaction will be indirect, where *A* is linked to *C* only through *B*, and institutionalised, in social structure. By 'large-scale society' I indicate a network of social interaction, with cleavage at its boundaries, extending over several hundred miles. Given the unevenness of actual geography, more precision than this would be misplaced. In the ancient world the societies which extended over such distances are generally termed 'Empires'—Rome, Greece, China, India, Mesopotamia and Egypt are all considered to have had Empires in ancient times, and in more recent times central and Andean America (Maya and Inca) are similarly labelled. This is a political label and in a sense gives primacy of explanation to the State form. I wish to avoid pre-judging this issue, however, and if I use the term Empire, it is only to be understood as a label of convenience for this empirical terrain. Though my argument applies in outline to all these cases, I should hasten to add (what will become clear to the reader) that only two cases, the Roman Empire (i.e. not the Republic) and China, are explored in any detail. Furthermore I should make it clear that no primary research has been done: I have complete dependence on the current conventional wisdom of classical scholars and sinologists (1). At this stage, moreover, 'modern large-scale societies' only enter for certain broad comparative purposes: by this term is to be understood the major capitalist

(1) I would like to thank Keith Hopkins and J. D. Y. Peel for pointing out my grosser errors with regard to these societies, as well

as for their more general comments and criticisms.

nation-states and the Soviet Union (2). I will not justify empirically the generalisations I make about these societies in this paper.

It is not necessary here to enter into general theories of the State. Only two theorists will be considered in detail, Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer. Spencer conveniently summarises a theoretical tradition developing in the late eighteenth century through Smith and Ferguson. My concentration is on two issues; (a) how one identifies the key defining structures of society; and (b) the relative autonomy and power of three types of social actor, direct producers (i.e. the subordinate economic class), direct expropriators (i.e. the dominant economic class, landlord equivalents), and the State political elite.

### 1. *Marxian theory.*

Central to Marx's theory of the State is the concept of mode of production. Despite all the ambiguities and controversies surrounding this concept, it has a clear explanatory purpose. In the familiar passage from *Capital* which follows, Marx clearly separates the *explanans*, mode of production, from the *explanandum*, the State:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled [...] It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers [...] which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the State. (1971 edition: Vol. III, 791).

Indeed, according to Marx (and all subsequent Marxists agree with him in this respect) the State itself only emerges with the separation of the direct producer from his surplus—classless primitive societies did not have States.

The theory is also quite clear with respect to the capitalist state. Private capitalist accumulation requires the enactment of distinctive contract and property law, the restriction of other agents (e.g. monarchs) from entering into accumulation, and an economic infrastructure of a centralised type. Capitalism cannot function

(2) Two problems of this designation are not faced up to in this paper: (a) the ambiguity between the nation-state and the international capitalist system in terms of

basic interaction networks; (b) the peculiarities of the USSR and satellites *vis-à-vis* capitalist society.

efficiently without these conditions. As they are all activities of the State, it follows that if capitalism is to be dominant as a mode of production then there must be corresponding forms of the State. Of course, there are other State activities, which might not be so determined. As Poulantzas has observed, there is nothing inherent in the capitalist mode of production which requires a democratic policy. The political form is free to vary (1972). But of the main functions which most States pursue, dispute regulation (i.e. law in this case) and economic distribution and redistribution are fundamentally determined by the mode of production. This is both a functional and causal statement: a particular mode of production cannot become dominant without transformations in these areas, and if it is dominant its needs must have caused such transformations.

So far, so good. But when we turn to pre-capitalist societies, we discover that Marx left a veritable hornets' nest of problems.

### *Coercion*

The first problem, now well recognised, is the problem of *coercion*. It is generally traced back to this passage from the same section of *Capital* :

[...] in all forms in which the direct labourer remains the 'possessor' of the means of production and labour conditions necessary for the production of his own means of subsistence, the property relationship must simultaneously appear as a direct relation of lordship and servitude, so that the direct producer is not free... Under such conditions the surplus-labour for the nominal owner of the land can only be extorted from them by other than economic pressure [...] (1971 edition: Vol. III, 790-1).

As all Marxists have equated this type of non-economic pressure as coercion applied *politically*, the State obviously has a different relationship to pre-capitalist modes of production. In capitalism, the State, once captured, institutionalises private ownership of the means of production. But as the worker is factually separated from these (i.e. he physically leaves them when he clocks off), he would have to take very active steps, including breaking the law, to keep the surplus he has produced. Yet the pre-capitalist producer is in possession of land, tools, and above all, the surplus itself. Now the non-producer has to take active and continuous steps to wrest it from him—hence coercion. Indeed, empirically, there is voluminous supporting evidence for the greater use of direct coercion in pre-capitalist societies. This takes three forms. As Marx says in the above passage, the producer's status is generally

unfree—slavery and serfdom are two of the most common ways of tying the producer to the land and to his lord. Secondly, tax and rent gatherers are conspicuously attended by troops in many pre-capitalist societies. In the later Roman Empire, the necessary employment of the regional legionary reserves for tax-gathering severely weakened the defence of the Empire against the barbarians (Jones, 1964: Vol. II, 686). Thirdly (and as Marx acknowledges in a footnote to the above quote) many of these unfree labour forms actually originated in the conquest of one society by another, especially slavery.

But the evident truth of Marx's remark worsens the conceptual problem. For haven't we now removed the clear distinction between *explanans* and *explanandum*, mode of production and State? One Marxist who accepts the force of this point is Perry Anderson:

The 'superstructures' of kinship, religion, law or the state necessarily enter into the constitutive structure of the mode of production in pre-capitalist social formations. They intervene *directly* in the 'internal' nexus of surplus-extraction, where in capitalist social formations, the first in history to separate the economy as a formally self-contained order, they provide by contrast its 'external' preconditions. In consequence, pre-capitalist modes of production cannot be defined *except* via their political, legal and ideological superstructures [...] The precise forms of juridical dependence, property and sovereignty that characterises a pre-capitalist social formation, far from being merely accessory or contingent epiphenomena, compose on the contrary the central indices of the determinate mode of production dominant within it. (1964a: 403-4; cf. also a passage in 1974b: 542-3).

But if we introduce 'political, legal and ideological superstructures' into our modes of production, is there anything lying outside of it to be determined? Without clear-cut conceptual distinctions between macro-social structures, Anderson's causal accounts of the development of Rome or feudalism or the absolutist state tend to be multi-factor, privileging no possible cause on theoretical grounds—a methodology closer to Weber than to Marx (3).

Essentially these points have been made (by Hirst, 1975) by one of the authors of another recent Marxist attempt to grapple with these problems. Hindess and Hirst add one excellent point of clarification when dealing with the feudal mode of production. They note that, though in a certain sense the peasant may be 'in possession', the mechanisms of feudal rent nevertheless '[...] by controlling the size, character and the reproduction of the units of production [...] makes the reproduction of the means of pro-

(3) This may, of course, be a correct methodology—I am at the moment dealing only with the consistency and operational

potentiality of the Marxist theory, not its correctness.

duction simultaneously a reproduction of the exploitative production relations' (1975: 236). In general, landlords under feudalism control such factors as the size of peasant strips and the provision of specialised services like draught animals, water and pasture land, thereby enmeshing the peasant economically as well as politically in the feudal mode of production. Obviously this form of analysis can be applied to other modes of production—how embedded is the direct producer in the economic exchanges which characterise each mode? I will attempt to answer this question with reference to ancient and modern societies.

However, Hindess and Hirst cannot theorise away the greater use of direct physical coercion in pre-capitalist societies—even if that is not the *sole* reason for their survival, it does at least appear to be more important than in capitalism. Indeed their analysis of mode of production /State relations in their three principal pre-capitalist modes all leave us with problems. In the ancient (Athenian and Roman) mode, appropriation is said to be by political citizenship: citizens exploit non-citizens (4) (we might add that later, in the Roman Empire, office-holders exploit others). Empirically they give us a description of the effects of the wars of the Roman Republic and its distribution of booty and slaves. Warfare is therefore crucial to this ancient mode and to its supposed contradictions, and yet it is not theorised. Secondly, the feudal mode is defined and explored functionally, but never causally. Thus the feudal state must legitimate monopoly ownership of land by the landlord class in order for the feudal mode to exist, but we are given no evidence to suggest that 'proto-feudal' production needs actually did lead to the emergence of the feudal state. Scholars generally agree that European feudalism originated in some union of Roman private property and the Germanic war-band. Again we would seem to need a theory of the relationship of warfare to economy. Finally, Hindess and Hirst 'abolish' the Asiatic mode of production, because the tax-rent form of exploitation in Asia is merely a variant form of feudal rent. They agree that an important difference remains between Asian and Western European feudal societies: the former had powerful States, the latter did not. They argue that the mode of production cannot explain this difference as it is identical in the two cases (1975: 196-9). Thus State and mode of production seem to have

(4) In this respect, their analysis is superior to another traditional Marxist identi-

fication of slavery as the key to the ancient economy.

a very substantial autonomy, and their relations are largely untheorised (5).

In opposite ways, therefore, these recent Marxian attempts to theorise the relationship between State and mode of production in pre-capitalist societies are in some difficulty. Either the two are merged or they are autonomous. It is clear that this unsatisfactory state of affairs has something to do with the neglect, throughout most of twentieth-century sociology, of warfare between societies. It was the fate of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century theorists like Spencer, Gumplowicz and Oppenheimer who concerned themselves with warfare to be identified as political undesirables by subsequent generations. But that should not be a sufficient reason for avoiding the whole subject.

*Mode of production, productive units and classes*

The second problem of the Marxian model again concerns a difference between the capitalist mode and the other modes. The mere *definition* of capitalist relations of production presupposes definite relations between productive units. Surplus value depends on exchange between what Marx termed Departments I and II of the economy, between units supplying production goods (means of production) and consumption goods. A capitalist factory cannot exist without other capitalist factories and without exchange between them. Yet no form of economic interdependence is assumed between feudal manors or indeed between ancient estates. They are *similar*, yes, but not necessarily interdependent. Exchange of any kind is not presupposed by either feudal rent or citizenship appropriation. Each productive unit may be self-sufficient; alternatively, it may be involved in exchange only with the State. In fact both of these situations are approximated to in pre-capitalist societies—later on we will see that with the decay of the Roman Empire the latter pattern gives way to the former.

Now this gives rise to a peculiar lack of fit between the geographical boundaries of the economies and polities of ancient Empires, for the extent of the latter considerably outstrip the former. The situation has been reversed with the advent of capitalism: today the political nation-state, even the United States, is embedded

(5) Hindess and Hirst conclude with a throw-away line, 'The only condition that does explain tax/rent is the extension of the rule of already constituted states to

previously stateless people', a generalisation which is true neither for ancient China nor ancient Sumer (Lattimore, 1962a; MacNeill, 1963).



in a wider economic system. Indeed *one* of the reasons why the contemporary State's autonomous power *vis-à-vis* the capitalist mode of production is extremely limited is that it cannot control *international* capitalist forces. This is particularly clear in the case of Britain which has to clear its political decision-making with the I.M.F. Yet this raises the possibility that in pre-capitalist large-scale societies such a balance of power may have been reversed: that the economy may be 'politically-determined' (to use a phrase of Weber's). We will see.

This in turn raises another thorny problem. If the overall economy of a society is made up of a number of largely self-sufficient units of production, economic *interaction* will be extremely limited in geographical scope. And if this is so, how can *classes*, in a societal-wide sense, emerge? Marx himself raised this problem in a well-known passage in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* concerning the French peasantry. After noting how the French peasantry were isolated from each other by their mode of production, he continues:

Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption and thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. In this way, the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes.

And Marx concluded that:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their interests and their culture from those of other classes and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection... and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class (Marx and Engels, 1968 edition: 170-1).

Contrary to many interpretations of Marx, this is not a distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' aspects of class, for local interconnection is just as 'objective' (and economic) as similarity of condition—though it has political and ideological (i.e. 'subjective') consequences. Can we therefore deduce objectively, according to Marx's second criterion of class, that neither a class of direct producers nor class conflict existed in all such pre-capitalist societies because intra-class interaction was lacking? *Classes can exist only if economic interaction exists.* Thus if an Empire were built up of a number of self-sufficient production units (estates, manors) it would contain many local, small, similar classes of direct producers, but not a societal-wide producing class capable of enforcing

its interests politically. This would constitute a *segmental* class system.

The use of Durkheim's term shows the extent to which I have been exaggerating empirical into hypothetical cases for the sake of illuminating the conceptual problem. For Durkheim (1964 edition: 174-181) used the term *segmental* society primarily to refer to stateless, loose associations of kin groups at a very early evolutionary stage. The productive units of the civilised societies I am discussing obviously did not possess complete self-sufficiency, but were bound into an empire-wide economy, even if it were rarely reciprocal exchange nor of the commodity form. We can trace two main types of effects of the economic system:

- (a) direct or indirect economic interaction: where *A* exchanges directly with *B* or where goods pass from *A* to *C* through *B*.
- (b) indirect economic *effects*: where the production of production unit *A* affects that of unit *B* even though no exchange may connect them. By examining these phenomena we analyse class as interdependence.

#### *The ancient Roman and Chinese economies and class systems*

I will begin by describing the main outlines of the Roman and Chinese economies after the development of their centralised, imperial systems and before they had decayed—Rome from the death of Augustus in A.D. 14 to the early fourth century A.D., and China from the formal accession of the Han dynasty in B.C. 206 to the accession of the Ming dynasty in A.D. 1368. Naturally, considerable over-simplification must result, and historical changes must be ignored, especially in the case of China (where the latter part of this period saw considerable economic development).

In both Empires around ninety percent of the population worked as direct producers on the land at just on or above subsistence level. Exploitation was in the dual form of tax paid to the Imperial authorities, and (far less frequently) rent paid to a landlord: similarly non-producers derived their wealth and power either from occupying Imperial office or from being landlord equivalents. Mercantile, trading and artisanal activity was quantitatively small (smaller in China than Rome), interstitial in relation to other class relation, and under considerable Imperial regulation. The boundaries of the Empire were clearly demarcated, and the Imperial authorities regulated, and sometimes prohibited, contact with outside peoples. Thus it constituted a gigantic common

market, and was a monetary economy: even peasants paid cash. Its systemic character was thus revealed when Imperial debasements of the coinage caused severe economic dislocation throughout the Empire. Also, Hopkins (1977: 5) has shown that an increase in the money supply in one province had immediate effects in other provinces. The economy thus presents two enormous contrasts: subsistence yet monetary, subsistence yet of a radius of a thousand miles. Exchange relations thus were peculiarly contradictory.

From the point of view of the peasant, the economy was largely *cellular*—that is, his exchange relations were bounded by a 4-5 mile area within which he could reasonably carry his goods for sale or exchange. The technology and costs of transport contributed fundamentally to this. For China Lattimore has calculated that the animals necessary to transport fodder by land would have to eat it up within 100 miles (1962*b*: 479). In Rome, Diocletian's maximum price edict implied that a 1200 lb wagon-load of wheat would double in price in 300 miles (Finley, 1973: 128; cf. also Jones, 1964, Vol. II, 844). When Antioch, the second city of the East, experienced famine in A.D. 362-3 it required the forcible intervention of Julian and his army to get grain brought from two districts of Syria only 50 and 100 miles away (Finley, 1973: 33). As water transport was much cheaper, this cellular structure was probably more marked and more regular in the case of largely land-locked China. Most sinologists place it at the forefront of their analyses (eg. Balazs, 1964: 16; Lattimore, 1962*a*: 41; Stover 1974: Chapter 4). Lattimore (1962*b*: 478-9) notes how from the village a small surplus would go to the district town, 10-20 miles from the next district town. From these a larger surplus would go to the regional city, usually the administrative centre of a region. Only a small surplus would flow from there into national trade. But even the regional city would depend for the greatest part of its produce on its own immediate hinterland. The Roman Empire had a more irregular structure than this, and a greater proportion of inter-regional sea trade. In the two Empires the Mediterranean basin constituted the most developed case of long-distance interdependence. I will discuss its form later. Despite its volume, most Roman cities also depended overwhelmingly on their immediate hinterlands (Jones, 1964: Vol. II, 714). Even counting such local markets, the volume of trade was low: in the fourth century A.D. Constantine's new tax on city trade produced only five percent of the land tax, though we cannot be sure of the accuracy of this calculation (Anderson, 1974*a*: 20; cf. Jones,

1964: Vol. I, 466; but for an account placing rather more emphasis on trade, see Hopkins (1977).

That said, however, I wish to concentrate on the form of the remaining five percent above subsistence. This is, after all, the economic base of civilization, five percent at the margin of subsistence is also of considerable meaning to the actors themselves! Most trade did not supply the peasant's consumption needs, but rather those of the expropriators. The most profitable form of agriculture in Rome was viticulture, a luxury good. The province which was most intensively farmed for corn was Egypt which supplied the capital (with its upper class and bureaucracy). Trade centres can also be linked to the location of legionary headquarters. The most succinct analysis of the systemic nature of the Roman economy is provided by Hopkins. I quote his conclusion:

The prime cause of this monetary unification of the whole empire was the complementary flow of taxes and trade. The richest provinces of the empire (Spain, north Africa, Egypt, southern Gaul and Asia Minor) paid taxes in money, most of which were exported and spent, either in Italy or in the frontier provinces of the empire, where the armies were stationed. The rich core-provinces then had to gain their tax-money back, by selling food or goods to the tax-importing regions [...] Thus the prime stimulus to long-distance trade in the Roman empire was the tax-demands of the central government and the distance between where most producers (tax-payers) worked and where most of the government's dependants (soldiers and officials) were stationed (1977:5).

The peasants' role was either passive and expropriated or as unfree or semi-free labour on large estates. Nevertheless, *some* mass consumption goods were exchanged: metals, pottery, textiles, salt, cheap wines (tea in China). But if we listed the economic benefits to the peasant of membership in such a society, the development of market exchange would only be one, perhaps minor benefit. The benefits were:

(1) *Imperial pacification* provided (barely) a security within which interaction between strangers could occur. It also kept in check one prevalent form of non-productive 'labour', banditry. Hopkins (1977: 5) notes that Roman ships were far larger and more vulnerable than had been possible in previous, more troubled times. Thus when civil wars interrupted this, trade dropped, with potent effects at that critical margin. Lattimore has noted that even in early twentieth-century China a breakdown in imperial authority dried up the salt trade, with consequent malnutrition (1962a: 43).

(2) *Imperial technical aids to exchange*: a guaranteed coinage, property and trade law, a literate bureaucracy and military-spon-

sored communications systems all provided infrastructural support for production and exchange in both Empires. China, additionally, possessed a uniform calendar and weights and measures.

(3) *Consumption markets* : the consumption of the bureaucracy, army and the landlord class developed trade and a monetary economy. As non-productive labour, they might appear to be exploitative rather than beneficiary, but we must also note the stimulus their consumption gave to trade.

(4) *Intensification of the labour process* : a paradox of the ancient economy was that the most efficient forms of agriculture, and probably the securest levels of subsistence for the producers, were in systems of production that involved non-free labour, especially in large estates and in the small extractive sector (Finley, 1973: 106).

Overall, there can be no doubting the level of economic development. The productivity of large Roman estates in Italy appears to have been markedly higher than in contemporary Italy, though there is some grounds for scepticism about yield figures. More reliable is Diocletian's Price Edict which implies a wage distribution to labourers of 1 part in kind to 1½-3 parts in cash. A similar government order in sixteenth-century England envisaged that maintenance would absorb at least half of the wages of labourers. This probably indicates higher living standards in Rome (Duncan-Jones, 1974: 11-12, 39-59). And certainly, at its height, the Empire supported a larger population than existed in Europe for another 700 years after its fall. The fall was part of the relapse from a money to a natural economy which occurred in Western Europe in the Dark Ages (Slicher van Bath, 1963: 30-31). The peasant was better off within the Empire than without it.

But that level of benefit was dependent on a high level of coercion. This is clear from the character of most of the benefits listed above—order itself, a communications system built mainly by soldiers but also by slave or *corvée* labour, the forcible extraction of tax/rent to pay for the consumption of non-producers, and unfree, intensive agriculture. Moreover, the benefits—with the possible exception of the last-named—are all somewhat abstract and indirect. The peasant does not *appear* to be in an exchange relation: his labour and his tax/rent are extorted, and he receives nothing directly in exchange. Only if peasants throughout a region, or even throughout the Empire, all acquiesce in the extortion, then will the benefits accrue to all of them. Finally, the

balance could be tipped the other way, *below* subsistence if the State's level of demand for manpower or taxes is increased.

Thus, we may provisionally conclude about the economic relations of the direct producers:

(1) economic-interdependence among direct producers is low because of the cellular nature of the economy;

(2) the major form of interdependence between direct producers and expropriators is probably with the State rather than with local landlords (to the extent that is possible to separate the two), except in the case of large estates;

(3) that interdependence is abstract, coercive and tenuous.

Let me expand the first point more fully by explicitly drawing the contrast with contemporary capitalism. Firstly, collective organizations of the direct producers now exist. Trade unions have *universally* accompanied the development of capitalism, and in *no* industrial country, capitalist or not, has it proved possible to rule industry without its owners/controllers at least consulting organized groups of workers, either in 'corporatist' or 'oppositional-democratic' structures (6). Furthermore, in liberal democracies working class political parties have also appeared. The explanation for this is twofold: the essential similarity of subordinate direct producers in the production process, and the interdependence of the workers. The interdependence itself takes two forms: the growth of large productive unities (and supportive communities) which concentrate bodies of workers in direct interaction, and the economic effects of different productive units on each other. The latter needs stressing. Given commodity production in capitalism, markets exist for both labour and products. Thus both the wage-rate and the productivity of worker *A* in Aberdeen affects that of worker *B* in Brighton, and his productivity also affects that of worker *C* in California. There is no guarantee that such competition effects will result in class action—and the intervention of other factors is needed to explain solidarity (to the extent that it occurs) rather than sectionalism. But there is interdependence. Furthermore, though in a different form, this also exists within other industrial societies. In the Soviet Union and its satellites, productivity and wage-rates of different production units also affect one another, though here the relationship is mediated by pressure-groups (representing different industries, regions, etc.)

(6) This is not an argument I can justify in detail here. Nazi Germany provides the only exception I know of, and that ap-

peared to need total war to support such a complete repression of working class organization.

at the level of the State. Such interdependence was generally lacking in ancient Empires. The first type, interaction, was confined within the economic cells, or within the larger confines of intensive agricultural systems. The second type of economic effect was also generally lacking. The production of peasant *A* near Antioch did not affect that of peasant *B* in Bythynia. In the wage-labour sector, wage fluctuations did not result from supply and demand factors (Finley, 1973: 23). The only possible economic effect between them would be mediated by the State, i.e. the taxation level of one region has effects on that of others. Not surprisingly, therefore, collective organizations of direct producers barely existed outside of the towns (7).

This is no way to deny—despite locality, ethnic and legal status differences—the *similarity* of almost all direct producers when compared to non-producers. The degree of inequality between the mass of the population and a tiny, almost completely urbanised, literate and office-holding elite was enormous. Land-holding was extremely unequal and tended to worsen in Rome from the height of the Republic onward. Roman army pay-scales give us our most precise data: they embodied a top to bottom ratio of 67: 1, while the division of the spoils among Pompey's soldiers at his triumph embodied the ratio of 500: 1 (Duncan Jones, 1974: 3; MacMullen, 1974: 94, and Chapters 1 and 4 in general). Hopkins (1977: 12-13) goes further and calculates that the income of a Senator was 2,000 times that of a peasant family at subsistence level. China contained similar inequality but reinforced it with a greater degree of cultural differentiation, distinguishing linguistically between the *shik*, those trained to serve their rulers, and the *min*, the ruled (Eisenstadt, 1969 edition: 321; cf. also Lattimore, 1962a: 49). Eisenstadt claims that such a distinction is common throughout imperial systems. As the poor were illiterate, they have left us no records of how they felt about this. But the wealth was visible, indeed ostentatiously displayed. We must expect that if starvation threatened, they would react with violence against the rich oppressors.

But who were the oppressors? And, in particular, what were the relations between the second and third actors in our model, the immediate expropriators and the political elite? Here we reach a very controversial issue, the degree of autonomy of the

(7) With the partial exception of the Chinese secret societies, which did sometimes play a 'class-type' role at a local or regional level (see below).

State officials *vis-à-vis* landlord /gentry /noble groups. The argument has evolved around the case of China. At one extreme lies Wittfogel's powerful, idiosyncratic, and highly political study of *Oriental Despotism*, 1957, some of whose chapter headings speak for themselves: 'A State stronger than society', 'Despotic power—total and not benevolent', 'Total Terror'. Wittfogel's argument rested on his conception of an 'hydraulic economy' i.e. large-scale canal and irrigation works which he thought necessitated a centralised imperial 'agro-managerial despotism'. Wittfogel generalised this to ancient empires and draws a parallel with Stalinist Soviet Union, developing an heretical Marxist analysis of the *economic* foundations of despotic empires. So far as I know, his is the only systematic, consistent attempt to account for the political structure of ancient empires in terms of their economies. However, a closer look at the Chinese economy does not support his argument. Eberhard has summarised the counter-arguments. The Chinese Empire developed its 'oriental despotic' structure before it expanded into the regions of extensive hydraulic agriculture; hydraulic systems were as likely to be developed by local as by central authorities, and if located in the provinces it is not clear they were the responsibility of the central 'ministries'. Eberhard also argues in more general terms that the Chinese state was not 'above' society, that indeed the Empire was a 'gentry society' in which gentry families, living on both the perquisites of office and absentee land ownership, and with different family members as landowners, scholars and politicians, only allowed the imperial authorities despotic power for very short periods (1965 edition: 42-6, 56-83; cf. also Chi, 1936).

This argument represents the other extreme. The State, it is argued, was not 'above' society—rather, it was an instrument of class rule. Actually, though China suited Wittfogel's argument relatively well insofar as hydraulic agriculture was concerned—for other Empires tended to have less of it—*politically* it was less suited, for the Chinese gentry was probably the most homogeneous dominant class of all, as Eisenstadt (1969 edition: 205) notes. Furthermore, even China exhibited those characteristic politics of imperial or monarchical systems which persisted right up to the modern period over most of the world—the struggle between State bureaucracies /households and landlord classes. Those politics, brilliantly analysed by Eisenstadt, centre on control of two institutions, the army and local civil administration, especially tax-gathering offices. Feudal levy or professional army, centrally-



appointed offices without tenure, centrally-appointed but then hereditary offices, or local tax-farmers?—such were the politics of most pre-industrial societies with states. Naturally, seen from below such conflicts must have seemed trivial. To the peasant it might have seemed one whether his exploiter was an imperial official or a landlord, whether he risked his life as a retainer of his lord or as a mercenary.

Yet despite the economic and cultural homogeneity of the exploiters, their divisions and organizational weaknesses were quite marked. Turning to the economy, we can note the relative lack of economic interaction among the landlord stratum. Unlike the peasantry, it is true, they were substantial producers and consumers of commodities. However, it appears that the two dominant forms of economic transaction did not involve them in economic exchange with each other. The first is represented by the *oikos*, the household economy (which is indeed the root word of our word 'economy'). The landlord, resident in towns in both Empires, consumed extensively from his own estates: for example, in the fourth century A.D. Roman aristocrats took about half of their income in kind. Secondly, the landlord purchased more specialised luxury commodities and also specialised labour from the distinctively urban and interstitial occupations of merchants and artisans. It is rare to find established landlord families engaged in trade, and so again there is little intra-class economic interaction. Now we must not exaggerate: most landlords would sell some of their produce on the market, some also involved themselves in mercantile activities. Such economic activity was not absent, but neither was it dominant. Moreover, it tended to be local and regional—leading in China to the emergence of 'Key Economic Areas' relatively tightly-integrated regional economies which in dynastic crises attained a degree of self-sufficiency from the rest of the Empire—at a cost (Chi, 1936: 5-11). The contrast with capitalist economies is again marked. Capitalists are involved in continuous economic interaction, both direct and indirect, at least at the level of the whole nation-state (and probably outside of it too). And as with the working class, collective organizations have everywhere arisen to control this interaction. Employers' associations, cartels, oligopolies, government agencies of co-ordination and research are all evidence that the capitalist class is *organized*. There were no comparable collective *economic* organizations of the landlord class in large-scale ancient societies.

Collective organization of a sort did exist, however, most notably

in Rome which retained some semblance of its representative political constitution for its entire history. Popular representation had disappeared in the Republic even before the civil wars of the first century B.C., but the Senate survived right through the Empire. Of course, it never once successfully challenged the power of an Emperor. There are no real signs that the aristocracy, or indeed landlords as a whole, wanted an active political role. Senators were exempt from the duties of local political office, and repeated attempts by Emperors to rescind this immunity failed. Thus the local city government probably did not involve the greatest landlords—a factor in the loss of power by the city *decurions* (councillors) to the regional officials of the Emperor. Indeed Rostovtzeff assigned to this political weakness of the landlord class (he called it the 'middle class') the decisive role in the decline and fall of the Empire itself (1957 edition: especially Chapter 12; cf. also Jones, 1964: Vol. II, 722-42). None of this applies to China, of course, where the gentry were without autonomous political representation yet thoroughly penetrated the imperial bureaucracy itself, especially after the introduction of the Confucian examination system. This contrast between Rome and China is instructive, for it may indicate that the only effective form of landlord class organisation possible in large-scale ancient societies was through the imperial bureaucracy itself.

The lack of autonomous landlord organization may give the impression of weakness relative to the Emperor. Yet, however much the initiation of policy may be his prerogative, in its implementation he is dependent upon landlords as long as he needs taxes. The peasantry does derive benefit from his rule, but as noted earlier it is abstract and infrastructural. A guaranteed coinage, order and security, and good communications provide an infrastructure for the peasant's economic production but they do not intervene in its form, unless local specialised means of production are under imperial control. Yet such factors as draught animals and their fertiliser, mills and local irrigation were generally controlled by landlords rather than the State in these two Empires (8). As Hindess and Hirst have noted, such control within the process of production enables the surplus to be extorted partly by direct 'exchange' rather than merely by force, and this puts

(8) This does not seem to have been the case in the earlier Empires of the Near East where State intervention in production was much stronger. However, when the

Sumerian States expanded out of the irrigated river-valleys into the upland pastures, this intervention seems to have declined (MacNeill, 1963).

the landlord in a better position to extort than the imperial authorities. The latter can dispense with taxation under certain circumstances, most notable of which is cheap, successful warfare providing booty, but if he wishes to finance this in the first place he needs taxes—and therefore landlord support.

This completes my static analysis of the imperial economic and class structure. If we identify classes by their *similarity* to the means of production, then we have two: direct producers and expropriators (though *forms* of expropriation vary within the same overall system). However, expropriators are divided into two main groups, landlords and officials, and much politics concerns their conflict. However, if we identify classes by their economic interdependence, it is not clear that we have *any*. The alternative is to identify a large number of *segmental* classes. The acid test of this ought to be the nature of the social conflict which ensues from economic crises. Is it *class* conflict?

### *Class conflict and civil war*

When they generalise most shamelessly scholars usually point out a 'surprising' absence of peasant revolts in ancient Empires (Jones, 1964: Vol. II, 811; MacMullen, 1974: 123-4; Eisenstadt, 1969 edition: 208; Wittfogel, 1957: 329-34). Actually we cannot be really sure whether it is revolts or records that are absent. The literate classes did not seem keen on noticing and chronicling the discontents of their subordinates. Where they did, however, the accounts rarely treat them as phenomena in their own right: they are related especially to the struggles among the expropriating groups. For example, for Spartacus' revolt we learn more about the effect that Crassus' successful suppression of the revolt had on his political ambitions than we do about Spartacus and his followers. In China, accounts are normally linked to accounts of dynastic struggles. This is reasonable given the apparent nature of most revolts. Let us take Rome first.

Severe social conflict was endemic to the Roman Empire as it was to all ancient Empires. In a barely-pacified society, away from the main communication routes, those who could afford to fortify their houses did so. Bandits were never actually eliminated from either Empire. In a sense, banditry is a perverted class-warfare. Its recruits are generally runaway slaves, peasants and soldiers on whom the burden of exploitation has become intolerable. But they do not resist the rent- or tax-gatherer, they run away

from him. And they do not reduce exploitation in the society at large: rather, being non-productive, they increase it.

More organised conflict involving class-type issues and transformational goals is not hard to find either. We can identify three main types. Firstly are the slave revolts, normally by recently-enslaved groups and so much less frequent in the Empire than they had been in the Republic. They were aimed at killing (or perhaps enslaving) the estate owners, and re-establishing free cultivation. Unfortunately we know nothing more of the form of production they established. These conflicts were aimed at ending economic exploitation, but they were local and rarely spread to free or semi-free peasants, i.e. they were a 'solution' to the specific relations of production of intensive agriculture. (MacMullen, 1974; MacMullen, 1966: 194-9, 211-16; Thompson, 1952).

Two further forms of conflict achieved wider organisational form, however. One concerns those dynastic civil wars which did appear to have an element of class grievance (obviously a minority of such cases). Rostovtzeff argued that the civil wars of the third century A.D. are to be explained as the revenge of peasant soldiers on their class enemies in the cities. Though this is nowadays an unfashionable view, we can accept two elements of truth in it: that the army was a main route of upward social mobility, and that for a peasant, booty from the cities might have been the only practicable way of substantially bettering himself. However, in order to accomplish this he must submit to the authority of his commander, almost certainly a rich landowner. The second form of conflict occurs mainly in the later Empire: religious schism. Several of these movements, especially the Donatists of Numidia in the early fourth century appear to have had social and redistributive goals, though this is in some dispute among scholars and in any case co-exists with regional/religious separatist tendencies (MacMullen, 1966: 200-6).

The class elements of these disorders are obviously undercut by another process, the tendency of local producers to place themselves in alliance with local expropriators against the authority of the state. They are dependent on non-economic forms of organisation, a pre-existing army or a church/sect. And they tend either to be disintegrative (to seek regional autonomy) or to reconstitute the State unaltered (as in case of a successful dynastic faction). They are not transformative of the State or of the mode of production—unless in a regressive direction.

These processes are exemplified if we examine the fall of the

Western Empire itself. It is hardly appropriate for me—with a pretence of authority—to adjudicate centuries of controversy about the 'decline-and-fall' issue. Recently, however, and in support of the general argument of this paper, there has been a swing back to an emphasis on military causes. Traditionally this argument was countered by pointing out that the barbarians who 'conquered' Rome were *never* capable of defeating its armies in the field. Therefore, Rome must have fallen from internal causes. But recent work, especially that of A. H. M. Jones, has argued that the low level of military and political organisation of the barbarians was precisely their strength. Unlike the civilized enemies faced by Rome (above all the Persians), an orderly process of war, diplomacy, punitive raids, etc. could not contain them. They would raid and disappear, living off booty and caring little if the Romans laid waste their homeland. The drain of taxation, needed to finance defence against such persistent enemies, then killed the Empire. Jones has also convincingly observed that the main differences between the Western and the Eastern Empire (which survived for another 1,000 years) were in terms of the strength of the enemies they had to face and of the defensibility of their frontiers. By contrast those who look for internal economic causes have had difficulty in specifying any convincing reasons for economic decline before the period of barbarian pressure (Jones, 1964: Vol. II, 1025-68; Bernardi, 1970). The nineteenth-century arguments about slavery hindering economic development (reproduced by Anderson, 1974a: 27) are no longer accepted by most authorities (Westermann, 1955: 120; Finley, 1973: 83-7; Hopkins, 1977: 26-9). Yet there are still several issues which will probably remain unsolved until (if ever) further sources enable us to date more precisely the beginning of economic decay (especially the abandonment of cultivated land, the *agri deserti*) and the extent of the fourth-century recovery. Thus the following is merely an attempt to describe the process of decline once it had started. It may also exaggerate the smoothness of the decline. Whether internal decay and population decline had already begun to weaken the fabric of the Empire, barbarian pressure against the frontiers shook it considerably in the second half of the second century A.D. Diocletian's reforms (A.D. 284-305) saved the Empire but heightened its contradictions. By doubling the size of the army and bureaucracy he increased the burden of taxation. The landowning classes tried to transmit the burden on to their subordinates, but in a near-subsistence economy this policy is soon self-defeating.

We know that under the fiscal pressure land went out of cultivation, and we can be virtually sure that people died. Probably as a reaction to the pressure, two major social changes occurred. Firstly, hitherto free men placed themselves under the patronage of local landowners protection, that is from the Imperial tax-collector. As slavery had already declined, this represented a homogenisation of economic positions. The emergence of the 'semi-free' feudal serf (the *colonus*) holding his land as a favour from his lord began to create a 'universal class' within the territories of the Western Empire even before its collapse. Yet this process was undercut by the second development, the decentralization of the economy, as local landowners attempted to increase their independence from imperial power through the self-sufficiency of the household economy (the *oikos*). The decline of inter-provincial trade was hastened by the invasions themselves as communications routes became insecure. Local landowners and *coloni* together viewed the imperial authorities as more and more exploitative. Yet only a few local populations actually welcomed the barbarians as liberators (though many more must have been indifferent). The Imperial system brought benefits if effective. Justinian's reconquest of Italy in the seventh century showed this—he was welcomed as a liberator, despite taxing peasant proprietors at a third of their declared gross product and tenant farmers at an even higher rate (Jones, 1964: Vol. II, 773-823, 1043, 1058-63).

The main area of controversy in this description is whether the collapse had quite such drastic effects on the peasantry. Bernardi (1970: 78-80) argues that the peasants did not die, rather, in alliance with their lords, they evaded the harsh taxes. Thus 'the political organization broke down, but not the framework of rural life, the forms of property and the methods of exploitation'. Finley (1973: 152) also doubts whether the Roman peasantry could be any more harshly oppressed or hungry than contemporary Third World peasants, who nevertheless breed satisfactorily. Finley's explanation is that the Empire's economy rested 'almost entirely on the muscles of men' who—at subsistence—had nothing to contribute to an 'austerity programme' made necessary by 200 years of barbarian attack. Thus the increased consumption needs of army and bureaucracy (and also the parasitic Christian Church—re-enter Gibbon!) led to a manpower shortage.

But it is the *disintegration* of the Empire that is of interest here. The growth of the *oikos*, the *colonus* and patronage show the decentralising tendencies, and the way in which local classes, both direct

producers and expropriators, united against the State political elite—not to transform it, but to evade it. And in the centuries that followed the collapse of the Empire, these disintegrating tendencies continued as peasants were forced to place themselves under the military protection of a local feudal lord against new barbarian invaders.

These same processes are visible in the better-documented case of China, where *reconstitution* is added to disintegration. The 'dynastic cycle' was almost a regular feature of Chinese history and, of course, peasant rebellions formed a major part of the replacement of one dynasty by another. The initial causes of a dynasty's decay seem to have been varied—expensive and unsuccessful foreign warfare, overpopulation, plainly incompetent Emperors or quarelling Imperial families. All lead to a tightening of taxation and peasant disturbances. The Emperor is now forced to tax where he can and rely more heavily on local strongmen and their private armies. Uniformity and therefore calculability is broken, trade declines, banditry increases. Out of this turbulence have often arisen radically egalitarian peasant movements, led by 'déclassé intelligentsia', organized through secret societies, and violently directed against gentry and officials alike. However, at this stage they are *local*. As Chesneaux remarks, they did not cross 'the boundaries of the district in which the goods they produced were to be found' (1973 edition: 21). They can progress further, nevertheless, and four did so to found new dynasties. But that is the point: to transcend that interaction boundary, they need to take on the imperial form. Moreover, they must recruit the gentry, their private armies and their greater interaction networks. The successful peasant leader, like the founder of the Ming dynasty, chooses the right moment to lessen the messianic emphasis and woo the local gentry (Dardess, 1969-70; cf. also Haeger, 1968-69; Lattimore, 1962a: 45; Wittfogel, 1957: 334; Chi, 1936; Wakeman, 1977).

The general conclusion is now clear: that class conflict in large-scale ancient societies tended toward disintegration in a way that is quite unlike that of capitalist society. When the direct producer reacted to excessive exploitation he might turn against either or both of his exploiters, the landlord or the State official. If only against the latter, he did so in collaboration with local lords in civil wars; if against the landlord, in an overt or disguised peasant revolt at the *local* level. Even these local peasant revolts only happened in conditions of relatively intense agricultural activity

(slave estates, co-ordinated irrigation systems). The crucial difference from capitalist society is the extent of economic interdependence among the society members: especially among direct producers. If the result of such conflict was the reconstitution of the Empire—as it was always in China, and was in Rome until very late—this was the result of the imposition by one *regional* ‘classless’ faction over another after prolonged internecine warfare.

Two further conclusions now emerge: that whatever constituted the defining elements of these societies, whatever made an *Empire* possible rather than a smaller territorial unit, was neither class structure nor mode of production. Note the limits of this argument: I am not arguing that classes did not exist (as Finley, 1973: 68 does) or that one cannot *describe* Roman or Chinese modes of production; rather that such concepts cannot be used to give an explanation of why these societies were so large in extent and had States of a particular ‘Imperial’ form. As yet I have not attempted to supply this explanation, but from various hints in the discussion so far we must obviously include *military* factors. So let us now turn to a theory of the State which incorporates military factors.

## 2. *Herbert Spencer : the militant society.*

I have taken Herbert Spencer to be the summation of a certain type of social theory prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which commented upon the transformations of the industrial revolution in an essentially complacent way. Peace, progress and freedom had supplanted despotism, barbarism and violence in society. Spencer’s clearcut distinction between *industrial* and *militant* societies may usefully stand for such theories. Spencer set out his theory in the three volumes of *The Principles of Sociology*, published between 1876 and 1896. It is an evolutionary theory. Societies change in terms of growth, aggregation and an increasing differentiation of functions and institutions. Those with a higher ‘degree of composition’ will better master their environment and—where in competition—other societies. To this classification in terms of degree of composition, Spencer offered a secondary principle of classification ‘into the predominantly militant and the predominantly industrial—those in which the organization for offence and defence is most largely developed, and those in which the sustaining organization is most largely developed’ (1969 edition: 110). Some commentators believe that



these 'militant' and 'industrial' societies are merely ideal-types, useful in illuminating societies at any historical epoch—thus the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany are modern approximations to 'militant' cases (Fletcher, 1971: Vol. I, 284), and indeed Spencer commented that both Bismarck and modern socialist and communists advocated a form of 'compulsory co-operation' reminiscent of ancient militant societies (1969 edition: 519-23; 535-6). But this sits at odds with Spencer's main historical generalisation: that human history has seen a shift in more compound societies from the militant to the industrial type. Spencer links the origins of the state to warfare:

[...] centralized control is the primary trait acquired by every body of fighting men [...] And this centralized control, necessitated during war, characterizes the government during peace. Among the uncivilized there is a marked tendency for the military chief to become also the political head (the medicine man being his only competitor); and in a conquering race of savages his political headship becomes fixed. In semi-civilized societies the conquering commander and the despotic king are the same, and they remain the same in civilized societies down to late times [...] few, if any, cases occur in which societies [...] have evolved into larger societies without passing into the militant type (1969 edition: 117, 125).

Note that, as a true evolutionist, he is inferring an empirical tendency not an universal law. At times he takes this further, arguing that stratification itself owes its origin to warfare. At any rate in such societies stratification and indeed the economy itself is subordinate:

[...] the industrial part of the society continues to be essentially a permanent commissariat existing solely to supply the needs of the governmental-military structures, and having left over for itself only enough for bare maintenance (1969 edition: 121).

This militant State-dominated society is governed by 'compulsory co-operation'. It is centrally, despotically regulated. It has dominated compound societies until recent times. Spencer produces examples indiscriminately from tribal chiefdoms and confederations and ancient Empires. He refers continuously to Rome as a militant society. He can give only one example of a largely industrial society in an earlier epoch, classical Athens. After then, we must wait until the time of the Hanse Towns, the early Dutch Republic and then England. Spencer's causal analysis is sketchy here, and he gives no real explanation of the rise of such 'industrial' societies. They are merely *composed* of an aggregate of a growth in agriculture, manufacture and commerce so that economic exchange relations come to dominate the 'sustaining' organization. Such exchange establishes '*voluntary* co-operation' and inter-

dependence in the economy, and therefore freedom and democracy in the polity. Hence the relationship between State and civil society is reversed, with the latter now dominant.

Such is Spencer's theory. It has a kernel of truth, once we tone down its overstatements and its complacent Victorian glow. Three points must be corrected or added. Firstly, it is incorrect as a theory of the *origins* of the State. Actually, States seem to originate around the world in all kinds of circumstances. If one factor appears more frequently than others, it appears not to be warfare but rather a centralised economic distribution function, the co-ordination by a chief of exchange between different 'ecological niches' (Service, 1975). However, warfare does appear crucial in understanding the development of two particular kinds of state, the Imperial type which is the subject-matter of this paper and the barbarian type which is parasitic upon such Empires. This will be explored below. Secondly, Spencer exaggerates considerably the despotism of militant societies as he does the freedom of industrial ones. The power of the central 'militant' State over its peripheral areas could not be complete given ancient communications and was, as we have seen, dependent on the co-operation of the dominant class in civil society. Spencer's view of freedom was decidedly *bourgeois*, blind to the difference in freedom between the economic exchanges of those who own property and those who have only their labour to sell. And what are we to make of the emergence, after his death, of apparently 'militant' industrial societies like Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia? However—even discounting all this—Spencer nevertheless correctly perceived a shift toward greater democracy in the world (though this is not an argument I will justify in this paper). Thirdly, as I noted, Spencer has no theory accounting for the development of industrial society. This is also outside the scope of this paper.

### *The origins of empire : military and economic organization*

For the purpose of this argument, I make two assumptions which I will in no way justify here: that mankind is restless and greedy for more of the good things of life, and that essentially this is a quest for greater material rewards. However, even on the basis of this rather crude materialist psychology it does not necessarily follow that economic structures are dominant/determinant in human society—it may be, for example, that the most efficient means of attaining material rewards is by military conquest, in

which case one must at least consider the possibility that military structures will be determinant/dominant rather than the mode of economic production. I will consider the well-known materialist objection to this later on. For the moment let us note that there are two major ideal-typical ways for an individual or social group to increase his/its material rewards, economically or by physical force. Economically, the process develops through intensification of exchange relations (which may, of course, be highly unequal); militarily, through conquest or the offer of defence for a group menaced by some other group. Naturally the way in which real societies have evolved have normally mixed these processes together along, indeed, with other more minor processes (exchange of women, the growth of cultural homogeneity, etc.). I want to consider especially the process by which a group incorporates new peoples and territories into its domain, concentrating on the origin of those ancient large-scale societies I have been describing.

At a very general level of analysis we can distinguish two main phases in the evolution of such societies. In the first place there arise over an area (which may be ecologically uniform or diverse) a number of quite similar small city-states or tribal chiefdoms in each of which a permanent centralised elite organizes economic exchange and redistribution. The state organization comprises essentially a market place, storehouse and management of such intensive agricultural techniques as exist (normally irrigation schemes). It is not necessary here to decide whether the members of this central organization constitute an aristocratic economic class or a political elite (the distinction might not seem a relevant one anyway in this case). The second stage is the extension of the hegemony of *one* of these units over the others. So far as we are able to tell from our sources, this process involved considerable warfare, though this is interspersed with 'voluntary' submissions. The emergence of one unit as hegemonic might appear as relatively steady (as in the emergence of Rome within Italy) or the fortunes of the various units might fluctuate considerably (as in the case of the emergence of the Sumerian city-states as nascent 'Empires'). Now, of course, we do not know enough about the cases where the second stage did not follow from the first (obviously, since such societies were unlikely to leave us written records or striking archeological remains). Moreover, there are at least two cases of societies which are sometimes termed 'Empires', and which were certainly large in extent, which do

not fit this model. Both Athens and Phoenicia developed as essentially trading societies (dependent—we may suspect—on the existence of the other cases). Yet this general model applies to the origins of China, to the other civilisations of the Near East and Mediterranean, and to those of central and Andean America (which had recently moved into the second phase when interrupted by the *conquistadores*). We need an explanation for the importance of warfare in their development.

A word of reservation is necessary about the explanation that now follows. Given the paucity of sources it must necessarily be a plausible argument rather than empirically-supported proof. However, it emerges out of certain general observations made by Owen Lattimore after a life-time of study of, and participation in, the relationship between China and the Mongol tribes. Lattimore notes that we may distinguish three radii of possible social interaction which remain relatively invariant until the fifteenth century in Europe. The most geographically-extensive radius is that of *military action*, itself divisible into two radii of which the inner reaches over territories that, after conquest, could be added to the state, and of which the outer is extended beyond such frontiers in punitive or tribute raids. Hence the second radius, that of *civil administration*, is less extensive and tends indeed to be a mere duplication of regional administrations which become isolated from each other in times of civil and dynastic strife. In turn, this radius is more extensive than the third, that of *economic integration*, which at the maximum is that of the region and at the minimum, the cell. Thus, for a considerable stretch of human history, large-scale integration was dependent on military and not economic factors (1962b: 480-91, 542-51). Thus we are presented with a modern variant of Spencer's militant society.

According to Lattimore this situation came to an end in the fifteenth century when the Portugese navigational revolution enabled long-distance transportation of staple goods—economic exchange, binding together large areas and diverse peoples, was now possible. This is a little simple and a little technicist: the whole configuration of capitalist development, rather than merely the compass or the stern-post rudder (which in any case China had earlier developed) extended exchange relations. Unfettered commodity exchange, the expropriation of direct producers and their migration to an urban /factory environment and the industrial revolution itself all led to a capitalist mode of production in which economic interaction is paramount.

We must also reduce the evolutionary and teleological tinges of Lattimore's theory by specifying certain preconditions of the situation he describes. He is describing, if not a standing army, then at least a body of armed men which can be called out at any time (and not just when the harvest has been gathered). In turn this presupposes two conditions: a surplus sufficient to support non-productive labour engaged in military activities, and a state which has the authority to call out troops. Thus the second stage of formation of large-scale ancient societies seems to be dependent on the first stage, i.e. the development of the standing army capable of large-scale conquest depends upon the prior existence of the central-place economy and State (which was, for example, largely absent from Africa until colonial times). But once the technique of the latter is present, then all the techniques are available for permanent military organization. The forms of the economy—its warehouses, secretariat and distributional organization—and its surplus can be merely turned over to an army under the same authority. If neighbouring societies appear both vulnerable and tempting, the opportunity for conquest is present. Assuming an evolutionary process in which materially-motivated men will tend to seize such opportunities, 'Empires' may emerge in such conditions (alternatively, if no one state can attain hegemony, a lengthy period of warring states may ensue). But naturally there is no inevitability about this development.

On one consequence of such warfare, Spencer was essentially correct. Successful booty or conquest warfare tends to heighten the State versus society stratification. This is for two reasons: leadership in emergency situations (of which wars are the clearest examples) needs the speed of authoritarian decision-making, and thus, secondly, booty will be normally distributed by the military-state leadership (see Andreski, 1971: 20-74, for a rather more sophisticated discussion of these issues). The most visible examples of this process are not in the emergence of the Empires themselves, but in the development of the State among those barbarian tribes who were able to live off plundering them (for the Germans and Rome see Thompson, 1965; for the Mongols and China see Lattimore, 1962*a*). Naturally if the war-leaders wish to maintain their degree of power independent of the classes of civil society, they will seek to continue the wars of conquest—and so develop the characteristic three-way politics of ancient Empires I described earlier.

Thus far there is little that Marx would have disagreed with

—excepting some of Spencer's and Lattimore's wider generalisations. Marx and Engels both accepted the importance of warfare and conquest in earlier phases of history. However, they always insisted on one central feature of warfare: that it is not productive. Thus in typical polemical vein in *Capital*, Marx comments:

Truly comical is M. Bastiat, who imagines that the ancient Greek and Romans lived by plunder alone. But when people plunder for centuries, there must always be something at hand for them to seize: the objects of plunder must be continually reproduced. It would thus appear that even Greeks and Romans had some process of production, consequently an economy, which [...] constituted the material basis of their world (Vol. I, 1970 edition: 81-2).

Except for the last phrase, Spencer would be in agreement. Now it is true that plunder presupposes production; and it is also true that the *character* of warfare is heavily dependent upon the mode of production of a people. Thus pastoral nomads become mobile light cavalry, settled agriculturalists become infantry phalanxes. There is nevertheless a certain autonomous 'military logic' in history, where battles and warfare may be decided not by the level of economic development but by military technology and strategy. The most outstanding example of this appears to have been the superiority in battle of those primitive pastoral nomads over far more economically advanced civilisations. The Chinese Empire was repeatedly conquered by barbarian cavalry able to concentrate its forces quickly, evade enormous infantry armies and strike at the Chinese headquarters. The smallest known group are the Sha-To who, numbering only 10,000 soldiers, conquered and ruled China in the tenth century. Such success apparently also attended the incursions of mounted barbarians in the ancient Near East (MacNeill, 1973) (9). But these conquests are bound to be somewhat parasitic: how can such a small number of illiterate, half-civilised conquerors without experience of intensive agriculture affect the mode of production itself? Mongol barbarians could not usually displace the existing Chinese bureaucracy/gentry class, for they could not rule without them. Indeed these examples are of a certain *autonomy*, not a determinancy, of military-political factors *vis-à-vis* the mode of production: changes in the composition of the political elite and the form of state may proceed without reference to economic processes, or contrary to their logic. As Marx expressed it in *Capital* (writing about India): 'The struc-

(9) Rome only rarely faced such enemies. Its barbarians were usually footsoldiers, who were never able to defeat properly-equipped and officered legions in the field.

ture of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky' (1970 edition: Vol. I, 358). If this is the argument, however, its implications should be fully accepted: that one cannot explain the structure of this form of State, its rises and declines, in terms of the mode of production.

Yet I have presented data which cast doubt on this autonomy of State and economy, indeed which attributes determinancies over certain attributes of economic life to militaristic State structures. Quite contrary to Marx, warfare *is* productive—if it is of a type which leads to the formation of ancient Empires. As Spencer pointed out, the form of the ancient State in large-scale societies was 'militant' i.e. it was modelled on the organization of the standing army—centralised, authoritarian and uniform. That was the only way disparate regions and peoples could be held together given the absence of economic interdependence. Spencer claimed that 'civilisation' emerged from this route but he never made it clear whether this involved economic growth. Sharing the distaste of most modern intellectuals for such despotism, he was reluctant to attribute functionality to it. Yet it is clear that such a militant State did have important developmental effects upon the extraction of surplus. I described these effects earlier. Three aspects of the militant State seem to have had marked effects on economic development: the heightening of stratification by conquest, the intensification of the labour process that authoritarian forms of labour control allow, and the provision of an infrastructure of order and uniformity (10). The latter should be particularly stressed, as it was by the Imperial authorities themselves. Of the two Empires I have considered in detail, China offered the more sophisticated self-analysis. Hartwell has documented the economic theory of the Northern Sung (i.e. A.D. 960-1126) financial bureaucrats which laid great stress on active currency and price management by the State as a way of ensuring *predictability* for economic decision-makers. He concludes:

Internal security against bandits and rebellion, external protection against foreign invasion and conquest, and the development of improved transportation and communications facilities may be [...] far more important elements in the history of economic growth [...] But if these conditions are met, then "continuous and consistent" economic policies—taxation methods, maintenance of the monetary system, attitudes toward distributive justice—became essential ingredients in sustained progress (1970-71: 309).

(10) The importance of slavery in the cRoman Republic also had economic repercussions peculiar to Rome: the expropriation of free peasants, their migration to the towns and thus the stimulus to urban trade (Hopkins, 1977: 23-31).

At this point Hartwell refers to Max Weber, noting the illumination which Weber's stress upon formal rationality, calculability and predictability throws upon economic development. My own analysis supports Weber's position. However, insofar as Weber commits himself to a causal explanation of the rationalization process it tends to be in terms of ideological factors, most notably the famous comparison he makes between Eastern and Western religions (as, for example, in the concluding chapter of his *Religion of India*). While I cannot enter into this enormous problem here, and while it might be claimed that I have neglected ideological factors, it seems to me that the conditions of formal rationality are essentially those provided by *pacification*. Furthermore, in both Empires the development of an economic policy embodying formal rationality *followed* the achievement of the pacification process (11). The chronology is quite clear: military consolidation and pacification — the development of inter-regional economic exchange — the growth of imperial economic policies of uniformity. It is not only the Marxian version of materialism we may oppose to Weber!

Yet as I have noted, economic exchange was never sufficient to replace military control as the major organizational form. Thus the society and its economy remained essentially 'militant' in its organization. Let me illustrate this with the Roman transport system. Firstly, shipping, the major form of long-distance transport of goods. By the fourth century A.D. shippers belonged to the guild of *navicularii*, controlled by the provincial prefects of the Empire. Membership was hereditary and compulsory—certain land was burdened by the obligation of *navicularia functio*, and inheritance of this land meant becoming a shipper (though this could sometimes be evaded by bribery). Fees for carrying state goods were fixed by the prefects, and so little free bargaining could occur between the shipper and the merchant possessing the goods. Furthermore, this payment was deliberately inadequate to cover the shipper's cost. He was compensated for this loss by the grant of legal privileges, of which the most important was immunity from civil obligations, that is, from the duties of local government, which were generally compulsory for the middle strata (the *decurions*) of the Empire, and which were costly in both time and money. Over land transport, its control was absolute through actual State

(11) Though in Rome, Diocletian's introduction of fiscal uniformity followed a period

of turbulence which had undermined the earlier pacification of the Empire.



ownership, managed directly by praetorian prefects and provincial governors. This *cursus publicus* maintained a vast and costly organization of staging posts, and appears to us to be extremely wasteful of the resources of men, horses, and carts. The amount of long-distance land trade was negligible when compared to the scale of this operation. Some of the more cost-conscious Emperors made attempts to reduce its scale, but it remained basically intact until the fall of the Empire (Jones, 1964: Vol. II, 827-34).

Such a transport system might seem inefficient to modern eyes. As far as the shipper is concerned, any rational calculation of profit and loss becomes rather difficult, for he has to include the indirect benefits of the legal immunities, as does the prefect in setting what he thinks are reasonable payments. Thus all those concerned have to mix economic and political considerations in their calculations. Finley (1973: 17-23) has noted (exaggerating only a little) that the Roman economy was not a 'differentiated sub-system of action'. It is clear that the government is thinking not in narrowly economic terms, but is combining economic, military and administrative needs. This is particularly so for the *cursus publicus*, which was seen by the government largely as an administrative military necessity. But is the system irrational? The recruitment of the shippers may seem odd, but for achievement to replace ascription as the basis of allocation, a large-scale technical education system would be needed. In fact, without this, hereditary transmission of technical roles is an efficient training mechanism found in most ancient economies. As for the subordination of economic to administrative and military considerations, does not this represent an accurate assessment of the nature of the Empire? For the economic 'spin-offs' are very indirect, especially those flowing from the provision of order itself. Without this, even local exchange relations are precarious, i.e. it is not that the *cursus publicus* develops a large volume of trade (though it develops some) but rather that it provides the pacification whereby all dealings with strangers can be regulated (and where banditry is reduced). The economic necessity of militaristic relations is also clear in the case of the authoritarian control of labour. Agricultural treatises which survive were concerned above all with the direction and control of labour rather than directly with the productivity of labour compared with other factors of production (though they generally date from the Republican period when slavery was more widespread). Finley comments that this shows the viewpoint of the policeman, not the entrepreneur (1973: 113).

Yet intensive agriculture could *only* be worked with non-free labour. The rationality of the system was militaristic.

In fact this point can be generalised to counter the tendency among writers since Marx and Engels to view the Romans as somehow 'irrational', 'blind to their own doom' or dominated by 'unteachable conservatism' in their failure to develop commodity production. Commodity production did not develop: economic technology (in contrast to military technology) remained essentially unchanged during the Roman Empire (though not during the Chinese); moreover, we might agree that *if* Rome had leaped several technological revolutions toward large-scale commodity exchange, it might not have collapsed. But societies confront the problems of their own time, not those that subsequent generations invent for them. Bandits never were totally eliminated, barbarians were never totally pacified, the political system was never immune from dynastic civil war—the problems *were* military, and authoritarian controls could not be relinquished. The rationality of the system was militaristic. The ancient world, *pace* Marx, did 'live off politics' in one very crucial sense—that its material conditions of existence depended ultimately on structures determined by military-political considerations. In this respect there can be no clear distinction between supposedly 'dominant' and 'determinant' structures.

### 3. Conclusion.

It is important that I be specific about my argument. It is in no way to be treated as a 'military determinism' of the general kind advocated for the ancient world by Spencer, and, on occasion, for the whole of history by Andreski (1971: 26). Over a specific empirical terrain, I have argued that military organization has had important effects upon economic structure. I have not emphasized conquest *per se*, which has had a distinctive and generally non-productive role *throughout* human history (up to perhaps the nuclear stalemate). Modern colonial Empires were acquired by force exactly as were ancient ones. The difference lies in processes of consolidation *subsequent* to the conquest. At a definite phase in social development, economic means could not provide this consolidation. They now can do so, and economic imperialism (within, of course, a militarily-protected perimeter) has largely taken over. Furthermore a decline has also occurred in non-

free forms of labour control as commodity penetration has developed. In ancient Empires consolidation, integration, was 'militant' in form, that is centralised, authoritarian and uniform. This had major economic effects: it heightened social stratification, and enabled the first substantial amassing of surplus from nature in human history.

Thus one cannot explain either the political form of the Ancient state or its economy without introducing distinctively social Darwinian and militaristic elements into one's theory. The former proposition—the political form—will not be generally contested. It is the latter that is contentious. Let us examine the economic effects a little more closely. It might be asked whether these effects are on 'the productive forces' or 'production relations'. I have emphasized the former: that is, the simple level of economic development. Yet substantial impact on relations can also be observed: heightening of stratification and of authoritarian modes of labour control. I am not sure that it is possible to be more theoretically rigorous about these effects. Now if one takes an extremely general view of a 'mode of production', one could note that none of these changes affect the basic form of expropriation. Tax/rent is the form at the beginning and the end of the Imperial State, rent in the successor societies in Western Europe. Hindess and Hirst find these to be essentially the same—one should add *definitionally* the same, given their starting point (12). That is all very well; but such a position not only fails to explain the State (which they accept), it fails to explain economic effects, which by *any* sociological standards must be regarded as important and worthy of explanation. That enormous societies were raised above subsistence level, contained staggering inequality, and survived, tottered and fell not fundamentally due to class conflict—these are major issues of historical sociology.

Over this empirical terrain, therefore, I have found support for Perry Anderson's position, that a 'mode of production', to be used as an explanatory concept, has to include important non-economic elements, notably 'militant' ones.

What, then, of that most persistent of attacks upon Marxism: that *no* mode of production can be specified without reference to non-economic factors? This argument usually stresses the importance of *norms* in society i.e. that in order for economic interaction

(12) I have omitted reference to the so-called 'ancient mode of production' which remains unclear to me.

to take place, there must exist prior normative agreements about the rules of exchange. Actually such arguments, by writers such as Plamenatz and Acton, are exactly the same as the much earlier attacks by Rousseau, Burke and Durkheim on contractual, utilitarian theory. In one sense, this traditional argument against varieties of 'economism' is correct. Norms *are* necessary for stable, economic interaction. But the conclusion drawn by all these theorists, that normative consensus must be accorded a privileged causal status in theory, does not follow from this. I have made this argument at greater length elsewhere (Mann 1977). Here I will merely note the importance of *conquest* in establishing the terms of exchange, the norms in both ancient Empires and modern capitalism. Both proceeded by *expropriation*, primarily of conquered peoples, but also of existing subordinate classes. Eventually, within their conquered territories, both systems established uniform rules of exchange and even of the rates of exchange (though these would be affected by further alterations in power relations). Thus these modes of production, and all modes involving significant territorial expansion, cannot be specified without a consideration of the military State.

However, military factors do not simply lose their importance once territorial conquest is complete. I have shown how the militant State apparatus continues to be necessary to the survival of ancient Empires, but a few final remarks are perhaps necessary about the military in the modern world. Though the economy can provide social integration in an industrial society, once pacified, the *international* level of pacification has always been problematic. From its beginnings, expansionist capitalism has been accompanied by devastating wars between nation-states. Norms of international economic exchange (free trade, currency convertibility, peace) have only been clearly established under the aegis of an 'imperial' power: Britain in the nineteenth century, the U.S. 1945-1971 (when President Nixon announced that the U.S. was abandoning dollar convertibility). The collapse of British hegemony was notably violent, and it conspicuously involved all those modern States which, it might be argued, have exhibited rather more autonomy *vis-à-vis* social classes than my overall thesis allows for—Wilhelminian Germany, the emergence of Fascism and Bolshevism, and Imperial Japan. If in truth these are cases of 'autonomous political power', then we must look to military factors—so long neglected by sociologists—for the major part of our explanation, just as we must in the ancient world. This time, however, 'the

problem of the State' is less that of one hegemonic, militant Empire, and more of a system of competing nation-states. And if the current demise of U.S. hegemony is likely to be a uniquely peaceful event in world-history, we must also look to two military factors for our explanation. Firstly, the early stages of industrial revolution provided a military technology which makes industrial societies militarily invulnerable to more primitive societies. As Gibbon first noted, unlike Rome or China we cannot be raided by barbarians, and if defence against them were our only external defence requirement, our military budgets would be a minute proportion of our total budgets (again unlike the ancient Empires). Secondly, and more recently, a balance of nuclear weapons between the major world powers renders direct warfare of the dominant historical variety unthinkable as a rational strategy of economic appropriation. Within this *pax industria et patria* the economy determines.

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