

# I Introduction

In this book I re-examine Karl Marx's analysis of value through a detailed study of Chapter One of Volume I of *Capital*. The object of this study is to bring out the political usefulness of the analysis of value by situating the abstract concepts of Chapter One within Marx's overall analysis of the class struggles of capitalist society. I intend to return to what I believe was Marx's original purpose: he wrote *Capital* to put a weapon in the hands of workers. In it he presented a detailed analysis of the fundamental dynamics of the struggles between the capitalist and the working classes.<sup>1</sup> By reading *Capital* as a political document, workers could study in depth the various ways in which the capitalist class sought to dominate them as well as the methods they themselves used to struggle against that domination.

During the last half-century, however, not only has *Capital* very rarely been read in this manner but it also has been largely neglected. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that, despite *Capital*'s world-wide reputation and quasi-religious status in the socialist world, its serious study has been a rare and isolated phenomenon in both East and West. Many have spoken of it, but few have really studied it. When it has been read, more often than not, it has been treated by Marxists of various persuasions as a work of political economy, of economic history, of sociology, or even of philosophy. Thus it has been an object of academic study rather than a political tool. The legacy

<sup>1</sup> For Marx, and for most Marxists who followed him, the term 'working class' has referred primarily to the industrial working class of waged workers producing commodities (be they manufactured goods, agricultural products, or services). For reasons which will become clearer later in this text, I use the term 'working class' to designate not only industrial waged workers but also a wide variety of unwaged workers. These include housewives, children, students, and peasants whose work under capitalism consists primarily of the production and reproduction of the ability and willingness to carry out activities (including industrial work) which contribute to the maintenance of the system.

of this Marxist tradition has served to all but remove the book from the battlefields of the class struggle.

This neglect has recently been replaced by a world-wide revival of the close study of Marx's writings, especially *Capital*. This revival has seen a proliferation of various Marxist 'schools of thought', among both academic and activist groups. Unfortunately, much of this new study is duplicating those past interpretations which have ignored or underestimated the usefulness of *Capital* as a political tool in the hands of workers. Those who have rediscovered *Capital* as a weapon and have read it politically have been few and widely scattered. This introduction outlines the various traditional and contemporary approaches to the interpretation of Marx and situates those political readings of *Capital* among them. The body of this book aims to contribute to such a reading of *Capital* as a whole by carrying out a political reading of Marx's analysis of value.

In order to outline the various approaches to Marx, I begin by discussing the general nature of the contemporary revival, locating it within the larger drama of which it is one moment: the global crisis of the capitalist system. It was the onset of the current crisis that led many back to the theoretical and political ideas of Marx.

Once I have sketched the various approaches to reading Marx, including the nature of recent political readings, I turn to the analysis of Chapter One itself. In Chapter II, I discuss the political reasons why it made sense for Marx to begin with the analysis of commodities — because the commodity-form is the basic form of the capitalist imposition of work and thus of the class struggle. In Chapter III, I interpret Marx's analysis of the substance of value as capitalist-imposed work and discuss the struggles over the time of work which underlie the measure of value — socially necessary labour time. In Chapter IV, I sequentially analyse the ways the various forms of value (the simple, expanded, general, and money forms) express the class relations in capitalist society and the lessons they teach us about working-class struggle.

By carrying out this study within the context of Marx's overall understanding of *Capital*, by bringing to bear on the reading of the first chapter the material of subsequent chapters, and by trying to grasp the various determinations of value within the context of the contemporary crisis, it is my hope to make some contribution to demystifying 'value theory' and to increasing its usefulness in the development of workers' strategies for dealing with capital.

## **The capitalist crisis**

The current crisis of capitalism began to emerge in the 1960s in the form of a wide variety of seemingly unrelated disorders in which a number of basic social institutions began to fall apart under the impact of a multiplicity of new social conflicts. In the beginning the black civil rights demands in the United States, the growing unrest of students and women in many parts of the world, and renewed peasant struggles of Asia, Africa, and Latin America appeared as simply different independent acts of resistance to the spread of post-World War II capitalism and American hegemony. Racial discrimination, academic regimentation, alienation, exploitation, imperialism,

dehumanization, sexual repression, consumerism, environmental destruction — one after another these evils of modern society were exposed in a confusing array of conflicts that seemed to threaten the very disintegration of that society.

As these social conflicts found verbal and physical expression and grew into social movements, it became increasingly apparent that their mutual independence was only a surface illusion. In the United States the revolt against racial discrimination swept out of the rural South to explode in the northern ghettos in urban guerrilla war and the welfare rights movements. As business sought to get the young blacks out of the streets, they carried their militancy into the factories, making the fight against 'niggeration' a critical part of the growing industrial revolt against work. The black revolt also spread into the schools and the army, again becoming a key element in the struggle against regimentation, the university as factory, and then the draft for war against Vietnam. The antiwar movement joined many of these diverse struggles, and its linkage with the peasants of Southeast Asia became complete with the slogan of 'Victory to the NLF' and with the flying of Vietcong flags from occupied campus buildings. Nor were the links between these social upheavals limited to the American-Southeast Asian connection.

North of Vietnam the great Chinese cultural revolution drew world-wide attention as it raised the banner of popular revolt within the socialist camp — both a reminder of Budapest and a foreshadowing of Prague. Also in northern Asia, Japan — the capitalist miracle of the East — was shaken by rising and interconnected revolts of students, workers, and peasants as the Spring Offensive and the Red Army ended the myth of Japanese stability. In Europe similar revolts broke out in critical areas. French demonstrations sympathetic to the Vietnam cause helped incubate the historic uprising of May 1968 when millions of students and workers carried the red and black flags of revolt to the barricades of Paris. It was both student and worker unrest in Eastern Europe against local repression and Soviet domination that helped provoke, first, economic and political reform and, then, the invasion by Russian tanks. In Italy the Hot Autumn of 1969 was only one explosion in an increasingly chronic social emergency. In Portugal the American experience was repeated even more dramatically as protracted colonial wars in Africa tore both Portugal's society and its army apart, bringing a revolution at home in response to those abroad.

Within all aspects of the American 'movement', as well as those elsewhere, the revolt of women matured and blasted the actions of male 'leadership', transcending the 'sexual freedom' of hippiedom and the Left into the autonomous demand for women's liberation as an irreducible moment of all these struggles. Indeed it was the fierce autonomy of women, blacks, browns, native Americans, and various 'nationalities' which partially hid the high degree of complementarity of the struggles. Even the international population and ecology movements, originally crafted by the architects of capitalism for their own ends, were partially transformed into radical challenges to an order that attacked people instead of poverty and spread death-dealing herbicides and poisons in Southeast Asia while preaching environmental cleanliness.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Steve Weissman, 'Why the Population Bomb Is a Rockefeller Baby', *Ramparts* 8, no. 11 (May 1970): 42–47.

As these conflicts, in all their sectoral and global diversity, circulated and melded, they came to constitute a tremendous rising tide of danger for the international capitalist system. They formed a global cycle of struggles, a complex yet interlocked whole that shook the entire capitalist social order to its roots and pitched it headlong into a crisis of historic proportions.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in some ways the globality of these struggles and the depth of this crisis became really apparent only in the 1970s as several crises of universally recognized international dimension followed one another in rapid succession. In June of 1971, détente and Richard Nixon's opening to China marked the end of the long bipolar Cold War, as well as the beginning of diplomatic problems between the United States and Japan. In August, Nixon's abandonment of dollar convertibility into gold destroyed the post-World War II international monetary arrangements of the Western capitalist system. This action together with the import surcharge created a new diplomatic crisis, now with Canada and Western Europe as well as Japan. All these actions, coupled with the imposition of austerity at home, announced the end of the ideology of growth and the end of the Great Society, of the New Frontier, and the Development Decade.

These changes were rapidly followed by others. First, the global food crisis of 1972–74 in which prices were raised sharply in the West and mass starvation was allowed in Asia and Africa. Second, the global energy crisis of 1973–74 in which oil prices were raised dramatically and the focal point of capitalist development appeared to be shifting to the OPEC countries while the north-eastern United States, Great Britain, and much of Western Europe plunged into the global recession of 1974–75. Finally, in 1975 and 1976 these same food and energy crises erupted in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as socialist planners also raised the prices of these commodities — provoking widespread social unrest. At that point the cycle was complete. The globality as well as the depth of the crisis could no longer be doubted.

## The revival of Marx

It was in the midst of these cycles of social conflict and global crisis that the revival of interest in Marx emerged and that *Capital* began to be reread and studied around the world. This interest in Marx can be seen to constitute one element of the widespread efforts to comprehend and to deal with all these crises. On the one hand, the turn to Marx by those making the social struggles of this period constituted a search for both self-clarification and strategy in a situation beyond all previous experience. It has been this search that has given birth to the study of Marx by independent groups in schools, factories, prisons, and a wide variety of social activist organizations. Faced with the sterility of both reformist and traditional leftist theories and strategic formulae, these groups have been returning to the evaluation of Marx's analysis of class struggle and revolution against capitalism.

At the same time, within the universities, as the result of a long series of demands,

<sup>3</sup> A partial analysis of that cycle of struggles is set out in *Zerowork* 1 (1975) and 2 (1977).

this same search has forced the creation of official courses, even degrees, in Marxism.<sup>4</sup> The civil rights movement demanded ethnic studies. The antiwar movement generated support for revisionist history, insurgent sociology, and radical economics. The women's movement forced the creation of women's studies programs. Within these new radical spaces opened in the traditional structure of education, the study of Marx himself has taken a larger and larger place as radical students and professors have come up against the same limits of conventional radical wisdom as do their counterparts outside academia: the failure of those approaches either to explain the current social crisis or to provide the means to usefully evaluate alternative strategies of action.

Yet it would be a mistake to see the revival of Marxism only in terms of the problems and needs of the various individuals and groups that have formed the core of the social revolts of the 1960s and 1970s. The crisis has been, above all, a crisis of the capitalist system and thus a crisis for the ideologues and planners of capitalism. As a result they too have an interest in a reassessment of Marx. To understand this we must recognize that this crisis is every bit as deep and fundamental (and perhaps even more so) as the last major crisis of the global capitalist system: the Great Depression of the thirties. That period formed a profound turning point in the historical development of capitalism because it showed that the relations of power between the classes and thus the basic social structure had been so altered that the old cyclical business downturn could no longer provide a solution to social upheaval through the classic means of rising unemployment and falling wages. The growth in workers' struggles and power during the 1920s and 1930s made that impossible by preventing any substantial fall in wages and by increasing demands on the state as collective capitalist for jobs and more social services. In order to survive that crisis capitalism required a new strategy and a new ideology to replace 'laissez faire'. The solution which emerged was the ideology of growth and full employment based on a strategy of harnessing workers' struggles for higher wages through productivity deals negotiated in collective bargaining. That wages and thus consumer demand would not rise faster than productivity would be guaranteed by state intervention with monetary and fiscal policy. In other words, the American answer to the last crisis of capitalism was Keynesianism as a strategy and thus an ideology.<sup>5</sup> The defeat of German and Italian fascism in World War II and the containment of Soviet and Chinese socialism after the war meant that the American answer became the solution for the entire capitalist West. This solution was institutionalized internationally through the

<sup>4</sup> The struggles of the 1960s transformed the situation of the 1950s, in which there was only one tenured Marxist teaching economics in an American university (Paul Baran at Stanford), into one in which there are today dozens of Marxists teaching in universities throughout the country, many with tenure. There are degree programs leading to what amounts to a Ph.D. in Marxism at several universities, including the University of Massachusetts (Amherst), the New School for Social Research (New York), and American University (Washington, D. C.). At others, such as Stanford, University of Texas, Yale, and Harvard, students can take field specialisations in Marxist economics and find enough sympathetic readers to write Marxist dissertations.

<sup>5</sup> This analysis has been developed in Mario Tronti, 'Workers and Capital', *Telos* 14 (Winter 1972): 25–62; Guido Baldi, 'Theses on Mass Worker and Social Capital', *Radical America* 6, no. 1 (May–June): 3–21; and Antonio Negri, 'John M. Keynes e la teoria capitalistica dello stato nel '29', in *Operai e Stato*, by Sergio Bologna *et al* [in English as 'Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929', in Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*]. A more detailed discussion of this analysis is presented below in the section on reading *Capital* politically.

United Nations system, and the International Monetary Fund agreements signed at Bretton Woods in 1944.

What we must now see is that the international cycle of social conflicts in the late 1960s signalled the collapse of that Keynesian strategy within individual countries and that the collapse of the international monetary system in 1971 showed that the crisis constituted a breakdown in the Keynesian era globally. It is because they are faced with this kind of profound historical crisis of the total system that the theoreticians and architects of capitalist economic and social policy have an interest in a re-evaluation of Marx. In these times of general systemic rupture, when the fiscal and monetary adjustments of Keynesian economists and technocrats are daily proving their inadequacy, we should not be surprised to find a new tolerance for all totalizing theories of crisis and societal development.<sup>6</sup> Because the policy makers of capitalism have not been able to find any more creative answers to the global social breakdown than crisis itself, they are willing to listen to any new conceptualization that might give them help in finding a solution. In other words, they would like to use the revival of Marx to see if anything useful can be learned.

While this might at first sound a bit farfetched, even a brief review of the Marxist tradition will show important instances where Marx has been used not to further revolution but to contain it. Business cycle theorists, growth theory specialists, industrial organization experts, and other orthodox economists have often drawn on Marx's writings in the development of their work.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps one of the best known examples is that of Wassily Leontief, the father of the modern techniques of input-output analysis that are the basis of many contemporary capitalist planning models. The roots of his ideas, as he is quick to recognize, come partly from Marx's reproduction schemes in Volume II of *Capital*. Perhaps even more obvious and far-reaching in implication have been the uses to which the Soviet state has put many orthodox interpretations of Marx in justifying its policies of repression and counterrevolution. Given this history it should not be hard to see why funding for Marxist studies has become available and why space in national newspapers and academic journals has sometimes been allocated to keeping track of and evaluating the course of the new Marxist researches.<sup>8</sup>

**6** Parallel to the revival of Marx has also been the revival of Hegel, the only bourgeois thinker whose totalizing vision matched Marx's own. For surveys of the Hegel revival, see Antony Quinton, 'Spreading Hegel's Wings', *New York Review of Books*, May 29, 1975, 34–37; Mark Poster, 'The Hegel Renaissance', *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973): 109–127; and John Heckman, 'Hippolyte and the Hegel Revival in France', *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973): 128–145.

**7** A number of bourgeois evaluations of the usefulness of Marx to bourgeois theory are included in David Horowitz, *Marx and Modern Economics*. See especially the essays by O. Lange, W. Leontief, J. Robinson, Fan-Hung, L. R. Klein, and S. Tsuru. Others who have explicitly drawn on Marx in their work have included William Baumol in his *Economic Dynamics* and Irma Adelman in her *Theories of Economic Growth and Development*. The debt of such economists as Joseph Schumpeter to Marx is well known.

**8** Examples of such surveys of radical thought in professional journals and the elite press are Martin Bronfenbrenner, 'Radical Economics in America: A 1970 Survey', *Journal of Economic Literature* 8, no. 3 (September 1970): 747–766; S. T. Worland, 'Radical Political Economics as a "Scientific Revolution"', *Southern Economics Journal* 39, no. 2 (October 1972): 274–284; and 'The Marx Men', *Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 1975. The *New York Times* went so far as to ask radical economist David Gordon of the New School to present his views on the current crisis in the *New York Times Magazine* ('Recession Is Capitalism as Usual'), April 27, 1975.

## Alternative approaches to Marx

Given the two-sided source of interest in the revival of Marxism — those wishing to use Marx to further social change and those wishing to use him to contain it — it is important to be clear about the different approaches to the reading of his works and about the implications of those approaches. The basic form of the revival has been the retrieval and study of Marx's own works and of those of his major disciples and interpreters. Together these works make up the totality of the 'Marxist tradition' understood as an accumulating body of thought. To some degree the revival of Marxism has also included somewhat more useful attempts to study that tradition within its historical context — to study 'Marxist thought' as part of the developing social history. In both cases there are various possible ways to categorize both the literature of the revival and that tradition upon which it has drawn in terms of the approaches to the reading of Marx in general and of *Capital* in particular.

One common approach to such a breakdown is along differing ideological lines, especially the break between orthodox Marxism — by which is normally meant Marxism-Leninism of various Stalinist or Trotskyist varieties — and nonorthodox Marxism — within which different kinds of revisionist tendencies can be distinguished, ranging from the social democracy of the Second International through the Council Communists and so-called Western Marxists of the interwar period to the various neo-Marxist tendencies of the post-World War II decade. Unfortunately, such an analysis leads us more directly to a comparison of the political conclusions reached than of the approaches taken to the reading of Marx.

A second much more useful break is one between those readings of Marx which are essentially ideological — regardless of line — and those readings of Marx which one might call strategic. This distinction is meant to differentiate between readings of Marx which see his work as fundamentally constituting an ideological critique, or critical interpretation, of capitalism and readings which see his work as both a critique of ideology and a strategic deciphering of the class war.

The concept of a strategic reading here is very much in the military sense because it seeks in Marx's thought only weapons for use in the class war. To the objection that ideology is a kind of weapon, I would agree. But, to push the military analogy, I am speaking here of the difference between a weapon like propaganda, which is a narrow tactic, and the weapon of strategy, which is on a very different level. To paraphrase Karl von Clausewitz's terms, strategy allows us to grasp the basic form of the class war, to situate the different struggles which compose it, to evaluate the opposing tactics in each of those struggles, and to see how the different tactics and different struggles can be better linked to achieve victory.<sup>9</sup>

In this case a further distinction must be made as to whether the strategic deciphering is from the point of view of capital or from that of the working class. In the former case we find the kind of reading which Leontief did — one which helps to

<sup>9</sup> Clausewitz's statement is: 'Strategy forms the plan of the war, maps out the proposed course of the different campaigns which compose the war, and regulates the battles to be fought in each' (cited in B. H. Liddell Hart's *Strategy*: 319).

develop capitalist strategy. In the latter we find readings which help to clarify and develop working-class struggle.

Cutting across this breakdown between ideological and strategic readings of Marx is a third breakdown which is primarily important because of its usefulness in understanding the current status of Marxist studies. This is the distinction between reading Marx as philosophy, reading him, especially *Capital*, as political economy, and reading him politically. To read Marx philosophically is at best to read his works as critical interpretations, as one form of ideology. To read Marx as political economy can include elements of ideology — when the aim is to critique capitalism — but it can also, and more importantly, include elements of a strategic reading in the interests of capital. This includes readings of *Capital* as a work of economic theory within a framework of historical materialism. At the very least the weaknesses and dangers of reading Marx as philosophy or as political economy are those of all ideological readings. No matter how critical they are of various features of capitalism, they are basically no more than passive interpretations of the social situation. With respect to such critical theories, one does well to never forget Marx's justly famous injunction: 'The problem with the philosophers is that they have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it.'<sup>10</sup> It is not just that interpretations are simply useless. If they are accurate ones, they may provide exactly one of the things capital needs to help plan its strategies. Those political economy readings which develop interpretations of Marx's thought in ways that bring out potentially useful strategic implications for capital in this period are not simply innocuous but must be viewed as potentially dangerous to the working class.

There remains to define what I mean by a political reading of Marx. All readings are political in that their execution involves real political choices and implications with respect to the class relations. Yet I would monopolize the term 'political' here to designate that strategic reading of Marx which is done from the point of view of the working class. It is a reading that self-consciously and unilaterally structures its approach to determine the meaning and relevance of every concept to the immediate development of working-class struggle. It is a reading which eschews all detached interpretation and abstract theorising in favour of grasping concepts only within that concrete totality of struggle whose determinations they designate. This I would argue is the only kind of reading of Marx which can properly be said to be from a working-class perspective because it is the only one which speaks directly to that class's needs for clarifying the scope and structure of its own power and strategy.

The diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the principal distinctions made among the various approaches to the reading of Marx. These are certainly not the only possible distinctions between approaches to the reading of Marx, but I have found them helpful in sorting out the various strands of the current Marxist revival and the traditions on which they are based. Since I have tried to write this present work as a political reading of *Capital*, I will now attempt to further clarify these distinctions so as to situate the

<sup>10</sup> This is the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach.



present work and to indicate why the approach it embodies represents a sharp break with others. I undertake this clarification by sketching some of the history and basic characteristics and weaknesses of the traditional readings of Marx as political economy and as philosophy and then elaborate on what it means to read Marx politically and illustrate how this approach allows a useful political reinterpretation of many of the other approaches' insights at the same time it avoids their errors.

Figure 1: Approaches to the reading of Marx

	<b>Ideological Readings</b>	<b>Strategic Readings</b>
<b>Political Economy Readings</b>	From capital's perspective	From capital's perspective
<b>Philosophical Readings</b>	From capital's perspective	<i>Empty set</i>
<b>Political Readings</b>	<i>Empty set</i>	From a working-class perspective

## Reading *Capital* as political economy

One of the strongest facets of the current Marxist revival is the return to the reading of *Capital* as a work in political economy. This approach has a long tradition that began in the period of the Second International (1898–1914) and has run through the history of orthodox Marxism and through a number of revisionist approaches outside orthodoxy. To define *Capital* as a work of political economy, as so many have, requires explaining not only what the field of political economy is, but also what those fields are which are excluded from its purview.

### The political economy of the Second International

The traditional way of making this distinction has been to define 'political economy' in the terms of the classical political economists from Adam Smith to David Ricardo. Accordingly, political economy deals with the social sphere that includes the production, exchange, and distribution of commodities. Based on a reading of Marx's now famous remarks in the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, this sphere of political economy is identified with the 'economic base' of society 'on which arises a legal and political superstructure'.<sup>11</sup> Within this economic base the mode of production is seen as the determining instance whose own development was determined by the dialectical interaction of the material productive forces (technology,

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 20–21.

organization, etc.) and the social relations of production (capitalists versus workers). Within this base/superstructure framework *Capital* was interpreted by Engels and those who followed him as being the truest, most scientific analysis of the capitalist mode of production and the relations of exchange and distribution based on it. If it were pointed out that Marx had titled the *Contribution*, and subtitled *Capital*, a critique of political economy, the response was that the critique was of classical political economy and what Marx had done was to correct its errors and constitute a more scientific work. In other words, Marx's *Capital* differed from Ricardo's *Principles* primarily by being more correct. He is seen either as fulfilling its promise or as having corrected its errors.<sup>12</sup>

In this view what *Capital* did not provide was a theory of the so-called superstructure, especially a theory of politics and of the state. This sharp dichotomy between politics and political economy was a primary characteristic of the debates of the Second International (and those that followed). It confined *Capital*, and ultimately Marx, to the realm of 'economics' and left the terrain of politics to the Marxist politicians of the day: the social democrats (e.g. Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein), on the one hand, and the revolutionary party builders (e.g. Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin), on the other. This dichotomy was the intellectual and political expression of the structure of German social democracy and the dual character of working-class struggle in that period: militancy of the workers at the factory level and the rise of the political party as an answer to the organizational problem of class unity. This unmediated split between the economic and the political shaped all sides of the debate during and after that period. In his theory, Bernstein would emphasize the 'economic' struggle and hence the critical need for trade union organization, while supporting in practice a party which acted only at the parliamentary level. The Bolsheviks and Lenin would attack this 'economism' and develop a theory of the autonomy of the political sphere which would explain social democracy at the same time that it would rationalize a centralized vanguard party acting in the name of the working class. In each case politics was brought in alongside the economic analysis of Marx (which all sides of the debate shared — though they differed in their interpretations).<sup>13</sup>

Despite being confined by this dichotomy to the sphere of political economy, the reading of *Capital* provided the basis for a key aspect of the Bernstein Debate: the theory of crisis. In his *Evolutionary Socialism*, Bernstein argued that according to his reading of *Capital* Marx's theory of economic crisis was predicated on a high level of anarchic competition between capitalists. Pointing to the rise of monopoly capital, he argued that the decline of competition reduced the anarchy of capital and made sufficient capitalist planning possible so that a crisis could be avoided.<sup>14</sup> As Lucio Colletti has pointed out, some such position as this was a natural response to the

<sup>12</sup> Such distinctions as to whether Marx was completing the work of the classical economists or remedying their errors preoccupied Henryk Grossman in his 'Marx, Classical Political Economy and the Problem of Dynamics', *Capital and Class* 2 (Summer 1977): 32–55.

<sup>13</sup> For further analysis of the relations discussed here, see Tronti, 'Workers and Capital': 31–37, and Sergio Bologna, 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Councils Movement', *Telos* 13 (Fall 1972): 14–21.

<sup>14</sup> Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism*.

failure of an expected crisis to occur before World War I and the resultant relatively long period of boom. It was also an economic theory which buttressed Bernstein's political position that emphasized 'economic' struggle and social democratic reformism.<sup>15</sup>

To these arguments Rosa Luxemburg responded with her own reading of *Capital* — first in *Reform or Revolution* (1900) and then in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), she argued the inevitability of crisis.<sup>16</sup> To build her argument she reversed Bernstein's reasoning to say that the rise of monopoly capital raised the level of capitalist anarchy to the conflict between nation-states and she produced a theory of imperialism that foreshadowed World War I. In *The Accumulation of Capital* she drew on the reproduction schemes of Volume II to argue the impossibility of smoothly expanding accumulation. Her economic theory, like Bernstein, supported her political position, in this case against reformism and for the preparation of violent revolution.

These works were the beginning of a long series of writings devoted to developing theories of crisis and imperialism based on the reading of *Capital* as political economy. Among the most important of the writers in this tradition during the period of the Second International and World War I were the Austrian Rudolf Hilferding, whose *Finanzkapital* appeared in 1910 and who like Bernstein tried to take into account the rise of monopoly and the expanded role of the banks; Otto Bauer, another Austrian, who critiqued Luxemburg's *Accumulation* in *Die Neue Zeit* (1913); and Nikolai Bukharin who published his *Imperialism* in 1915 (preceding and outdoing Lenin's of 1916).<sup>17</sup> After the Russian Revolution and World War I, with the exception of Bukharin who published an extended critique of Luxemburg's *Accumulation* in 1924, most of this kind of work was concentrated in Western Europe. In 1926 Fritz Sternberg published his *Imperialism* developing the Luxemburg approach.<sup>18</sup> Three years later in 1929, Henryk Grossman collected his lectures at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, into 'The Law of Accumulation and the Collapse of the Capitalist System'.<sup>19</sup> Both Sternberg and Grossman were critiqued by Natalie Moszkowska in her 'Theories of Crisis' (1935) and 'Dynamics of Late Capitalism' (1934).<sup>20</sup> Grossman, Bauer, and Luxemburg were all criticized in 1934 by the Dutch Marxist Anton Pannekoek. His fellow Council Communists, like Paul Mattick who moved to the United States in the 1930s, also contributed to these debates on the political economy of crisis and imperialism through such journals as *Ratekorrespondenz* and *Living Marxism*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Lucio Colletti, 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International', in his *From Rousseau to Lenin*.

<sup>16</sup> Rosa Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution* is made up of two articles published in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in 1898 and 1899.

<sup>17</sup> There is an underground English translation of Hilferding, but it has not yet appeared in print. [An English translation was published in 1981.] Otto Bauer's critique appeared in *Neue Zeit*, March 7–14, 1913.

<sup>18</sup> Fritz Sternberg, *Der Imperialismus*.

<sup>19</sup> Henryk Grossman, *Die Akkumulations und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des Kapitalistischen Systems*, not yet translated into English. [An abridged English translation was published in 1992.]

<sup>20</sup> Neither of Natalie Moszkowska's books (*Zur Kritik Moderner Krisentheorien* and *Zur Dynamik des Spätkapitalismus*) has been translated into English, but a short presentation of some of her argument can be found in Karl Schoer, 'Natalie Moszkowska and the Falling Rate of Profit', *New Left Review* 95 (January–February): 92–96.

<sup>21</sup> Anton Pannekoek, 'The Theory of the Collapse of Capitalism', *Capital and Class* 1 (Spring 1977): 59–82. This article was originally published in *Ratekorrespondenz* 1 (June 1934). For Paul Mattick's view, see his *Marx and Keynes* and the references in Peter Rachleff's recent book, *Marxism and Council Communism*.

The particular arguments of these debating authors varied considerably, either refuting, developing, or taking new directions from those who came earlier. But while their work can usefully be re-evaluated in terms of the political conjuncture and class composition of their times (and not by the usual sterile contrasting to Marx), the main point that concerns me is neither the variety nor the relative acuity of the analysis. It is rather that, despite the fact that most of these authors tried to take into account newly developing aspects of capital, their restriction of the scope of *Capital* and of the derived theories of crisis and imperialism to the realm of political economy both limited the comprehensiveness of their analysis, leaving major aspects of the system uncriticized, and made it one-sided: they analysed capitalist growth and accumulation independently of working-class initiative. Because of this it is of secondary importance that some of these authors endorsed social democracy and/or collaborated with capitalist governments (e.g. Bernstein, Kautsky, Hilferding, Bauer, Sternberg), while others endorsed a 'revolutionary' perspective (e.g. Luxemburg, Lenin, Pannekoek, Mattick). In all cases, by reading *Capital* as political economy they limited themselves to a critique of capitalist anarchical instability or exploitative nature. As a result they were bound to seek (by reform or revolution) the cure for these bad aspects of capitalism in socialist planning (either the central bureaucratic or the workers' council variety) and the end of private property. Of the authors mentioned, only the Council Communists developed a coherent critique of the emerging Soviet state as a collective capitalist planner.<sup>22</sup> This demand for the rationalization of capitalist anarchy has been characteristic of the entire Left. The Trotskyists, for example, who made no notable contribution to these debates during this period and totally embraced the state capitalist solution that emerged in response to the Russian Revolution, could only offer the extremely narrow and politically useless critique of Soviet bureaucracy (the one from which Leon Trotsky had been purged).

## Communist Marxism

In the Soviet Union itself, following the defeat of the 1917 revolution, the study of *Capital* in all forms, political economy or otherwise, was rapidly sterilized. Bukharin's critique of Luxemburg, published in 1924, was an exception soon to be excised under the Stalinist purges.<sup>23</sup> The supposed 'heroic period' of the application of Marxism to the problem of socialist accumulation in the middle 1920s was in fact one of the best examples of the attempt by Soviet capital to use Marx to justify its policies of exploitation and industrialization.<sup>24</sup> The study of Marx's works was replaced by the recitation of his major interpreters: Lenin and Stalin. As the Bolshevik party turned from the seizure of state power to the development of the socialist solution to revolution

<sup>22</sup> Racheff, *Marxism and Council Communism*.

<sup>23</sup> For Nikolai Bukharin's critique of Luxemburg, see his 'Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital', in *The Accumulation of Capital — an Anti-Critique* and K. Tarback, ed. *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital*.

<sup>24</sup> This term, 'the heroic period', is used by Horowitz in his introduction to the collection *Marx and Modern Economics*. He finds correctly, but incredibly notes approvingly, that 'the problems raised and the answers given in the U.S.S.R. anticipate to an astonishing degree the work done in the same field [industrialization or growth theory] at a much higher level of sophistication, within a different conceptual framework, by economists outside the Soviet orbit during the last two decades': 13).

— the planned orchestration of accumulation — it moved to dismantle any independence of the worker soviets and to impose a new discipline of work and maximized production. In this movement the Leninism of centralized party power was emphasized over their Marxist analysis of the nature of exploitation in class society. Marx's works, especially *Capital*, were after all an analysis of capitalism and had not capitalism been overthrown in the Soviet Union and later in China? What relevance could *Capital* have for the development of socialism? Better to focus on the writings of the new architects of socialism. Stalin, for one, explicitly argued that Leninism was the fullest development of Marxism and that the study of Marx's texts could be dispensed with.<sup>25</sup> This clearly served the ideological purposes of avoiding too close a scrutiny of the relation between capitalism and socialism, especially the similarities of state repression and working-class struggles in both systems.

Among the more respectable 'Marxists' whose reinterpretation of Marx played an important part in his abandonment in the East was the Polish economist Oskar Lange. Lange, who became chairman of the Economic Council of Poland, early on in his career (1935) reduced the 'significance' of Marxism to its ability to provide a long-run view of the evolutionary tendencies of capitalism. He completely jettisoned Marx's theory of value as being an inadequate, general equilibrium model of exchange and declared, quite correctly and more honestly than many Eastern economists, that Marshallian economics 'offers more for the current administration of the economic system of Soviet Russia than Marxian economics does'. Given that Lange's problem, like that of other socialist administrators, was the organization of capital accumulation, he was quite right that neo-classical economics offers more precise tools for the extraction of surplus value — at least when those administrators have the power to use them.<sup>26</sup>

In China, also, as the peasant revolution grew in strength, and with it the power and prestige of Mao Tse-tung, Marx was an often evoked but unstudied authority. In his place stood Chairman Mao whose essays, pamphlets, and quotations, rather than Marx's writings, provided the main material for discussion among both cadre and the masses. As a result of such development, reference to Marx became primarily a religious gesture. Indeed the title 'Marxist' was largely replaced by the term 'Marxist-Leninist', with the emphasis overwhelmingly on the second term.

If this nonreading of Marx had been only a disappearance of Marxism, it would have been one thing. But communist leaders, both in the socialist countries and in their allied parties abroad, have also turned their interpretation of Marx into a weapon against workers. Domestically and internationally, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has continued its dedication not to encouraging revolution but to containing it. Within Mother Russia, Soviet Marxism was used in the 1920s and 1930s to justify the crushing of both peasantry and industrial workers in the name of socialist accumulation. When working-class and peasant revolt broke out in the new Eastern European satellites

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Douglas Kellner, 'Korsch's Revolutionary Historicism', *Telos* 26 (Winter 1975-1976): 70-93. As Kellner points out, even Korsch endorsed Stalin's position in the early 1920s.

<sup>26</sup> Oskar Lange, 'Marxian Economics and Modern Economic Theory', *Review of Economic Studies*, June 1935; reprinted in *Marx and Modern Economics*, ed. Horowitz: 68-87.

in the 1950s, Soviet Marxism was used again to justify intervention and repression, of which the crushing of the Hungarian revolution was only the most obvious example. Even in the 1960s, when the Soviet and Eastern European communists introduced their own brand of communist Keynesianism, to foster growth with some increase in real wages, the aim was still control, as the invasion of Czechoslovakia pointed up. Only the Soviet government's provision of arms to Vietnam and its economic support for Cuba gave the illusion of supporting its claims to be a progressive pro-revolutionary force in the world. Elsewhere in the Third World and in Europe the role of the Moscow-oriented Communist parties and their orthodox Marxism were blatantly reactionary and counterrevolutionary.

Nowhere was this more obvious than in Latin America and parts of Asia where the Party took strong positions in support of local groups of capitalists and against revolutionary movements to destroy them. Here their Marxist political economy was employed to argue that the real enemy was feudalism and that its overthrow by the emerging middle classes was necessary to strengthen the capitalist nation-state against other imperial powers and to lay the basis for some future nationalistic socialist revolution which just might be achieved peaceably. In Latin America this took the form of opposition to the generalization of the Cuban model of rural guerrilla insurgency and of support for social democracy.<sup>27</sup> In India this took the form of support for the Congress Party and its development plans which were deemed progressive vis-à-vis the Indian landholding elite.<sup>28</sup>

On the European continent, as the struggle of industrial workers, immigrant workers, students, women, and peasants accelerated in the 1960s, they came into increasing conflict with Party policy. As a result political and theoretical breakaways occurred repeatedly as they had elsewhere. Such events as the worker and student upheavals in France in May 1968 or Italy's Hot Autumn in 1969 brought out the growing separation between the struggles and the Communist Party/trade union hierarchies. In both cases the Party sided with the bourgeoisie against the workers. By its actions it showed its own bankruptcy as an organ of working-class struggle. By its attempts at ideological justification of its own role and of Soviet imperialism, it showed the bankruptcy of its political strategy and of its ossified interpretation of Marxism. As elsewhere, these developments led to the growth of new organizational and theoretical alternatives — and both would involve a reevaluation of a Marx freed from Party scholasticism and opportunism.

## Neo-Marxist Keynesianism and the New Left

Emerging at first parallel to this tradition of Marxist political economy and then joining with it at certain points was the work of a number of Western economists whose work

**27** It is not hard to see the combination of Soviet pressure on local Communist Parties to reject insurgency, in combination with its economic aid to Cuba to help it develop at home, as amounting to a major contribution to the capitalist stabilization of Latin America.

**28** The position of the Communist Party of India varied considerably over time, but after the aborted Telengana Revolt (1946–1951), it became, for the most part, a staunch ally of the Congress. This position resulted in multiple splits producing the CPI-M and various CPI-MLs and lasted right up through the Ghandian Emergency.

before and during World War II was sharply influenced by the rapidly changing composition of the working class and the rise of the Keynesian state. These included such authors as Michael Kalecki, Joan Robinson, Paul Sweezy, and Paul Baran. Kalecki's work on the political business cycle anticipated much of Keynes' own efforts but was developed with a distinct Marxist flavour despite his non-use of the Marxian categories of *Capital*.<sup>29</sup> In Joan Robinson's *Essay on Marxian Economics* (1942), Marx is re-evaluated positively vis-à-vis classical orthodoxy but found to contain certain limitations where 'it is necessary to call in Keynes' analysis to complete' his theories. In the process she completely rejects Marx's labour theory of value as 'much ado about nothing' and recasts his work within the framework of aggregate Keynesian variables. In her later work, helping to develop the so-called Cambridge Theory, she added to her use of Keynes and Kalecki the work of Piero Sraffa, whose models of the production of commodities by commodities are partly based on Marx's reproduction schemes but lead in quite different directions.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most important, because the most politically influential, of Western economists who evolved from a strictly neo-classical analysis toward some form of Marxism have been Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran. Sweezy's work on Marxian political economy is not only some of the best done by economists influenced by Marx but it also typifies the problems raised by a nonorthodox political economy reading of *Capital*. Sweezy's first major contribution to the literature of Marxian political economy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, appeared in 1942<sup>31</sup> and constitutes an extremely informative link between the older tradition of debate over crises and imperialism that I sketched above and the newer neo-Marxism of those like Kalecki and Robinson, who were heavily influenced by the changing social relations of the Great Depression and sympathetic to Keynesian theoretical approaches. In his book Sweezy passes in review not only Marx's 'economics' but also the major interpreters of Marx from Bernstein to Grossman. The outcome of his review and thinking was to reinterpret Marx's theory of crisis into a form of underconsumptionism very close to that of Bauer, whom he found to be 'essentially correct' and whom he reformulated and corrected in the mathematical terms of modern growth theory.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately his work can be seen to be even closer to that of Keynes, whose language and forms of analysis he increasingly adopted. Perhaps most obvious in this regard is his collaboration with Shigeto Tsuru, whose direct translation of Marxism into Keynesian concepts is included in the book as an appendix.<sup>33</sup> In the development of Sweezy's work we can see that, while his Marxism represented a rupture with his prior orthodox economics, the theory

**29** See Michael Kalecki's *Essays in the Theory of Economic Fluctuations*, *Studies in Economic Dynamics*, and *Theory of Economic Dynamics*.

**30** See Joan Robinson, *An Essay on Marxian Economics*, and her article 'Marx and Keynes', *Critica Economica*, November 1948, reprinted in *Marx and Modern Economics*, ed. Horowitz: 103–116. Robinson's views on Marx have remained virtually unchanged over the last thirty years. For a recent statement of them, see her review of Ronald Meek's *Studies in the Labor Theory of Value* in *Monthly Review* 29, no. 7 (December 1977): 50–59, where she briefly summarises her own position and that of Sraffa.

**31** Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*.

**32** *Ibid.*: 186–189.

**33** *Ibid.*: 365–374. Also see Shigeto Tsuru, 'Keynes versus Marx: The Methodology of Aggregates', in *Marx and Modern Economics*, ed. Horowitz.

he developed, insofar as it moved beyond the old debates, ultimately tried to reconcile Marx's views with those of the new Keynesian macroeconomics. In so doing he joined Kalecki and Robinson in abandoning Marx's value analysis as the basis of his analytical work. Like the work of these other authors, Sweezy's evolution can be interpreted to have developed as a moment in the general process of disillusionment which accompanied the rise of fascism and the successful Keynesian response to the working-class struggles of the 1930s, first with the Second World War and then later with the defeat of the united fronts in Europe by the Marshall Plan, the collapse of the post-war strike wave in the United States, and the emergence of a new period of capitalist growth within the context of the new American empire. All this certainly must help explain Sweezy's abandonment of the Marxian theoretical framework in favour of that of ascendant Keynesianism. Added to this in Sweezy's case was also the growing dissatisfaction which he shared with many others over the continued excesses of Stalinism — a phenomenon that also seemed to point up the inability of Marxism to explain and predict the pattern of socialist development.<sup>34</sup>

Nor did Sweezy work alone in this loss of faith in the core of Marxist theory. Economist Paul Baran of Stanford University, who became his closest collaborator, shared these doubts. In both Baran's *Political Economy of Growth*, published in 1956, and their joint work, *Monopoly Capital*, which appeared in 1964, the basic analytical weapons brought to bear in analysing capitalist development in underdeveloped and developed countries were variants of orthodox neo-classical and Keynesian political economy.<sup>35</sup> Marxism was, for the most part, reduced to supplying the rhetoric and the moral background of these works.

In the *Political Economy of Growth*, for example, Baran not only bases his discussion of monopoly capital on the neo-classical theory of the market behaviour of the monopoly firm, but also quite explicitly throws out Marx's concept of surplus value (and thus that of value) and substitutes a generic concept of surplus which can fit almost any orthodox growth theory model.<sup>36</sup> At the same time that he made a lasting contribution by explaining the 'roots of backwardness' in the underdeveloped world in terms of the imperialist extraction of its surplus, he did so in a way which ignored both value and the class relations which it expresses. He thus laid the basis for a paradigm of underdevelopment devoid of an analysis of the struggles between classes. Similarly, in *Monopoly Capital*, Baran and Sweezy redeploy the surplus concept and study what they think is the problem of its 'disposal' in terms of the limitations they find in the ability of Keynesian fiscal and monetary policy to manipulate aggregate

<sup>34</sup> For an analysis of the history of Sweezy's position on the Soviet Union and China, see Peter Clecak, *Radical Paradoxes*.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*, and Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*.

<sup>36</sup> Baran's concept of 'actual surplus' is simply the Keynesian savings out of current income available for investment. His much maligned concept of 'potential surplus' is in some ways more interesting. Although his definitions of 'essential' consumption and 'potential' output are the creations of his own notions of rationality, which he juxtaposes to the irrationality of capitalism, they are nevertheless at least suggestive of a working-class viewpoint. It is true that capital has its own 'rationality' and that it is futile to moralistically label it 'irrational' as Baran and Sweezy do. But it is also true that the working class has its own rationality and one can, quite legitimately, do as Marx did and point out how capital does not respond to working-class needs.



demand. In this way they continue a trend started in their earlier works of seeing the problem of surplus not in terms of both its production and realization but only in terms of the latter. This would seem to reflect their evaluation of the post-war working class as having been first defeated and then bought off by capital, in such a manner that its struggles in production had been neutralized, so that the only hope for revolution was seen to be in the Third World and in the nonworking-class groups of blacks and students in the developed world.

Given the circumstances in which they found themselves in the 1950s and the bankrupt nature of the ossified version of Marxism as political economy to which they fell heir, these developments, even if regrettable, are certainly understandable. Indeed, one can argue persuasively that in those years a careful reading of Keynes was undoubtedly more enlightening as to the reality of early post-war capitalism than any reading of orthodox Marxism.<sup>37</sup>

During the cycle of struggles of the 1960s, despite these limitations, and perhaps partly because of their rejection of Marxism as it was then being interpreted, Baran and Sweezy's books appeared to provide a distinct alternative to the orthodox neo-classical synthesis, to orthodox Marxist political economy, and to the politics both implied.

In the United States, where sectarian Marxism had long since been discredited by the time of the rise of the civil rights, the black power, the women's power, the welfare rights, and the antiwar movements, the 'New Left' found in such neo-marxist theories as those of Baran and Sweezy a more appealing and useful interpretation than those of the old dogmatisms. Seeing their time as full of new developments, the New Left saw their struggles as falling into the realm of revolt against alienation, or discrimination and imperialism, products of a stifling, increasingly regimented 'industrial society', or of sexism and racism *per se*. Baran and Sweezy's analysis provided an account of capitalist crisis which put the onus for current problems on an irrational 'system' and explained the Vietnam war as the outcome of American imperialism. Yet at the same time the analysis of capitalist crisis remained locked within the old categories of political economy. Baran and Sweezy, and those who followed them, still defined the working class only as wage workers and thus identified the struggles of unemployed Black Panthers, militant Students for a Democratic Society, radical feminists, or welfare rights activists as being outside that class.<sup>38</sup> All that could be seen of the working class within this perspective were the hard-hat attacks on antiwar demonstrators. What place could there be for Marx in a vision in which the working class had sold out and allied with the capitalist class and the only true revolutionaries were nonworking-class students, women, Third World minorities,

**37** The persistence of most Marxist political economists in criticizing bourgeois economists like Keynes because they are not Marxists (for example, see Mattick's *Marx and Keynes*) is, to my mind, regrettable. The real interest in Keynes or any other author is what we can learn about the nature and parameters of the class conflict and the strategies used in it. From the point of view of those engaged in struggle, whether workers or capitalists, Keynes' work was not essentially theoretical; it was strategic. And if today we are in a post-Keynesian world it is not because his 'theories' are deficient, but because his strategies have been defeated by the working class.

**38** This shows up clearly in their book *Monopoly Capital* and in the pages of Sweezy's journal, *Monthly Review*.

and peasants? In the place of the vision of the working class as the major protagonist in the struggle emerged that of 'the people'.

This critical activist rejection of what was then traditional Marxist theory was an important point of reference for the new generation of radical intellectuals that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s. These intellectuals were in the beginning overwhelmingly non-Marxist but were united by their opposition to the policies of capitalism at home and abroad. They faced the need to explain the global scope of counterinsurgency efforts of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations that had such misleading titles as the New Frontier, the Alliance for Progress, and the Great Society. They also sought to understand the rising global resistance to these efforts that was spreading under the banner of Guevarra's battle cry, 'Two, three, many Vietnams!' and guided by Lin Piao's prescription for rural guerrilla warfare to 'surround the cities'.

Their response to these phenomena was twofold. On the one hand, these activists-turned-intellectuals looked inward and discovered the ways in which the universities and academic disciplines were heavily involved in supporting the system at home and overseas.<sup>39</sup> They consequently focused much of their attention on those institutions, producing shut-it-down strikes and a new wave of militancy. On the other hand, they sought to theorize these phenomena and gathered together in new groupings of alternative professional organizations, such as the Union for Radical Political Economists. United more by their opposition to a dominant social order and its theoretical paradigms than by a coherent vision of their own — Marxist or otherwise — they nevertheless began serious study of the cycle of struggles in which they were involved. As they did, many turned to political economy and sought to develop the theories of Baran and Sweezy.

Important among the results of the elaboration of neo-Marxist political economy were the theories of those like Andre Gunder Frank who helped develop the alternative theory of imperialism and revolution. Frank and others argued that the feudalism attacked by the orthodox Marxists in Latin America and Asia was an illusion. Capitalism was and had been from the beginning an international system which incorporated all prior social systems into itself — into an international hierarchy of metropolises and satellite relations. These theories implied the rejection of the Communist Party's support for local bourgeois forces. These last were seen as mere comprador, or caretaker, capitalists, lower-level managers of the international capitalist system. Support for them could only mean support for the system as a whole and a reduction rather than an increase in the possibilities of successful working-class revolution.<sup>40</sup>

These theories were more in tune with the interests of workers and peasants than those of the Old Left. They expressed more accurately both the new cycle of struggles

<sup>39</sup> For an example of this kind of strategic evaluation of the political role of the universities that laid the basis for action against them, see Anne Bauer and Harry Cleaver, 'Minority Report on the Stanford Research Institute', in *The Radical Attack on Business*, ed. Charles Perrow.

<sup>40</sup> See Andre Gunder Frank's *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America, Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpenddevelopment*, and 'Not Feudalism — Capitalism', *Monthly Review* (December 1963): 468–478. Also see Martin Nicolaus, 'Who Will Bring the Mother Down?' in *Readings in U.S. Imperialism*, eds. K. T. Fann and D. C. Hodges, and *Monthly Review* generally.

and its international dimension. And in general they supported the revolutionary upheavals among the peasantry, as well as among blacks, students, and women, identifying both capitalism and orthodox communism as the enemy. Yet at the same time they were theoretically weak in many ways. Not based either on Marx or directly on contemporary bourgeois economic theory, their formulations of the mechanisms and dynamics of imperialism were an inconsistent mélange of Marxist rhetoric about exploitation and dependency and of bourgeois trade and Keynesian development theory. Unwilling to accept the tools of bourgeois theory outright yet having abandoned Marx's theories of value and surplus value, their writings were sometimes brilliant with insights but often murky in construction and weak in logical consistency.

### The revival of orthodoxy

As a result of these weaknesses, these New Left political economists left themselves open to counterattack from the Old Left on the terrain of political economy from at least two different directions. The first aspect of the riposte came through the employment of the conceptual foil of 'mode of production' against their failure to integrate their theory of a global capitalist economic system linked by trade and capital flows with a theory of production which could explain the vast variation in production conditions within that system. To this problem of the specificity of production relationships — which was particularly marked in the Third World — French Communist Party theoretician Louis Althusser and those he influenced brought the concept of different but articulated modes of production where one mode dominated others.<sup>41</sup> Ernesto Laclau, for example, directly attacked Frank's work on Latin America by zeroing in on the structural differences between the forms, or modes, of production in urban capitalist industry and in rural agricultural society still dominated by mini- or latifundias.<sup>42</sup> The success of this thrust can be measured by the degree to which the analysis of struggles in the Third World has been replaced by a debate over the exact specification of 'peripheral social formations' or of the nature of the mode of production in various agricultures. Not only has this new histomat (historical materialism) been reanimated as a weapon of the Communist Party but it also has been accepted as the theoretical ground of debate by a wide variety of leftist writers both within and without the Old Left parties — including a number of Marxist anthropologists, sociologists, and political economists.<sup>43</sup> Debate has been particularly prolonged in Latin America and Asia where it has profound political significance for strategy.<sup>44</sup> But it has also permeated certain circles of political economists in the United States and Western Europe where its political ramifications are less direct but

<sup>41</sup> Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar's *Reading Capital* was one of the opening shots in this counterattack. The philosophical and political underpinnings will be briefly examined in the next section.

<sup>42</sup> Ernesto Laclau, 'Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America', *New Left Review* 67 (1971): 19–38.

<sup>43</sup> Among the better known of the Marxist anthropologists who have been deeply affected by these concepts are Claude Meillassoux, Maurice Godelier, Emmanuel Terray, and Pierre-Phillippe Rey.

<sup>44</sup> For a summary and critique of the Indian debate, see Harry Cleaver, 'The Internationalization of Capital and the Mode of Production in Agriculture', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 27, 1976: A2–A16. For part of the Latin American debate, see *Latin American Perspectives* 1, no 1 (Spring 1974), Special Issue: 'Dependency Theory: A Reassessment'.

the underlying conflicts are as real. Attempts to reconcile the neo-Marxist political economy of those like Baran, Sweezy, and Frank with such 'mode of production' analysis — such as the attempts by Samir Amin — have produced only incoherent eclectic conglomerations.<sup>45</sup>

The other side of the attack on neo-Marxist political economy by a renovated orthodoxy has been in the economic theory of capitalism, especially in the political economy of crisis. This has occurred mainly in the developed world during the current international crisis where the role of the peasantry is vastly less important and the national economies are generally agreed by all concerned to be overwhelmingly capitalist. For all the flood of literature in this attack — which has constituted an important moment of the current revival of Marxist political economy — it has represented for the most part not a return to Marx but a return to the framework and problems of pre-World War II Marxism. We find during the last few years only revised versions of theories of the past. From an older generation have come writers like Ernest Mandel, theorist of the Trotskyist Fourth International, and Paul Mattick, the last of the original Council Communists.<sup>46</sup> From a younger generation have sprung those like Mario Cogoy, David Yaffe, or Michael Kidron.<sup>47</sup> Wielding the weapons of traditional interpretations of Marx's theory of value and, often, of his theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall against neo-Marxism's Keynesian underconsumptionism, they have forced it to fall back and regroup.

Backtracking before this onslaught, Sweezy has reformulated his arguments in Marxist rather than Keynesian terms and relaunched his particular version of underconsumptionist theory of crisis against these foes.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, this refurbished theory uses the same basic concepts of value as do his opponents. As a result we find many of the battles of the period 1900–1940 being fought over again in almost exactly the same terms with which they were fought years ago. This arcane spectacle is a bizarre one and has a distinct macabre character. One might have expected to find the 'reappropriation' of Marxism to be something like an exercise in archaeology designed to uncover the nature of the political weapons developed during the history of class conflict with an eye to their possible usefulness today in a time of crisis. Instead what we find all too often is an exercise in necromancy in which one or

<sup>45</sup> Samir Amin's basic idea to analyse the subject in *The Accumulation of Capital on a World Scale* is magnificent. Unfortunately, despite points of brilliance and insight, the way he jumps back and forth between theoretical frameworks, Marxist here, bourgeois there, makes of the book a cut-and-paste patchwork without any internal consistency. In short, he completely fails to integrate neo-Marxian Keynesianism with either a mode-of-production approach or a Marxist value theory.

<sup>46</sup> See Ernest Mandel's books, *Marxist Economic Theory* and *Late Capitalism*, as well as his 'Where Is America Going', in *Readings in U.S. Imperialism*, eds. Fann and Hodges, and 'The Laws of Uneven Development', *New Left Review*, January–February 1970: 19–38. For Paul Mattick's attack on Baran and Sweezy, see his 'Marxism and "Monopoly Capital"', *Progressive Labor* 6, no. 1 (May 1967): 34–49.

<sup>47</sup> Mario Cogoy, 'Les Théories neo-Marxistes, Marx et l'accumulation du capital', *Les Temps Modernes* 314–315 (September–October 1972): 396–426, and 'The Fall of the Rate of Profit and the Theory of Accumulation of Capital: A Reply to Paul Sweezy', *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists* (Winter 1973): 52–67; David Yaffe, 'Marxian Theory of Crisis, Capital and the State', *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists* (Winter 1972): 5–58; and Michael Kidron, *Western Capitalism since the War*.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Sweezy, 'On the Theory of Monopoly Capitalism', *Monthly Review* 23, no. 11 (April 1972): 1–23, and 'Some Problems in the Theory of Capital Accumulation', *Monthly Review* 25, no. 12.

another long-dead spirit is summoned from the grave to direct the battles of the present. One might have expected to find attempts to grasp the theories and practice of these great historical figures of Marxism within the class struggles of their time as input into the solving of our own problems (and leaving them at rest once the lessons they have to teach us have been learned). Instead time and again we see a very un-Marxist blindness to the historical specificity of our period and a desire to find the key to the present somewhere in the past.

## The limits of political economy

We thus find in this current literature all the fundamental limitations of reading Marx as political economy that have plagued the approach from the beginning. Whether in the case of orthodoxy, revisionism, or neo-Marxism, the field of examination is strictly confined to economics, and Marxism as political economy becomes at best an ideological prop to political positions which are brought in alongside these critiques of capitalism. In each case we can see how the various authors remain locked into a world where concepts designate abstract relations and the source of crisis or imperialism is to be found in the system's mysterious economic 'laws of motion' that regulate the behaviour of the capitalist class.

What we have here is a reading of *Capital* that is not only limited to being a passive interpretation, but which also, by restricting itself to the 'economic' sphere or 'base' effectively, makes of political economy the theory of the capitalist factory and its waged workers alone.<sup>49</sup> This has the effect of excluding the rest of society from the analysis — not only the state and party politics but also the unemployed, the family, the school, health care, the media, art, and so on. As a result political economists who would try to take these things into account find themselves rummaging through Marx's writings looking for suggestive tidbits of 'other' theories.<sup>50</sup> Yet it is precisely in these 'other' social spheres that many of the major social conflicts of today are occurring. At the turn of the century, when working-class struggle was located primarily (but not uniquely by any means) in the factory, there was perhaps some excuse for reading *Capital* as a theoretical model of the capitalist factory. But as a result of the extensive social engineering of the 1920s and 1930s through which capitalist social planners sought to restructure virtually all of society, and as a result of the nature of recent social struggles against such planning, such interpretations today are grossly inadequate. The New Left correctly sensed this and avoided orthodox interpretations. The inadequacy of both orthodox and neo-Marxist theories became abundantly clear in the late 1960s. Both were unequipped to explain the revolts of the unwaged and were forced to appeal to ad hoc solutions. Orthodoxy revived historical materialism and

<sup>49</sup> 'Capitalist factory' is used here as a metaphor for the whole network of industrial firms which constitutes industrial capital. It is in these firms that the 'productive' workers are said to be found, and it is what happens in the production and sale of the commodities these waged workers produce that is generally considered to determine all else.

<sup>50</sup> Some of these efforts will be examined in the next section. The two areas of social life outside the factory which have probably received the most attention by political economists have been the school and the home. For an example, see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*; Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*; and Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming, eds. *All Work and No Pay*.

tried to shove peasant revolts into the box of pre-capitalist modes of production. Student revolts were classified as either petty bourgeois or lumpen. Women's revolts were within the framework of some 'domestic' mode of production. All were thus set aside as unimportant secondary phenomena because they were not truly working class. This of course set up the Party once again as the mediating interpreter of the real working-class interests and justified the attempt to repress or co-opt these struggles.

Although the neo-Marxism of the New Left made these struggles central to its notion of revolution, it fared little better theoretically. Because it accepted orthodoxy's exclusion of these groups from the working class, all it could offer were vague evocations of 'the people's' interests. In as much as either they fell outside the 'economic' sphere or their place within it was obscure, these revolts had to be seen as by-products of the general irrationality of the system. We can thus see that one great weakness of reading Marx as political economy has been to isolate and reduce his analysis to that of the factory. But if this is a weakness which has made both orthodox and neo-Marxism utterly incapable of accounting for the present crisis, it is not the only problem.

Even more important is the one-sidedness of all these analyses, from those of the Second International right up through the contemporary debates on crisis theory. This one-sidedness lies in the limited way in which the working class, however defined, makes an appearance in these models. When it appears on the scene at all, it comes in from the outside and usually as a victim fighting defensive battles. This is why I would label the Marxist or neo-Marxist categories employed in these models 'reified'. They are 'reified' in that instead of being understood as designating social relations between the classes they have been turned into designations of things, things within capital separate from the social relation. In fact the concept of capital itself in these models usually designates not the class relation (that is sometimes thrown in as an afterthought) but rather the means of production, money capital, commodity capital, and labour power, all circulating as mindless entities through the ups and downs of their circuits. Where does the impulse to movement, technological change, or expansion come from in these models? Why, it comes from within capital, of course, usually the blind result of competition among capitalists. When competition breaks down in monopoly capital, Marxists like Baran, Sweezy, and Josef Steindl deduce a necessary tendency to stagnation. In either case the working class is only a spectator to the global waltz of capital's autonomous self-activating development.

This was not Marx's view of the world. Not only did he repeatedly insist that capital was a social relation of classes, but he also explicitly stated that at the level of the class the so-called economic relations were in fact political relations:

Every movement in which the working class comes out *as a class* against the ruling classes and attempts to force them by pressure from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory or even a particular industry to force a shorter working day out of the capitalists by strikes, etc., is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force an eight hour day, etc., *law* is a *political* movement. And in this way, out of the separate

economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a *political* movement, that is to say a movement of the *class*, with the object of achieving its interests in a general form, in a form possessing a general social force of compulsion.<sup>51</sup>

The point here is that as the struggle for the eight-hour day develops, as it becomes generalized, it moves beyond the particular demands of a narrowly defined group of workers and becomes a demand of the whole class and thus political. This corresponds to a historical movement which begins with the demands of a quantitatively small number of workers but which circulates to become a new qualitative focal point of the class struggle. Such demands spread if they correspond to the underlying social conditions of the class generally. Marx sought out and analysed several of these struggles — over the length of the working day, the intensity of work, productivity, mechanization, the social wage, and so on. In *Capital* he lays out both the specific history of their development in England and their general place within capital, that is, within the overall class struggle. From the time when these areas of contention become generalized, they are branded as class and hence political relations. At any given moment particular groups of workers may or may not be actively struggling for one or another demand, but if they do, the individual struggle at each factory or industry can no longer be considered an isolated ‘purely economic’ struggle but must be grasped as a part of the whole, as a political struggle for power. Today we can see this even more clearly than in Marx’s time because of the transformed role of the state. The rise of the Keynesian state has meant the virtual merging of not only the state and the ‘economy’ but of the state and ‘society’ itself.

This is a second fundamental danger of reading Marx as political economy and as ideology. We are presented with elaborately detailed critical interpretations of this self-activating monster in a way that completely ignores the way actual working-class power forces and checks capitalist development. Marx saw how the successful struggle for a shorter working day caused a crisis for capital. These political economists do not: they see absolute surplus value as a reified abstract concept. Marx saw how that struggle forced the development of productivity-raising innovations which raised the organic composition of capital. He thus saw relative surplus value as a strategic capitalist response. These political economists do not: they see only competition between capitalists. Marx saw how workers’ wage struggles could help precipitate capitalist crises. These political economists see only abstract ‘laws of motion’.<sup>52</sup> These kinds of interpretations glorify the dynamic of capital, however evil, and portray

<sup>51</sup> Marx to Bolte, London, November 23, 1871, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Correspondence 1846–1895*: 315–319.

<sup>52</sup> There are today a few political economists who have begun to see that the power of the working class does play a role in the emergence of capitalist crisis. Unfortunately, they remain bound within the terms of Marx’s discussion of *Values, Price and Profit* and Chapter 25 of *Capital* (Volume I), where these struggles are essentially over distributive shares, are at best responsible for inflation, and are always effectively checked by capitalist crisis. See, for example, A. Glyn and B. Sutcliffe, *British Capitalism, Workers and the Profits Squeeze*; R. Boddy and J. Crotty, ‘Class Conflict, Keynesian Policies, and the Business Cycle’, *Monthly Review* 26, no. 5 (October 1974): 1–17; and John G. Gurley, ‘Unemployment and Inflation’, *Monthly Review* 29, no. 7 (December 1977): 23–29.

the working class as a hapless victim. Because of this, even if one wishes to see ideological critique as a weapon in the class struggle, one must conclude that such theories which accord all power to capital can only be in its interest. Such critiques are particularly well suited to the needs of Leninist parties or any other elitist groups which would present themselves as the only solution for the class. If the class is powerless in the ‘economic’ struggle, as the theories say, then its only solution is obviously ‘to join the Party and smash the state’. How this mass of hapless victims is to achieve such a feat would seem to be a mystery understood only by the Party hierarchy, who will provide the necessary leadership and wisdom. But the truth is that the class is not powerless at all and that the Party leaders seek to mobilize its power as a prelude to taking control themselves and becoming the managers of a rationalized, planned ‘socialist’ economy in which the workers, they hope, will work even harder than before.

Because of these limitations and dangers of political economy readings of *Capital* there have been those who have tried to go beyond them. The first limitation — the inability of Marxist political economy to grasp the full scope of capitalist social relations outside the factory and the consequent inability to explain the social crises of the mid-twentieth century — opened political economy historically to a deep critique that was developed over several decades by a number of Marxists seeking to fill the void. Their efforts will be examined in the next section. We will see that the second and deeper failure — to ignore the working class — runs through the work not only of the political economists but of their critics as well.

## Reading Marx philosophically

The tradition of reading Marx as a philosopher is at least as old, and much more varied, as that of reading him as a political economist. During the Marxist revival of the 1960s and 1970s the tradition of philosophical Marxism has occupied a prominent place. Within that tradition we can outline two general tendencies: orthodox and revisionist. The first, by far the narrowest, is that adopted by communist Marxism: dialectical materialism whose evolution runs from Engels’ work through the Stalinist era to its latest ‘reformulation’ by Althusser and followers. The revisionist tendency, much broader and more complex, regroups all those attempts to reinterpret Marx in the light of other philosophers and of new elements in the development of capitalism. Included here must be such diverse currents as the so-called Western Marxism of György Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, and Karl Korsch, who all emphasized Hegel’s influence on Marx; the neo-Kantianism of Galvano Delavolpe and Lucio Colletti; the Marxist Hegelianism of Jean Hyppolite and Alexandre Kojève; the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty; the phenomenological Marxism of Tran Duc Thao and Karel Kosik; and the critical theory of those associated with the Frankfurt School for example, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas. The vast sweep of philosophical questions investigated by these authors, orthodox or revisionist, defies any short summary of this tradition,



as was possible with political economy. In lieu of such a summary, I will discuss briefly two elements of this tradition to illustrate some of the limitations of reading Marx as a philosopher: (a) the contemporary attempt to revive *diamat* (dialectical materialism) through a ‘philosophical’ reading of *Capital* by Louis Althusser, and (b) some aspects of the analysis of the ‘cultural sphere’ of advanced capitalism in Western Marxism and critical theory.

### Born-again orthodoxy

It is unfortunate but true that one of the most politically important of the philosophical readings of *Capital* in this period is that of Louis Althusser, a leading theoretician of the French Communist Party. In *For Marx* (1965) and *Reading Capital* (1965), Althusser and his colleagues set out to reinterpret the full sweep of Marx’s opus from his youth to his maturity with the aim of revitalizing dialectical materialism as an ideology to mediate the widely discredited political practices of the French Communist Party.<sup>53</sup> Their work represents the most thorough attempt of the old orthodox Marxism to cleanse itself and recoup the ground lost during previous decades.

As the orthodox version of Marxism-as-philosophy, *diamat* dates from Engels’ formulations in *Anti-Dühring*, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, and the *Dialectics of Nature*.<sup>54</sup> In those works he sought to expand Marx’s analysis of capital into a universal philosophical system which would englobe not only the entirety of human history but the entire cosmos of the natural world as well. This project meant a return to the terrain of debate with German idealism that Marx had abandoned after completing the *Holy Family*, the *German Ideology*, and his study of Feuerbach.<sup>55</sup> Ignoring the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach with which Marx had closed his accounts with philosophy, Engels undertook a reinterpretation of the relation between Marx and Hegel that presented ‘Marxism’ as both a reversal and a correction of the Hegelian system. Confusing both Hegel and Marx’s critique, Engels interpreted Marx’s formula that the Hegelian dialectic was ‘standing on its head’ and ‘must be turned right side up again if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell’ as saying that Hegel’s dialectic was a method (the rational kernel) that could be extricated from his idealism (the mystical shell) and applied within a framework of materialism — thus the formulation ‘dialectical materialism’. This interpretation understood the idealism of Hegel as being an affirmation that only ideas were real and material reality merely a pale reflection of those ideas. According to Engels, materialism reversed the relation, making ideas a reflection of material reality. But this constituted a complete misreading of Hegel’s concept of ‘real’, which referred not to existence but to logic. Instead of seeing that Hegel’s *Zeitgeist* was ultimately a philosophical formulation of the dialectic of capital and that his idealism lay in the perception of an infinite capacity to logically resolve

<sup>53</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, and Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*.

<sup>54</sup> *Anti-Dühring* was written in 1876–78, *Ludwig Feuerbach* in 1886, and the *Dialectics of Nature* over the period of 1873 to 1883.

<sup>55</sup> Marx and Engels wrote ‘The Holy Family or a Critique of Critical Criticism’ in 1844 (*Collected Works*, IV: 5–211); they wrote ‘The German Ideology’ in 1845–46 (*Collected Works*, V: 19–539); and Marx wrote ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ in 1845 (*Collected Works*, V: 3–5).

the contradictions within capitalist society, Engels thought the problem was to adapt that dialectic to the analysis of the world. He thus set a pattern, which in some quarters survives to this day, of understanding the dialectic not as a characteristic of capital that working-class struggle seeks to destroy but rather as a universal logic and method to be adopted! Ironically, Engels, and those who followed him, thus preserved in a distorted way the Hegelian vision of a dialectical cosmos — a vision that can be seen as an optimistic moment of bourgeois philosophy that theorizes capital's tendency to impute and impose its own logic on the world.

Once the dialectic was divorced from capital, once materialism was no longer understood as the working class's ability to destroy capital's idealism but as 'matter' in the abstract, once, in short, the dialectical form was divorced from its content, Engels could apply that form anywhere: in the analysis of both nature and human history. In the former case, as Lucio Colletti has usefully shown, the result was little more than a pretentious reworking of Hegel.<sup>56</sup> In particular, in Colletti's view, Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* is a distorted adaptation of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* that completely missed the point that all of Hegel's work was based on the dialectics of matter within an infinitely totalizing movement.<sup>57</sup> In the case of analysing human history, Engels reworked the ideas of the *German Ideology* and the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* into 'historical materialism' — wherein the dialectic (of capital) is projected backward onto all previous societies. The result was the analysis of society in terms of the famous base/superstructure dichotomy where the superstructure of politics, law, culture, and so on is determined by the economic base that is founded on a given 'mode of production'. The development of the mode in turn was explained by the dialectical interaction of the forces and relations of production.

This simple formulation was adopted in one form or another by the participants in the Second International (e.g. Kautsky in 'The Agrarian Question', Lenin in 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia').<sup>58</sup> The difficulties of this formulation are notorious. The usual presentation smacks of pure economic determinism — the economics of the mode of production unilaterally determine the superstructure. Despite Engels' famous letter to Joseph Bloch denying any such intention, the problem of the meaning of reciprocal interaction of base and superstructure remain unresolved.<sup>59</sup> Among other well-known problems is that of analysing the interaction of varying models (e.g. capitalist/socialist) to explain complex or transitional societies. Histomat was ultimately simplified even further by Stalin into a rigid unilinear progression of modes through which all social groups had to pass.<sup>60</sup> In its Stalinist incarnation histomat became a

<sup>56</sup> See Colletti's 'From Hegel to Marcuse' in his *From Rousseau to Lenin*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*: 123–128.

<sup>58</sup> Karl Kautsky, *La Question Agraire*. This is a facsimile reprint of the 1900 edition by Giard et Briere. See also V. I. Lenin, 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia', in *Collected Works*, vol. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Engels' statement to Bloch was: 'Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due it. We had to emphasize the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other factors involved in the interaction' (Engels to J. Bloch, September 21, 1890, *Marx–Engels Selected Correspondence*: 396).

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

blatant ideology of domination — the theoretical justification for the exploitation of Russian workers.<sup>61</sup> This purpose was served by interpreting the interaction between the relations and forces of production as a veritable technological determinism. Marx's remarks in the Preface on the forces bursting the fetters imposed by the relations of production were transformed into a theory that the development of the productive forces was not only necessary but also sufficient to guarantee permanent transformation of the relations of production. This provided an ideological justification for the use of force in pushing ahead at all possible speed with 'socialist' accumulation to guarantee no recrudescence of 'capitalism' in the Soviet Union. The obviously reactionary role played by both histomat and diamat in the Soviet Union was one reason for their abandonment by political economists in the West in the post-World War II period (see above). In the East, the Chinese communists reformulated histomat to meet their own needs. They avoided the economic and technological determinism of Stalin by emphasizing the relative autonomy of the superstructure (politics) on the economic base (economy). This constituted a reversed interpretation that a cynic might suggest was useful in justifying Party intervention and attempted political regimentation of all spheres of production through ideological re-education.<sup>62</sup>

This, then, was the sorry condition of orthodox Marxist philosophy in the 1950s. Beginning with Engels' early misguided attempts to convert Marx into a philosopher, orthodox Marxism had evolved into a pretentious but sterile and dogmatic ideology of domination. It was from this discredited position that Althusser and friends set out to rescue it in the early 1960s.

We have already seen in the preceding section the political role played by their reinterpretation of historical materialism — in the Communist Party riposte against those political economists who attacked the Party's support for capitalist development against 'feudal elements' in the Third World. That reworking of histomat was presented in *Reading Capital* as a new 'science of history' and was based on a number of philosophical positions concerning the nature of Marxism and of Marxist methodology.

In the beginning of *Reading Capital*, Althusser explicitly outlined his project as a philosopher's reading of *Capital* as opposed to that of an economist, a historian, or a logician.<sup>63</sup> This project he defines as posing the question of the 'specific object' of Marx's discourse and as discovering the 'epistemological status' that distinguishes the unity of the discourse and its object from other forms of discourse. What is the point of this? To discover 'the place that *Capital* occupies in the history of knowledge'. From the beginning, then, we know to expect a purely theoretical exercise in ideology. When Althusser goes on to lecture his readers on the analysis of the 'silences' and 'invisibilities' in a discourse, we are inevitably led to discover in Althusser himself total silence on the working class's real struggles and revolutionary trials.<sup>64</sup> For Althusser there is no such history. There is only the 'science of history'. What is this 'science'

<sup>61</sup> Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR*.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Hung Hsueh-ping, 'The Essence of 'Theory of Productive Forces' Is to Oppose Proletarian Revolution', *Peking Review* (September 19, 1969): 5–8.

<sup>63</sup> Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*: 14–15.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*: 19–28.

that Althusser would construct by totally ignoring history? It is the construction of an ahistorical, frozen conceptualization of ethereal theoretical structures. It is the reconstruction of an old dogmatism.

To refound this old dogmatism, Althusser proceeded in at least two ways. First, he ruled out of consideration Marx's early works like the *Manuscripts of 1844* by asserting an epistemological break between a young misguided Hegelian Marx and a mature 'scientific' Marx — the Marx of *Capital*.<sup>65</sup> This position neatly eliminated a whole series of questions about the nature and quality of work (e.g. the problematic of alienation) that are today just as embarrassing to the Soviet state — for which Althusser has continued to apologize — as they are in the West. Second, and more importantly, he argued that Marx's mature scientific work — *Capital* — was a purely theoretical work whose object, the concept of the capitalist mode of production, is analysed in an abstract manner. This concept is then generalized as the basic category of a theoretical science of history in which all human experience is classified into one mode or another.

By arguing the autonomy of his 'theoretical practice', Althusser was at once creating a space for his work within the French Communist Party and for a reading of *Capital* that totally divorced it from either the concrete history analysed therein or any other history in which it might be grasped. The historical material with which *Capital* is crammed full was dubbed of a merely illustrative nature and irrelevant to the developing theoretical model of the capitalist mode of production. In this fashion Althusser escapes by a slight of hand any embarrassing need to verify his theory in history (a normally essential aspect of any 'science') and simultaneously makes of his theory a boringly dogmatic scientism.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the doubts of some of the Party hierarchy about this 'new' approach, from their point of view the nice thing about this structuralist Marxism (as it was quickly dubbed by commentators) had to be that to all intents and purposes it continued to remove the class struggle from centre stage and to consign it to a substructure of a structure (the relations of production within the economic structure). *Capital* is thus deemed to analyse the concept of capital independently of class struggle that may (or may not) be brought in later as a further, derived development. This interpretation is obviously a convenient one for a French Communist Party dedicated to playing down working-class struggle and keeping it in check. To solve the sticky problems of economic and technological determinism, Althusser could only borrow from Freud the concept of overdetermination and from Mao the 'relative autonomy' of the superstructure. The result is a hodgepodge: an admission of any number of 'determinations' while the right of determination in the last instance (whose meaning is never clearly defined) is preserved for the economy. This reformulation amounts to only a somewhat more sophisticated justification for a Marxism-Leninism in which Marxism continues to provide an analysis of economics and Leninism

<sup>65</sup> See the introduction to Althusser's *For Marx*.

<sup>66</sup> For one of the more enjoyable and thorough critiques of Althusser's scientism, see François George, 'Reading Althusser', *Telos* 7 (Spring 1971): 73–98.

to provide that of the political sphere which Marx never developed.

Despite the fact that Althusser in his *Elements d'autocritique* and Nicos Poulantzas — one of the most prolific Althusserians — in *New Left Review* have admitted that their previous works (*Reading Capital, For Marx, Political Power and Social Classes*) by and large ignored the class struggle, they have clung to their basic theoretical structure with all its political ramifications.<sup>67</sup> The limited extent of the revision Althusser has felt necessary is indicated by his change in the definition of philosophy from being a 'theory of theoretical practice' to being 'the class struggle in theory'. The only class struggle that he seems willing to address is the ideological battles of leftist intellectuals.

This whole exercise is both remarkable and depressing. It quickly becomes apparent to anyone who has read Engels and Stalin that Althusser and friends have added almost nothing to the original discussions of historical materialism except a more obscure vocabulary and a deeper scientific gloss. We are still left with a lifeless sociological taxonomy of modes of production, the unresolvable problems of the interactions between the base/superstructure dualism, the mystery of the articulation of modes,<sup>68</sup> the absence of class struggle, and a fetishism of production that justifies contemporary socialism.<sup>69</sup> The widespread acceptance of these positions by those who grasp at the promises of 'scientific method' and try to disengage the 'science' from the Party's political philosophy which engendered it bespeaks the intellectual and political isolation from concrete working-class struggles of many of those trying to revive Marx in this period.

At this point I will briefly recapitulate what has been said thus far concerning the reading of Marx during the contemporary revival as a point of reference for the discussion that will follow. One basic criticism of reading *Capital* as political economy was that it accepted the tradition of making a sharp dichotomy between economics and politics and confined *Capital* to the former sphere. As we have seen this tradition has also been justified 'philosophically' in the various forms of diamat, including the Althusserian version. Whether in the case of the revived Marxist tradition of crisis theory or in the case of neo-Marxist Keynesianism, the analysis focuses predominantly on the development of capital itself — defined autonomously from the class struggle. Political economy, in short, has concerned the theorization of the capitalist factory as the site of the production of surplus value together with the circulation and realization of value. Within the factory capitalist domination is seen to be virtually complete. Although workers might legitimately struggle to keep wages from being depressed in periods of crisis, such 'economistic' struggles are ultimately confined within the dynamic of capitalist growth and cannot pose any real threat to its existence. The

<sup>67</sup> Nicos Poulantzas' somewhat grudging admission that he and Balibar 'underestimated' the 'role' of class struggle is to be found in his 'The Capitalist State', *New Left Review* 95 (January–February 1976), especially pp. 74, 78. For Althusser's self-criticism, see his *Elements d'Autocritique*.

<sup>68</sup> For one of the most serious attempts to work out a theory of the 'articulation' of modes which demonstrates the limits of the concept, see Pierre-Phillippe Rey, *Les Alliances de Classes*.

<sup>69</sup> For a useful critique of the fetishism of production by many Marxists, see Jean Baudrillard's *The Mirror of Production*. Unfortunately, his use of structural linguistics and his misunderstanding of Marx limit the usefulness of his work to that critique.

inevitable conclusion of this kind of analysis is to place all hope for effective struggle in the 'political' sphere, which usually implies support for some form of party organization. In such a situation the discussion of the rise and organization of class struggle generally turns around the question of 'class consciousness'. Under what circumstances and through what processes do workers gain the consciousness of themselves as a class that is deemed essential for them to be organized to overthrow capital? With respect to this issue, as we have seen, Marxist orthodoxy has been associated with the answer given by the Lenin of *What Is to Be Done?*: namely that the workers would be educated by a specialized party of professional revolutionaries who alone can see beyond the particular economic interests of each group of workers to the interests of the class as a whole.<sup>70</sup>

### **Critical Theory: the factory and the cultural sphere**

It is against the backdrop of this Marxist-Leninist tradition that we can examine that of Western Marxism and Critical Theory and begin to see both its innovations and its similarities. In what follows I will focus on only two of the possible points of comparison: (a) the analysis of the capitalist factory, in which the critical theories of the Frankfurt School show remarkable similarity with the basic thrust of traditional Marxist political economy, and (b) the analysis of the cultural sphere in which Western Marxism and Critical Theory advance beyond orthodox Marxism at the same time that they reproduce its most basic failing.

### **Technological rationality and planning**

Western Marxism and Critical Theory are most commonly associated with the return to Hegel and the problematics of consciousness, alienation, and culture — a return that occurred in the context of an attempt to rethink Marxism in the light of the collapse of the Second International in 1914, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the experiences of the workers' councils in the early post-World War I years. Yet, behind these defining cultural themes lay implicit and at times explicit positions on the traditional Marxist themes of political economy. This can be seen to varying degrees in the work of Korsch, Gramsci, and Lukács, but it is particularly true of the Frankfurt School. In fact, as Critical Theory developed around the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research there was considerable discussion about political economy in debate with exponents of more traditional views like Henryk Grossman and Council Communists Paul Mattick and Anton Pannekoek (whose work was mentioned in the previous section on reading *Capital* as political economy). Much of this discussion centred on the question of capitalist crisis and the political implications of seeing or not seeing its inevitability. Positions varied widely with respect to both inevitability and its implications. Lukács, for example, embraced the concept of blind crisis laws in *History and Class Consciousness* and in the end remained faithful to the Leninist party. Grossman, Mattick, and Horkheimer also accepted the inevitability of collapse, yet they all refused the Leninist political

<sup>70</sup> That *What Is to Be Done?* was neither the only nor the last position on organization held by Lenin has been ably demonstrated in Antonio Carlo, 'Lenin on the Party', *Telos* 17 (Fall 1973): 2–40.

conclusion. On the other hand, Pannekoek and Korsch (in the end) rejected both inevitability and Leninist politics.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, however, the debate about crisis theory was a derived issue. The basis of the whole discussion was a shared certainty of absolute capitalist domination in the economic sphere — of capitalist despotism in the factory. At this level they differed only in their formulations of the character of that control. And at this level the Critical Theorists pushed even further than most political economists in analysing the character of that despotism.

The fundamental thrust that, in this area, carried those associated with the Frankfurt School beyond traditional Marxist political economy was their analysis of technological domination, on the one hand, and of capitalist planning, on the other. During the late 1920s and 1930s, critical Marxism had to come to terms not only with the failure of the workers' councils but also with the subsequent dramatic shifts in the management of capitalist accumulation associated with the rise of European fascism, of 'socialist' accumulation in the Soviet Union, and of the Keynesian state during the American New Deal. The end results of that coming to terms are fairly well known. They include the analysis of the Soviet Union as state capitalism (a position shared by the Council Communists), Marcuse's discussion of one dimensionality, and Horkheimer's formulation of state capitalism, whether of the 'liberal', 'fascist', or 'socialist' variety, as the authoritarian state. The essential underpinnings of these positions have been less well recognized until recently: the understanding that capitalism had overcome its crises of the 1920s and the 1930s through the implementation of systematic economic planning, not only by the Soviet bureaucracy but also by the capitalist states in the West. A key figure in the clarification of this analysis was Friedrich Pollock of the Institute at Frankfurt.<sup>72</sup> His studies of economic planning, East and West, led him to conclude that the old 'automatic' mechanisms of capitalist market competition that had led to the recent international crisis were being abandoned by capital in favour of an 'economically planned new order' based on state intervention. This new, centrally administered accumulation of capital was the essence of 'state capitalism' and of the 'authoritarian state'. For Pollock this development was an outgrowth of the growing concentration of capital that made possible the extension of the factory model of despotic control to society as a whole. Integral to his development of this view was his research into the new way of organizing technology as domination within the plan of monopoly capital: automation. 'Among the most serious consequences of automation,' he wrote, is 'the danger that it strengthens the already existing trend toward a totalitarian society.'<sup>73</sup> This helps explain how Critical Theory could turn its attention toward the analysis of the 'cultural realm'. Because it assumed total capitalist control in the factory and saw the authoritarian state as extending that hegemony to the rest of society, the obvious implication was the study of the emerging new forms of domination that made up that extension.

<sup>71</sup> Russell Jacoby, 'The Politics of the Crisis Theory: Towards the Critique of Automatic Marxism II', *Telos* 23 (Spring 1975): 3–52.

<sup>72</sup> The importance of Pollock's work and influence on Critical Theory was emphasized in Giacomo Marramao, 'Political Economy and Critical Theory', *Telos* 24 (Summer 1975): 56–80.

<sup>73</sup> Friedrich Pollock, *Automation*, cited in Marramao, 'Political Economy and Critical Theory': 75.

With this background it should be clear that the general preoccupation of Western Marxism and Critical Theory with ‘cultural’ themes was immanently political and was not, at least in its most fruitful years (1930s), a retreat to ‘purely philosophical’ realms of speculation as some have claimed.<sup>74</sup> The abandonment in the 1940s and 1950s by Horkheimer, Adorno, and others of the project of founding a politically radical critique of capitalist society was a separate chapter in the evolution of Critical Theory. For example, Gramsci’s many writings on the role of intellectuals and educational, religious, and other cultural institutions in the 1920s were part of his attempts to analyse how capital achieved hegemony through the ideological inculcation of consent — a problematic whose importance grew with the increasing penetration and planning of these institutions by the capitalist state. Although in the 1930s and 1940s Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse all took up and expanded Pollock’s work on the tyranny of technological rationality as well as the extension of factory regimentation and the commodity-form to the entire society, it was primarily through the work of Marcuse in the 1960s that these ideas were preserved and became widely known and influential in the New Left.

In *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse elaborated the fundamental ideas of the Frankfurt School’s critique of the new ‘affluent society’.<sup>75</sup> The Keynesian state as collective capitalist is interpreted as the administration not only of the collective factory but also of the sphere of consumption in which working-class demands are instrumentalized by a new consumerist logic of domination. By meeting the working class’s quantitative demands at the same time that it manipulates and shapes those demands qualitatively, advanced capitalism is able to integrate workers’ economic struggles within capital and thus blunt the formation of working-class consciousness and revolt. This is the ‘cultural’ aspect of planning. It is no longer the game of crushing workers’ wage struggles through periodic crises but rather of managing working-class needs quantitatively and qualitatively so that they do not challenge the system. With the extension of the commodity-form to all aspects of life, this involves the control of virtually the whole cultural sphere through the manipulation of consumption. In such institutions as the educational system this kind of control is complemented by other forms of integration, which also take the form of co-optation rather than direct repression. This was the basic concept of Marcuse’s famous essay on the ‘repressive tolerance’ of dissent within the framework of academic ‘freedom’, which was published in 1965.<sup>76</sup> Here we find in a new context the reiteration of many of the themes of the Frankfurt School of the 1940s. Marcuse’s attack on the institutionalized violence of capital evokes Horkheimer’s 1940 analysis of the pervasive repressiveness of the authoritarian state.<sup>77</sup>

It was also in the 1960s that Critical Theory again, tenuously, linked with political economy. Marcuse’s analysis of capitalist hegemony, which in *An Essay on Liberation*

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Perry Anderson in his *Considerations on Western Marxism*. In his efforts to vindicate the Trotskyist version of Marxism-Leninism, he fails to come to grips with the real insights of Western Marxism and misses its basic thrust by misgrouping under that title such anti-Hegelians as Althusser, Delavolpe, and Colletti.

<sup>75</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*.

<sup>76</sup> R. P. Wolff, B. Moore, Jr., and H. Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*.

<sup>77</sup> Max Horkheimer, ‘The Authoritarian State’, *Telos* 15 (Spring 1973): 3–20.



is explicitly understood as a global phenomenon, found an echo in the writings of Baran and Sweezy.<sup>78</sup> A certain influence of the Frankfurt School had already been apparent in *The Political Economy of Growth* (1956), by Baran, who had spent a formative year as Pollock's undergraduate research assistant in Frankfurt in 1931.<sup>79</sup> That influence had appeared not only in Baran's arguments that the American working class was totally integrated into an American 'people's' imperialism but also in his formulation of the contradiction between capitalist rationality and the progress of historical reason.<sup>80</sup> In *Monopoly Capital*, Baran and Sweezy's critique of the 'irrationality' of advanced capital, and their continued dismissal of the revolutionary potential of the U.S. working class, paralleled Marcuse's work, as did their search for revolutionary agents 'outside' capital among nonworking-class groups of Third World peasants, disaffected students, and the black unemployed.<sup>81</sup> Like Marcuse they deplored the consumerism, waste, and violence of Keynesian capitalism as integral parts of its economic and cultural hegemony. In all these aspects Marcuse, Baran, and Sweezy expressed major issues of the cycle of struggles of the 1960s in a way that simultaneously eclipsed the ossified theories of orthodox Marxism and the Old Left and revived the advances made by Western Marxism and Critical Theory in the 1930s and 1940s. Unfortunately, as was indicated in the earlier discussion of Baran and Sweezy and must be reiterated here about Marcuse and Critical Theory, these approaches contain a basic flaw which undermines their ability to fully grasp the import of the struggles of the 1960s or of the subsequent period of capitalist counterattack in the 1970s.

The flaw that lies at the very heart of Critical Theory's concept of bourgeois cultural hegemony (just as it lurks within political economy's theory of capitalist technological domination in the factory) is its total one-sidedness. The positing of cultural hegemony, like that of an all-powerful technological rationality, reflects the inability to recognize or theorize the growth of any working-class power capable of threatening the system. Although the theory may have accurately reflected the new issues that accompanied the rise of Hitler, Stalin, and Roosevelt, its exaggerated pessimism became manifested in the 1960s. The logic of the theory of absolute consumerist integration forced Marcuse, Baran, and Sweezy to interpret the upheavals of the time as falling 'outside' the class struggle and they built their hopes on what they saw as revolts against racial and sexual repression and against the general irrationality of the system. This exteriorization of contradiction blinded them all to the effectiveness of the actual struggles of wage workers as well as their interaction with the complementary struggles of the unwaged. As a result Marcuse could see only defeat in the dissolution of the 'movement' in the early 1970s and the rising danger of a new fascism. Unable to grasp how the cycle of struggles of the 1960s had thrown capital into crisis, Marcuse was forced back to the political economy of Baran and Sweezy for an explanation of the

<sup>78</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*.

<sup>79</sup> Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Huberman, eds. *Paul Baran: A Collective Portrait*: 32–33.

<sup>80</sup> Baran, *Political Economy of Growth*: 119.

<sup>81</sup> See Chapters 9 and 10, 'The Quality of Monopoly Capitalist Society' and 'The Irrational System', in Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*.

international economic crisis of the 1970s.<sup>82</sup> It is ironic that, while he has spoken of a capitalist 'counterrevolution' that could lead to 1984, he cannot see the 'revolution' to which it is a counter and can only proclaim it a 'preventive' action by capital.<sup>83</sup> He does see the revolt against work but interprets its rampant absenteeism, falling productivity, industrial sabotage, wildcat strikes, and school dropouts as simply 'prepolitical' signs of discontent and of the possible crumbling of bourgeois cultural hegemony via managed consumerism.<sup>84</sup> As a result he has begun, in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972), to remodel his critical theory into one of how the consumerist logic of contemporary capitalism may be undermining itself by the production of nonintegrable, transcendent needs. He postulates a growing divergence between the consumerist promises of capitalist ideology propagated by the mass media and the willingness to deliver in a period of economic crisis: 'a contradiction between that which is and that which is possible and ought to be'.<sup>85</sup> The political conclusions Marcuse draws from this analysis formulate the current political situation in terms of the ideological question of whether growing popular dissatisfaction can be crafted by a revitalized New Left educational and organizational effort into a real threat to the system. Despite his affirmation that consumerism has enlarged the base of exploitation and political revolt, and his calls for a New Left revival, it must be said that he repeatedly points to what sometimes seems to be insurmountable difficulties in carrying out this program. Given his insistence on the isolation of radicals, his repeated affirmation of the 'political weakness and the non-revolutionary attitude of the majority of the working class', and his endorsement of the necessity of a 'long march through the institutions' (working within the system), one is not surprised to find in his final declaration the traditional Old Left evocation of the 'long road': 'the next revolution will be the concern of generations and the 'final crisis of capitalism' may take all but a century.'<sup>86</sup> Gone is his sense of optimism that rode the wave of struggles of the 1960s. Marcuse seems to have rediscovered the inherent pessimism of the Frankfurt School's concept of hegemony as well as its limited political program for a long process of 'building consciousness' through the ideological critique of society. Blind to the real power developed and held by workers today, Marcuse cannot see either the extent and difficulties of current capitalist attempts at restructuring or how the continuing struggles of workers are thwarting those efforts. Of this drama he can capture only the repressive side of the capitalist offensive and falls back into a more or less traditional leftist program of defence against authoritarian state capitalism via the ideological struggles of Critical Theory.

To summarise: despite the originality and usefulness of their research into the mechanisms of capitalist domination in both the economic and cultural spheres, and indeed precisely in the formulation of those mechanisms as one-sidedly hegemonic, Critical Theorists have remained blind to the ability of working-class struggles to

**82** Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*: 5n.

**83** *Ibid.*: 1–2.

**84** *Ibid.*: 21–23.

**85** *Ibid.*: 16–21.

**86** *Ibid.*: 134.

transform and threaten the very existence of capital. Their concept of domination is so complete that the 'dominated' virtually disappears as an active historical subject. In consequence, these philosophers have failed to escape the framework of mere ideological critique of capitalist society.

To return to the military analogy used earlier in this introduction, we can pose the difficulty this way: if one's attention is focused uniquely on the enemy's activities on the battlefield, the battle will assuredly be lost. In the class war, as in conventional military encounters, one must begin with the closest study of one's own forces, that is, the structure of working-class power. Without an understanding of one's own power, the ebb and flow of the battle lines can appear as an endless process driven only by the enemy's unilateral self-activity. When the enemy regroups or restructures, as capital is doing in the present crisis, its actions must be grasped in terms of the defeat of prior tactics or strategies by our forces — not simply as another clever move. That an analysis of enemy strategy is necessary is obvious. The essential point is that an adequate understanding of that strategy can be obtained only by grasping it in relation to our own strengths and weaknesses.

In the movie *Patton* there is a highly instructive scene in which Patton sees that he will defeat Rommel's armour in North Africa and cries, 'I read your book, you bastard!' He is referring to a translation of Rommel's book on tank warfare. If Patton had read that book of his declared opponent the way Critical Theorists read bourgeois authors, he would still have been sitting in his quarters writing 'critiques' of this point or that when Rommel rolled over him with his army. Instead, he read the book as an enemy weapon, which it was, in order to develop better strategies to defeat him. It would also have done him little good if, when he finally faced Rommel's army, he had had no understanding of the strengths of his own firepower.<sup>87</sup>

It serves little purpose to study the structures of capitalist domination unless they are recognized as strategies that capital must struggle to impose. Revolutionary strategy cannot be created from an ideological critique; it develops within the actual ongoing growth of working-class struggle. Blindness to this inevitably forces one back into the realm of 'consciousness raising' as the only way to bridge the perceived gap between working-class powerlessness (capitalist hegemony) and working-class victory (revolutionary defeat of capital).

This brief sketch of Critical Theory in no way pretends to give a complete picture of its development and breadth — only a sense of its basic thrust and limitations. Thorough evaluation of the work done by Critical Theorists would have to deal with the full range of work of the authors mentioned, as well as with such contemporary figures

**87** Although the use of military analogies is helpful in conceptualizing the class struggle as a class war, there are definite limitations to this line of thought. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that wars between armies, unlike those between classes, usually are conducted by generals. To conceptualize working-class strategy as being formulated and applied by generals would come very close to the usual concept of the Marxist-Leninist vanguard. While it is true that the capitalist class does have something like the joint chiefs of staff in the bodies of its planning institutions, it is rare that the working class has very centralized organization (Leninist pretensions notwithstanding). Therefore, the concept of working-class strategy has to be understood in terms of the effective thrust of working-class struggle. The effective unity of strategy depends on the degree of complementarity of strategies of the various sectors of the class.

as Oskar Negt, Alfred Schmidt, and, especially, Jürgen Habermas. However, as a reading of works like Habermas' *Legitimation Crisis* will show, the basic characteristics of the analysis remain its commitment to ideological critique and its impotence in dealing with the growth and development of working-class power.

## Reading *Capital* politically

The alternative to ideological critique, whether of the political economy or the philosophical variety, is to begin from a strategic analysis of the pattern of development of working-class power as the only possible ground for answering the question of how that power can be increased. Such an analysis requires starting from an examination of workers' actual struggles: their content, how they have developed, and where they are headed. By this I mean the struggles of the workers themselves, not of their 'official' organizations (trade unions, parties, etc.). The actions of these organizations may accurately express the struggles of the workers themselves, or they may not. They are often completely at odds with them. It is because of this that we must begin with the unmediated struggles themselves. Since the class is not monolithic but is divided — capital rules by division — the examination of such struggles necessitates an analysis of the different sectors of the class and their interrelations, especially how the struggles of one sector are, or are not, circulating to other sectors. It is only through a circulation of struggles, in which those of various sectors of the class interlink to become complementary, that real unity against capital is achieved. Without such complementarity, 'class consciousness' is only an ideological gloss; with it, 'class consciousness' is superfluous. Therefore, it is essential for an assessment of present working-class power to clearly perceive both the divisions within the class — which must be understood as basically hierarchical divisions of power vis-à-vis capital — and the degree to which those divisions are being overcome. It is only within this framework that we can correctly situate the role of the 'official' organizations of the class. It is also only within this framework that we can fruitfully evaluate capital's initiatives both in the factory and in the broader 'cultural' sphere.

In order to undertake such an evaluation of the class struggle from a working-class point of view, it is first necessary to perceive its point of departure: the self-activity of the class that makes it more than a victimized cog in the machinery of capital and more than a fragmented mass requiring instruction in its class interests. This basic perception is one that seems to have been repeatedly forced on at least some Marxists during periods of revolutionary upheaval, and too frequently lost again in periods of defeat. For Marx, his understanding of working-class autonomy vis-à-vis other classes was spurred by his participation in the revolutions of 1848 and by his studies of the Commune in 1871 and confirmed in his detailed studies of the historical development of capitalism. We find many striking examples of this understanding in *Capital*, for example, his analysis of worker struggles to shorten the working day (see below, Chapter II).

For Lenin, the rapid development of the Soviets by Russian workers in 1905 and again in 1917 forced him to rethink his previous analysis of *What Is to Be Done?* (1902).

He had previously insisted on the fragmented and defensive nature of workers' struggles and the need for professional revolutionaries to teach the class its interests. As a result of the demonstrated autonomy of the Soviets vis-à-vis both capital and the Bolsheviks, he returned to the example of the Commune in writing *State and Revolution* and launched the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets'. Later, with the bureaucratization of the Soviets and the struggle for 'socialist accumulation', the concept of workers' autonomous power was erased from the lexicon of the Soviet planners and orthodox Marxism.<sup>88</sup>

As we saw in the previous section, despite their experience in the workers' councils, the Council Communists failed to develop any lasting concept of workers' autonomy. For example, Karl Korsch, who participated in the aborted German workers' governments of 1923, retained a Leninist position of the *What Is to Be Done?* variety all through the period. When he later abandoned this position, it was in the context of his expulsion from the German Communist Party and of an analysis of worker struggles in the Soviet Union itself. By that time (1927), however, the counterrevolution was well entrenched both in Western Europe and in the Soviet Union, and workers' struggles were predominantly defensive.<sup>89</sup> This background helps explain the inability of the Western Marxists to conceptualize any autonomous role of working-class struggle within capital.

## The Johnson-Forest Tendency

One important moment of recognition of the reality of autonomy is to be found in the work of the so-called Johnson-Forest Tendency, which arose within the Trotskyist movement in the 1940s and then split from it in 1950.<sup>90</sup> The Johnson-Forest Tendency took its name from the pseudonyms J. R. Johnson and F. Forest taken by C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, respectively, during that period. The struggle by those in the Tendency for the recognition of workers' self-activity and against the Leninist party concepts of *What Is to Be Done?* took place on many levels.

A black from Trinidad, James seems to have come to his position through his participation in, or ties to, a variety of workers' struggles, for example, the independence movement in Trinidad and the struggles of American blacks in the South and in the auto factories of Detroit. From the late 1930s on, he argued for the recognition of the vitality and importance of the independence of black struggles in the United States and against any attempt to subsume them within a leftist party. Indeed, by the late 1940s, James argued that black workers constituted 'the vanguard

<sup>88</sup> Carlo, 'Lenin on the Party'.

<sup>89</sup> See Douglas Kellner's discussion of the change in Korsch's position in his 'Korsch's Revolutionary Historicism'.

<sup>90</sup> The Johnson-Forest Tendency first emerged in 1941 within the Trotskyist Workers party which had split off from the Socialist Workers party (U.S. branch of the Fourth International) the year before. In 1947 Johnson-Forest left the Workers party to return to the SWP where it remained until finally leaving the Trotskyist movement altogether in 1950. The only history of this Tendency and of the subsequent groups associated with it that I have found written by an outsider is Bruno Cartosio's introduction to an edited Italian collection of Martin Glaberman's writings, *Classe Operaia, Imperialismo e Rivoluzione negli USA*. Several of the Tendency's own documents discuss its development and there is a partisan account by Raya Dunayevskaya in her *For the Record, the Johnson-Forest Tendency or the Theory of State-Capitalism, 1941-51: Its Vicissitudes and Ramifications*. A great many of the documents of the Tendency can be found in the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

of the workers' struggles' in the auto industry and elsewhere.<sup>91</sup>

However, the recognition of autonomy by those in the Tendency went beyond that of black workers. They also recognized the autonomy of the working class itself, from capital and from its 'official' organizations: the Party and the unions. This stands out clearly in their treatment of developments in the United States and in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and 1940s. During the 1940s both James and Dunayevskaya carried out intensive studies of the nature of the system in the Soviet Union and its relation to Western capitalism as part of their attempts to understand that period of class struggle and the meaning of World War II. As their analysis proceeded, they came into increasing conflict with the orthodox Trotskyist analysis of the situation in the United States and of the USSR as a 'degenerate workers' state', as well as with the conceptions of correct political directions these analyses implied. In a series of articles, pamphlets, and statements, they set out their own positions on these issues. Perhaps the most important of the documents of this period, because it was the culminating one, was *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, which seems to have been written primarily by C. L. R. James and submitted to the 1950 Convention of the Socialist Workers Party.<sup>92</sup> It was shortly after this convention that the Tendency officially split away to reconstitute itself in 1951 as the Correspondence Publishing Committee.

In *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, James analysed the mode of production in the United States and argued that the rise of Taylorism and Fordism heralded a new phase in the class struggle. Like those of the Frankfurt School, though without any direct connection that I can find, he saw that the new technologies constituted new methods of domination. Unlike them, he also saw workers' power and he was well aware of the fundamental importance of this recognition.

Taylorism, he argued, had moved from a pre-World War I phase of experimental application to become a 'social system' wherein the factory is 'laid out for continuous flow of production, and advanced planning for production, operating and control'.<sup>93</sup> And then Fordism, between 1924 and 1928, added a further 'rationalization of production' associated with 'the constantly growing subdivision of Labor, decrease in the need of skills, and determination of the sequence of operations and speed by the machine'.<sup>94</sup> This new organization of production provided the ground of modern totalitarianism not only in the United States but also in Germany and the Soviet Union. 'Ford's regime before unionization,' he wrote, 'is the prototype of production relations in fascist Germany and Stalinist Russia.'<sup>95</sup> But where James and the Johnson-Forest Tendency differed radically from others who also saw domination was in their equal

<sup>91</sup> See C. L. R. James, 'The Revolutionary Solution to the Negro Problem in the United States (1947)', *Radical America* 4, no. 4 (May 1974): 18, a special issue on C. L. R. James.

<sup>92</sup> C. L. R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*: 22. The essay was originally presented as a document and was subsequently published in book form. Glaberman gives his formulation of its authorship in the introduction: 'The origin of this work as the collective viewpoint of the Johnson-Forest Tendency also dictated that its authorship be anonymous. It is gratifying to be able to record that, with the kinds of assistance from other members of his grouping that are usual for political documents, the author was C. L. R. James.'

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*: 39.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*: 40.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

insistence on the power of workers to oppose these new forms: ‘But — and without this, *all* Marxism is lost — inextricably intertwined with the totalitarian *tendency* is the response of the working class. A whole new layer of workers, the result of economic development, burst into revolt in the CIO.’<sup>96</sup>

When he then analysed the subsequent period, in which the union bureaucracies were turned against the workers and transformed ‘into an instrument of capitalist production’, he again saw more than simple domination. He saw instead autonomous rank-and-file revolt against both speedup and the union: ‘But along with this intensification of capitalist production and this binding of the worker for five years [with the contract] *must go* inevitably the increase of revolt, wildcat strikes ... That is precisely why the bureaucracy, after vainly trying to stop wildcat strikes by prohibiting them in the contract, has now taken up itself the task of repressing by force this interruption of production.’<sup>97</sup>

The critique of the Soviet Union by James and Dunayevskaya was also similar to that of the Frankfurt School. They argued that the Soviet Union was state-capitalist and basically only a variation in the present historical phase of capitalist development.<sup>98</sup> ‘The Stalinist bureaucracy,’ James wrote, ‘is the American bureaucracy carried to its ultimate and logical conclusion, both of them products of capitalist production in the epoch of state-capitalism.’<sup>99</sup> As with Friedrich Pollock’s work, this conclusion was based on a study of the organization of production in the Soviet Union. James traced the pattern of introduction of unpaid labour, piecework, and the Taylor system. But, despite the Stalinist success and the defeats of workers in this period, he argued that they were only temporary and that workers would once again gain the initiative. The organization of that initiative would not come, in his view, through traditional Leninist organizations. ‘The proletariat,’ he wrote, ‘always breaks up the old organization by impulse, a leap ... The new organization, the new organism will begin with spontaneity, i.e. free creative activity, as its necessity.’<sup>100</sup> Moreover, as workers develop new forms of ‘disciplined spontaneity’, he argued, it would mean the destruction of the Communist parties which had become agents of capital. When revolt did break out in 1956, James supported the Hungarian workers’ councils against Soviet intervention. As long as the Johnson-Forest Tendency remained a faction of the Trotskyist movement, there were limitations on the clarity with which their rejection of the old formulas of organization could be set out. Once they split, however, they addressed this question very clearly indeed. In the Preface to the second edition (1956) of *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, the attack on Leninism was direct: ‘The political conclusions of this economic analysis can be summed up in its total repudiation of the theory and practice of the Leninist theory of the Vanguard Party for our era.’<sup>101</sup>

**96** Ibid.

**97** Ibid.: 41.

**98** While both James and Dunayevskaya wrote on the state-capitalism theory of the Soviet Union, the larger part of the research seems to have been done by the latter working in the Slavic Division of the Library of Congress. For an example of this early work, see Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Original Historical Analysis: Russia as State Capitalist Society* (1942).

**99** James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*: 42.

**100** James, ‘Notes on the Dialectic’, *Radical America* 4, no. 4 (May 1974): i.

**101** James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*: 10.

As to the nature of new organizational forms which would be appropriate to the new era, James and those holding similar positions looked to the workers' movements themselves:

The great organizations of the masses of the people and of workers in the past were not worked out by any theoretical elite or vanguard. They arose from the experience of millions of people and their need to overcome the intolerable pressures which society had imposed upon them for generations ... the new organizations will come as Lilburne's Leveller Party came, as the sections and popular societies of Paris in 1793, as the Commune in 1871 and the Soviets in 1905, with not a single soul having any concrete ideas about them until they appeared in all their power and glory.

But once we have a clear historical perspective we can see outlines of the future in the rising in Eastern Germany in 1953, the great strike in Nantes in 1955, the general strike against Reuther of the UAW ... the incredible 10 year struggle of the British dockers, and now, as we write, the Coventry workers ... All these struggles, varied as they are in scope and significance, have this in common, that they all embody formations and activity which over-ride, bypass or consciously aim at substituting new social forms for the traditional workers' organizations. However high they soar *they build upon shop floor organizations and action on the job.* [My emphasis]<sup>102</sup>

This emphasis on the initiative of workers at the base, of the rank-and-file, grew out of studies of and contacts with factory workers by those in the Johnson-Forest Tendency and then in the Correspondence Publishing Committee and was the hallmark of the political tendency they represented. From this point of view, perhaps the most important of their publications were those which presented and analysed struggles of rank-and-file workers against both management and unions. These included such essays as *The American Worker* (1947) dealing with daily struggles in an automobile plant, *Punching Out* (1952) on factory life, and *Union Committeemen and Wild Cat Strikes* (1955) on the 1955 wildcats in auto and the role of radical union committeemen.<sup>103</sup> Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, they kept alive the politics of workers' self-activity through study, writing, and active intervention into workers' struggles.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.: 10–11.

<sup>103</sup> Phil Romano and Ria Stone [Raya Dunayevskaya], *The American Worker*; Martin Glaberman, *Punching Out and Union Committeemen and Wild Cat Strikes*. There were many sides to the work of the Johnson-Forest Tendency and the groups which grew out of it. Both James and Dunayevskaya have had, from the beginning, a noticeable predilection for philosophical generalization. As part of their theoretical work during their break with Trotskyism, they reread and restudied not only Marx but also Hegel. The strong Hegelian side to their Marxism is obvious in such works as James' *Notes on Dialectics* (1948) and Dunayevskaya's *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973). Any attempt to analyse their development as a whole would have to take such diverse concerns into account, as well as their evolution.

<sup>104</sup> Because my only interest here lies in focusing on the recognition of the autonomous power of workers by those in the Johnson-Forest Tendency, I do not go into any greater detail of the evolution of those involved. Those interested in the subsequent history, which includes the 1955 split, when Raya Dunayevskaya and those around her broke off to form the News and Letters Committee, and the 1962 split, when James and Grace Lee Boggs left and the Correspondence Publishing Committee changed its name to Facing Reality, can consult the materials cited in note 90 above.



## **Socialisme ou Barbarie**

The growing crisis of Trotskyism in the United States during and after World War II, out of which the Johnson-Forest Tendency emerged, was paralleled by a similar crisis in Europe. The same dissatisfaction with Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union and the role of the Party led several members of the French section of the Fourth International (the *Partie Communiste Internationale*) to form first an opposition faction and then an entirely separate group which published the review *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (1949–1965).<sup>105</sup> Not only did the evolution of the group around *Socialisme ou Barbarie* have many striking parallels with the Johnson-Forest Tendency but also the two groups were in direct contact with each other, published each others' materials, and co-signed various documents indicating the similarities of their views. Most importantly for my interests here, they shared a similar conception of the fundamental role of working-class autonomy and pursued similar projects of investigating and analysing the concrete reality of workers' struggles.

Like Johnson-Forest, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* had two major spokesmen: in this case, Cornelius Castoriadis, a Greek economist, and Claude Lefort. Castoriadis' break with Trotskyism originated in his experiences in Greece during World War II when he began to see that the Trotskyist analysis of the Communist Party was dangerously inadequate. That party, he saw, was no more likely to become 'unstable' if it came to power (which the Trotskyists in Greece supported) than the Russian Communist Party, which had emerged from the war stronger than ever. Like his American counterparts, he thought that the reality of the growing power of the Russian bureaucracy dogmatically contradicted Trotsky's theory of a 'degenerate Workers State'.<sup>106</sup> Lefort, who shared this perception, also brought to the critique of Trotskyist orthodoxy the influence of his one-time teacher, the philosopher Merleau-Ponty, and a strong dose of existential phenomenology.<sup>107</sup> Together with others in their group they pushed forward not only a detailed analysis of the Soviet Union (like the work of James and Dunayevskaya based on study of the social relations of production) but also the inevitable critique of Leninist concepts of the Party and of socialism.<sup>108</sup>

Although the critique of bureaucracy developed in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* differed in very important respects from the theory of state-capitalism, both the French and American groups shared a rejection of the reified categories of orthodox Marxism and an emphasis on the analysis of workers' struggles in production and in the community unmediated by any official organizations. In a recent (1975) interview dealing with the evolution of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Claude Lefort commented on

**105** As with the Johnson-Forest Tendency, there is no adequate history/analysis of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. However, the interested reader can consult, in English, Dick Howard's introductory notes to an Interview with Castoriadis as well as that interview, which contains some historical material, in *Telos* 23 (Spring 1975): 131–155; a similar interview with Claude Lefort in *Telos* 30 (Winter 1976–1977): 173–192; and Andre Liebich's 'Socialisme ou Barbarie, a Radical Critique of Bureaucracy', *Our Generation* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 55–62. These essays, especially the last, contain many further references to the works of Castoriadis and Lefort available in English and in French.

**106** See 'An Interview with C. Castoriadis': 131–132.

**107** See 'An Interview with Claude Lefort': 173–174.

**108** For examples of this work, see Cornelius Castoriadis, 'From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy', *Our Generation* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 43–54; and Claude Lefort, 'What Is Bureaucracy?' *Telos* 22 (Winter 1974–1975).

their relation to the American group: 'They [C. L. R. James and R. Dunayevskaya] had come to conclusions similar to ours concerning the USSR, bureaucracy, and the conditions for an autonomous struggle of the exploited. Their conception of workers' daily resistance in industry was particularly fruitful.'<sup>109</sup> The interest of Castoriadis and Lefort in that conception was expressed first by translating and reprinting *The American Worker* (as a series beginning with the first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) and then through many articles in which this approach was developed in the French context. This work was undertaken partly by Daniel Mothé and Henri Simon, who were workers and trade union militants like Paul Romano. Where Romano had written of his struggles in a General Motors auto plant, Mothé wrote of his struggles in a Renault plant, and Simon of his work in a large insurance company. Castoriadis, as well as others, also contributed to the analysis of such struggles in a variety of articles.

In the case of both *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the Johnson-Forest Tendency, their unorthodox Marxism and focus on workers' struggles also led them beyond the factory into the community. In the United States, James' work on the struggles of blacks anticipated the later rise of the civil rights and black power movements. In both the United States and France the two groups were among the earliest to focus attention on nonfactory struggles, including those of youth and women, which were to become so important in the subsequent decade.

Despite the fact that both groups remained small throughout their existence and despite the fact that, at least in the case of Castoriadis and Lefort, their major spokesmen came to reject not only orthodox Marxism but all Marxism, their contribution to the development of a useful understanding of workers' struggles in contemporary society has been enduring. On the one hand, through their writings they have left invaluable and still relevant documentation of their analyses of such themes as the nature of Soviet society, the forms and character of workers' struggles, the critique of orthodox Marxism, and the question of organization. On the other hand, although the distribution of their work was limited and their members few, their work nevertheless constituted an important experience and point of reference for many who followed. Just as recognition and appreciation of their writings seem to be only now beginning to catch up with its importance, so also are the lines of influence they exerted only beginning to be studied. One important line of influence which will be mentioned, if not adequately explored, in the next section was the impact of their analyses of autonomous workers' struggles on important figures of the 'workers' autonomy' wing of the Italian New Left in the 1960s and 1970s.

## The Italian New Left

The new awareness of workers' autonomy that emerged in the 1960s produced much new analysis of the theoretical and political implications of this phenomenon. This was especially true in France and Italy where the growth of workers' insurgency took the form of confrontation and rejection of the powerful Communist Party by large numbers of industrial workers, students, and intellectuals. Unlike the situation in the United States

<sup>109</sup> 'An Interview with Claude Lefort': 177.

where the return to Marx took place against the predominant influence of neo-Marxism, in Italy and France it emerged out of conflict with the Communist Party and the communist-dominated trade unions. This confrontation arose as the rapid circulation of new forms of working-class struggles in both factory and community began to escape the Party's control. In France, the breaking point came in the dramatic events of May 1968, when millions of workers and hundreds of thousands of students seized factories and threw up barricades in an autonomous upheaval that took the Party as well as the government completely by surprise. In Italy, the revolt was less dramatic but grew rapidly through the 1960s, escaping both the control and the understanding of Marxist orthodoxy. When, in both cases, the Communist Party joined with capitalist forces to try to contain the movements of revolt, it revealed its nature as an organization within capital. As in Asia and Latin America, the increasing conflict between working-class and intellectual militants and the 'official' organizations of the class led to breakaways and the formation of new organizations and new theories as part of a new politics. An essential element in several of these new groups was the centrality of the concept of workers' autonomy.

In Italy some of the most important analyses of those associated with the new tendencies of the 'extraparliamentary' Left were published in a series of new journals: for example, *Quaderni Rossi* (1960–1966), *Classe Operaia* (1964–1967), *Lavoro Zero* (1975–), *Contropiano* (1967–1972), *Primo Maggio* (1973–), and *Quaderni del Territorio* (1976–). The extraparliamentary groups formed during this period included organizations like *Potere Operaio*, *Il Manifesto*, and *Lotta Continua*.

The central fact that working-class struggles repeatedly surged forward autonomously from, and often against, the influence of either trade unions or the Party was a fundamental subject of discussion, theorization, and debate among that new generation of militants. From the study of the reality of autonomy among rank-and-file workers, and from a reassessment of the history of working-class struggle, especially in the United States, they were able to articulate with new sharpness and depth the position that the working class is not a passive, reactive victim, which defends its interest against capitalist onslaught, and that its ultimate power to overthrow capital is grounded in its existing power to initiate struggle and to force capital to reorganize and develop itself.

The studies of insurgency in Italian factories and of working-class history involved and were informed by a reworking of some of the best Marxist analysis of earlier periods. For example, one leading figure in *Quaderni Rossi*, Raniero Panzieri, combined an analysis of the growth of Fordism in Italy and the emergence of the deskilled 'mass worker' with a re-evaluation of the work of the Frankfurt School and a rereading of Marx on technological domination. In the process he rediscovered the ideas set forward earlier (by Critical Theorists and those in the Johnson-Forest and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* groups) that the organization of labour constituted a capitalist plan for the division and control of the working class. And if the Johnson-Forest and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* people had gone beyond Pollock in seeing working-class power against such domination, Panzieri went even further. Through his studies he was able to formulate the technological evolution of capital in terms of capitalist response to working-class struggle through rising levels of planning. In his article 'Surplus Value

and Planning: Notes on the Reading of *Capital*', Panzieri set out an analysis of how autonomous working-class struggle overcomes capital's divisions and forces it to reorganize production in the factory and broaden its planning to higher levels.<sup>110</sup> He is thus able to situate the new phase of capitalist planning of the 1930s, identified by the Frankfurt School and James, within a general theoretical framework for analysing the revolutions of capitalist technology and workers' organization within the dynamic of class struggle. In fact, what emerges from his work is the concept that, ultimately, the only unplannable element of capital is the working class. This constituted both a theoretical and a political advance beyond the Frankfurt School, which had seen only capitalist planning, and a theoretical advance beyond those who had emphasized autonomous working-class struggle against such planning but had not worked out such a general theory. The incorporation of working-class autonomy into the theory of capitalist development implied a new way of grasping the analysis of the class struggle in the evolving structure of the capitalist division of labour. Not only is the division of labour seen as a hierarchical division of power to weaken the class — a certain composition of power — but also, against this capitalist use of technology, the working class is seen to struggle against these divisions, politically recomposing the power relations in its interests. This, in turn, implied a new way of understanding both the nature of capital and the problem of working-class organization.

If autonomous workers' power forces reorganization and changes in capital that develop it, then capital cannot be understood as an outside force independent of the working class. It must be understood as the class relation itself. This led to the re-emphasis by Mario Tronti, another major figure in *Quaderni Rossi* and later in *Classe Operaia*, of Marx's theoretical juxtaposition of labour-power to working class. In other words, capital seeks to incorporate the working class within itself as simply labour-power, whereas the working class affirms itself as an independent class-for-itself only through struggles which rupture capital's self-reproduction.<sup>111</sup>

These kinds of considerations informed two kinds of further studies. The first was the concrete study of contemporary class struggles. As indicated by the work of Danilo Montaldi, who had translated *The American Worker* into Italian from the French version published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and who had also translated some of Daniel Mothé's work from the same journal, the Italians were influenced by and drew on this Franco-American experience of the direct examination of workers' struggles.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Raniero Panzieri, 'Surplus Value and Planning: Notes on the Reading of Capital', in *The Labour Process and Class Strategies*: 4–25.

<sup>111</sup> Mario Tronti, 'Social Capital', *Telos* 17 (Fall 1973): 113–121.

<sup>112</sup> Montaldi's translation of *The American Worker* appeared in *Battaglia Comunista*, February–March 1954.

The American example has been an important reference point throughout the theoretical and political development of this Italian work. The reasons for this are to be found not only in the pathbreaking work done by people associated with the Johnson-Forest Tendency (works by C. L. R. James, James Boggs, George Rawick, and Martin Glaberman, among others, have been translated into Italian and probably received wider circulation and discussion in Italy than in the United States) but also in the perception that, just as American capitalism is the most advanced in the world and therefore particularly important to study, so too must the struggles of American workers, which have forced and continue to challenge that development, be of particular importance for workers everywhere. As many have said, probably correctly, the evolution of revolutionary struggles in the United States is determinant for struggles everywhere.

Added to this was the rediscovery of Marx's *Workers' Inquiry*, an outline that Marx drew up of a proposed empirical study of workers' lives and struggles. It was translated into Italian and analysed in *Quaderni Rossi*.<sup>113</sup> The implementation of this kind of work in Italy was spearheaded by a friend of Montaldi, Romano Alquati, who began to interview workers in Italian factories and studied the concrete processes of composition and political recomposition of the Italian working class.<sup>114</sup> The second kind of study involved a reassessment of earlier struggles in the history of the working class internationally. Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna, and others undertook the re-examination of the experience of the European and American working classes, both in terms of their struggles with capitalist planning and in terms of their organizational history. Retracing and going behind the rise of Fordism, they examined the relation between class composition and working-class organization. In his article 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party', Bologna located the experience of the soviets and German workers' councils form of organization in the concentration of skilled workers whose pre-existent partial control over their instruments of production led them to conceive of organization in terms of taking over their tools completely.<sup>115</sup> He juxtaposed this experience to that of the American IWW whose very different organizational experience reflected a different class composition — the highly mobile unskilled labour force of the American West. In 'Workers and Capital', Tronti similarly retraced the experience of both the period of German social democracy and American industrial unionism in terms of the underlying class composition and the interaction between workers' struggles and capitalist planning.<sup>116</sup> In these studies we see a rich development of the fundamental point made by C. L. R. James a decade earlier: 'The proletariat always breaks up the old organization by impulse, [and makes] a leap.' Working-class struggles only achieve the recomposition of a certain division of labour (e.g. skilled labour or mass worker) through appropriate organizational forms (e.g. workers' councils or industrial unions). In other words, at each stage of class composition the appropriate form of organization changes. These studies founded a new Marxist understanding of both working-class autonomy and organization. By showing how workers developed and discarded various forms of organization according to the concrete character of the class relation, trade unionism, social democracy, workers' councils, and the Leninist party were all shown to have been particular historical products. By shifting the focus of study from the self-development of capital to that of the working class, these authors revealed the idealism of those Marxists who treat both the form of capital and the form of working-class organization as eternally given

**113** See Dario Lanzardo, 'Intervento Socialista nella lotta operaia: l'Inchiesta Operaia di Marx', *Quaderni Rossi* 5: 1–30. The translation of the inquiry by Maniuccia Salvati and Piero Scaramucci was attached as an appendix to Lanzardo's analysis.

**114** See Romano Alquati, *Sulla Fiat e Altri Scritti*.

**115** Bologna, 'Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Councils Movement'.

**116** Tronti, 'Workers and Capital'. It must be pointed out that this essay is a translation from the 1970 postscript to Tronti's book *Operai e Capitale*, which was written after Tronti's return to the Italian Communist Party. Therefore, despite its useful historical analysis, his interpretation is geared to providing a justification for current social democratic programs of the Italian Communist Party. His assessment of the degree to which American workers made gains in their struggles of the 1930s is taken as a model for workers in Italy today — a conservative argument for limiting struggles to trade union activities and confiding the future to the Party.

(see Chapter 5 below). In this way they elaborated a theoretical framework for understanding the growing disaffection of Italian workers with their 'official' organizations as well as shifting their own frame of reference in such a way as to be able to 'see' emerging new forms of organization.

These concepts were applied not only to the factory studies of the mass worker (e.g. Alquati) but also to the study of the role of the Keynesian state in the Italian post-war 'economic miracle'. Here again important advances were made beyond previous work. I have mentioned briefly the Frankfurt School's perception of Keynesianism as the satisfaction of workers' quantitative needs while those same needs are shaped qualitatively to control the class through a new consumerist logic. The analysis of Keynesianism by such theorists as Tronti and Antonio Negri during this period constitutes an important partial answer to these theories of domination.<sup>117</sup> First, by grasping the Keynesian strategy as capital's response to workers' success in making wages 'sticky downward', they recognized that strategy as a response to working-class power — not as simply another crafty scheme. Second, through a reworking of Marx's analysis of relative surplus value and crisis, and through a close study of the Keynesian strategy, they were able to specify the core of the 'quantitative strategy': the Keynesian productivity deal which tried to tie wage increases to productivity increases and thus harness working-class struggle as a motor of capitalist development. (James and his followers had also studied the wage/productivity trade-off in the 1950s, as well as workers' resistance.) When this understanding met with their studies of Italian workers' struggles in the 1960s, they realized that exploding wage demands and a growing revolt against work and productivity were rupturing those deals. It became obvious that the Keynesian 'quantitative' strategy as applied by the Italian government's incomes policies was already collapsing. In fact, they located the growing crisis of the Italian economy partly in this rupture of the productivity deal. By grasping the Keynesian economic strategy as a political response by capital to the crisis of the 1930s and 1940s, which was itself caused in part by the growth or workers' power, they were led to see that the distinction between economics and politics that dominated leftist thinking since the Second International had already been collapsed by capital in a new and dramatic way.

In Italy, these considerations carried considerable political significance. On the basis of the analysis, groups like Potere Operaio (PO) attacked the Communist Party's participation in government efforts to enforce Keynesian-type productivity deals on Italian workers as complicity with a capitalist strategy to control and harness workers' power. PO supported the workers' autonomous strategy of demanding more wages and less work, less productivity — a strategy whose thrust was to directly undermine the Keynesian strategy.<sup>118</sup>

This position was also supported theoretically by the abandonment of the old

<sup>117</sup> Negri, 'John M. Keynes e la teoria capitalistica dello stato nel '29'.

<sup>118</sup> Potere Operaio, 'Italy 1969-70: A Wave of Struggles', supplement to *Potere Operaio*, June 27–July 3, 1970; idem, 'The Communism of the Working Class'; idem, 'Italy 1973: Workers' Struggles and the Capitalist Crisis', *Radical America* 7, no. 2 (March–April): 15–32.

leftist perspective on work (which was rooted in the skilled workers' experience from the period of early capitalism through the councils and soviets): that the struggle was to liberate work from capital, to achieve nonalienated work. As Tronti pointed out, under the conditions of the unskilled mass worker, work itself could only be seen as a means of social control to be abolished, not upgraded. This understanding led directly to the realization that the basic characteristic of working-class struggle in this period is not only an escape from capital but also an escape from existence as working class. The aim of the mass worker is to cease to be a worker, not to make a religion of work.<sup>119</sup> This, again, represented a step beyond earlier work. James, for example, who had recognized and studied workers' autonomous struggles against work in the United States of the 1950s had nevertheless retained the traditional view that what the workers really sought was 'satisfaction in the work itself'.<sup>120</sup> In the United States this recognition that the revolt against factory work goes beyond the rejection of 'alienating' work is to be found in the analyses of those like John Zerzan ('Organized Labor versus the Revolt against Work' [1974]) and the authors of the journal *Zerowork*.<sup>121</sup>

In this fashion, through study and the experience of workers' struggles in the 1950s and 1960s, the old theories of total capitalist domination in the factory have been undermined. The new theories that have emerged, and the politics of which they are a part, have been able to both incorporate and yet go beyond the earlier concepts of capitalist technology of Marxist political economists. In the place of old theories that saw technological change as a by-product of competition, or more advanced Frankfurt School analyses of technological rationality, we have today examples of analyses that go beyond one-sided concepts of capitalist autonomy and dominations. They integrate factory technology, capitalist strategy, and working-class autonomy into a real dialectical understanding of class struggle from the perspective of the strategic needs of the working class. The studies in which this integration has been achieved include the investigation of a variety of different industrial sectors as well as the study of capitalist strategy at the level of the state, both nationally and internationally. In Italy, for example, several studies have been done on the petrochemical sector, which is being reorganized as part of an attempt to deal with workers' struggles in the current crisis.<sup>122</sup> Similar studies of restructuring in the auto sector have been carried out not only in Italy, but also in Britain and in the United States.<sup>123</sup> Still others have been carried out on extractive industries, such as mines and agriculture.<sup>124</sup> In all these

**119** Mario Tronti, 'The Struggle against Labor', *Radical America* 6, no. 1 (May–June 1972): 22–25.

**120** James Special Issue, *Radical America* 4, no. 4 (May 1974): 23.

**121** John Zerzan, 'Organized Labor versus "The Revolt against Work": The Critical Contest', *Telos* 21 (Autumn 1974): 194–206.

**122** Sergio Bologna, 'Questions of Method for Analysis of the Chemical Plan', from *Quaderni Piacentini*, January 1973. Potere Operaio, 'Porto Marghera: An Analysis of Workers' Struggles and the Capitalists' Attempts to Restructure the Chemical Industry, a Worker's Inquiry', from *Potere Operaio*, November 1971.

**123** Ferruccio Gambino, 'Workers' Struggles and the Development of Ford in Britain', *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists*, March 1976: 1–18. Peter Linebaugh and Bruno Ramierez, 'Crisis in the Auto Sector', *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975): 60–84.

**124** William Cleaver, 'Wildcats in the Appalachian Coal Fields', *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975): 113–126; and Harry Cleaver, 'Food, Famine and the International Crisis', *Zerowork* 2 (Fall 1977): 7–70.

studies the object has been to study the interplay of working-class and capitalist power as the basis of building the former. At the same time the basic recognition of working-class self-activity not only has informed these factory or industrial studies, but also has bounded a rethinking of the structure of capitalist society as a whole — including the ‘cultural sphere’ of consumption and ‘quality’.

Starting from the recognition that capital includes the working class within itself (until its struggles to break out succeed), Mario Tronti returned to Marx to analyse the total process of accumulation. It was not hard for him to locate the fundamental point in *Capital* in which Marx insists that the process of accumulation is, at its core, the process of the ‘accumulation of the classes, of the capitalist class and of the working class’. In his article ‘Capital’s Plan’, first published in *Quaderni Rossi* in 1963, he moves on from this observation to examine the various ways Marx analysed the ‘total social capital’.<sup>125</sup> He focuses on how the analysis of circulation and reproduction in Volume II of *Capital* also involved the reproduction of the classes. This insight meant that the equation of capital with the ‘factory’, characteristic of Marxist political economy, was clearly inadequate. The reproduction of the working class involves not only work in the factory but also work in the home and in the community of homes. This realization brought into sharp focus the importance of Marx’s long discussion of the reserve army in Volume I’s chapters on accumulation. Accumulation means accumulation of the reserve army as well as the active army, of those who worked at reproducing the class as well as those who produced other commodities (besides labour-power). The ‘factory’ where the working class worked was the society as a whole, a social factory. The working class had to be redefined to include nonfactory workers. This theory provided a point of departure for understanding within a Marxist analysis not only the increasing number of struggles in the 1960s which involved students, women, and the unemployed in Italy, but also similar struggles elsewhere in Europe and the United States as well as those of peasants in the Third World.

The concept of capital as social control, or as social factory, amounts to a reformulation of the problematic of the ‘cultural sphere’ posited by the Critical Theorists. Where they see a centrality of ‘consumption’ that throws into question the whole relevance of Marxism (understood to see production as fundamentally determining instance), Tronti’s work amounts to a reintegration of that vision within Marxism by understanding ‘consumption’ as the production and reproduction of labour-power. Like the Critical Theorists, he sees capital’s plan as englobing the totality of society, but, unlike them, he sees more than the production of the quiescence of inculcated consent. He understands capital’s plan as a strategy to deal with a working-class insurgency that has spread through the community outside the factory. And, as in the factory, he sees that strategy as being increasingly threatened by that insurgency. From the perspective of seeing workers’ revolt as being against their status as workers, it is not far to see the revolt in the community, or cultural sphere, as amounting to a disruption of the production of labour-power. In place of the one-sided theory of

<sup>125</sup> Tronti’s article was published in English as ‘Social Capital’.



bourgeois cultural hegemony, we have the basis of a dialectical theory of struggle in this sector of the social factory. This approach allows the adaptation of much of the new (and old) Marxist analysis of the industrial division of labour to the cultural sphere, and the possibility of integrating many of the useful insights of the Frankfurt School, while avoiding its flaws.

In Italy the implications of these insights into the nature of the social factory were immediate for many involved in these extraparliamentary struggles. The various struggles that were emerging in the community outside the industrial factory could be understood and supported as integral components of working-class struggle against capitalist labour in all its forms. While some groups, like PO, continued to focus primarily on factory struggles, others like Lotta Continua moved increasingly to support community conflicts (such as those around the self-reduction of housing, food, and utility prices) and to attempt to help link those conflicts with factory struggles. Their efforts led to such linkages as factory workers in Turin setting up mobilization committees in support of self-reduction struggles led by housewives against the state-controlled electricity corporation.<sup>126</sup> These were the kinds of battles which both engendered the theoretical developments and were clarified by them.

An extremely important political moment in the development of these struggles in the community, and in their theorization, was the coalescence of the autonomous struggles of women into self-conscious, organized political groups. In this development we can see the kind of autonomy which C. L. R. James saw two decades ago in his analysis of black struggles in the United States: the autonomy of a sector of the working class from other sectors.<sup>127</sup> This new autonomous movement arose through struggle against what many women saw as the domination of the New Left organizations by men, and their overemphasis on the factory. Those women grasped not only the theoretical concept of the social factory but also the key role of the struggle of nonfactory workers — most of whom are women. Mario Tronti and other men in PO could see that the reproduction schemes of Volume II of *Capital* included the reproduction of labour. The women in PO could see that it was their labour which accomplishes that reproduction, and that it had been the struggle of women against that labour in the community which was at the core of the self-reduction movement and other community struggles in Italy and elsewhere.

As a part of their struggles to bring this issue to the fore, women like Mariarosa Dalla Costa developed both new theoretical emphases and new organizations. Organizationally, they broke with PO and organized Lotta Femminista in Italy and, subsequently, an international Wages for Housework campaign. On the theoretical level they vastly expanded Tronti's work on the nonfactory part of the working class. They focused on the key role of the wage in hiding not only the unpaid part of the working day in the factory, but also unpaid work outside it. They drew on Marx's work on the reserve army and the wage, yet they went beyond it in seeing the reproduction

<sup>126</sup> Bruno Ramierz, 'The Working Class Struggle against the Crisis: Self-Reduction of Prices in Italy', *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975): 142–150.

<sup>127</sup> James, 'The Revolutionary Solution to the Negro Problem in the United States'.

of labour-power as within capitalist planning. They brought out the way the wage divides the class hierarchically into wage (factory) and unwaged (housewives, students, peasants, etc.) sectors, such that the latter groups appear to be outside the working class simply because they are not paid a wage. They pushed forward the analysis of the work of reproducing labour-power and analysed its structure both within the home and in the socialized forms of schools, hospitals, and so on.<sup>128</sup>

This understanding of the wage as the fundamental tool for the hierarchical division of the class brought a key insight to the old problem of the role of sexism and racism in capital. As Selma James has argued in her path-breaking work on this issue, sexism and racism can be understood as particular cases of division which are almost always simultaneously wage division.<sup>129</sup> This is true even when the racial or sexual divisions are among the unwaged. Here the hierarchy is that of unwaged income. Her extension of this analysis to the case of the peasantry opened the door to a re-conceptualization of the international character of capital and to a rigorous redefinition of the role of the peasantry within the international capitalist system as a whole. Here was the answer to Althusser's renovated but sterile historical materialism of modes of production as well as a more solid basis for the rejection of the politics of that theory. If the neo-Marxists like Frank had correctly grasped the global nature of capital but failed to develop a theory to explain the wide variety of production arrangements — especially among the peasantry — then James' work provided that theory, especially when combined with the concepts of working-class autonomy and political recomposition to explain the evolution of the structure of production over time.

The political implications of these new insights were far-reaching. As women, the members of Lotta Femminista and Wages for Housework could see that leftist strategies for women calling for their 'joining' the working class by moving into the factories were counterproductive. Not only did going into the factories mean double work, women were already working for capital at home, but also, once in the factories, the wage hierarchies of capital, perpetuated by the unions and the Party, would either keep women down as a group or divide them up over that same hierarchy and thus destroy their collective power. Just as C. L. R. James had argued for the necessary autonomy of the black movement, so did they refuse to be subsumed in such organizations.<sup>130</sup> These women saw that the basic difference between the waged and the unwaged was one of power. The wage — money — gives power, the material resources as a basis for struggle. Hence they put forward the qualitative demand that wages be paid for housework by the collective capitalist: the state. As to the quantitative determination of wages, that would be based on women's power, not on any capitalist productivity measure. It was a demand aimed against the waged/unwaged division. It sought to increase both women's power and, in so doing, that of the working class as a whole by raising that of the lowest level.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*.

<sup>129</sup> Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class*, and 'Wageless of the World', in Edmond and Fleming, eds. *All Work and No Pay*.

<sup>130</sup> Selma James, 'Women, the Unions and Work, or... What Is Not To Be Done', *Radical America* 7, nos. 4-5 (July-October 1973): 51-72. Originally a pamphlet by the Notting Hill Women's Liberation Workshop Group, 1972.

<sup>131</sup> Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework*.

This work formed a decisive advance over the earlier work by Tronti and others. It not only allowed a more adequate grasp of the political recomposition of the Italian working class, but also opened the path to the generalization of earlier work on the capitalist crisis to the global level. The identification of the leading role of the unwaged in the struggles of the 1960s in Italy, and the extension of the concept to the peasantry, provided a theoretical framework within which the struggles of American and European students and housewives, the unemployed, ethnic and racial minorities, and Third World peasants could all be grasped as moments of an international cycle of working-class struggle.

By incorporating the work of Dalla Costa, James, and others in *Wages for Housework* into the analysis of the capitalist crisis, it was possible to extend that analysis to the United States and to the world as a whole. A growing number of articles in both the United States and Europe have underlined the position and importance of the unwaged in the current crisis. For example, *Operaio Multinazionale* (1974) contains a number of articles which seek, through the analysis of the immigrant or 'multinational' worker, to integrate our understanding of the connection between peasant struggles in the Third World, the student, women and 'Third World' struggles in the developed countries, and those of the waged working class.<sup>132</sup> These articles help locate the origins of the current international crisis as being of the social factory as a whole and thus see it as immeasurably more profound than generally recognized.

In 1975 the first issue of the journal *Zerowork* argued, through detailed studies of struggles in the United States, that they were of the same sort as those Italian conflicts demonstrated by PO to have undermined the post-war Keynesian order and forced capital to adopt crisis as a strategy to regain control — to call a political strike on investments. But the collapse of the Keynesian attempt to mobilize working-class energy was not simply at the level of productivity deal in the factory. Analysis of the civil rights/black power movement, the student power, antiwar and women's movements showed that the collapse had been throughout the social factory. Not only had industrial investment in leading sectors like auto and mining faltered under the blows of a new working-class insurgency, but also the human capital investments of the Kennedy-Johnson era in ghetto and university had been undermined by the new movements of the unwaged. All these struggles had been seen before by the New Left theoreticians, but never before had it been possible to integrate their analysis within that of the working class, or to see the autonomy of those struggles, or to analyse the pattern of their circulation among sectors of the class.<sup>133</sup>

Further work on the struggles of the waged and unwaged in the Third World and in the socialist block in the second issue of *Zerowork* has brought out the truly international character of the cycle of struggles. A re-evaluation of peasant and farm-worker struggles in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam showed that the pattern of both worker offensive and capitalist strategy had much in common with peasant and agricultural-worker struggles in the 'West'. These studies contribute to

<sup>132</sup> Alessandro Serafini, et al., *L'Operaio Multinazionale in Europa*.

<sup>133</sup> *Zerowork* 1 (December 1975).

the reinterpretation of a number of key phenomena, such as the role of access to land and the role of multinational workers. Against the traditional views of land ownership as simply a petty bourgeois or feudal characteristic, these studies brought out the way land appears at once as a guarantor of income and as a tool for dividing the unwaged. Against the view of labour migration as simply a spectacle of victimized workers driven by capitalist manipulation, the role of autonomous labour mobility as a form of struggle against capital is emphasized.<sup>134</sup>

All this has led to a fundamental reinterpretation of Marx's crisis theory. With the working class understood as being within capital yet capable of autonomous power to disrupt the accumulation process and thus break out of capital, crisis can no longer be thought of as a blind 'breakdown' generated by the mysteriously invisible laws of competition. Beginning with Antonio Negri's work on Marx's crisis theory, crisis has been reinterpreted in terms of the power relations between the classes and competition has been located as only one organization of this relation.<sup>135</sup> Marx's understanding of crisis as a means to restore the conditions of growth is seen in terms of restoring adequate control over the working class. Thus 'the' modern crisis emerges as a phenomenon of two moments: a first, in which working-class struggle imposes crisis on capital, and a second, in which capital tries to turn the crisis against the working class to restore command. Thus in the present cycle of international crisis, the 1960s figure as the period in which capital lost control of the social factory as a whole due to an international cycle of working-class offensive. And the 1970s figure as the period in which capital has launched an international offensive in which the direct manipulation of the prices of food and energy and of exchange rates and international debt is being used to achieve through international channels what Keynesian policies failed to do nationally: regain control by containing wage struggles within the limits of rising productivity. At the same time capital's organization of this second phase of the international crisis has included the attempt to decompose working-class unity by restructuring the class technologically and geographically. In terms of theory this has also involved a new assessment of Marx's analysis of the long-term trend in capital to substitute constant for variable capital — a trend which Marx saw as leading to a fundamental crisis for a system based on the employment of labour.<sup>136</sup>

These are some of the major insights which together constitute the beginning of a strategic analysis of the pattern of working-class power: (1) the working class as an autonomous power; (2) capital as including the working class within it, capital thus as the class struggle; (3) technology as a particular division of working-class power produced through the class struggle; (4) working-class organization as a function of the composition of the class and thus the historical specificity of trade unionism, social

<sup>134</sup> *Zerowork 2* (Fall 1977).

<sup>135</sup> Antonio Negri, 'Marx sul ciclo e la crisi', in *Operai e Stato*, by Bologna *et al* [in English as 'Marx on Cycle and Crisis', in Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*]. See also Sergio Bologna, 'Moneta e crisi: Marx Corrispondente della 'New York Daily Tribune,' 1856–57', in *Crisi e Organizzazione Operaia*, by S. Bologna, P. Carpiagnano and A. Negri.

<sup>136</sup> See the final pages of Mario Montano, 'Notes on the International Crisis', *Zerowork 1* (December 1975): 32–59. For an overview of the differences between the kind of crisis theory implied by this work and the traditional approaches of political economy, see Peter F. Bell, 'Marxist Theory, Class Struggle and the Crisis of Capitalism', in *The Subtle Anatomy of Capitalism*, ed. J. Schwartz.

democracy, and Leninism, as valid working-class organizational solutions; (5) political recomposition as the working class overcoming capital's division; (6) the working class as including the waged and unwaged; and thus (7) capital as social capital or as social factory; (8) capitalist crisis as crisis of power between the classes; and (9) working-class political recomposition and capitalist decomposition as the substance of the two moments of crisis.

In the foregoing sketch, I have tried to bring out how the rereading of Marx has been an important moment in the development of these elements. Panzieri's rereading of Marx on the organization of work, Tronti's rereading of *Capital* on accumulation, Wages for Housework's rereading of Marx's discussion of the reserve army and of the wage, Zerowork's rereading of the *Grundrisse* on the end of the work, among others, have been necessary and important moments in the development of an analysis which is of greater strategic use to the development of working-class power than either orthodox or Western Marxism. What kind of rereadings are these? How, if at all, do they differ from traditional approaches? They are not, it seems to me, exercises in ideology or in capitalist strategy building. They do not seek a critique of capitalism. They seek rather new tools for developing working-class power. Panzieri discovers working-class autonomy in forcing the transformation of capitalist technology and planning. Tronti discovers the theoretical grounds for exploring how to link factory and nonfactory struggles. Wages for Housework rediscovers the wage as a key to power in overcoming divisions of the class. Zerowork locates contemporary struggles against work as creating a historical crisis of capital.

Given the goal of a strategic or political reading of *Capital* (derived from the needs of contemporary struggles), what is there in *Capital* which makes it possible for us to separate it from its nineteenth-century origins and to use it to illuminate the struggles of the present crisis? The answer is that it provides a fundamental insight into the nature of categories and relations in capitalist society: *there are always two perspectives, capital's versus the working class's!* The analysis of every category and phenomenon must be two-sided; there is no objective place beyond these two perspectives. Althusser's and others' search for an 'objective science' is as futile as that of classical political economy or of Karl Mannheim. To recognize the inevitable two-sided character of analysis is not to merely reflect the class struggle but to reproduce it.

As an example, consider Marx's discussion of the wage. First, the wage is revenue for a worker but it is a cost for a capitalist. Second, capital uses the wage-form to hide its exploitation and the separation of variable capital and surplus value. But then the working class uses wage demands to attack this exploitation. Finally, the wage is a key instrument to divide the working class and weaken it, to ensure its exploitability. But at the same time it can be turned into a weapon to attack that very division.

It is by applying such a two-sided, or class, analysis, which explores the meaning of each category from the differing perspectives of the two classes, to all the other categories of *Capital*, that we can interpret Marx and discover how his work can be of use to us. We must not get bogged down with the mystifications of philosophy or of political economy which, by failing to show how the determinations of capital are

both imposed on the working class and shaped by its struggles against them, at best reveal the one-sided perspective of capital itself. We need not be content with such approaches because through the optic of current struggles we can now see how Marx's work reveals the workers' standpoint as both antithetical to capital and as having the power to destroy capital's determination. Revolutionary strategy is not something extra. It is an essential part of the study of the class relation. Though this relation is constantly shifting, though the nineteenth century is long gone, the two-sided nature of capital remains. Its analysis is not simple, but at the same time we have no vested interest in revelling in the supposedly incomprehensible complexities by which 'professional Marxists' obscure the meaning of *Capital*.

This seems to me to be an important lesson of the recent work sketched above. It implies a way of reading *Capital* politically that involves two steps: *to show how each category and relationship relates to and clarifies the nature of the class struggle and to show what that means for the political strategy of the working class.*<sup>137</sup> These two moments are immediately interrelated and often to do the former is already to do the latter implicitly. For example, by showing us how money is an integral part of capital — a mediation imposed by capital as part of the commodity-form — Marx is implicitly saying that any working-class strategy to destroy capital must ultimately involve the destruction of money.

This demand that each category be explicitly related to the class struggle is not to reduce everything to the class struggle, because class struggle is not an independent, outside cause of the categories and relations. Nor is it an exterior, derived consequence of them. *Capital*, as we have begun to see, is the class relation, and that relation is one of struggle. Class struggle is the confrontation of the capitalist class's attempt to impose its social order — with all its categories and determinations — and the working class's attempts to assert its autonomous interests. Working-class struggle is that revolutionary activity which puts the 'rules of the game' of capitalist society into question. This is why all those rules and determinations must be read from a perspective which insists on evaluating every aspect of capital from the point of view of working-class strategy. This is the source of the two-sided character of capitalist categories. The 'science' of the philosophers and the political economists is only capital's view of itself. The political reading of *Capital*, and of capital, is a strategic activity of the working class. There is no third, objective point above the struggle, because revolutionary activity reveals the other side everywhere. The vital significance of the work I have briefly surveyed above is that it has rediscovered this fact and begun to carry out this strategic project.

This project is exactly the project called for in Marx's discussion of fetishism. We must remember that it is after the detailed discussion of the commodity-form in Chapter One that Marx brings us up short by denouncing the analysis he has just undertaken

<sup>137</sup> In a discussion of Marshall's principles, Mario Tronti points out Marshall's one-sidedness and the need to see the working-class viewpoint: 'This is exactly opposite the truth from our viewpoint where every discovery of an objective social science can and must be translated in the language of the struggles. The most abstract theoretical problem will have the most concrete class meaning' ('Workers and Capital': 30).

as being fetishistic because it deals only with the relations between things rather than the social relations between classes. We must, Marx argues, see behind that fetishism of commodities in which they appear, like religious ideas, as ‘independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race’. We must, in other words, see behind Marx’s own exposition of the commodity-form in which commodities appeared to interact with one another on their own. When Marx goes on in Chapter Two to analyse exchange as an activity between people and then, in the rest of the book, to analyse other aspects of the social relations of capital, he is doing exactly what he prescribes — putting commodities and all their determinations into their place within the class relation. This is an important part of the project I have outlined above: to analyse the meaning of each category of capital within the context of the class confrontation.

There are certainly regularities, or ‘laws’, of commodity exchange just as there is a logic to the commodity-form itself, but that logic and those laws are only those which capital succeeds in imposing. What Marx shows us in *Capital* are the ‘rules of the game’ laid down by capital. These rules reflect its own internal structure — the contradictory struggle of two classes. Our problem is to clarify the importance and meaning for the working class of each of these determinations and ‘rules’ and not simply to accept them as objectively given.

## Reading Chapter One

One of the most basic concepts in *Capital*, which has been central to those readings of Marx that I outlined above, is that of value. Unfortunately, the concept itself has never, to my knowledge, been subjected to a political reading and this has led to some confusing and contradictory usage. This seems to me to be avoidable through a political reading of Marx’s analysis of value in Chapter One of Volume I of *Capital*. To do this, I have tried to bring to bear on the elucidation and interpretation of the various concepts and categories of Chapter One the two-sided approach which I have described above.

The ‘reading’ of this chapter requires care, because Marx is dealing with only a few of the determinations of capital — what he calls the commodity-form. Many of the other determinations of capital are carefully laid out in the rest of Volume I and in Volumes II and III, in what he (and Engels, who edited Volumes II and III) felt was a logically developing progression of ever more complex determinations. This is why labour-power as a commodity, surplus value, capital, accumulation, profit, wages, and so on do not, for the most part, appear in this chapter. Paradoxically, because of this, Chapter One’s difficulty lies, not in its complexity, but in its simplicity. This is one reason why its interpretation has traditionally been difficult, even mysterious. Because the first chapter excludes most explicit discussion of the relation between the commodity-form and capitalism, many interpreters have fallen into exactly the trap of commodity fetishism which Marx warns against. They have looked at the determinations of the commodity-form as being abstract characteristics of any and all commodity

exchange — from those of a simple or ‘petty commodity mode of production’ to the commodity exchange of capital. In this way the whole analysis of Part I, including that of exchange in Chapter Two and of money in Chapter Three, has been treated as being separable from the analysis of capital, which is seen as entering only in Part II in ‘The Transformation of Money into Capital’ — as if the money of Part I were either some ahistorical category or that of some precapitalist mode of production.

But the order of Marx’s exposition is neither ahistorical nor aimed at reproducing a historical development with the precapitalist-category money preceding the categories of capital. ‘It would be inexpedient and wrong, therefore, to present the economics categories successively in the order in which they have played the dominant role in history. On the contrary, their order of succession is determined by their mutual relation in modern bourgeois society’.<sup>138</sup>

As far as the question of the nature of value and money in pre-capitalist society goes, I would only say the following at this point. It is a good idea to take seriously Marx’s admonition in the ‘Introduction’ to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that it is not valid to apply categories appropriate to capitalism to other social systems without modification. ‘Bourgeois economy thus provides the key to the economy of antiquity, etc. But it is quite impossible [to gain this insight] in the manner of those economists who obliterate all historical differences and who see in all social phenomena only bourgeois phenomena. If one knows rent, it is possible to understand tribute, tithe, etc., but they do not have to be treated as identical.’<sup>139</sup>

As a part of this methodological discussion, Marx discusses the case of money explicitly. He notes that, while it is certainly true that ‘money may exist and has existed in historical time before capital, banks, wage-labour, etc. came into being’, it is nevertheless the case that that ‘money’ was less developed in precapitalist society, and thus different. ‘Although the simpler category [money] therefore may have existed historically before the more concrete category [capital], its complete intensive and extensive development can nevertheless only occur in a complex social formation.’<sup>140</sup>

Thus, if one wishes to analyse the nature of value and money in precapitalist society — which is not my aim here — then one would do well to follow Marx’s example and attempt to see how the theory in *Capital*, which is appropriate for capitalism, needs to be modified in order to be useful in other situations.

Chapter One lays out the determinations of a fully developed system of commodity exchange — a system which has only existed as an aspect of capitalism. Because capitalism is such a fully developed system — for reasons I will discuss in the next chapter — those determinations are also determinations of capital and must be understood as such. If Marx made a distinction between money employed as capital in the hiring of wage labour and money employed not as capital in the purchasing of personal services, as he did, it was because he perceived situations in which capital was unsuccessful in completely using money in the expansion of its system. This

<sup>138</sup> Marx, ‘Introduction’, to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 213.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*: 211.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*: 209.



distinction is certainly a valid one, as is the differentiation of the working class's use of money or the *rentier's* use of money. But these uses are not of money as some abstract money *per se* but of money in a particular historical class context. From capital's point of view all these employments of money must be subordinated to and integrated within capital's own expanded reproduction. If they are not, then they are not functioning as money for capital. What this brings out is exactly why it is vital to understand value and money as integral parts of capital. We must understand why they are forms appropriate to and reproduced by capital in order to understand what it means to destroy them.

Another problem is that it is too easy to interpret Marx as accepting as natural fact the relations he is laying out. To do so involves an error, often repeated by Marxist political economists, of seeing Marx's analysis of the commodity-form as different from that of classical political economy only by its correctness. Marx does see and correct the 'errors' of his predecessors — that is the project of Volume IV of *Capital* on theories of surplus value. He is able to better show us the logical consistency of the set of rules associated with the commodity-form. But, he could do this exactly because he stepped outside their perspective (that of capital) and could see the commodity-form as inherent in capital — both as the form by which it compels the working class to work 'freely' for it and as the way it masks that compulsion by an appeal to market relations. Marx is not showing why the 'invisible hand' functioned even better than Adam Smith thought it did. He is showing the ideal structure that capital tries to impose and the way it at once achieves and camouflages this imposition through the mediation of commodities — a camouflage which is reproduced fetishistically in the economic theory of the invisible hand.

Our problem is different than Marx's one of exposition. To understand the theory of value in Chapter One is to see how to do what Marx tells us we must do: integrate the discussion of the commodity-form into our understanding of the class relations which he developed further on in *Capital* and which we are today extending even further. To do this *we must bring to bear on a reading of this first chapter all our knowledge and interpretations of the rest of Capital and of the class struggle it analyses*. Marx spread out his analysis in a logical progression for the sake of clear exposition. *We must reintegrate the totality* and relate each separate part to each other part. It is not enough to assert as a methodological principle that the discussion of surplus value includes that of value because the former is a more developed form of the latter. We must explicitly show how the determinations of value are preserved and added to in surplus value, just as we must show how the determinations of surplus value are preserved and added to in the totality of the class relations. This is the sense of the political reading of *Capital* that I discussed above. It is only by doing this that we can see 'how each category and relationship relates to and clarifies the nature of the class struggle.' It is the only way we can begin to see what value and money mean 'for the political strategy of the working class in general'. And it is only by grasping these relations not as abstract moments of an abstract model but as real moments of the contemporary actuality of the class confrontation that we can discover what they

mean, in particular, today. It is on the basis of such an understanding of value that I think we can evaluate to what extent the rest of *Capital* and its extensions have been, or can be, reinterpreted consistently and usefully.

In what follows, I 'reread' Sections 1, 2, and 3 of Chapter One, in that order, and deal sequentially with the commodity-form within capital; the analysis of the commodity-form into use-value and exchange-value and into qualitative and quantitative aspects; abstract labour as the substance of value; socially necessary labour time as the measure of abstract labour; the forms of value (winding up with the money-form); and, finally, those aspects of money brought out by the money-form. In each case I have attempted to bring out the two class perspectives and briefly discuss the implications for working-class struggle. I give no separate analysis of Section 4 of Chapter One which deals with fetishism, simply because, as I have already explained, this whole essay involves the work of going behind the appearances of the commodity-form to get at the social relations. In conclusion, I sum up some of the major results of reading this chapter.