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Conclusion: Socialist Strategies and the State in Advanced Capitalist Societies

In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin dismissed bourgeois representative democracies as "mere talking shops". Since the real centres of political power lay in the state bureaucracy, even parliamentary victories by working class parties would not give the working class control of the state. As for the bureaucracies themselves, they were structured in such a way as to make it impossible for the working class to participate directly in the exercise of bureaucratic power. Since parliaments were impotent and bureaucracies impregnable, the only way in which the working class could attain state power was to smash the state apparatus as a whole.

These judgements were based on the historical experiences of bourgeois democracies in the first part of the 20th century. Sixty years have passed since then. Capitalism has progressed from the period of the consolidation of monopoly capitalism to the emergence of diverse forms of state-directed monopoly capitalism. The pivotal contradictions of the accumulation process have shifted from the rising organic composition of capital to an incipient politicization of the accumulation process through state intervention at the level of production. The class structures of capitalist societies have changed drastically: the traditional petty bourgeoisie has shrunk to a small proportion of the population, contradictory locations within class relations have increased, and simultaneously, many of those contradictory locations are becoming increasingly proletarianized. The ques-

tion is thus posed: to what extent are Lenin's evaluations still valid under contemporary historical conditions? In what ways can parliamentary victories of working class parties contribute to a socialist revolution? Or, more broadly, how can the capitalist state be used in the struggle for socialism in advanced capitalist societies? Such questions are being posed with a renewed urgency as European communist parties move away from traditional Leninist answers and seem prepared to participate fully in the institutional framework of the capitalist state.

In the rest of this chapter, we will explore these issues by linking the analysis of the capitalist state and bureaucracy in the previous chapter with our earlier discussion of capitalist crisis and class formation. Specifically, we will examine the thesis that *in advanced monopoly capitalism it is possible to use the democratic capitalist state apparatus as a basis for (ultimately) destroying the capitalist state itself*.¹ There are some indications that this thesis, in one form or another, is at least tentatively being advanced by certain tendencies within European Communist Parties.² In much clearer terms, this general thesis has been supported by a variety of political tendencies to the left of the Communist Parties.³ As a general stance towards

1. It is important to note that this thesis does not pertain to the capitalist state in general, nor even to the democratic form of the capitalist state in general, but specifically to the democratic form of the capitalist state under the conditions of advanced monopoly capitalism. The historical specificity of this claim is one of the things (among others indicated below) which differentiates it from social democratic strategies.

2. For example, Santiago Carrillo, the Secretary-general of the Spanish Communist Party, expresses this basic thesis in his book *Eurocomunismo y Estado* (Barcelona: Critica, 1977): "The state apparatus as a whole continues to be an instrument of the dominant class. This continues to be a Marxist truth. The State is not above classes, it is not an arbiter between them. . . . Without transforming the state apparatus all socialist transformation is precarious and reversible. . . . The problem is not only to arrive to the Government. The problem still is *how to transform the state apparatus*." (pp. 18, 66, emphasis in the original.) The tactfulness of the language (transformation instead of destruction of the state) should not obscure the central theoretical point being made: the state apparatus itself has a class character and that unless that class character is fundamentally changed, any transition to socialism will be thwarted. The claim that it is possible to use this bourgeois apparatus in the process of its own transformation should not be confused with the liberal claim that it is not a bourgeois apparatus in the first place.

3. See, for example Lucio Magri, in a recent interview: "Italy, Social Democracy and Revolution in the West: an Interview with Lucio Magri", *Socialist Revolution* No. 36, 1977. Magri argues that a socialist strategy in advanced capitalism involves participation in parliamentary activity but it is not limited

the capitalist state, this thesis must be differentiated from both the traditional social-democratic position and the traditional Leninist position.

The traditional social democratic position, at least since World War I, is that it is possible to use the capitalist state as a basis for a transition to socialism without at the same time destroying the capitalist state itself. The state apparatus is thus viewed as an essentially neutral instrument, capable of being used by different class forces for radically opposed ends. Socialism is viewed as a series of policies, or reforms, which can be effectively implemented through the democratic state apparatus of capitalist society. While this does not imply that such a reform process will necessarily be smooth or uncontested, it does imply that there are no inherent structural limits to such reforms embedded in the very character of the state itself.

The traditional Leninist position has generally rejected the possibility of using the capitalist state in the transition to socialism.⁴ The structural limits imposed by the capitalist state

to electoral activity. "The problem is to add to the traditional forms of representative and parliamentary democracy the new forms of direct democracy expressed through the councils, the women's movement, the movement of young people, and the unemployed workers' movement, and to achieve an ever greater level of activation and organization of the masses. It is necessary to use the opportunities offered by bourgeois democracy against bourgeois democracy itself. . . . When we speak of a government of the left, we are not thinking of a sort of Kerensky government—the reformist left parties going into the government and helping us open the road to revolution. Rather, we propose that the left parties, although not yet having full control over state power, use the government itself to help the mass movement grow and to create the space and the instruments for coordination of the mass movement." (pp. 130–131) A similar stance is adopted by Ralph Miliband in the concluding chapter of his book *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford 1977): "[The transition to a socialist society] both *includes* and *requires* radical changes in the structures, modes of operation and personnel of the existing state, *as well as* the creation of a network of organs of popular participation amounting to 'dual power'. The 'reformist' strategy, at least in this 'strong' version of it, may produce a combination of direction and democracy sufficiently effective to keep the conservative forces in check *and* to provide the conditions under which the process of transition may proceed" (p. 189).

4. It is always dangerous to talk about "the" Leninist position, since a wide variety of political orientations have at different times and places adopted the label "Leninist". The position outlined here under this designation is not necessarily restricted to Leninists, and certainly not all groups which have called themselves Leninist have invariably held this position. But I do think that it represents the central thrust of the traditional Leninist views of the capitalist state and the correct strategies of socialist movements with respect to that state.

are thought to be so narrow that any attempt at using that state apparatus will necessarily have the effect of reinforcing bourgeois domination. The capitalist state cannot be captured and used by the working class; it must be destroyed. Such a stance does not prevent purely tactical and conjunctural demands *on* the capitalist state for certain kinds of policies or reforms, but it does argue against a strategy of trying to control the capitalist state apparatus itself.⁵ Not only would such a strategy fail on its own terms; its net effect would only be to strengthen the capitalist state and make the task of smashing the state that much more difficult.

The thesis that the capitalist state can be used for its own destruction differs from both of these more traditional stances towards the capitalist state. Like the social democratic position, this thesis accepts the possibility of the Left systematically using the democratic capitalist state for socialist objectives (or at least for helping to create the preconditions for socialism). But unlike the social democratic position, the capitalist state is understood as imposing definite structural limitations on any socialist transformation. Thus, like the Leninist position, the

5. Lenin in particular argued that the capitalist state should be used tactically in the struggle for socialism. His emphasis was generally on the importance of engaging in parliamentary struggles as a way of educating the masses. For example, in 1920 he wrote: "Participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum is *obligatory* on the part of the revolutionary proletariat *specifically* for the purpose of educating the backward strata of *its own class*, and for the purpose of awakening and enlightening the undeveloped, downtrodden and ignorant rural masses. Whilst you lack the strength to do away with bourgeois parliaments and every other type of reactionary institution, you must work within them because it is there that you will still find workers who are duped by the priests and stultified by the conditions of rural life. . . . In Western Europe, the backward masses of the workers and—to an even greater degree—of the small peasants are much more imbued with bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices than they were in Russia; because of that, it is *only* from within such institutions as bourgeois parliaments that Communists can (and must) wage a long and persistent struggle, undaunted by any difficulties, to expose, dispel and overcome these prejudices." See *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, in *Selected Works*, London 1969, pp. 546, 551. However, while Lenin vehemently attacked the "ultra-left" for denying tactical participation in bourgeois parliamentary democracy, to my knowledge he never argues that a workers' government in a bourgeois democracy could transform the very capitalist character of the capitalist state through a series of structural reforms. The capitalist state may well be a vital arena for class struggle, but it cannot be *used* strategically by a workers' party in order to destroy the capitalist state.

thesis acknowledges the necessity of ultimately destroying the very structure of that state in order to make possible a sustained transition to socialism. The strategy embodied in the thesis breaks with traditional Leninism, however, in arguing that under the conditions of advanced capitalism, it is possible for the Left to control the capitalist state apparatus (or at least parts of it) and to use that apparatus systematically in the attack on capitalist state power itself.

The modes of determination discussed throughout this book may help us to understand more rigorously the logic of this thesis. Two relations of determination are particularly important.⁶ First, state interventions are *structurally limited* by the underlying class structure of the society and *selected* by the structure of the state apparatuses. This means that certain forms of state intervention are made impossible by the basic social structures of the society, and that within the range of possible interventions, a narrower set of possibilities are selected by the state apparatuses (i.e., the apparatuses establish limits within limits). Second, the class structure of the society generates *limits of functional compatibility* on the effects of state interventions. That is, within the range of all structurally possible state interventions, only certain interventions can be considered optimal for the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole; other interventions are compatible with that reproduction but not optimal (i.e., they have contradictory effects), and still other possible interventions are actually non-reproductive of capitalist social relations. An intervention by the state which falls outside of the limits of functional compatibility sets in motion a chain of consequences which will either lead to a negation of that state activity, or eventually to a break with the structure of capitalism itself.⁷

6. Figure 1.7 in Chapter One presents a model of determination which corresponds fairly closely to the present discussion. The only difference is that a relation of limitation should be added between economic structure and state policies.

7. In these terms, a "perfect" capitalist state, from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, would be one in which the state apparatuses were organized in such a way that only those state interventions which were optimally reproductive for capitalism would be selected within the range of structurally possible interventions. Such a coincidence of the limits of structural possibility and the limits of functional compatibility would doom any attempt by the working class to "use" the capitalist state to failure. Such a perfect capitalist state cannot exist

Now, the thesis that the capitalist state can be used to destroy the capitalist state can be reinterpreted as a thesis about the possibility of the noncoincidence between these two kinds of limits in a capitalist society: *the limits of what is structurally possible need not correspond to the limits of what is functionally compatible with the requirements of reproducing capitalism.*⁸

The premise of the strategy of using the state to destroy the state is that in advanced capitalism the instrumental control of the summits of the state apparatus by the Left can serve to widen this gap between the structural limits on the state and the functional effects of the state.⁹ The implicit reasoning goes

because the capitalist state is not simply the product of bourgeois domination, but of class struggle. The ruling class may rule, but not just as it pleases. This means that the extent to which the interventions of the state will be optimal for the capitalist class is always problematic. Many Marxist theoretical works on the state nevertheless adopt the view that the capitalist state is such a perfect apparatus for the bourgeoisie. The assumption is made that the capitalist state is universally functional for reproducing the dominance of the capitalist class, and thus the two modes of determination discussed above are fused into a single relation of determination. The "functionalist" cast to some of Poulantzas's early work (see especially *Political Power and Social Classes*, NLB London 1973) comes in part from this fusion of the limits of structural possibility and the limits of functional compatibility.

8. If the theoretical claim is to be made that there is inevitably a coincidence of the limits of functional compatibility with the limits of structural possibility, then it is necessary to demonstrate the social mechanisms which guarantee such a coincidence. In the absence of a discussion of these mechanisms, the claim for coincidence becomes ideological rather than scientific. The one tradition within Marxism which has attempted to outline such concrete mechanisms is so-called "instrumentalist" research on the ruling class. In this tradition of research, it is the concrete ties of the capitalist class to the state apparatus which guarantee the coincidence of the activities of the state (limits of the possible) with the interests of the bourgeoisie (limits of functional compatibility). However, it is only if the bourgeoisie is thought to be both omniscient and omnipotent that the empirical demonstration of such ties to the state can be translated into a theory of the *necessary* coincidence of the limits of the possible and the functional. Such an assumption implies that history can be understood simply in terms of class domination rather than class struggle.

9. The degree of non-coincidence between the limits of the possible and the limits of the functional is not fixed for all time. Rather, it is a variable non-coincidence. In certain historical conjunctures such a non-coincidence is very restricted, in others it is very broad. The degree to which such a non-coincidence occurs is a measure of the extent to which the basic class contradictions of the society have been internalized into the state. The fundamental reason why the strategy of using the capitalist state to destroy the state may be a plausible strategy in advanced capitalism, but not in earlier forms of capitalism, is that

something like this: because of the gap between the class selectivity of the state and the class functionality of the state, a Left government can potentially enact certain reforms (i.e., structurally possible interventions) which have the effect of changing the structure of the state itself in ways which erode the class selectivity of the state apparatuses. As the class selectivity of the state structures is eroded, the possibility of nonreproductive state interventions increases. Such interventions can potentially change the class structure itself in ways which broaden the structural limits on the state, thus increasing the gap between structural limits and functional compatibility still further. At some point such a process leads to a qualitative transformation (destruction) of the class character of the state itself. Once this occurs, a new type of state structure is established which can function to build socialist relations of production rather than simply undermine capitalist relations. Such a transformation represents a revolutionary break with capitalism.¹⁰

It is one thing to make an abstract claim about the theoretical possibility of such a contradiction between the limits of structural possibility and the limits of functional compatibility of capitalist state interventions, and another thing to demonstrate the historical reality of this possibility. Certainly in the case of the United States, the above scenario of progressively eroding the class character of the state has little immediate plausibility.

the structural changes embodied in the capitalist state (greater role in accumulation, the welfare state, etc.) have considerably increased this internalization of class contradictions within the state. This internalization of contradictions, of course, only generates the potential for an increased gap between the class selectivity of the state and the class functionality of the state. The extent to which this potentiality becomes an actuality is determined by class struggle (through a relation of mediation).

10. At first glance, this series of propositions may seem extremely voluntaristic: by an act of will, a socialist government can somehow transcend the constraints of capitalist structures. The argument, however, is not that a Left government can voluntaristically ignore the constraints imposed by the capitalist character of the capitalist state. Those constraints are real and limit the options of any government. Rather, the argument is that the structural contradictions of late capitalism create conditions within which political struggles can have the effect of gradually shifting the constraints themselves. It is not a question of political will-power, but of the objective contradictions within the state—the gap between the limits of the possible and the limits of the functional—which make possible such transformations of the state itself.

Both because of the weakness of the Left in general and because of the (still) relatively untarnished hegemony of the capitalist class, the gap between structural possibilities and functional effects of the state offers little opening for such strategies in the United States.¹¹

The situation in parts of Western Europe appears quite different, and it is there that the strategy of using the capitalist state to destroy the state has received the most attention. The organizational capacities of the working class are greater than in the United States and the internal contradictions of the capitalist state more intense. If the strategy is to be plausible in the current period, it will be in Europe rather than the United States that it will be tested.

I do not have a sufficiently broad understanding of current developments in Western Europe to provide a rigorous analysis of alternative socialist strategies. What I can try to do is indicate the general developments in advanced capitalism which impinge on the strategy of using the state to destroy the state. My general conclusion will be that the conditions of advanced capitalist societies *simultaneously* generate new possibilities for such a strategy and recreate obstacles to any attempt by socialist forces to use the capitalist state. The decisive task of any socialist strategy is to grapple with this intensely contradictory situation, rather than to ignore the contradictions in the polemical defence of a specific choice.

This discussion of the strategic implications of developments in advanced capitalism will focus on four issues: 1. the relationship of immediate to fundamental interests of the working class in advanced capitalism; 2. the relationship of state bureaucracy to the class formation; 3. the dialectical rela-

11. This is not to say that the scenarios of socialist revolution presented by various vanguard Marxist-Leninist parties in the United States are more plausible than the strategy of using the state to destroy the state. The problem is that in the United States in the late 1970s no strategy for socialism is particularly plausible. This is not because of a failure of revolutionary imagination on the Left, but because the historical conditions within the United States make it difficult to assess the chain of consequences which flow from a given strategy. In a sense, therefore, the crucial immediate question for the American Left is less "how to make a revolution", but rather "how to create the social conditions within which we can *know* how to make a revolution". In the common parlance of the Left in the United States, this is referred to as "putting socialism on the political agenda", i.e., creating the ideological and political conditions in which socialism is viewed as a serious alternative within the working class.

tionship of class capacities of the working class to the capitalist state; 4. the problem of repression.

1. *Fundamental and Immediate Interests*

Parliamentary competition has generally been one of the basic mechanisms by which struggles for the fundamental interests of the working class become displaced onto struggles for immediate interests.¹² Electoral campaigns tend to encourage promises of immediate benefits of constituencies, and the structural prerequisite for a party to "deliver the goods" is a healthy capitalist economy. Furthermore, the attempt by socialist parties to create an electoral majority has always necessitated electoral appeals to voters outside of the working class, and this too has tended to undercut electoral campaigns around the fundamental interests of the proletariat.¹³ The end result is that "responsible" parliamentary parties of the Left generally restrict their programmes to reforms which are compatible with the reproduction of capitalism, and this means that immediate interests of the working class tend to replace fundamental interests in party programmes.

While there are some exceptions to this pattern—as when left parliamentary parties act to strengthen the legal rights of working class organizations, thus facilitating the development of the class capacities of the working class—nevertheless, the typical effect of parliamentary competition on left parties has been to shift their real programmes from fundamental to immediate interests. This is the traditional pattern. The question, then, is whether the new contradictions of advanced capitalism allow the Left to link fundamental interests to reforms over immediate interests within the framework of democratic bourgeois politics? It would be a serious mistake to argue that somehow in advanced capitalism, socialist and communist parties have been liberated from the pressures and constraints faced by earlier parties. Indeed, it can be argued that since these

12. See chapter 2 above for an extended discussion of immediate and fundamental interests.

13. For an extremely interesting and important discussion of this process of erosion of fundamental interests within socialist electoral parties, see Adam Przeworski, and John Sprague, "A History of Western European Socialism", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September, 1977.

parties are likely to come to power under relatively unfavourable economic conditions, their first order of business will be to stabilize and revitalize the accumulation process. In the short run this could imply a fairly serious constraint on even the pursuit of immediate interests of the working class (higher wages, more jobs, better housing, etc.), but it certainly would constrain the pursuit of more fundamental interests.

Nevertheless, the specific contradictions of advanced capitalism do open up a new terrain for joining immediate and fundamental class interests of the working class. Two specific developments are especially important. First, since the Second World War there has occurred a partial erosion of the purely commodified character of labour power. The most striking form of this decommodification of labour power centres on welfare state policies which reproduce labour power even when it cannot be sold as a commodity on the labour market. The mildest form of this decommodification is unemployment insurance, which guarantees the reproduction of wage-labourers during periods when they cannot find employment. Other forms include state subsidies to families for child support, state welfare for the handicapped, for the aged, etc. To a greater or lesser extent, all of these forms of state transfers break the linkage between subsistence and the market, i.e., they undermine the commodity status of labour power.¹⁴ Labour power is also partially decommodified through the reduction of the portion of the life cycle during which an individual labourer sells his/her labour as a commodity (i.e., through the lengthening of schooling, through earlier retirement and through longer life).¹⁵ Again, this implies a partial weakening of the link between selling labour power as an exchange value, and the reproduction of people through the consumption of use-values.

Of course, the counter-tendency also exists within capitalism. Most notably, the rapid incorporation of vast numbers of women

14. One of the crucial consequences of this partial decommodification of labour power is a weakening of the effectiveness of the reserve army of labour as a way of disciplining the working class. Unemployment no longer holds the terror for workers that it once did, even though it is still unquestionably a hardship on most workers. (See chapter 3 above.)

15. This point was suggested by Adam Przeworski. See his "The Process of Class Formation: from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to recent debates", *Politics and Society*, 1977.

into the labour force since the 1940s implies that an increasing proportion of women's labour is commodified. Thus, while the growth of the welfare state partially decommodifies all labour power, an increasing proportion of the population spends at least part of their lives selling their labour power as a commodity.

The critical point in the present context is that this partial decommodification of labour power potentially undermines the assumption that the "natural" organization of production requires labour power to function as a commodity. To the extent that such decommodification of labour power deepens, then struggles for improvements of the standard of living of workers will tend to be progressively displaced from direct wage struggles (struggles over the exchange value of labour power) to struggles over the provision of use-values by the state. This in turn may make it easier to challenge at the ideological level the commodity status of labour power itself.

The second way in which the specific contradictions of advanced capitalism potentially allow for a closer linkage of immediate and fundamental interests concerns the progressive politicization of the accumulation process itself. As was argued at some length in the discussion of contemporary crisis dynamics in chapter 3, the solutions to the present world economic crisis will involve much more profound interventions of the state into the production process itself. Such interventions will take many forms: more pervasive levels of state planning, state controls over investments and flows of capital, the direct organization of broader spheres of production by the state, etc. All of these contribute to an erosion of the unrestricted sway of commodity relations in the economy, i.e., increasingly exchange-value criteria are replaced by use-value criteria (ultimately political criteria) in the process of resource allocation within capitalist economies. To be sure, an attempt will be made politically to subordinate such use-value criteria to the needs of commodity production itself. However, the very fact that such allocations pass through the state opens the door for their political contestation in ways which are impossible so long as accumulation is directed entirely within "private" corporate boardrooms.

Such a shift away from pure commodity relations may be essential for the reproduction of capitalism itself, but it simul-

taneously contradicts one of the basic requirements for the reproduction of capitalist relations: the displacement of conflicts from fundamental to immediate interests. The increasing intervention of the state within accumulation means that purely economic conflicts between capital and labour immediately become political conflicts; while the erosion of market rationality means that those political conflicts will more directly pose the question of the class content of the state interventions within production itself. Again, this means, at least potentially, that conflicts between labour and capital over immediate interests can more easily be linked to questions of fundamental interests.

Both of these developments—the partial decommodification of labour power and the politicization of accumulation—only *potentially* provide a basis for linking immediate and fundamental interests of the working class. They can also serve to reinforce a split between the two. The partial decommodification of labour power, for example, poses new divisions within the working class between those workers whose labour is completely commodified (full time wage labourers) and workers whose labour is less commodified (students, pensioners, unemployed, underemployed). Instead of challenging the assumption of labour power as a commodity, therefore, the partial decommodification of labour power could potentially become a material basis for deepening the hostilities between workers with strong and weak positions in the market. Similarly, the politicization of accumulation need not link immediate to fundamental class interests. Instead of raising the issue of the class content of the process of resource allocation in a capitalist society, such a politicization can simply reproduce at the political level the belief that the strengthening of capitalist institutions and capital accumulation is in the interests of everyone.

The extent to which these developments will lead to a stronger linkage of immediate and fundamental class interests or to a continued displacement of fundamental onto immediate interests depends, therefore, on the ways in which class struggles in general, and socialist politics in particular, intersect these contradictions. In terms of our discussion of modes of determination, the effects of these contradictions are mediated by class struggle.

The policies of a socialist government around the question of full employment are especially important in shaping the effects of the partial decommodification of labour power. If a full employment policy takes the form primarily of stimulating economic growth in order to provide greater employment through the market (i.e., classical Keynesian programmes), then the commodity status of labour power might even be reinforced. If, however, a full employment policy was centred around a reduction of the average hours worked per worker, with state subsidies to workers to provide compensating income supplements, then full employment would be consistent with a continued decommodification of labour power.

Perhaps even more importantly, the stance a socialist government takes toward the contradictions embedded in the politicization of accumulation will have a significant impact on the possibilities of linking struggles over immediate and fundamental interests. The temptation of any government in a capitalist state, including a Left government, is to try to obscure the class character of its own activity. If austerity measures are necessary to prevent the flight of capital, such policies are likely to be portrayed as necessary for "national prosperity and economic recovery". Instead of arguing that such measures reflect the constraints of the capitalist mode of production, they will be defended in terms of neutral technical criteria which essentially obscure the contradictions between state interventions which stabilize capitalism and the fundamental interests of the working class. A Left government can adopt another stance: it can try to make the class content of its own interventions explicit, showing how in spite of Left control within the state apparatus, the bourgeoisie remains the ruling class and is thus capable of constraining the state itself. Of course, proclamations that the capitalist class constrains the state can be an excuse for inaction and immobility rather than a basis for demystifying the class character of the state itself. It is not enough to proclaim the constraints of capital; it is necessary for the policies of the state constantly to push up against those constraints, materially demonstrating the limits of possibility within the existing social structure. If this is done, the politicization of accumulation in advanced capitalism can become the basis for asserting the necessity of progressively joining the

struggles for immediate and fundamental interests, i.e., for attacking the constraints themselves.

2. *Bureaucracy and Class Formation*

Lenin insisted that in the parliamentary republic the real work of government took place in the bureaucracies, not in parliaments. If a left government is to have any chance of instituting policies which serve the fundamental interests of the working class (anti-capitalist policies) it is essential that it not only be capable of legislating such policies, but of actually implementing them. This requires a capacity to control the actual workings of the bureaucracy. If the bureaucracy is sufficiently autonomous from control by elected bodies—as Weber indicated was the case in Prussia in the early 20th century—then anti-capitalist state policies are likely to be neutralized in the actual process of state intervention.

As in the case of the relationship of immediate to fundamental interests, the Left confronts very contradictory prospects on the question of controlling the state bureaucracy. On the one hand, the power of state bureaucracies has if anything increased over the past half century, further eroding the capacity of parliamentary majorities to define decisively state policy. The saga of increasing centralization of the state apparatus and decreasing influence of legislative bodies has been told many times.

On the other hand, pervasive contradictions have emerged within the state bureaucracies themselves which pose new possibilities for the Left. Whereas Lenin could refer to the bureaucratic personnel of the state apparatus as tied to the bourgeoisie "through a thousand threads", which guaranteed their loyalty to the capitalist class, the class character of state bureaucratic positions can no longer be characterized in such a simple manner. As was argued in the discussion of class in Chapter 2, many positions within the bureaucracy should be considered contradictory class locations between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and many others should be viewed as essentially proletarian in character (excluded from both the creation and execution of state policy). Furthermore, there are certainly some reasons to believe that many of the contradictory locations within the state apparatuses are being increasingly pro-

letarianized in late capitalism. The growth of trade unionism among state employees in the United States, for example, would tend to support the view that contradictory locations within the state are being drawn closer to the working class. As the state attempts to rationalize its own labour processes in order to counter the fiscal crisis of the state, this tendential proletarianization of civil servants will if anything increase.

Such a proletarianization of positions within the state apparatus significantly changes the relationship of bureaucratic structures to the class struggle. While it remains the case that bureaucratic structures still act as a barrier against any direct influence of the working class on the administration of state policies, the emerging class relations within the bureaucracy mean that substantial portions of the bureaucratic personnel are potential allies of the working class in class struggles. This means that with socialist governments in power, parts of the bureaucracy, at least, are likely to throw their weight behind the Left, rather than sabotage the Left. The problem of resistance from top levels of the bureaucratic structure would remain, but it will be potentially easier to counter such resistance if lower levels of the state bureaucracy can be drawn into working class organizations.

The proletarianization of state employees, including lower level bureaucratic personnel, does not imply that people in such positions will automatically join forces with the working class in socialist struggles. At the level of immediate interests, a fairly deep division between state workers and non-state workers continues to exist because of the link of state sector wages to taxation. The organization of state workers into unions and the intensification of their struggles with the state over immediate interests can have the effect of increasing the conflict between state workers and other workers. To the extent that state workers are mobilized only around purely economic demands, their proletarianization is unlikely to tie them more closely to the working class as a whole.

In order for the proletarianization of state workers to contribute to an erosion of the barriers between the working class and the bureaucracy, therefore, it is essential that state workers also be organized around political demands—demands for better social services, for smaller classes in the schools, for

client and consumer participation in the management of state services, and so forth. The strategy of socialist penetration of the capitalist state, of using the state to destroy the state, will depend heavily upon the success of the Left in organizing state workers around such political demands. To the extent that state bureaucratic personnel remain unorganized by the Left, the Weberian dilemma of parliamentary control of the bureaucracy would undermine the effectiveness of any Left government. To the extent that substantial segments of the bureaucracy are mobilized into working class formations, Lenin's insistence that the bureaucratic structure of the capitalist state negated any possibility of the working class using parliament for anti-capitalist ends would need to be qualified.

3. Working Class Capacities and the Capitalist State

The eventual possibility of a revolutionary break with capitalism in advanced capitalist societies depends upon the organization and strength of the working class. The most decisive issue in the strategy of using the capitalist state to destroy the state is thus: *in what ways can the control of the government by the Left contribute to expanding and deepening the class capacities of the working class?*¹⁶ If a Left parliamentary victory were to lead to a demobilization and disorganization of the working class, then even if such a government were to enact a series of progressive reforms, it is inconceivable that it could create the conditions for a socialist transformation.

As Poulantzas has effectively argued, one of the central functions of the capitalist state is precisely to disorganize the working class while simultaneously organizing the bourgeoisie. This disorganization of the working class is accomplished above all by the essential institutional structures of the capitalist state. The privatized character of voting, the canons of equality before the law, the denial of "class" as a juridical category, and so on, all serve to transform people from members of a class into individual, atomized citizens.¹⁷ To the extent that the working

16. Lucio Magri strongly emphasizes this issue. He argues that it is less the intrinsic character of the reforms enacted by a Left government that matters than the relationship of such reforms to the mass struggle. (See footnote 3 above.)

17. For an extended discussion of such processes of disorganization of the working class, see Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*.

class is formed into a class in spite of such processes of atomization, the repressive apparatus of the state functions to limit the growth of the organizational capacities of the working class and to channel such organizations toward objectives which divide rather than unite the working class as a class.

It would be extremely utopian and idealist to suppose that an electoral victory of a Left coalition would somehow allow a Left government to be unconstrained by this basic function of the capitalist state. The disorganization of the working class is an effect of the very structure of the capitalist state; it is not primarily a question of a "policy" of the government of the capitalist state. *As long as a capitalist state remains a capitalist state, therefore, it will continue to have such disorganizing effects on the working class.*

This being said, the question becomes: To what extent can a Left government act to *minimize* the disorganizing effects of the capitalist state? To what extent can it actively erode the structural basis of those effects?¹⁸ Answers to these questions are pivotal to the strategy of using the capitalist state to destroy the state. Fundamentally, "destroying the *capitalist* state" means destroying the structures of that state which systematically undermine the class capacities of the working class and thus make it impossible for the working class to become a ruling class.

Answering these questions involves two major tasks: first, analysing what actions a Left government would have to pursue once in power in order to erode the structural basis of the

18. These questions presuppose that the atomization of the working class is a *variable* rather than constant effect of the structure of the capitalist state. There are two sources of this variation: first, different variations of the structure of the capitalist state will generate differing degrees of disorganization of the working class; and second, the same structure will produce differing degrees of disorganization depending upon the conditions of class struggle (for class struggle always mediates the effects of state structures). The strategy of using the state to destroy the state presupposes both sources of variation: the control of the government by the Left can push the capitalist state towards the minimal pole of disorganization of the working class through structural change of the state itself, and class struggles can mitigate the disorganizing effects of the state. All Marxists, of course, would acknowledge the mediating role of class struggle (if not, it would be impossible to organize the working class), but they differ strongly on their views of the first source of variation of disorganization of the working class. The traditional social democratic view would be that the state does not necessarily disorganize the working class at all (i.e. it is a neutral apparatus), while the traditional Leninist view would be that possible variations in disorganizing effects were extremely limited or non-existent.

atomizing effects of the state; and second, analysing the pre-conditions necessary for the Left to be able to engage in such actions if it gained control of the government.

State actions which potentially minimize the disorganization of the working class. The disorganization of the working class, as was observed above, is accomplished through two sorts of mechanisms: the direct repression of the expansion of working class capacities, and the atomization of political life through the structures of the capitalist state. The first of these is more easily influenced by a Left victory than the second, but the second is more important if the capitalist character of the capitalist state is to be eventually destroyed.

Any electoral victory by the Left is likely to be accompanied by considerable initiatives from the working class, ranging from the formation of neighbourhood councils to factory occupations. The reaction of the new government to such initiatives will have long-term consequences for the ultimate success or failure of the regime in building the capacities of the working class. Upon coming to power, a Left government would be under considerable pressure to prove that it was "responsible", capable of maintaining order and controlling its own ranks. The temptation under such circumstances would be for the government to crush such popular movements, or at least to create conditions which would be highly unfavourable to their expansion. Threats of various sorts from the capitalist class—ranging from withdrawal of investments to political disruption to military intervention—would add considerably to the pressure to repress such initiatives from the working class. To a large extent, the capacity of the government to withstand such pressures and to provide some sort of protective umbrella for the growth of popular social movements will determine the longer-term prospects for more fundamental structural change.

A Left government would not simply be under pressure from the bourgeoisie to repress popular mobilization. It would also be under pressure from conservative socialist forces within the government itself to control social movements, especially those involving significant participation of the extra-parliamentary revolutionary left. Again, the temptation of the government under such pressures would be, at a minimum, to withdraw any

institutional support for those movements, and perhaps even to actively repress the extra-parliamentary revolutionary left.

Such a systematic repression of a Left opposition would seriously undermine the possibilities of using the state to expand the class capacities of the working class. It might seem somewhat of a contradiction, but a socialist government within a capitalist state needs a healthy, politically active left opposition outside of parliament. In the absence of an organized opposition on its left, it would be extremely difficult for a socialist coalition in power to avoid gradually moving toward the right under the pressures of the constraints of the capitalist state. In a complementary way, of course, such a left opposition must be a "loyal" opposition in the sense of refraining from purely destructive tactics aimed at wrecking the coalition in power. It is only under conditions where an extra-parliamentary revolutionary Left offers critical support to a socialist parliamentary government and yet continues to engage in political work outside of the constraints of the capitalist state, that the parliamentary parties themselves will be able to contribute to building the political capacities of the working class.¹⁹

The policy of adopting a generally non-repressive stance toward popular social movements as a way of expanding the class capacities of the working class is fairly straightforward, even if it will confront serious opposition. The problem of effecting structural reforms of the capitalist state itself in order to undermine the atomizing effects of the state is much more

19. A policy of sheltering social movements by a Left government poses potential risks to the regime, in addition to the obvious possibility of direct threats from the capitalist class. On the one hand, not all popular social movements are animated by the Left, and a generally non-repressive stance towards popular mobilization may give the Right greater room for manoeuvre. Repressive responses selectively directed towards right-wing organizing might be effective, but such repression would potentially undermine the legitimacy of the government as a "constitutional" regime among various middle strata which otherwise might support the government. On the other hand, not all extra-parliamentary left forces may be a "loyal" opposition. Some will undoubtedly direct much of their energy against the regime itself, arguing that it is deceiving and coopting the working class. If such opposition took the form of sabotage or other highly disruptive tactics, the government might be impelled to try to control such groups. Yet once the government begins to repress one segment of the revolutionary Left, it becomes more difficult to protect tendencies within a "loyal" revolutionary Left opposition as well.

problematic.²⁰ But if the class capacities of the working class are to develop, such reforms are of critical importance.

Perhaps the most important way by which the structure of the democratic capitalist state atomizes the working class is by limiting popular political life to voting, to periodically casting a ballot as private individuals for political representatives. The key issue involved in minimizing such atomization is to expand the ways in which people can directly participate in politics as members of organized collectivities. In order to accomplish this it is necessary to establish primitive organs of direct democracy on the fringes of the state administration. Such structural changes would include such things as community planning boards linked to neighbourhood councils, client-worker committees in state services, delegates from factory councils on state planning bodies, self-management (*auto-gestion*) structures in state industries, and so on. In each of these new quasi-democratic forms of state administration, the critical issue is not simply the greater participation of individuals in political processes, but rather the participation of individuals *as members of class-based collectivities* within politics. If this occurs, then such forms of limited "debureaucratization" of the state can serve partially to replace the individualized and privatized forms of political participation embodied in voting, with more collective and public forms of political life. The collective-public character of this participation could potentially widen and deepen the social relations within the working class and this in turn would serve to strengthen the class capacities of the working class.

Within the framework of the capitalist state, such a dissolution of the state apparatus would of course be limited in scope, constantly thwarted by the constitutional and economic impediments to working class democracy. Rules of due process would continually impinge on the initiatives of grass roots organizations attempting to participate in the new "democratic" forms of state administration. Bureaucratic prerogatives would undermine the effectiveness of attempts at administrative decentralization. The necessity of working

20. For a relatively early discussion of the problem of reforming the capitalist state in ways which enlarge the power of the working class, see André Gorz's discussion of "non-reformist reforms" in *Strategy for Labor*, Boston 1967.

40-hour weeks would undermine the vitality of popular participation within political organs. It is precisely because of factors such as these that it is impossible for a Left government within the capitalist state to eliminate atomized politics. The most that can be hoped for is that a limited erosion of bureaucratic structures will contribute to expanding working class capacities and that such policies will serve as a concrete demonstration in embryo of the alternative to bourgeois representative institutions. To the extent that this occurs, then the experience of the constraints on such a programme of debureaucratization could itself contribute to demonstrating the necessity of more fundamental transformations beyond the limits of capitalist structures.²¹

Preconditions for a Left government to be able to minimize the disorganizing effects of the capitalist state. In order for a Left government to adopt a generally non-repressive stance toward social movements and even to begin a minimal erosion of the bureaucratic structure of the capitalist state, two pre-conditions are necessary: First, it is essential that the Left gain control of the government on the basis of a mobilized working class with strong, autonomous organizational capacities. Second, it is important that the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie be seriously weakened prior to a Left electoral victory. These two conditions are dialectically linked, but it will be helpful to discuss them in turn.

If the Left were to come to power through the typical dis-

21. A word should be said about the relationship between this analysis of the possibilities for a limited dissolution of the state (partial debureaucratization) and the classic revolutionary theory of "dual power". Dual power refers to the relatively brief period during a revolutionary situation in which a new, revolutionary state apparatus is first established and exists alongside the apparatus of the old regime. In effect, there are two states, competing with each other for popular support. The revolutionary state, in these terms, is external to the old apparatus. The perspective of a Left government within a capitalist state adopting structural reforms which reduce the atomizing effects of the state is a scenario of changes internal to the old state apparatus. In a sense it can be interpreted as an argument about the possibility of creating primitive forms of socialist political institutions within the fabric of the capitalist state. This does not imply that it will be unnecessary at some point to break qualitatively with the structures of the capitalist state and that such a break might involve the creation of a dual power structure. The claim is simply that it is possible to prepare the political terrain for such a break through structural changes within the capitalist state itself.

organized political relations of electoral politics—if, for example, the Left won an election in a period of economic crisis more because of the collapse of bourgeois parties than because of its own organizational base—then it would be very difficult to imagine how it could even tentatively adopt policies which would significantly expand the capacities of the working class. The crucial way by which a Left government can potentially contribute to the consolidation and expansion of the capacities of the working class is to link various working class organizations directly to the processes of state intervention. The irony is that unless those organizations already have considerable vitality and cohesion prior to an electoral victory, then such participation in state activity is likely to generate manipulative, co-optive forms of corporatism rather than a strengthened capacity of the working class. Even under the best of conditions with the best of intentions, the pressures for efficiency and control will diminish any genuine contribution by working class organizations to a planning process. From a bureaucratic point of view it is much more convenient for such participation to be purely formal rather than substantive. Only strong and autonomous working class organizations genuinely rooted in the working class (i.e., constituting working class capacities) would be able to counter such tendencies. Given the heavy political and economic pressures faced by a Left government once in power, it will be impossible to wait for such organizational capacities to develop if they are not already present.

A relatively weak organizational capacity of the working class would also make it difficult for a Left Government to control effectively the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, let alone to initiate programmes to erode the bureaucratic structure of that apparatus. Any programme of restructuring bureaucratic agencies in ways which would allow for genuine participation by grass roots organizations would be impossible without the co-operation of at least the rank and file workers in the bureaucracy. Again, in the absence of strong working class organizations with already well-established linkages to state workers prior to an electoral victory of the Left, it is difficult to see how such changes could be successfully made.

The reverse side of the necessity for strong working class organizational capacities as a precondition for efforts by a Left

government to counter the atomizing effects of the capitalist state, is the necessity for the hegemony of the bourgeoisie to be relatively weakened. The crucial aspect of "hegemony" in this context is the capacity to define *ideologically* what kinds of social alternatives are possible at a given moment. (Hegemony must be contrasted with "domination", which refers to the capacity to *enforce* a certain range of social alternatives regardless of whether people believe other alternatives are possible or not.) If the hegemony of the bourgeoisie is more or less intact, then it would be difficult for any socialist government to adopt programmes which seriously attempted to expand the scope of political participation of the masses. In order for such mass participation to have its desired effects—the expansion of the class capacities of the working class—it is essential that people participate in a committed and energetic way. Unless there was already a fairly pervasive socialist consciousness within the working class, it is unlikely that such commitment would be sustained over an extended period.

For these reasons, it is essential that the Left not simply attempt to achieve a parliamentary majority (a difficult enough task, needless to say), but that it do so in ways which build the organizational capacities of the working class (i.e., strengthen social relations among workers) and challenge the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class. This means both drawing more and more people into the organizations of the working class and linking those organizations to longer-term socialist objectives. In order to accomplish this, electoral struggles must be systematically linked to grass roots social movements, electoral strategies must be oriented as much around local and regional levels of government as around national levels of government,²²

22. The strategic emphasis of the Italian and French Communist Parties on building a base at the local and regional levels of government, before attempting to form a government at the national level, could potentially contribute to the strengthening of the organizational capacities of the working class prior to assuming a dominant role in the central government. The critical question, then, is the extent to which the control of the local state apparatuses by the Left has fostered or undermined the organizational capacities of the working class in societies like Italy and France. Have Communist city governments in Italy, for example, underwritten neighbourhood councils, giving them greater resources and scope of action, or have such governments tended to restrict neighbourhood councils, undermining their initiatives, coopting their leadership? Systematic,

party programmes must be sensitive to popular initiatives and not be formulated exclusively through top-down, bureaucratic directives, socialist cultural activity must reach broader masses of the people, and so forth.

These arguments about the necessity of undermining capitalist hegemony and creating durable organizational capacities of the working class prior to a Left electoral victory do not imply that capitalist hegemony must be completely shattered or that the working class must already have an organizational capacity sufficient to enable it to become the ruling class. On the contrary: the strategy of using the state to destroy the state assumes that it is only through structural changes within the capitalist state that capitalist hegemony can be definitively undermined and that the capacities of the working class can develop to the point where a decisive break with capitalism becomes possible. The point here is that a certain level of working class organizational capacity and of the disintegration of bourgeois hegemony is necessary for the control of the government by the Left to provide a basis for ultimately destroying the capitalist state. If these pre-conditions are not met, then a socialist electoral victory is likely to produce, at most, a series of relatively progressive reforms, but reforms which do not shift the basic balance of class forces in the society. If, on the other hand, they are met, then the government can potentially adopt reforms which contribute to an expansion of the capacities of the working class. Such expanded capacities would in turn potentially accelerate the erosion of bourgeois ideological hegemony, and this in turn would create conditions allowing for a further consolidation of working class capacities.

4. *The Problem of Repression*

Ruling classes do not rule by hegemony alone; they also rule through domination. An attack on the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie will not create a socialist society unless it becomes translated into an attack on the domination of the bourgeoisie. The strategy of using the capitalist state to destroy the capitalist state is implicitly an argument about such a

comparative case studies of Italian cities would be extremely useful for answering such questions.

possibility. To argue that structural changes within the capitalist state can facilitate a strengthening of the organizational capacities of the working class is to argue that it can make such a challenge to bourgeois domination possible.

The problem, of course, is that the bourgeoisie may not wait for the class capacities of the working class to reach such a level. The bourgeoisie would certainly respond vigorously to state interventions which appeared to be shifting the balance of class forces in favour of the working class. Initially the response would probably be various forms of economic sabotage (capital flight, cutting off credits by international financial institutions, embargoes, etc.). Under normal conditions, such actions would so seriously constrain the possibilities of state activity and so severely undermine the economic security of the population, that they would effectively reverse the pattern of state interventions.²³ This is what it means to say, after all, that the bourgeoisie is the dominant class even when working class parties hold the reins of government.

In advanced capitalism, however, the effectiveness of such economic sabotage by the bourgeoisie may be less pervasive than in earlier periods. The greatly increased role of the state in accumulation means that a much larger proportion of social resources are managed by the state rather than directly by private capital. This would, in principle, somewhat mitigate the impact of economic sanctions by the capitalist class. Furthermore, the weakening of bourgeois ideological hegemony and the strengthening of working class organizational capacities implies that in some countries, at least, large sections of the working class may be prepared to weather the hard times which capitalist sabotage would provoke. While it would be a serious mistake to underestimate the economic leverage that the capitalist class still possesses in every capitalist society, such leverage might not be sufficient by itself to topple a Left government or force it into submission.

This, then, raises the fundamental question of armed counter-revolution, of the possibility that the capitalist class

23. This is precisely what it means to say that there are "limits of functional compatibility" imposed on state interventions. Interventions which fall outside those limits set in motion a chain of consequences—in this case, escalating forms of economic class warfare—which eventually lead to a reversal of the policy or to a break with the system of capitalist domination.

would attempt a military coup or perhaps even an invasion by imperialist forces to destroy a democratically elected socialist government. Perry Anderson has expressed this issue well: "The logic of Marxist theory indicates that it is in the nature of the bourgeois state that, in any final contest, the armed apparatus of repression inexorably displaces the ideological apparatuses of parliamentary representation, to re-occupy the dominant position in the structure of capitalist class power. This coercive State machine is the ultimate barrier to a workers' revolution, and can only be broken by pre-emptive counter-coercion. . . . An insurrection will only succeed if the repressive apparatus of the State itself divides or disintegrates—as it did in Russia, China or Cuba. The consensual 'convention' that holds the forces of coercion together must, in other words, be breached."²⁴ The historic lesson of Chile underscores the theoretical rationale of this argument. It is ultimately the capacity of the bourgeoisie to destroy violently any peaceful attempt at constructing socialism that makes such attempts so precarious.

At some point, a Left parliamentary regime either has to abandon its socialist objectives or directly confront and challenge the repressive apparatus of the state. In such a confrontation the decisive issues become the extent to which the ideological unity of the military itself has been eroded by socialist struggles, the extent to which that military apparatus can call on external imperialist forces for assistance, and the extent to which the class capacities of the working class have been fortified or weakened during the period of socialist parliamentary rule. While a confrontation with the military may be inevitable, it is not necessarily inevitable that the military win such a confrontation.²⁵

24. Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", *New Left Review* No. 100, 1977, pp. 76–77.

25. It is because of this threat of military intervention that Western European Communist parties ascribe such importance to the current international equilibrium of forces. Their hope is that the general balance of power between the US and the USSR will make it unlikely that direct military intervention would occur if a Left government came to office. This does not mean, however, that the threat of internal military counter-revolution can be treated lightly. Even in Chile, where American involvement was quite important in the fall of the Allende Government, it was unnecessary for the United States to invade the country directly. Any socialist strategy in advanced capitalism must therefore

The purpose of this chapter has not been to provide an historical judgement of the actual practices of specific political parties, nor to attempt a forecast of the likely strategies which will be pursued in the future. Rather, the intention was to explore the logic of a particular strategic alternative facing the left and to examine the social conditions which will shape the possibilities of success for such a strategy. It remains to be seen whether the strategy of using the capitalist state to destroy the class character of that state will ever be generally accepted by the organized left in Western Europe or elsewhere. Perhaps even more importantly, even if the strategy were sincerely held as a theoretical position, it remains to be seen whether in practice any socialist government in a capitalist state could resist the enormous pressures to abandon such a strategy.

In the end, it is the character of class struggles during a period of socialist parliamentary rule which will determine the plausibility of the strategy of using the capitalist state as a basis for destroying the capitalist state. While there are important new possibilities for socialist transformation generated by the contradictions of late capitalism, those contradictions do not uniquely determine the success or failure of specific strategies for socialism. The extent to which the strategy can succeed, therefore, depends in large measure on the extent to which communist and socialist parties systematically and continually attempt to strengthen the class capacities of the working class—which in turn depends upon the complex ways in which class struggle itself mediates the diverse processes of class formation, state activity and social change.

involve serious organization within the military itself, efforts at changing life within the military in order to break down the social and ideological isolation of the army from the working class and so on.