

Antonio Gramsci and the Recasting of Marxist Strategy

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The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears. –Gramsci: Prison Notebooks

Introduction

It has been over sixty years since the Bolshevik Revolution and the formation of Communist Parties divided the international Marxist movement into two seemingly irreconcilable camps, each with its own tradition, political strategy and international allegiances. Today, more than half a century later, the divisions remain, and the balance sheet of the left in the developed capitalist countries appears as follows. In spite of all Communist efforts, Social Democracy continues to be the ideological and political orientation of the great majority of the working classes, with some notable exceptions (Italy, for example). The recent electoral successes of Socialists in France, Greece, Sweden and Spain point to Social Democracy's continued vitality as does the remarkable revival of French socialism over the last ten years. Not only that. Left-wing or renovating currents in Social Democracy, sometimes called Euro-Socialism, promise new forms of democratic socialism and even the possibility of a restoration of the revolutionary elements of 1930s socialism which were systematically abandoned during the Cold War years. Electoral and organizational successes notwithstanding, we should not overlook one central fact: decades of Socialist governments cannot conceal the sad truth that Social Democracy has not meant the construction of socialism in a single country, but only the uneven and somewhat more humane management of capitalism.

Meanwhile some of the major Communist Parties in the West (Italy, Sweden, Spain, Holland, Britain, Greece) as well as those in Japan, Australia and Mexico have abandoned the Soviet variant of Marxism and to one degree or another embraced Euro-Communism. This process has been neither smooth nor irreversible, witness the retreat of the French Communists (PCF) from their tentative Euro-Communist positions, the Communist Party of Italy's forced departure from the "historic compromise," and

the present severe crisis of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). When it first appeared, Euro-Communism was hailed as the answer to the “crisis of Marxism” in the developed capitalist world. Things have not exactly turned out that way, however. European Communism confronts this paradox: if it adheres to the sterile, dogmatic strategies and pro-Sovietism of the pre-1956 era it runs the risk of being marginalized like the PCF. But if it fervently adopts Euro-Communist doctrines, the risk of breaking up and being marginalized is no less real, as the example of the PCE demonstrates. When and in what manner this dilemma will be resolved is not yet clear. In any case, Communism, too, has failed to lead a single Western country to socialism.

Perhaps even more tragically, the unprecedented capitalist crisis which has grown increasingly acute in the last several years has failed to elicit from either Social Democracy or the Communists the necessary political response which is capable of mobilizing the working class and other political forces that are being radicalized by the crisis. While capitalism is undergoing a fundamental restructuring, Marxism has been unable to develop a successful strategy for actively intervening in the restructuring process to the advantage of the popular forces, let alone a strategy for socialism. In short, if capitalism is experiencing difficulties as a result of its structural contradictions, the left is suffering paralysis and defeats as a result of contradictions of its own.

The purpose of this article is to present an overview of the history of Marxist strategy as applied to the advanced capitalist countries since the time of the Second International, including, in addition to the Second International’s strategic conception, that of the Bolsheviks and the Third International, Gramsci’s prison writings, Euro-Communism, and the new strategic orientation which has recently developed on Euro-Communism’s left wing, called by some Neo-Gramscianism. This is a lot of ground to cover; there are many things we have been obliged to leave out, many which we are able to touch upon only in a partial manner. Nonetheless, if the trajectory of Marxist strategy which we trace here is an accurate one, the historical roots of the present “crisis of Marxism” and the promise of its resolution will both be made apparent. The depth of this crisis and the possibility for its resolution are nowhere clearer than in the contemporary Communist movement. World Communism today is in an interregnum like the one described by Gramsci in the quote which begins this article. Stalinian socialism is dying, but the necessary alternative has not been born. In the meantime we have been witness to the “morbid symptoms” corresponding to this period, of which the Polish “military road to socialism” is the outstanding example.

After the declaration of martial law in Poland the Communist Party of Italy felt compelled to declare that the driving force which originated in the Bolshevik Revolution had exhausted itself. It is the opinion of this author that the Communist movement in the West must fundamentally recast Marxist theory and politics, building on the positive elements contained in Socialist, Communist and Gramscian traditions, to create a new vision of socialism. If it fails to do so then truly we will be facing the end

of an era in the West, an era in which the heirs of the Bolsheviks played a generally progressive and necessary role in the struggles of working people and all the oppressed.

The Marxism of the Second International

The Marxism of a given nation in any epoch can only be appreciated if the character and specific combination of a number of factors is taken into account: existent theory; extent of a mass base, in what social strata, and relations to it; political program, strategy and tactics, popular culture, the forms and effects of organization and leadership; incorporated elements of competing or hostile ideological discourses and forms of practice. The Marxism of the Second International is important to us here because it was the first systematization of the scientific socialist theories of Marx and Engels into party doctrine and practice, corresponding to the perceived needs and demands of a mass workers' movement in Europe. The precise long-term ramifications of this systematization for both the theory and politics of Marxism were not fully understood at the time, but the progressive effects of this process can nonetheless be measured.

Marx and Engels' theoretical legacy was primarily in the field of economics. Theories of the State, of ideology and of social classes were scarcely developed—mere suggestions and provocative asides took the place of rigorous and elaborated texts. Yet all too often the real limitations of this legacy were denied and Marxism was treated as an all-encompassing theoretical system whose basic theses enabled, as Engels remarked, the whole of history and all political and philosophical wisdom [to be] concentrated into a few short formulae.[1] As a result, the fundamental need for further theoretical progress was generally replaced by a complacency in which authors preferred to improvise on old themes or endlessly popularize existing doctrine rather than push forward into the unknown.

This is certainly not to say that there was no progress in Marxist theory in the era of the Second International. One can, for example, cite the many important writings of the Austro-Marxist school on a variety of themes, Kautsky's work on the Agrarian Question, and the many texts and spirited debate on imperialism and economic crisis by such authors as Hilferding, Kautsky, Bukharin, Lenin and Luxemburg as well as the writings of Labriola on philosophy.

Of course, there will always be a gap between the theory and practice of any political movement, and socialism is no exception. But this particular systematization of Marxism—the historically constituted Marxism of the Second International—expressed this dichotomy in its own distinct manner which had grave repercussions for the revolutionary goals to which the movement was dedicated. From its inception in 1889 until 1914 the Second International was characterized by a growing divergence between the domain of its official discourse and the domain of its practical activity (trade union, parliamentary), as leaders and activists in each area tried to grapple with

the growth of imperialism, militarism and the threat of world war. Ultimately, Socialists were unsuccessful in both domains because the articulating principles of Social Democratic theory and practice—economism and class reductionism—failed to provide the means with which to grasp the nature and dynamic of capitalist transformations and the requirements of socialist activity. The final capitulation of Social Democracy on the eve of World War I is directly traceable to this failure.

The breakdown of the Second International in 1914 and the inadequacy to the strategic causes of its theory and practice can be schematically expressed in the following theses:

(1) The Second International saw socialist revolution as the necessary and irreversible consequence of the economic structure of capitalism. The “natural” unfolding of basic economic laws—increasing concentration and centralization of capital, overproduction crises, and the general proletarianization of the population—was seen as creating all the requisite conditions for socialism. Marxist theory was described as a science, similar to the natural sciences. Like them it monitored a “natural” process, namely capitalism’s collapse while socialist practice helped to facilitate a preordained inevitability.

(2) Classical Social Democracy perceived society according to the base-superstructure metaphor, viewing politics and ideology as epiphenomenal expressions of the essence of society— economics. In practice this meant that the growth of Social Democratic political power and socialist consciousness was expected to flow naturally from the numerical growth of the proletariat and the exacerbation of economic contradictions. If German theoreticians like Kautsky laid stress on the ultimate goal of socialist revolution confident that capitalism could only help evolve toward this eventuality, party trade union officials and Reichstag deputies spoke instead of bread and butter issues and elections, equally confident that time was on their side and that preoccupation with such ‘practical’ matters could do no harm.

(3) The strategy for socialist victory which corresponded to the theory and practice of the Second International involved two relatively independent variables. First, capitalist crises would sooner or later create an insoluble economic breakdown for which the traditional political parties would have no solution (the “breakdown thesis”). At the same time, the previous steady growth of socialist representation in parliament and socialists’ superior understanding of the causes of the crises would make them the only ones capable of taking the reins of government once the crisis erupted. As August Bebel told the Erfurt Congress of German Social Democracy in 1891: “bourgeois society is contributing so powerfully to its own downfall that we only need to wait for the moment when we can pick up the power which has fallen out of its hands.”[2] The absurd lengths to which socialists would carry this self-confidence is illustrated by a story told of H. M. Hyndman, leader of the tiny British Social Democratic Federation. Even though this organization was virtually without power and influence, Hyndman is

said to have always carried a list of potential cabinet ministers in his coat pocket in case he were ever summoned by the Queen to form a new government.

The Socialists grasped politics and socialist strategy in an essentially Statist manner: the State was seen as the center from which all politics emanated so that political success could be measured in terms of gaining control over the State system. This end having been attained, Socialists would use the State to remake society. Such a view embodies an instrumentalist vision of the State: under capitalism it is a weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie, under socialism it will be a weapon in the hands of the workers.

(4) On the positive side, Social Democracy was strongly committed to the struggle for democracy and the struggle for partial reforms. When Rosa Luxemburg wrote the following in 1899 she was expressing a view that few main-line Social Democrats would have found objectionable:

The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to Social Democracy the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal—the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage-labour. Between social reforms and revolution there exists for Social Democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.[3]

(5) On the negative side, in addition to economism, the Marxism of the Second International was marred by a class reductionist theory of politics and ideology. By this we mean that the Social Democrats treated all politics and ideology as class specific: each structure, practice and discourse and their various component elements was said to have a class character. The socialist movement was thus defined as the political and ideological expression of the workingclass, in opposition to bourgeois parties and their ideologies.

Why should socialists pay attention to the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie, except at election time? These were historically obsolescent strata; capitalism was proletarianizing-them and the defense of their interests, to the extent that it retarded proletarianization, would retard the revolution itself. While this class reductionist view of politics may have helped the socialists to build a strong base in the workingclass, at the same time it dangerously isolated the workers' movement from possible class allies.

(6) Classical Social Democracy viewed ideology basically as an emanation of economics, social consciousness as determined by a subject's class position, and politics as the reflection at the political level of "objective class interests" existing at the economic level. True proletarian consciousness was defined as class and socialist consciousness uncontaminated by any elements of "bourgeois ideology." In keeping with this

framework all ideological elements were said to be concretely tied to a specific class, that is, to have a necessary class belonging (bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, proletarian), and therefore all elements of the ideology of the bourgeoisie had to be rejected by the workingclass if it were to remain true to its interests. The socialist movement proudly rejected capitalist society in toto; its job was to help the workers constitute their own exclusive and antithetical counter-discourse and practices to those of capital.

(7) Since all Marxists knew beforehand how capitalist crises develop and what their final outcome would be, there was no perceived need for a specific socialist theory of politics or of conjunctural analysis: the “laws of history, working with iron necessity toward inevitable results” would take care of everything.[4] This indifference to the immediate effects of political practice on the class struggle helps to explain how it was possible for the trade unions and the parliamentary deputies of the Socialist parties to develop the kind of autonomy which they enjoyed during the years of Social Democratic successes, and the opportunist policies which resulted from this “independence.”

The Second International’s combination of doctrine and practice transformed Marxism from a highly intellectual system of ideas, accessible to a relative few, into a mass workers’ movement in the major European states. Look at the figures. Before World War I the International had affiliates in twenty-two countries. The Social Democratic Party of Germany had 1,085,000 members and polled 4,250,000 votes in the 1912 elections. The Austrian Social Democrats had 145,000 members and polled 1,041,000 votes in the 1907 elections. The French Socialists had 80,300 members and won 1,400,000 votes in the 1914 elections. The Italian Socialist Party had 50,000 members and polled 960,000 votes in 1913. The Socialist Party of the United States had 125,500 members and won 901,000 votes in the 1912 elections. Socialist Parties in Czechoslovakia and Hungary had 144,000 and 61,000 members respectively.[5] But all these numbers should not blind us to the genuinely weak foundations upon which this success was built.

At the turn of the century, the gap between socialist perspectives and the forward rush of capitalist development, economically and politically, was increasingly obvious, manifesting itself within the International in a number of unresolved disputes over strategy and tactics, goals and means. These included the struggle over Millerandism and participation in bourgeois governments (1899-1900); the Kautsky-Bernstein debates on revisionism (1899-1903); the struggle over war and united action against it, which became particularly vigorous at the Stuttgart (1907) and Copenhagen (1911) International Conferences; and the Kautsky-Luxemburg debate on revolution of 1910.

The Leninist Breach

All of these disputes foreshadowed but cannot compare with the decisive break in International Socialist politics provoked by the World War, the collapse of the Second International, and the Bolshevik Revolution. The theory and practice of the Bolshevik

leadership, what came to be called Bolshevism or Leninism, represented a fundamental break with the Marxism of the Socialist International on a whole number of basic questions. Some of these differences signalled a return to positions put forward by Marx and Engels in an earlier period, but quietly dropped by classical Social Democracy. Indeed, many Leninist writers in the post revolutionary period sought to present Bolshevism in the light of a return to the “authentic” Marxism of the founders. While in some respects this was an accurate perspective, Leninism was much more importantly an extension or expansion of Marxism into a number of hitherto underdeveloped areas, most importantly, politics.

In truth it can be confidently asserted that Leninism for the first time consciously put politics in its essential, central place in Marxist thought and practice. Not just any politics, but revolutionary politics. Leninism succeeded in accomplishing an immense transformation of Socialist activity under the difficult conditions of Czarist Russia where a small proletariat could not hope to make revolution without the support, or at least benevolent neutrality, of the peasant majority. These specific conditions of the Russian social formation and the revolutionary transformation of Marxism which Bolshevism wrought contained the potential for a conscious rupture with both economism and class reductionism; in short, a potential for carrying the struggle against the articulating principles of classical Social Democracy through to the end. The extent to which Leninism succeeded and the degree to which it failed in this regard are critical to what followed in the long years of the Stalin era and thereafter.

The Leninist breach can be schematically summarized as follows.

(1) Socialist revolution was no longer seen as the inevitable unfolding of economic contradictions, although the base/superstructure metaphor continued in use. Instead capitalism was thought to exist as an international system or “chain” with the various states constituting either strong or “weak” links. According to the Leninist framework, the relative strength of the various links was determined, not by economics alone, but by the conjunction of a multiplicity of factors: economic, political, ideological and military, at a given time. In breaking with the monocausalist economism of the Second International, Leninism saw a weak link as not necessarily a country with the most crisis-ridden economy, but one in which contradictions at the economic and other levels reinforce each other to create the conditions for a radical transformation of social relations. Put another way, politics and ideology were no longer dependent effects, but rather relatively autonomous variables in the creation of favorable conditions for a socialist transition.

(2) For Leninism the causes of conjunctural crises were not only complex, but their outcome could not be predicted in advance, through some misguided reliance on an inevitable “economic breakdown.” Instead, the results of any crisis would be determined by the inter-relations and activity of the various classes and active social forces of that society, working within the limitations established by its basic social

structures. Political practice is key to Bolshevism because politics is the arena in which the balance of class and social forces is set and thus where the opportunities presented by crises can be most effectively grasped. For Leninism, Marxists ought not to wait for the right conditions to assume state power, revolutionaries had to act decisively and correctly to help bring these conditions into being, and once created, to maximize their effects.

(3) The most far-sighted of the Bolsheviks realized that this new emphasis on politics simultaneously required a new definition of politics itself and an expanded definition of political subjects. Henceforth, Marxism could not be content with focusing on a given economic structure endlessly churning out political class-subjects. Now politics itself was seen as mobilizing political subjects and one had to start with the actual social forces active at any time as the basis for intervening in political struggles. Of equal significance, Russian conditions made it apparent that winning political power, and keeping it, could not be the task of a single class but would be the result of a worker-peasant alliance, albeit under proletarian hegemony. In this way the specific demands and interests of this non-proletarian social group (the peasants) became of vital concern to the workingclass which had to produce the programmatic theses and tactics to advance peasant, as well as proletarian interests and facilitate building the necessary revolutionary alliance.

(4) For the Bolsheviks, like the Second International, the State was the source and basis of political power, an instrument in the hands of capital. Making revolution meant seizing State power and, since the State was seen as a Monolithic instrumentality, it could only be attacked from the outside. Once taken it would be turned from an instrument of oppression to one of liberation—to nationalize the economy and transform society.

The Bolshevik revolutionary strategy was simple and direct. One could not rely on the promise of economic collapse and a parliamentary road to socialism. Instead, “the struggle of the popular masses for state power was, in essence, a frontal struggle of maneuver or encirclement, taking place outside the fortress-state and principally aiming at the creation of a situation of dual power.”[6] It was the responsibility of the party to play a catalytic role in radicalizing the working masses in the villages, factories and armed forces, and at the appropriate moment, mount an armed frontal assault on the State from without for the purpose of seizing its commanding heights and transferring them to revolutionary control.

(5) As with politics, so with ideology. Leninism represented an initial break with the class reductionist view that social consciousness was an automatic product of the subject’s class location by giving added weight to the role of ideological struggle outside the economic realm. Class consciousness was still the privileged form of ideology, reflecting “objective class interests” created at the point of production. Politics, however, recognized those interests, and ideological struggle created socialist

consciousness through the activity of revolutionary intellectuals and other militants organized into a highly disciplined Party. Marxists could not simply wait for economic difficulties to radicalize the workers; agitators and propagandists had to go to the people, join their struggles, and convince them, on the basis of their own experience, of the correctness of the socialist program.

(6) Since, for Leninism, political practice was now primary and since its character was determined by the nature of the conjuncture and the balance of social forces, “a concrete analysis of a concrete situation” became the living heart of Marxism. Consequently, conjunctural analysis had to be developed as a specific area of theoretical investigation and practice. It was no longer sufficient to understand the long run trends and general principles of Marxist theory—one had to be able to politically grasp their particular forms and effectivity at a given place and time and draw the necessary conclusions for revolutionary practice.

Limitations of the Leninist Breach

It would be easy to stop here, having demonstrated the advances Leninism represented over the positions of classical Social Democracy. Indeed, this is precisely where adherents of the revolutionary legacy of the Third International usually end their inquiry. Fortunately this is no longer possible and even less appropriate. Leninism is not a harmoniously unified body of doctrine; it is an historically constituted ensemble of theory and practice with its own dynamic, its own contradictions and its own history of successes and failures. Lenin himself was rarely reticent about pointing out errors and shortcomings in his own work; unfortunately the same cannot be said for all too many of his supporters. The following comments and criticisms are offered, not in the spirit of his later sycophants, but in the tradition of rigorous self-criticism which Lenin himself repeatedly espoused.

The theory and practice of Bolshevism is limited in three general respects. First, by the character of Lenin’s own theory/practice. Second, by the unique conditions present in the Russian social formation which left their indelible mark on Bolshevism. Third, by the deficiencies which were inherent in, or arose from, Bolshevism’s later development. Let us examine each of these limitations in turn.

Lenin’s Theory/Practice

Without falling into a “cult of the personality,” we must nonetheless acknowledge that a major factor in the development of Bolshevism was the personal influence of V. I. Lenin’s life and work. One of Bolshevism’s tragedies consists in the fact that, while Lenin was able to produce a great number of remarkable texts, he was unable to train those around him to master his own theory of theoretical and political practice. Lenin said of Marx that he did not leave us his Logic, but only the logic of Capital. In the same sense we might say that Lenin himself never left us his “The Theory of Conjunctural Analysis,” only the conjunctural analyses present in the practical state in

his many texts. Lenin's intense preoccupation with the practical problems of party leadership and, after 1917, with running the revolutionary government, meant that more often than not his writings were immediate and succinct, aimed at a mass audience or as an intervention in a particular inner-party debate. Many times Lenin's actual political analyses and strategic formulations explicitly contained concepts and approaches which broke with the traditions of classical Social Democracy. Equally often, however, the writings themselves employed the language of the old problematic or "images, metaphors, historical analogies and even silences,"[7] which disguised or concealed what was radically new in his thought.

This dichotomy between the radical thrust of Lenin's practice and the relatively less ground-breaking character of many of his written formulations has led Chantal Mouffe to remark, "it was Lenin's political practice rather than his actual thought which really proved to be the transforming force which shattered the narrow economistic confines of Western Marxist thought at the beginning of the century." [8] Unfortunately, later generations of Leninists have tended to rely on Lenin's texts—passing over the ambiguities, taking the metaphors literally, ignoring the silences and contradictions—while neglecting the content of Lenin's actual practice, and the theoretical advances, implicit but not explicit, in his writings.

A final problem with Lenin's work is the fact that, in a number of areas, Lenin simply took over the ideas of others, often leaders of the Second International in other countries, and presented them unchanged in the course of his own analyses. While many contemporaries would have undoubtedly recognized the origin of these opinions, in time this did not continue to be true. Thereafter, ideas which Lenin simply borrowed became attributed to him as his own. Lenin's writings on the Jewish question are a good example. His view that Jews were a "caste" rather than a nation is taken directly from Kautsky's earlier writings on the subject as are most of the perspectives contained in his polemics against the Bund. The fact that these ideas appeared in Lenin's discourse in this manner rendered them above criticism after his death, and little or no effort was made to go back to the source to critically examine them in their original context. Had this been done, probably the way would have been opened much earlier for a rethinking of many of these "borrowed" notions. The difficulties with Lenin's theory/practice and the manner in which it was subsequently treated by the heirs of the Bolshevik legacy constitute the first limitation of Leninism.

The Concrete Conditions of the Russian Social Formation

Leninism unfolded in a concrete social formation: the Russian Empire in the early part of this century. Unlike German Social Democracy, which set the pace for the world movement, in the pre-revolutionary period Bolshevism was never self-consciously intended as a universal model, in spite of what later commentators have imagined. In fact, Leninism evolved its unique characteristics in large part due to a struggle to root itself in Russian conditions. It is therefore essential to be familiar with these specific

conditions in order to understand both how and why Bolshevism developed, as well as to measure the gap between Russian social structures and relations and those which prevailed (and continue to prevail) in the developed capitalist countries.

Before and after the revolution Lenin repeatedly stressed the active presence, indeed the dominance, within the Russian Empire of various pre-capitalist modes and forms of production. This circumstance—a multiplicity of co-existing forms of production and the relatively weak position of capitalism within the resultant articulated hierarchy—set Russia apart from the bourgeois democracies of Europe and North America. At the same time it gave to Russian social life, its politics and its institutions, an entirely different complexion from that of the advanced capitalist countries of the West where these pre-capitalist forms and modes of production had long been extinct.

Equally important for our analysis here are Lenin's comments on the nature of the Czarist State. On many occasions Lenin criticized this State as feudal absolutist in character.[9] That is to say, even if capitalism were rapidly growing within the Russian social formation, the State system of the Empire was not yet capitalist but of a pre-capitalist character, like the absolutist states in Western Europe in the pre-bourgeois period. While social formations in Western Europe had largely discarded this State-form centuries earlier, it continued on in Russia, necessitating forms of anti-State struggle, politics and organization which were not applicable in the West where Marxists were operating under conditions of bourgeois democracy. There is considerable evidence that, toward the end of his life, Lenin was beginning to recognize these significant distinctions between Russia and the West, and the need for Western Marxists to take them into account in developing their strategy and tactics. In 1918, for example, he wrote:

The revolution will not come as quickly as we expected. History has proved this, and we must be able to take this as a fact, to reckon with the fact that the world socialist revolution cannot begin so easily in the advanced countries as the revolution began in Russia—in the land of Nicholas and Rasputin, the land in which an enormous part of the population was absolutely indifferent as to what peoples were living in the outlying regions, of what was happening there. In such a country it was quite easy to start a revolution, as easy as lifting a feather.

But to start without preparation a revolution in a country in which capitalism is developed and has given democratic culture and organization to everybody, down to the last man—to do so would be wrong, absurd. There we are only just approaching the painful period of the beginning of socialist revolutions.[10] Different conditions in countries in which “capitalism . . . has given democratic culture and organization to everybody” require correspondingly different kinds of political practice. The acknowledgement of this fact led Lenin to champion the fight for the United Front policy at the Third Comintern Congress (1921). The United Front was to be implemented by the Western Communist Parties for the purpose of winning a majority

of the working masses in those countries to socialism. This was a new strategy, a new approach to revolutionary struggle more appropriate to advanced capitalism than the Bolshevik strategy applied in Russia.

Another example might be useful here to demonstrate the extent to which erstwhile immutable Leninist principles were, in fact, an adaptation of the Marxism of the Second International to specific Russian conditions. We refer to the issue of party organization. Anyone with even a passing familiarity with Lenin's writings knows *What Is To Be Done?*, written in 1902. In orthodox Leninist circles it is treated as a virtual universal blueprint for party building. In reality, it was a document preoccupied, not with general principles, but with the very immediate question of creating a viable revolutionary party in the very unfavorable conditions of Czarist Russia which rendered any such organization illegal. However, when freedom of assembly, of association and of the press were won for a brief period during the 1905 Revolution, Lenin openly called for a revision of the organizational policies set forth in *What Is To Be Done?* Now that Russian conditions appeared to more closely resemble those in the bourgeois democracies, Lenin asserted: "we must begin to organize in a new way, we must submit new methods for general discussion, we must boldly and resolutely lay down a 'new line.'" [11]

Whereas *What Is To Be Done?* had called for a small, highly centralized, restricted Party of professional revolutionaries, in "The Reorganization of the Party," written in November 1905, Lenin presented a very different approach. First, he observed that the acquisition of political liberties required the complete democratization of the Party, which had not been possible previously. At the same time he recognized the need for the massive broadening of the Party, through the recruitment of "hundreds and thousands of workers." Nor did Lenin draw back from the implications of this recruitment policy. He acknowledged that it would require new and broader forms of organization, and that these new forms would "most likely have to be less rigid, more 'free', more 'loose'" than those provided for in *What Is To Be Done?* [12]

Of course, the period of legality turned out to be a brief one, and the promise of 1905 had to be abandoned. Nonetheless, it clearly showed that Lenin by no means made a fetish of his 1902 plan for party organization, nor considered it to be valid for all times and places. If only the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party had had a longer period of time to develop under conditions of relatively open bourgeois democracy, perhaps the whole evolution of communist organizational practice in the West might have turned out differently.

Theory and Practice of the Leninist Breach

Bolshevism, to the extent that it became a qualitatively new political phenomenon and not simply another national component of the Second International, developed its distinctive features in three revolutions—one in 1905 and two in 1917—and in the bitter Russian civil war which followed. As such, Bolshevism is preeminently the theory and

practice not just of the Russian social formation, but of that society in periods of crisis and revolution; its unique features are its new responses to conditions created by a series of revolutionary situations. So much so that in practice Leninism became the theory of politics in revolutionary crises and its primacy of politics was largely a matter for periods when revolution was on the agenda and revolutionary tactics could actually produce significant results. Its program in periods of relative social calm, except for its theory of the Party, and its alliance policy, was relatively indistinguishable from that of other sections of the Socialist International. This fact significantly limited Bolshevism's ability to further the break with economism and class reductionism on its own. Moreover, in the post-war period, Leninism was embraced by parties facing a decade of capitalist stabilization. The absence of a developed Leninist strategy and tactics for non-revolutionary conjunctures made it inevitable that, if communists did not consciously develop Leninism for these conditions, they would have to fall back on classical Socialist traditions for guidance on how to survive and advance in the unexpected decade of capitalist resurgence which followed World War I.

Equally significant in understanding the limits of Bolshevik theory is the fact that, while reformism and revisionism were identified by Leninism and consciously fought, economism and class reductionism were never specifically defined or targeted as errors to be defeated. While the practice of the Bolsheviks undoubtedly represented a certain break with these positions, the failure to elevate this practice to the level of articulated theory and to re-organize political education and conscious political activity accordingly, contributed to a situation in which economism and class reductionism experienced a decided revival within international Marxism in the decade after Lenin's death.

Unfortunately, it was not only Bolshevism's theory which was weak in this area. As noted above, while the practice of Leninism represented a certain break with these errors, it was by no means an all-sided one. Its weakness in this respect is well illustrated by the example of class reductionism. Bolshevism represented an advance with regard to the traditional socialist position inasmuch as it was able to recognize the need to take into account the desires and demands of the Russian peasantry, thereby breaking with the single class exclusivity of the Second International. But this recognition did not break with class reductionism altogether because Bolshevism failed to understand that the oppression of multi-class social groupings such as women, national minorities and Jews, was rooted in society relatively independently of class oppression, and was therefore reproduced by a multiplicity of political, ideological, national and cultural factors, as well as economic-class relations. Instead, Bolshevism continued to treat these forms of oppression—sexual, national, anti-semitism, etc.—as so dependent on the existence of class divided society and the oppression of the workingclass, that the victory of the proletariat in Russia and a commitment to the abolition of classes was thought to be sufficient to eliminate the material basis for their continued existence. Rather than acknowledging the on-going presence of sexism and anti-semitism in Soviet society as a result of the continued production and

reproduction of their independent conditions of existence, these phenomena were held to be mere vestiges of pre-socialist society whose imminent demise was simply delayed due to certain, unspecified reasons. The struggle against these “vestiges” was further retarded by Leninism’s continuation of the Statist conceptions of political power found in the Second International. The fact that laws were passed against anti-semitism and for women’s rights increasingly came to be seen as sufficient, in and of itself, to solve these problems.

Not all the limitations of Leninism were like this one, a holdover of Socialist traditions. Some were the product of the very innovations and advances which Leninism had inaugurated. Perhaps the most significant of these are the problems associated with the increased importance which Leninism attributes to politics and political practice. For Leninism the primacy and relative autonomy of politics mean; that the proletarian political party is no longer the passive representative of an economic class, but is its relatively autonomous vanguard. The freedom and flexibility which this new conception entails also brings with it two dangers. First the primacy of politics can be replaced by the primacy of the party such that other absolutely irreplaceable forms of popular political practice (mass organizations, for example) can be disregarded or reduced to simple passive instruments serving the Party rather than functioning as independent forms of popular power. Second, Bolshevism conceives the Party as representing the objective interests of the class. The problem with this is the means by which “objective interests” are defined and the relationship between these interests and the actual subjective “state of mind” of real political subjects. The danger is that the Party will define the “objective interests” of the masses without any regard for their actual desires and intentions, and indeed, without regard to their actual needs. Rather than starting from where people actually are, the Party can begin with its own preconceptions of where they should be and seek to impose upon them an alien agenda. Poland is the most recent example of this.

Another area in which a genuine Leninist advance contained the seeds of difficulties which would only later germinate was its theory of hegemony and class alliances. Bolshevism’s strategy was one of class subjects (workers and peasants) with clearly defined interests uniting under the political leadership of the workingclass. Given this class-based framework, there was no definite place for other multi-class or popular-democratic forces (women, national minorities, Jews, etc.), who therefore either had to subordinate/subsume themselves and their own relatively independent interests into one of these classes, or else passively tail after the pre-established political-class alliance. In this sense Bolshevism broke with the class exclusivity of the Second International in that it broadened the socialist movement to include class forces other than the proletariat, but did not break with the basic class-reductionist framework which could only conceive of political subjects in class terms and political strategy in terms of an alliance of classes.

Another problematic area for Leninism was its attitude toward reforms and democracy. Given its primary focus on revolutionary conjunctures and the narrow limits which the Czarist autocracy placed on the ability of popular forces to wrest concessions from the State, Leninism did not devote the same attention to fighting for and winning the battle for reforms as Social Democracy had done. More importantly Bolshevism tended to reduce the institutions of representative democracy to simple emanations of the bourgeoisie according to the formula: representative democracy equals bourgeois democracy equals dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. This formula then became a substitute rather than a guide for analysis with disastrous effects, as we shall see when we examine the Comintern line during the 1929-1934 period. Nevertheless, if Lenin rejected representative democracy, he highly valued the Soviet form as the centerpiece of a new socialist direct democracy, an emphasis on workers' power at the base which unfortunately did not continue for very long after his death.

Responses to the Leninist Breach: East and West

Three significant currents of Marxist thought responded positively to the Leninist breach. One was a heterogeneous group of young revolutionary intellectuals who were inspired by what they perceived to be Bolshevism's emphasis on the role of the "revolutionary will" in history, and its inherent critique of the positivist, mechanist and evolutionist approach of the Second International. Many in this group came from anarchist or syndicalist backgrounds including Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, and the young Antonio Gramsci who wrote *The Revolution Against "Capital"*. While grasping Lenin's stress on the primacy of the political, these intellectuals essentially reduced revolutionary politics to the expression of the will of the proletariat (see Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness*), thus reinforcing class reductionism. At the same time, their hostility to positivism led many of them to a philosophical rejection of science itself, thereby retarding the development of historical materialism.

Much more important politically than this Hegelian-voluntarist current was the initial impetus in many countries which culminated in the formation of the Third International, the politics of which we shall discuss shortly. The third positive response to Leninism was the specific translation/adaptation/development of Leninism represented by the theory and practice of the more mature Antonio Gramsci. In order to evaluate these last two responses, particularly as they have affected the development of Communism in Western Europe and America, it is necessary to fully grasp the difference between East and West as distinct objects of theoretical investigation and political strategy.

Above we discussed some of Lenin's writings on the distinction between East and West in terms of the relative ease/difficulty of making revolution and the different strategic responses which different conditions require. In a famous passage in the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci comments on Lenin's perceptions:

It seems to me that Ilitch understood that a change was necessary from the war of movement applied victoriously in the East in 1917, to a war of position which was the only form possible in the West. . .

Ilitch, however, did not have time to expand his formula—though it should be borne in mind that he could only have expanded it theoretically, whereas the fundamental task was a national one; that is to say it required a reconnaissance of the terrain and identification of the elements of trench and fortress represented by the elements of civil society, etc. In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed.[13]

This dense but useful excerpt calls for a number of clarifications. For the moment it is necessary to specify the distinction between Russia and the West. Later on we will examine the formulation: war of position/war of movement.

Gramsci's distinction between Russia and the West can be briefly summarized:

(1) Russian civil society was relatively undeveloped; there was a lack of participation of large sections of the population in politics. The absence of forms of popular political practice meant that the political mechanisms for generating support for, and loyalty to the state were generally lacking. In the West, under bourgeois democracy, civil society was more highly developed; citizens consented to the State because they participated as political subjects in practices which fostered the belief that they exercised control over it.

(2) Russian society was industrially, technically and culturally backward. This resulted in a relatively primitive and weak State and a small workingclass with a low degree of technical, cultural and political preparation for the exercise of power, surrounded by a large, even more backward peasantry. In the West industrialization and modernization had created an educated workingclass majority, but it had also created a modern State with a much more sophisticated and powerful apparatus for violence and the mobilization of consent.

(3) The Russian state was autocratic/feudal/absolutist in character; it increasingly failed to correspond to the requirements of the developing Russian social formation, and it was relatively isolated by its lack of popular legitimacy. The States in the West were bourgeois democratic; as Perry Anderson puts it, they rested primarily on the consent of the masses as well as on a superior repressive apparatus.[14]

This two-fold superiority of the capitalist States in the West and their correspondingly stronger ties with civil society were seen by Gramsci as the key to capitalist power in Europe—the reason why the Bolshevik experience could not be repeated in the West. Toward the end of his life, Lenin had begun to recognize the accuracy of this assessment, hence his advocacy of the United Front Strategy. Under these conditions,

the Comintern and Communist Parties in the West should have set to work finding the specific forms and manner in which the lessons of the Soviet revolution could be translated and further developed in the specific conditions of their own countries. As Gramsci stated in the quote presented earlier, while Lenin might have expanded upon the new tactics required in the West theoretically, the fundamental task was a national one: understanding the specific terrain of struggle in each country and identifying and constructing the necessary elements for the transition to socialism. Perhaps more than anything else, the inability of the Communist International and its member parties to take up this task constitutes the fundamental weakness of the Third International. Gramsci's words, written in 1923, speak to the entire epoch of Comintern history:

The tactic of the united front, which has been posed with such precision by the Russian comrades, both theoretically and from the point of view of general orientation, has not found in any country the party and people able to realize it and draw its practical applications.

Something is not working in the international field. There is a weakness, a lack of leadership.[15]

To fully understand this failure it is necessary to understand the manner in which the Communist International appropriated and modified Leninism.

Theory and Practice of the Third International

As we have tried to demonstrate above, while Leninism developed in Russian conditions, it had implications for Marxist theory and practice which were of universal value. It was therefore incumbent on Communists, if they desired to remain faithful to its revolutionary significance, to take up Leninism in the context of the specific conditions of their own countries, applying what was appropriate, rejecting what was not, and further developing, modifying and transforming the whole as the situation and the times required. In fact, this is not what happened in the Comintern for a number of complex reasons.

To begin with, the first communists seriously misjudged the immediate post-war conjuncture. Thinking that a revolutionary situation existed in Europe and America which demanded immediate Bolshevik organizations and insurrectionary tactics, they prematurely split many Social Democratic parties, taking with them only a relatively small percentage of the total forces who might otherwise have affiliated with the Comintern had the Communists prepared the way with several years of patient propaganda, education and example. The precipitous organization of many Communist Parties in Europe and in the United States isolated the new International from much of the workingclass in the developed capitalist countries. In the United States, for example, the premature formation of several CPs isolated the new organizations from most native-born revolutionaries. The resulting relative rootlessness of the emerging Communist forces impeded their ability to closely link

themselves with the popular forces in their own countries, a weakness which was then exacerbated by their increasing dependence on Moscow.

Indeed, the predominant role which the Soviet party played within the Comintern was another important factor in the failure of its leadership to expand the Leninist breach. While initially Bolshevik leadership was essential, in the long run it became a concrete obstacle, particularly as the Soviet party was increasingly merged with, and in fact subordinate to, the Soviet State so that its strategy and tactics were subsumed under the perceived state interests of the latter. Within the Comintern itself, internationally minded Communists (Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek) were increasingly replaced by State bureaucrats (Manuilsky, Kuusinen), a phenomenon which was paralleled by the progressive weeding out of any figures capable of independent thinking and initiative from the leaderships of the various affiliated Parties. The culmination of this process was the purge of 1928-1930 when many forces including those who went on to form the International Communist Opposition (ICO) were expelled in mass. The ICO supporters were the last major international tendency within the Communist International to place the necessity of developing Marxism in accordance with the specific conditions of each country above the national interests of the USSR.[16]

This last dilemma was truly the crux of the matter, for even Comintern leaders had to admit that the national interests of the USSR did not always correspond to the needs of the world revolutionary movement (See the "Report on Peace" by Ercoli [Togliatti] to the Seventh World Congress in 1935). After all, the Soviet Union as a nation-state, surrounded by hostile powers, had to strive for normal, if not friendly relations with many capitalist regimes, against whom revolutionaries were locked in mortal combat. For these latter, normal, not to mention friendly relations, were out of the question. To what then did the Comintern ultimately owe its allegiance: the Soviet Union or the World revolution? The answer provided by the representatives of the Soviet State who dominated the Comintern after 1928 was never in doubt, as the liquidation of the international anti-fascist struggle after the signing of Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 demonstrated.

A final reason for the failure of the Comintern to further develop Leninism can be located in the type of internal life which the various parties developed, the monolithic approach to unity, and the suspicion of open discussion and debate which made genuine theoretical work and political innovation impossible. The implications of this evolution of the Communist International for Leninism should be clear: Soviet domination could not be long maintained if Leninism would have enormously expanded and developed by rooting itself in different countries and taking on new forms appropriate to those varied conditions, thereby strengthening the possibilities for independent initiative and leadership. If, however, Leninist strategy, tactics and organization as they developed in Russia continued to be the universal and unchangeable models for all places and times, then learning from the Soviets would

continue to be mandatory, legitimating ultimate Soviet authority on all questions of theory and politics.

This history of the Comintern can be divided into four general periods: the era of Lenin (1919-1924), the years of transition (1925-1928), the Third Period (1929-1934), and the era of the Popular Fronts (1935-1943). The first, and to a degree the second, have been discussed above. What follows are more detailed comments on the strategic orientation of the third and fourth periods.

Comintern Strategy in the Third Period

(1) While Lenin's practice contained an appreciation of combined and uneven development, "weak links," and conjunctural analysis, beginning in the 1920s the Comintern enshrined a theory of the "general crisis of capitalism" in its place. This theory held that since World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution international capitalism was experiencing a permanent "general crisis," for which socialism alone was the solution. In some ways this was only a more sophisticated version of the "breakdown theory" of the Second International, to the extent that it disregarded the uneven development of capitalism and the complex approach to crises inherent in Lenin's work. At the same time, the theory of a "general crisis of capitalism" also represented a throwback to the Marxism of the Second International in another respect. The Comintern framework, like that of its predecessor, defined this crisis in economist fashion as a manifestation of capitalism's alleged inability to further develop the productive forces of society. Needless to say, time and time again throughout this century, capitalism has proven itself more than capable of enormously advancing the productive forces and of overcoming crises, "general" or otherwise, the Comintern notwithstanding.

(2) While Lenin's last writings on the world revolution concentrate on the different problems faced by revolution outside the USSR, the Comintern refused to recognize these necessary distinctions. Leninism and the pre-revolutionary Bolshevik strategy were universalized and thereby ossified as the mandatory single model appropriate to all countries. Similarly, the fact that Leninism was largely a strategy for revolutionary conjunctures, the need for a clear, practical line for non-revolutionary periods was never adequately addressed. This resulted in a permanent dualism in the political line of the Third International. Whenever it thought revolution to be on the agenda, as, for example, in the 1929-1934 period, it attempted to apply Bolshevik insurrectionary tactics. At other times, when it had to admit that capitalism had "stabilized" itself, as in the mid-1920s, it half-heartedly applied a version of united front tactics which meant largely the kind of economic agitation and electoral propaganda that the Second International had practiced in a previous era. Thus Lenin's vision of the United Front as a long term strategy for revolution in the advanced capitalist countries which would break with the economism and reformism of the Socialists and yet not simply mimic the tactics of the Bolsheviks went unrealized. In Comintern hands it was simply a

temporary tactic for preparing the way toward a new revolutionary period, when it could be immediately discarded.

(3) The Comintern failed to follow up on the implications of Leninism's partial break with class reductionism. In official parlance Marxism continued to be defined as the "ideology of the proletariat" and the class specificity of Communist ideology was continually asserted. This condition was to a considerable degree influenced by developments in the USSR. In the Soviet Union heightened hostility toward the peasantry became the official policy of the Stalin leadership after 1929, with the result that even the kind of genuine worker-peasant alliance which Lenin had envisioned would not be realized. To no avail Bukharin and his supporters opposed this development. In the 1924-25 period Bukharin foreshadowing Gramsci's later work, argued that the hegemony of the Soviet State had to be based on the ability of the workingclass to forge a political alliance and build a broad base of popular support. Within this alliance the workers would lead the peasantry at the same time that they would rule over the bourgeoisie. What actually happened instead is well-known. Forced collectivization and one-sided industrialization led the Soviet State first to rule over the peasantry, and then, with the enormous expansion of its administrative and repressive apparatuses, over the workingclass itself.

In the Comintern the same class reductionism which made this development possible took the form of slogans like "class against class" and the identification of all forces outside the communist orbit as "bourgeois" or even "social fascist." In the developed capitalist countries this sectarianism and workerism did more than isolate Communists from other non-proletarian strata, it isolated them from the bulk of the workingclass itself. At this point the version of Leninism practiced in the Third Period went beyond class reductionism since Communists reduced all politics to the question: "for or against the proletariat?" by which they really meant: "for or against the Communist Party?" The concealment inherent in this substitution was made necessary by the continuing workerist mentality which prevailed, but the underlying focus on communist organization expresses the extent to which a qualitatively new conception of the role of the party had taken hold of the Communist International. In truth, the dangerous tendencies in original Bolshevik thinking which allowed the Party to arbitrarily define the objective interests of the class, independently of its actual consciousness now found conditions in which to flourish. Given that Communists everywhere represented only a small minority of the working population, the actual orientation of the class had to be disregarded while the Communist Party was elevated to absolute arbiter of its objective needs and line of march. Once the needs of the class and that of the party were equated it was easy for all opponents of the Communists to become "enemies of the workingclass." Meanwhile, mass organizations, in practice if not in theory, were reduced to one-way "transmission belts," fit only for transmitting the Party line through them down to the masses. The very term "transmission belt," popularized in the Stalin period with all its mechanical implications, shows how far the

Comintern had strayed from a conception of mass organizations as genuine forms of popular power with their own dynamic and independence.

Finally, the Third Period was a time when the equation of all forms of the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie” was taken to its logical conclusion: communists were not permitted to distinguish bourgeois democracy from fascism or favor one over the other. After all, both were equally dangerous obstacles to revolution, each in its own way.

The Leninism of the Popular Front

By 1935 it could no longer be concealed that the decisive struggle convulsing Europe was the one between existing representative democracy and fascism. If it were not apparent earlier, Nazi victories in Germany and Austria made this lesson painfully clear. For the Communists, who in Germany lost their strongest party outside the USSR, the traditional democratic systems of Western Europe could no longer be taken as givens. Now democracy had become a contested terrain on which a host of multi-class social forces (right and left) were vying for power. The slogan “class against class” was obviously inadequate to characterize the new array of forces emerging in the struggle over fascism since it was not class-specific issues around which the actual-existing political forces in Europe were now mobilizing.

The Popular Front policy, inaugurated at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935, asserted nothing less than a radically new political strategy for the world movement. For the first time Communist Parties were to go beyond being the “proletarian vanguard” and become the hegemonic articulating element in a broad field of democratic struggles in defense of bourgeois democracy against fascism. Explicit in this strategy, and a justification for the new line was the recognition of its defensive character and the indefinite postponement of revolutionary tactics as long as the fascist menace persisted. If a new conjuncture mandated this startling reversal in attitude toward bourgeois democracy, nothing in the Leninist theoretical tradition had prepared the way. Lenin had spoken of the progressive character of bourgeois democratic rights compared with conditions under absolutism, and of the need to participate in its political forms (parliament, etc.), but never of the defense of bourgeois democracy as such. Moreover, the Comintern had given over much time during the Third Period to “proving” that there was no qualitative difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism, both being forms of the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.”

In fact, the great merit of the Seventh Comintern Congress line was that it recognized the existence, even centrality, of the terrain of popular democratic struggles, the need for the workingclass and its political parties to actively participate on this terrain, and the necessity for communists to become involved in the institutions and practices of bourgeois democracy, not just for propaganda purposes, but to produce real political effects, as part of a larger political strategy. Implicit in this new approach was the necessity for taking into account multi-class political subjects (anti-fascists, for

example) which were not reducible to or equatable with class subjects, and the requirement of re-thinking the question of political alliances, with them on a platform which could not necessarily be class-defined. We have said that these things were all implicit in the new Popular Front strategy; the situation demanded leadership capable of making them explicit and drawing the necessary conclusions for practical work. Unfortunately, the Comintern leadership did not rise to the occasion.

It was not in the tasks which the Seventh Congress posed for the Communist movement that its failure can be measured, but in the theoretical-political framework with which it took up these tasks and the manner in which it endeavored to carry them out. The Comintern was unwilling or unable to recognize in the triumph of Nazism in Germany a two-fold defeat: the failure of the post World War I Social Democratic reformism on the one hand, and the failure of the Bolshevik insurrectionary model as practiced in various forms since 1919 on the other. Given the tremendous changes in strategy which the Seventh Congress inaugurated, a corresponding theoretical reassessment would have seemed essential. Yet the Comintern managed to put off the entire problem by insisting that the new strategy was necessitated by the new world situation and not by past failures of its own.

If the replacement of Bolshevik insurrection and the offensive struggle for socialism by a defense of bourgeois democracy was justified on conjunctural grounds, the Leninist revolutionary legacy was not abandoned or modified—it was simply shelved until after fascism's defeat. (In actual fact it was never restored: in the advanced capitalist countries, the popular fronts against fascism gave way, in the post World War II period, to popular fronts against monopoly capitalism). Indeed, the Comintern leadership had built its legitimacy on the sacrosanct and unvarying nature of Leninism, and the valuable opportunity for reassessment represented by the breach which the seventh Congress inaugurated was let pass without any critical rethinking in this department. Given the situation, these two frameworks (one, orthodox Leninist, the other, Popular Frontist) continued to uneasily co-exist side by side: the Popular Front guiding a Party's day-to-day activity, while Marxist-Leninism waited in the wings to be brought forth when necessary as the ultimate justification of practical activity. As Earl Browder acknowledged in the case of the Communist Party, USA:

. . . the CP . . . gradually merged with the organized labor movement and the New Deal in all practical activities, while retaining the facade of orthodox Marxism for ceremonial occasions. It became the most successful reformist party in the Marxist tradition that America had seen, while remaining unchallenged as spokesman of revolutionary Marxism in its ideological aspects.[17]

Because the line of the Seventh Congress never developed the necessary theoretical-political framework appropriate to it—one capable of drawing out its full implications—the actual political theory and practice which was ultimately implemented was an eclectic combination of established socialist and communist, even bourgeois tactics,

Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, and simple pragmatism. This weakness was most clearly manifested in the inability of the Comintern to accurately characterize the nature of the struggle for democracy in the advanced capitalist countries. Since any democracy other than the Soviet variety was inherently suspect as, by definition, an emanation of the bourgeoisie, it was being defended simply to prevent the worsening of conditions for the workers. The Communists did not see that participation on the field of struggle for popular democratic gains was central to the construction of the broad political movement which alone could lead to socialism. In this sense popular democratic struggles are essential, not simply to defend bourgeois democratic gains already won, but more importantly to constitute the kind of political subjects and new forms of political practice which socialism requires, and finally, to lay the foundations for genuine socialist democracy itself. By taking socialism off the agenda and replacing it with the defeat of fascism, the question of the relationship between democracy and socialism was avoided, not only because it made the new communist line easier to present to bourgeois anti-fascist allies, but also because raising it would have required communists to address the prior Leninist formulations on this question as well. Perhaps another factor which hindered communist ability to fully grasp the importance of democracy in the capitalist countries was the steady curtailment of democratic rights and freedoms in Stalin's USSR. Too open championing of the one might have proven embarrassing to the other.

In the end the opening promised by the Seventh Comintern Congress became a closure: a perspective of participation in the institutions and practices of bourgeois democracy not out of any commitment to the terrain itself or its necessary role in the creation of socialist militants, but as a tactical necessity for winning allies, gaining strength and defeating fascism until such time as it could be discarded on behalf of a return to the Leninist struggle for socialism. At that moment all "bourgeois baggage" of the previous period about democracy would be discarded in favor of direct appeals and immediate preparation for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Popular Front Tactics

Before leaving the Marxism of the Popular Front it is necessary to briefly comment on some aspects of its tactical orientation in keeping with the framework of this article. Tactically, the Popular Front line was no less eclectic and contradictory than the strategy intended to direct it. Because there was critical summation of the positive and negative lessons of the past period with which to guide them, communist militants abandoned certain traditional tactics and forms of organization, particularly those pertaining to mass work, while many others, particularly those relating to the Party and its role were carried over into the new period slightly modified or relatively unchanged.

A number of positive aspects of the "Third Period" were thus unnecessarily cast off. The fierce class reductionism of 1929-1934 years had strongly emphasized the development of workingclass identity: ideologically, politically, and culturally, through

educational campaigns and a host of organizations dedicated to the flowering of proletarian sports, proletarian culture, etc. Instead of trying to effectively integrate these forces and the real wealth of workers' culture which they represented into the anti-fascist fronts, the Comintern liquidated them altogether and, wherever possible, subordinated their memberships to pre-existing bourgeois organizations, new frontist groups, or simply let them drift off. This is what happened to the proletarian literature movement in the Un States, where the John Reed Clubs had been established to foster young workingclass talent. With the advent of the new line in 1935 the Clubs were dissolved and in their stead American Writers Congress was created which spent most of its time in an effort to attract celebrities and sponsor amorphous "progressive" culture rather than encouraging the work of actual workingclass writers and cultural workers.

In the same manner the Comintern had previously stressed Lenin's insistence on the need for maintaining the political independence and initiative of the workingclass and its party regardless of the political climate—even in cases of political alliances. After 1935, rather than develop a correct balance between independent initiatives and joint work with other anti-fascists, the practice of the Comintern was largely one-sided, for the Popular Fronts were so constituted that the workingclass was generally reduced to an auxiliary force whose agenda and activity were circumscribed by the limits electoral coalitions with bourgeois parties.

In the Third Period Communists advocated "united fronts from below" through the constitution of rank-and-file; "organizations of struggle" in the factories and communities. Given the ultra-left sectarianism of these years, such organizations never materialized. After 1935, however, mass politics from below increasingly gave way to exclusive electoral coalitions created not by struggle at the base, but by negotiations conducted at the top and then imposed top-down by the various party leaderships. Instead of seeking to build anti-fascist unity from direct work with the petty-bourgeois and rural masses, communists sought to draw these forces into Popular Fronts through coalitions with their "traditional" political parties. Rather than radically restructuring political terrain in the course of mass struggle, this approach helped to maintain and reinforce the domination of potential workingclass allies by the old bourgeois political bureaucracies which had always controlled them.

If in all these respects the Comintern abandoned certain positive features of the pre-1935 period, other negative aspects of that epoch were carried over unchanged. The most important of these was the Monolithic party with its absence of internal democracy, a distrust of mass organizations, their independence and spontaneous activity, and a worship of all things Soviet. Also, the mechanical application of a single line in all countries, regardless of conditions, was carried over into the era of Popular Fronts so that fascism was everywhere targetted as the main danger. In countries where this was not the case, the US for example, this line seriously weakened the

ability of communists to correctly identify and practice the necessarily different approach which their own situations required.[18]

The legacy of the Popular Fronts was by no means entirely negative, however. Comintern activity helped to strengthen the organization and mobilization of anti-fascist forces and give them real political power. It also restored a much needed measure of tactical flexibility to the Communist Parties. It legitimated work in all kinds of new areas and among multi-class political subjects. It made many Communists sensitive to national particularities and national consciousness for the first time. Most importantly, it forced Communists to articulate their ideology to that of popular consciousness. Earl Browder's slogan—"Communism is 20th Century Americanism"—would have been a brilliant idea had it been correctly interpreted. That is, if it had been practiced to re-articulate the progressive elements of national consciousness and the American revolutionary tradition around a socialist core, instead of what was actually done, namely redefining Communism as simply Abe Lincoln plus the New Deal. Finally, the Popular Front line was, in spite of all else, a success in increasing the size of the various Communist Parties (decimated as they were by the excesses of the Third Period), even if as a political strategy it proved largely unsuccessful in building effective anti-fascist fronts.

In the end the importance of the Popular Front line for us here lies in the fact that it was the basis from which Communists in the post-World War II era would develop their own independent "roads to socialism" from which, in turn, the theory of Euro-communism emerged. Before we can examine Euro-communism, however, it is necessary to discuss the most important alternative to the Marxism of the Communist International which appeared within its own ranks in the prewar years as the third major response to the Leninist breach: the theories of Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci's Marxism

As Lucio Colletti has observed, Gramsci's Marxism was not in harmony with either the ultra-leftism of the Third Period or the Popular Frontism of the Seventh Congress.[19] Instead Gramsci charted a fundamentally different path, due in no small part to the fact that he started from different premises. Perry Anderson explains:

Gramsci was unique among Communists in persisting, at the nadir of the defeats of the thirties, to see that Russian experience could not be merely repeated in the West, and in trying to understand why. No other thinker in the European workingclass movement has to this day addressed himself so deeply or centrally to the problem of the specificity of a socialist revolution in the West.[20]

Certainly Gramsci's work is full of ambiguities, contradictions and unelaborated insights. It is also true that later theorists, whose work we will examine at the end of this article, have modified and criticized some of his formulations—modifications and criticisms with which we are in substantial accord. Nevertheless, the end result of

Gramsci's efforts was a qualitative recasting of the Marxism of his time, particularly in regard to our immediate concern here—socialist strategy in the advanced capitalist countries. Gramsci's work not only represented a break with the Socialism of the Second International; it also meant a marked advance over the then-existing Leninist legacy with which Gramsci himself began. What follows is an abbreviated summary of some of Gramsci's more important contributions:

(1) For the Socialist International, as for Lenin, the unity of a social formation was derived from the necessary actions of the economic base upon the superstructure, hence the constant use of this architectural metaphor. Gramsci allows us to definitely break with this approach by further developing Lenin's conception of the primacy of politics. Gramsci begins with the alternative formulation that the unity of a society is not an economic given, but a continuous political process—the struggle of fundamental classes for hegemony.

This is to say that the unity of a capitalist social formation is not determined by the structural effects of the economy on politics and ideology, but by the balance of social forces at all levels, and the ability of one of the fundamental classes (bourgeoisie, proletariat) to exercise its hegemony over society through the process of reproducing certain favorable economic, political and ideological relations, practices and discourses. While economic crises may threaten the unity of social formation and the hegemony of a fundamental class, by themselves they cannot create a revolutionary situation. Instead the impact of economic crises depends on the strength of the institutions of civil society and politics and the overall balance of social forces which they reflect. Because this balance is the key to the unity of a society at all times, and not merely in periods of revolutionary crisis, for Gramscian Marxism politics is always the decisive moment in social practice. With this orientation economism can finally be put behind us.

(2) The consistent emphasis on the primacy of politics requires a new definition of politics itself. Not only can political practice no longer be reduced to the reflection at the political level of objective class interests at the economic level. Now all political subjects can no longer be identified with or reduced to class subjects for society is also composed of a host of popular democratic formations whose participants do not belong to the fundamental classes or which are multi-class in composition. Gramsci thus enlarges the field of politics to go beyond the terrain of class relations to include society in its entirety, and the host of relations based on gender, race, generation, residence, nationality, etc. which comprise it. This expanded field of politics is riven by social contradictions and the struggles of antagonistic forces for domination and resistance. The product of all of these struggles—the creation of political subjects—is not dictated by the capitalist economy alone, but by the totality of actual struggles themselves which go on within and through all social structures and relations.

For Gramsci, political leadership can no longer be understood as organizational leadership over pre-constituted class subjects. Instead he sees political power as established and/or undermined through the economic, political and ideological practices of fundamental social classes conducted over the whole field of social relations; and he looks to forms of “political, intellectual and moral leadership” exercised upon this field as the means by which popular democratic forces are drawn to support one or another of the fundamental classes so that the unity of a social formation is alternately secured or threatened with reorganization.

(3) Gramsci’s new approach to politics allows for a significant break with the instrumentalism which marred the State theories of the Second and Third Internationals. Gramsci’s notes on the State in the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe and North America insist that the State is not an “empty shell” nor a force without direction or function in itself, nor simply a tool in the hands of a single class. On the contrary, the State is seen as contradictory itself, yet having an active role to play, in relative autonomy from all social classes, in the organization and unification of the dominant classes and the atomization and pacification of those which are dominated. It is not that the State has no class character—for Gramsci it definitely does—but that this class specificity is the result of a constant struggle between and among classes in which the State as an institutional apparatus and a locus of power performs a necessary and irreplaceable function.

Gramsci’s work also entails a shift from concentration on the repressive aspects of the State system to an examination of the way in which physical coercion and violence are combined with fraud/corruption and the mobilization of active consent. Gramsci identifies two modes of class domination: force and hegemony, which always exist in combination and inter-action. Force involves the use of coercive and repressive apparatuses to keep the masses in line. Hegemony on the other hand involves the successful mobilization and organization of the active consent of the dominated classes and social groups by the ruling class(es) through its

taking systematic account of popular interests and demands, shifting position and making compromises on secondary issues to maintain support and alliances in an inherently unstable and fragile system of political relations (without, however, sacrificing essential interests), and organizing this support for the attainment of national goals which serve the fundamental long-term interests of the dominant group.[21]

Both force and hegemony are institutionalized in complex systems of apparatuses that form part of the State, and by a complex and stratified civil society that provides a host of organizational reserves which bolster and extend the State system. This type of State, with its extra-governmental reserves in civil society, Gramsci calls the integral State. He traces its development in Western Europe through the increasingly active role of the State in civil society and the economy, and in the reproduction of specific forms

of domination within them. Unlike the situation of Czarist Russia where there was little or no mediation between the State and the individual citizen, in countries of advanced capitalism, the State develops around itself a whole series of connecting links in and through civil society which mediate the citizen's relationship with the State system and upon which the State can draw in times of crisis. Yet however vigorously the State seeks to avail itself of these extra-governmental reserves, it cannot immunize itself and them from the effects of the class and social struggles which go on around and within them. Thus the integral State draws much of its power, but also derives many of its contradictions and an increased vulnerability from its organic links to the economy and civil society.

(4) Gramsci's analysis of ideology is equally path-breaking in its rejection of the class-reductionism of the Second and Third Internationals. For classical Marxism, as we have seen above, ideological struggle consisted in the confrontation of two already elaborated anti-thetical world-views—one bourgeois, the other proletarian – with each corresponding to the “objective interests” of the basic antagonistic classes of modern society. Not only is each world view class-specific and mutually exclusive, but all of the elements of each are class specific too.

Gramsci starts from a fundamentally different premise. For him the popular culture and the popular democratic ideology of any society must be the starting point for an examination of ideology in general and ideological practice. Popular democratic ideology in the broadest sense is defined as an historically evolved set of beliefs, values, common sense assumptions, social attitudes and “folklore,” the various elements of which do not have any pre-given absolute class character. Class character is given to an ideological elements only when it is operated on by the political-ideological practice of a fundamental class; more specifically, only by its inclusion within an ideological system organized around the hegemonic or articulating principle of a fundamental class, which is itself class specific.

This is to say that each fundamental class in a society has its own world view and value system, as classical Marxism recognized. But Gramsci goes beyond the classics in see these world views as the central core of much broader, unified ideological systems to which other ideological elements from popular culture and the world views of other classes are articulated. When such a broader ideological system has been created by the political-ideological practice of a fundamental class we say that an organic ideology of that class has been formed. The class-specific central core is the articulating principle of the ideological system because it functions to link all the disparate elements together; it is also the hegemonic principle because it links them together in such a way that their unity and meaning correspond to the logic and requirements of that fundamental class. In this manner, ideological elements can take on a class character which is not intrinsic to them and which can be transformed in turn by their re-articulation to another hegemonic principle of a different class. Thus, for Gramsci, “democracy” has no intrinsic class character, but acquires a different one depending on

whether it is articulated to a bourgeois hegemonic principle or a proletarian one. This then is the definition of ideological struggle in the Gramscian system: the process of the “disarticulation-rearticulation of given ideological elements in a struggle between two hegemonic principles to appropriate these elements.”[22] What this new definition means for revolutionary strategy will be apparent shortly.

(5) Some of Gramsci’s writings concerned the nature of politics, the State and ideological struggle in general. Others concentrated specifically on conditions in Italy and Western Europe, directed toward the formulation of a new revolutionary strategy, qualitatively different from the Bolshevik model. If in Russia an offensive “war of movement” was by itself capable of overthrowing Czarism; in the West the way would have to be prepared by a long, protracted “war of position.” The concept “war of position” entails the lengthy unfolding of multi-dimensional political struggles at all levels of the economy, civil society and the State by a unified “national popular bloc” under proletarian hegemony, to the point that the balance of social forces decisively shifts and a revolutionary seizure of power (“war of movement”) becomes possible. The proletarian “war of position” or struggle for hegemony has been described as a two-fold process: the development of self-consciousness of the workingclass as a distinct group, and the creation of a basis of consensus between it and all other oppressed groups.

More specifically, for Gramsci this meant: (a) a class consciousness and leadership wherein the workingclass presents itself as an autonomous and independent political force and an intellectual, cultural and moral leader, organizationally expressed in and through its political party; (b) a class leadership (hegemony) exercised in the context of a policy of alliances. This is not simply traditional political leadership over pre-constituted subjects, but the imposition of a hegemonic principle upon a totality of social relations, practices and discourses such that a new kind of politics and ideology created and popular democratic subjects are linked together through them under proletarian direction.

The “war of position” has a fundamental goal: to alter the balance of forces, to organize and expand proletarian hegemony and to prepare for the political-military “war of movement.” This means, for Gramsci, that the workingclass must forge its own forms of organization (a party, workers’ councils, etc.) through which “to organize the workingclass, to form organic links with the masses and disarticulate the democratic basis of the bourgeois state in the consent of the governed, to paralyze the functions of legal government over the masses and to move on to positive activity,” the establishment of a workers’ state.[23]

(6) The “war of position” has ideological, political and organizational aspects.

Organizational

The bourgeoisie as a class exercises its hegemony through different apparatuses of force and hegemony that form part of the State and also extend into civil society. At the same time civil society contains a multitude of other institutions—popular political parties, trade unions and mass organizations—which actually or potentially provide an organizational basis for the creation of a counter-hegemony on the part of the workingclass. The organizational tasks of the workingclass are therefore, first, to intervene in the State and rulingclass apparatuses of hegemony and force to disrupt, disorganize and neutralize them; second, to become active in pre-existing popular institutions which can serve to organize proletarian hegemony; and finally, to create new organs of proletarian power (the Party, workers’ councils, mass organizations).

Political

The “war of position” implies a multi-dimensional conception of political radicalization. Since political subjects are constituted by all social relations not just class ones, political struggle must be waged around all these social relations—race, sex, residence, generation, nationality, etc.—to the extent that they embody relations of oppression and domination, in addition to the class struggle which has a primary role in relation to all the others in the Gramscian system. And since the integral State has bastions of defense throughout civil society, the struggle against the State must be carried on throughout civil society; to isolate the State from without and exacerbate its internal contradictions.

At the same time, for Gramsci the ability of the workingclass to develop into a hegemonic force capable of successfully challenging capital depends entirely upon its capacity to develop a new political practice which is not symmetrical with that of the dominant classes.[24] This is to say that, under capitalism, bourgeois politics in a broad sense is the practice of reproducing relations of exploitation and oppression. It is a bureaucratic practice which seeks to enhance the power of the dominant class at the same time that it reduces the dominated to objects, passive actors or supports, accepting subordination or actively consenting rather than providing leadership. The workingclass, if it is to reorganize itself into a hegemonic nucleus and rally around itself the popular forces, cannot simply reproduce within its own institutions and discourses this practice of bureaucratic politics and forms of anti-democratic leadership and organization. Instead, it must consistently produce relations of democratic control and mobilization wherever possible, together with institutions of direct democracy which are consciously anti-thetical to bureaucratism in all its aspects. Only by preparing this asymmetrical practice of politics well before the “war of movement” can the workingclass insure that once the proletarian State is established it will not degenerate from a leadership of the masses to a dictatorship over the masses.

This concern with a new practice of politics led Gramsci to sharply attack the bureaucratic centralist model of the revolutionary party which developed in the Stalin era in the Soviet Union. For Gramsci such a “party” was not a political party at all, but

more akin to a branch of the State repressive apparatus. In *The Modern Prince* he wrote:

When the party is progressive it functions “democratically” (democratic centralism); when the party is repressive it functions “bureaucratically” (bureaucratic centralism). The party in this second case is a simple unthinking executor. It is then technically a policing organism, and its name of “political party” is simply a metaphor of a mythological character.[25]

The distinction between democratic and bureaucratic centralism is provided in Gramsci’s definition of the former:

a continual adaption of the organization to the real movement, a matching of thrusts from below with orders from above, a continuous insertion of elements thrown up from the depths of the rank and file into the solid framework of the leadership apparatus which ensures continuity and the regular accumulation of experience.[26]

Ideological

The creation and unification of political subjects toward which the “war of position” is directed (popular-democratic bloc) requires an ideological process whereby the overwhelming majority of popular-democratic ideological elements of a given society are articulated to the value system of the workingclass so that other popular social groups come to see in the outlook and action of that class an expression of their own and the national interest. The resultant popular-democratic ideological system, with the world view of the workingclass as its hegemonic principle, unites the popular democratic forces around it in a new way, and provides the ideological basis for proletarian counter-hegemony in the struggle against capital.

In this short section we have only been able to hint at the tremendous richness of Antonio Gramsci’s theoretical-political legacy. Before examining the way this legacy is being employed and significantly modified by contemporary revolutionary strategists of the left it is necessary to examine an alternative approach to the contradictions of late capitalism which has only become a significant force in the last decade: the approach which has come to be known as Euro-communism.

Euro-Communism

Euro-communism has never been a monolithic ideology: it has meant one thing in Italy, another in France, another in Japan, still another in Australia. Yet all its forms have enough in common to enable us to outline its broad features with some degree of certainty. Euro-communism is moreover not a particularly theoretical approach to political practice; nonetheless, to the extent that it has shown an interest in its origins it has claimed as its antecedents the two traditions which we have just discussed: the theory and practice of the Popular Front era of the Comintern and the theoretical

tradition of Antonio Gramsci,[27] although it must be admitted that only in Italy has the second been prominently featured.

The Italian Communist Party (PCI) is also important in that it has been the most successful of the European Euro-communist parties, in no small part due to the leadership of Palmiro Togliatti and the unique strategy which he inaugurated for it in the post World War II period. Returning from Moscow where he had spent the war years, Togliatti transformed the Popular Front against Fascism into a national front for social reconstruction and constitutional reform. Preferring to rely on alliances with bourgeois parties rather than develop the revolutionary impetus unleashed by the armed resistance movement, the PCI grew spectacularly in the 1944-1947 period. The political results which accompanied this growth were considerably less impressive, as Gabriel Kolko suggests:

By stressing the political goal of unity above all else, even if that alliance meant cooperation with fascist collaborators, the CP became the party of transcendent nationalism, a nationalism that submerged class goals and vetoed the triumph of the Left in a period of considerable, but by no means irresistible, revolutionary possibilities.[28]

Togliatti always attempted to balance what he perceived (rightly or wrongly) to be the Italian national interests with official orthodoxy and deference to Soviet preeminence in the world communist movement. Nevertheless, from the beginning he attempted to utilize Gramscian concepts in his own way, and after the Soviet de-Stalinization campaign of 1956 he accelerated efforts toward a strategy and tactics independent of the Soviet model, in words as well as in fact. Similar independent trends developed in other advanced capitalist countries, first after 1956, and later after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, in 1967.

Euro-communism itself, as an explicit orientation, did not emerge until the mid-1970s, in response to a world situation marked by the intersection of two crises: one the crisis of world capitalism, the other the crisis in the international Communist movement. The 1970s saw the maturation of an international crisis of capitalism, more specifically of the world capitalist system which had emerged and been consolidated after World War II in a long wave of economic expansion and prosperity. By the late 1960s, however, this system began to break up under the impact of various wars of national liberation (Vietnam's most importantly for the US), the collapse of the international monetary system and a world crisis of capital accumulation for which the Keynesian system had no ready-made solutions. In the developed capitalist countries this slump was accompanied by the rise of a whole series of new political subjects—students, young workers, women, gays, ecologists, etc., who in turn intensified an already serious ideological-cultural crisis of no small proportions.

The result of this unfolding structural crisis and the response to it of various sections of capital has been an uneven but perceptible motion in the direction of a fundamental

restructuring of capitalism as a world system, spearheaded by the multi-nationals in cooperation with increasingly authoritarian bourgeois regimes. In the face of these efforts the workingclass and its organizations (unions, parties) have been weakened and demoralized, unable to effectively resist or unite around themselves popular democratic forces, let alone pose a revolutionary way out of the crisis.

The international communist movement also has not been able to live up to the challenges posed by this period. Its own crisis which erupted in 1956 was intensified by the Sino-Soviet split and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which discredited “existing socialism” as models for other countries. More serious for Communists in the advanced capitalist countries was the legacy of theoretical dogmatism, organizational bureaucracy and political paralysis which they seemed unable or unwilling to overcome. Euro-communism emerged in direct response to these crises in countries with a relatively strong communist labor movement as well as a divided bourgeoisie (Italy, Spain, France). Building on the traditions of the Popular Front era and the anti-fascist resistance, Euro-communism sought to incorporate a fundamental reassessment of the bourgeois democratic political system and the new demands being raised by the new political movements. The result was a new kind of popular front strategy, up-dated with a number of important new features.

(1) Euro-communism is a strategy which, from the beginning excludes the idea of violent revolution organized in the form of a military assault on the State. If the Popular Fronts of the 1930s put revolution off until after the defeat of fascism, Euro-communism puts it off altogether.

(2) Euro-communism places commitment to the necessary conditions for socialist transition in its own countries above all interests of the USSR and does not hesitate to criticize what it feels are errors and inadequacies in the internal policies and foreign affairs of the Socialist countries. The right to criticize is seen as fundamental to the equality of all parties; the right to follow their own path, fundamental to their independence.

(3) If for the Comintern in the 1930s fascism was the immediate enemy against whom it was necessary to unite all popular forces, even non-fascist sections of monopoly capital, for Euro-communism monopoly capital is the main enemy against whom it is permissible to unite all forces, even non-monopoly capital. The theoretical justification for this approach is the theory of state monopoly capitalism; in political application a form of “progressive or advanced democracy.”

(4) For Euro-communism the dynamic basis for a transition to socialism is fundamental structural reform: the steady democratization of the structures and institutions of representative democracy which capitalism has already developed through increased electoral power: in other words, a parliamentary strategy for socialism.

(5) The Euro-communist strategy abandons the Leninist conception of a single vanguard party leading an alliance of oppressed classes. Euro-communism starts from the proposition that there does and will exist equal and independent political parties representing various classes, class fractions and multi-class groupings who come together in a coalition of equals seeking to mobilize around themselves a broad electoral bloc against monopoly.

(6) Finally, Euro-communism defends constitutional rights and individual liberties, not just for the transition period, but into socialism itself. It believes that socialism can give these forms, won through decades of mass struggle, a radically deeper content, corresponding to the new needs of socialist democracy.

Limitations of Euro-Communism

As noted earlier, a number of theoreticians of Euro-communism claim that it is derived from Gramsci or at least represents Gramsci “brought up to date.” The Italian Communist Party in particular has always sought to demonstrate a continuity between its latest thinking and the prison writings of its most gifted founder. The truth is that, more often than not, Gramsci’s ideas and concepts used in connection with Euro-communism have concealed the extent to which Euro-communism is much more a product of popular front era than anything to be found in Gramsci himself. This said, it is only fair to add that in carrying the Popular Front tradition forward, Euro-communism has not done so in a mechanical fashion, but has attempted to grapple with the unprecedented changes which advanced capitalism has undergone in the most recent period. For reasons which will become clearer shortly, the Euro-communist approach has not been a successful one. To understand why it is necessary to concentrate on the weaknesses of the Euro-communist strategy, some which it shares with its Comintern predecessors, and some which originate with it.

(1) Perhaps the central error of the Euro-communists, one they have carried over from the Popular Front era, is “an overemphasis on parliamentary tactics, at the expense both of the revolutionary labor movement and of the new social movements.”[29] Euro-communism is basically an electoral strategy for the transition to socialism which, unlike Gramscian strategy, subordinates other, more direct, forms of politics to electoral mobilization. The result is that mass political practice is often reduced to vote-getting, while parliamentary activity itself becomes a series of high-level alliances between political elites and endless parliamentary maneuvering. Neither the workers’ movement nor the new political subjects have been satisfied by this performance, and in Italy, Spain and other countries there has been a frustration, cynicism, and a relative decline in communist strength among industrial workers, young people, etc., all of whom are demanding a new kind of politics, not just another behind-the-scenes political deal.

(2) Another central weakness of Euro-communism, like Social Democracy and Leninism before it, is its Statist orientation. Euro-communism continues to view the State as the

principal site of political initiative, economic development and ideological legitimation. As a result, the Euro-communist strategy is largely one of attempts to purge the existing state of bourgeois control and simultaneously to harness it to a workingclass program of economic and political transformations. Putting the primary focus of political activity on the existing State results in an avoidance or indifference to forms of mass direct democracy, embodied in workplace or neighborhood councils, which were absolutely crucial to Gramsci's conception of hegemony and the transition to socialism. The statism of Euro-communism is a serious obstacle to its political success, as Carl Boggs has argued:

In the final analysis, the Euro-communist version of the democratic road fails to point toward a radical transformation of social and political life . . . because it views the transition as a process that passes more or less exclusively through the existing state machinery. If the complex task of building a new ensemble of political forces and social relations is obscured by Leninism, with its scenario of frontal maneuvers against the state, it is also distorted by Eurocommunism in its nearly singular preoccupation with an internal modification of structures.[30]

(3) Closely linked to the error of statism is Eurocommunism's tendency to deemphasize, if not seriously underestimate, the class nature of the capitalist State, particularly its non-repressive apparatuses. The democratization of the capitalist state has become the goal, by which is meant a progressive reconstitution of its institutions through providing them with a new administration, new social priorities, and a new ideological content. In Italy, the PCI claims that the contradictions undeniably present within the State represent a situation of presently-existing "dual power" such that electoral gains and left control of city and regional councils constitute the growth of positions of workingclass power within the State itself. Given this framework, illusions are sown that incremental advances by the workingclass in the institutions of representative democracy can lead to a workers state without any need for other organs of direct democracy at the base, or an overall shift in the social balance of forces. While a rethinking of the Leninist counterposing of representative (equalling bourgeois) to direct (equalling proletarian) democracy is clearly required, Euro-communism goes to the other extreme by ignoring the class character and function of existing institutions of bourgeois representative democracy and the limitations they set on the self-activity of the workingclass and new political subjects.

(4) The Euro-communist strategy embodies a conception of hegemony fundamentally different from that put forward by Gramsci in his prison writings. For Gramsci hegemony involved both the construction of a broad, national-popular bloc against capital and the struggle to insure that a proletarian world view and practice was at the core of that bloc. This in contrast to the Popular Fronts constructed by the Comintern in the 1930s which gained their breadth by drawing the workers' movement behind the political demands of its petty-bourgeois and bourgeois allies. Euro-communism has followed the Comintern tradition in this respect. Certainly broad popular coalitions

have been constructed and maintained by the Italian Communists, but not through the construction of an alternate political and ideological hegemony. Rather the PCI has been successful in presenting itself as the most faithful defender of Italian traditional values, order and stability, not by rearticulating these elements in a new organic ideology, but by striving to faithfully uphold their traditional articulation in the face of bourgeois corruption, indifference and failure. In this manner the Party has locked itself into an approach of promising to protect and foster Italian capitalism better than the capitalists themselves; is it any wonder that the Party is losing ground among the workers, women, and youth?

(5) In another respect the Euro-communists have followed the Comintern tradition rather than Gramsci. This is the matter of democratic centralism and inner-party democracy. For all their talk of democratizing social life, the Euro-communist parties have been noticeably reluctant to start with their own institutions. Although some of the smaller parties have made more progress in this respect, the Communist Parties of Italy and Spain continue to practice Stalinian forms of internal organization, the orchestrated purging of dissent, and a “transmission belt” mentality with regard to mass organizations, while the PCF has retreated so far into Stalinian organizational forms and manipulation that it has lost almost all credibility as a democratic force.

(6) The insistence on the principle of political independence from the USSR and other parties has posed promises and dangers for Euro-communism. As Goran Therborn explains:

On the one hand, the independence of the national Communist parties has increased their sensitivity to the concrete problems and traditions of the formations in which they work. . . . On the other hand, independence also generates tendencies toward national integration, that is, absorption into the existing bourgeois social framework.[31]

While it is certainly true that the bourgeois nationalist “virus” has infected some Euro-communist parties, subservience to Moscow is no immunization, as the racist anti-immigrant electoral tactics of the Communist Party of France in 1981 illustrates. The key problem is and remains how to transform progressive national traditions by articulating them to a socialist hegemonic core while never abandoning an internationalist perspective. Unfortunately, the Euro-communists have not made notable advances in this field.

The Evolution of Euro-Communism

The promise of Euro-communism seemed brightest in the 1975-1977 period. Enrico Berlinguer, Santiago Carrillo and Georges Marchais met to plan a common perspective in June, 1976, and in the same month the Communist Party of Italy registered significant electoral advances. At the end of the year Carrillo’s Euro-Communism and the State was published in conditions of increasing Spanish democratization after

Franco's death. In France the Union of the Left looked forward to the March 1978 elections with the expectation of victory.

Yet almost immediately the efforts of Euro-communism were confronted with serious difficulties and their resulting responses failed to measure up to the demands of the situation. In Italy the Christian Democrats regained their initiative and in the June 1977 elections the PCI lost more than half of the gains of 1976. More recently, the much touted "historic compromise" had to be abandoned in the face of Christian Democratic intransigence and Socialist Party hostility. In France left unity collapsed in September 1977 and the Common Program lost the March 1978 elections. At its 23rd Congress in 1979 the French Communists began a retreat from Euro-communist positions which led to a mounting wave of resignations and purges and ultimately French support for Soviet actions in Afghanistan and Poland. The most recent fruit of this retreat were the serious defeats suffered by the Party in the 1981 and 1982 pollings in which the Communists received their lowest votes in any post-war election.

In Spain the Communists have been successfully isolated on the left by a much stronger and more dynamic, although right-wing, Socialist Party. Internally, the Communist Party of Spain has suffered the loss of nearly one-half of its membership and a growing factionalism which, together with recent electoral losses, has resulted in the resignation of Santiago Carrillo as general secretary.

Euro-communism as presently constituted has failed to meet the challenge posed by the two-fold crisis of capitalism/crisis of Marxism. Its strategic orientation is basically flawed: it has failed to learn the negative lessons of the 1930s Comintern experience in the same way that it has neglected to learn from Gramsci's revolutionary recasting of Leninist theory and practice. Its immediate program of accelerated economic and technological growth and increased government spending has been rendered more and more unrealistic by the deepening economic and social crisis which Europe has been undergoing, a crisis which makes any such economic expansion unfeasible.

But if Euro-communism as a movement has failed to live up to its promise of 1975-1977, as a theoretical-political beginning it may still redeem itself. A number of prominent theorists have emerged on the left-wing of Euro-communism, seeking to build on the positive aspects contained within it, but carrying its impetus forward toward a new fundamental recasting of Marxism itself. Because most of these writers draw their inspiration from the work of Antonio Gramsci they have been called Neo-Gramscians. It is to them and their contributions to revolutionary strategy that we now turn.

The Neo-Gramscians

In truth, one cannot speak of Neo-Gramscianism as a unified school of approach. Instead we are faced with a number of militants on the left-wing of Euro-communism who come from different theoretical backgrounds and who approach the problem of

socialist strategy from different angles. Their conclusions, while not always identical or even closely similar, nonetheless share sufficient common features to enable us to group them together, and examine their efforts as a whole.

Before his untimely death in 1979, Nicos Poulantzas' prodigious theoretical output justly earned for him recognition as the most influential Marxist political theorist of the post-war period. Starting from a position in which he juxtaposed, combined and synthesized Gramscian and Althusserian analyses, Poulantzas toward the end of his life moved away from his Althusserian and Leninist roots to a position firmly on the left wing of Euro-communism, although he never entirely abandoned certain class reductionist and structuralist vestiges of his prior work. It is a great tragedy that he did not live to follow through on the many fruitful insights which his last writings contained. Politically, he was a member of the Euro-communist Communist Party of Greece (Interior).

Also important in the evolution of Neo-Gramscian thought in the English-speaking world have been the writings of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Living in England, they have published a number of articles and books, individually and working together. If Poulantzas sought to integrate the study of hegemony into a regional theory of politics and its structural determinations, Laclau and Mouffe concentrate on issues of ideologies and ideological struggle. They are more influenced by the Italian communist experience—Togliatti as well as Gramsci—than was Poulantzas.

Other theorists who deserve mention here for their involvement in Neo-Gramscian type investigations include Goran Therborn, the Swedish sociologist associated with the Euro-communist Swedish Left Party-Communists, and Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst in England, also active in left Euro-communist projects. Therborn, as well as Hindess and Hirst, began from Althusserian positions. Therborn continues to acknowledge his debt to Althusser and has been involved in theoretical production on politics (*What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?*) and on ideology (*The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*). Hindess and Hirst on the other hand, have radically repudiated their Althusserian pasts and, together with others, have turned their attention to a basic recasting of Marxist economics (*Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today*). Of all the theorists we have been discussing here Hindess and Hirst seem least directly influenced by Gramsci's work, although their conclusions on strategy and ideology are closely akin to those of Poulantzas et al.

The Neo-Gramscians are centrally concerned with the problem of the transition to socialism, defined as the process of transcending capitalism and constructing a society characterized by communal possession of the means and conditions of production under popular democratic control, the withering away of the State and the progressive elimination of all forms of domination and oppression. At the same time these authors are aware that no universal blueprint for this transition can be constructed. There is no such thing as capitalism in general, only specific, inter-related national capitalisms,

subject to different problems and constraints. Equally specific are the forms and resources of each socialist movement. In Italy and France there are mass Communist and Socialist workers' movements. In the USA there are neither. In Britain there is a political labor movement which is led by the Labour Party, a mass organization which is both a socialist and popular party as well as a party of government. Given the difference between capitalisms and between socialist movements, socialisms themselves must differ both in their forms and in the strategic roads necessary to achieve them.

Neo-Gramscian theory in the advanced capitalist countries consciously rejects the three principal strategic orientations which have dominated the modern left in this part of the world: parliamentarism, insurrectionism and oppositionism. Parliamentarism believes that workingclass participation and eventual control of the dominant bodies of representative democracy under capitalism can, by themselves, lead to the peaceful and legal transfer of state power. It is the strategy which has principally guided Social Democracy since World War I. Insurrectionism rejects the parliamentary road on behalf of a revolutionary movement constructed outside and against the capitalist State with the aim of frontally assaulting it so as to seize its commanding heights by force. Oppositionism admits the need to participate in parliament and other institutions of bourgeois democracy, but does so only to oppose therein the existing policies of capital and to be a mouthpiece for popular grievances. Instead of a realistic and positive strategy for politically using these institutions, it offers only negativism and indignant refusal. It has been the dominant perspective of the British Labor Party when out of office. All three of these strategies have proven their bankruptcy in the advanced capitalist countries. Parliamentarism because it can only succeed in reforming capitalism, not taking us beyond it; insurrectionism because the conditions for its successful development do not exist anywhere in these countries; oppositionism because it is a strategy for defense and posturing, not for a socialist advance.

Socialist strategy in Western Europe and North America involves the central problem of how to build the political and ideological conditions for socialism in the context of bourgeois democracy and parliamentary forms, and in particular how, given this context, to build a mass base of popular organizations, practices and discourses which can support and extend the struggle for socialism. It involves the problem of mobilizing the workingclass behind a socialist agenda and articulating its demands with those of the new political subjects in an organic bloc against capital. It means producing a political agenda of immediate reforms and long term transformations, of shifting the balance of social forces decisively in favor of socialism. In short, it requires a protracted "war of position" as originally envisioned by Gramsci, but brought up to date to take into account the new contradictions and political subjects of late capitalism and the need to carry the struggle against economism and class reductionism through to the end. This has been the focus of the Neo-Gramscian project. What follows are some of its tentative conclusions on these issues.

Politics and Power

(1) Neo-Gramscians consider it essential to assert the primacy of politics, not only for all conjunctures, as Gramsci proposed, but for all levels of the social formation as well, even the economy. This means that notions about the neutrality of the productive forces must be abandoned. Also untenable is the conception that the economy is a homogeneous field ruled by the logic of its own economic laws, and that politics is something located outside it. Instead, Neo-Gramscians view the economy, like other levels, as a terrain of political struggle, governed not by a simple economic logic alone, but by the hegemonic articulation of social forces in society as a whole, mediated through the economic structure.

This recognition of the political complexion of the economy has important ramifications for the struggle for socialism. Since the productive forces are subject to a type of rationality and organization imposed upon them by capital, the forms of socialization of the productive forces developed by capitalism are not necessarily compatible with the requirements of a socialist system. On the contrary, socialism will have to deconstruct capitalist forms of economic organization and administration and create new ones in their stead.

(2) At the same time that it recognizes the primacy of politics in the economy, the Neo-Gramscian school guards against going too far in the opposite direction of over-politicizing the economy and thereby eliminating its relative autonomy and specificity. Economic structures operate at the level of production relations to condition the formation of classes-groups of economic agents-and their inter-relationships. The dialectic between economics and politics in the determination of these categories of economic agents plays an important role in Neo-Gramscian theory. Its supporters insist that economic processes do not automatically translate themselves into necessary and predictable political effects. In other words, increasing socialization of any class of economic agents- workers, for instance-at the economic level does not, of itself, necessarily lead to the homogenization or unification of that class at the political level. This is true not simply because economic determinations are always numerous, varied and produce different effects (differences of income, working conditions, types of occupation, etc.). It is also true because individuals are never constituted as subjects just by economic determinations, but by political and ideological determinations as well, and these, too, are numerous, varied and produce different effects, which can negate as well as reinforce each other and economic factors.

The lesson Neo-Gramscianism draws from this knowledge is important for its conception of strategy: one cannot rely on a subject's position in the economy to provide him or her with a pre-given basis for a correct political orientation. The basis of support for socialist politics must be created by the effects of socialist political activity itself.[32]

(3) For the Neo-Gramscians this consistent application of the primacy of politics is invested with a new conception of political power. No longer can we think of power as an object located at some point or place (the Winter Palace) to be seized. Rather it is necessary to recognize that all social relations under capitalism are constituted around a power vector, a tension between domination and resistance. Power is a complex phenomenon: the ability to produce significant effects through the interaction of specific social forces within the limitations provided by the prevailing set of structural restraints.[33]

Under capitalism class power involves exploitation and oppression; power in sexual relations, the domination and oppression of women by men, etc. All powers can exist only insofar as they are materialized in certain apparatuses, practices and discourses through which power is exercised and which play a role in its constitution, reproduction, transformation and dissolution. These materializations of power exist throughout society and at all levels: the oppression of women, for example, is reproduced in the economy, politics and ideology through apparatuses like the family, practices such as marriage, and the manifold ideologies of sexism, in short, the entire system of patriarchy. At the same time these various powers are relatively autonomous so that the elimination of one (class power of capital) does not automatically spell the elimination of another (power of men over women). Each requires its own specific struggle, although certainly these struggles can gain much from mutually reinforcing one another.

Political power in any society represents the balance of all these relations of domination and resistance in a society at a given moment, with class power as its most important component in class-divided societies. While political power exists throughout a social formation, it is pre-eminently concentrated and materialized in the State which is therefore the central site of the exercise of political power, although by no means the only one. Recognizing the centrality of the State in the exercise of political power does not mean that changing the State, in and of itself, will change all social balances of power. It is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a total social transformation.

(4) The Neo-Gramscian conception of the State may be summarized as follows:[34]

(a) The State is a network of institutions, and apparatuses which cannot, by itself, exercise power. These institutions and apparatuses have different functions – some perform legislative, others administrative functions – and different effectivities – some are sites of significant power (defense department), others of little power (OSHA). The unity of the State and all these apparatuses is not a pre-given, but must be constructed and maintained politically.

(b) Neo-Gramscianism rejects the instrumentalist view that classes are already constituted outside and independently of the State and then attempt to use them as a tool for their own interests. For the Neo-Gramscians political forces do not exist

independently of the State but are shaped in part through its forms of representation, its internal structure and its forms of intervention in society. The State plays a role in the consolidation and political unification of capital in the face of its economic divisions through the constitution of a unified power bloc. At the same time it works to dis-unify and demobilize the popular masses, as well as encourage their active support through granting limited concessions and fostering ideological illusions.

(c) State power is a complex social relation that reflects the changing balance of social forces in a determinate conjuncture.

(d) State power is capitalist to the extent that it creates, maintains or restores the conditions required for capital accumulation in a given situation, and not capitalist to the extent that it does not.

Classes and Political Subjects

(5) As noted earlier, Neo-Gramscianism argues that classes are categories of economic agents defined at the level of relations of production to which do not necessarily correspond political positions or effects. The political weight of a class depends on its political practice: its forms of organization and activity at all levels, as well as on the political conception it has of itself and its allies.

This perspective rejects the idea that classes have some pre-given essential objective “class interests” which are provided them outside of politics by the economy and then recognized and represented at the political level, as expressed in the Young Marx by the distinction between a “class in itself” and a “class for itself.” In place of this notion, Neo-Gramscianism holds to the view that class interests are constituted in terms of definite political ideologies through specific political and cultural practices. As one group of authors writes: “political practice does not recognize class interests and then represent them; it constitutes the interests which it represents.”[35]

As with class subjects, so with all political subjects in general. The field of politics is the field of social relations and all political subjects and their interests are constituted on it by and through social struggle. From Gramsci we know that individuals and collective groupings are constituted as subjects on the basis of class, gender, race, generation, residence and nationality, as well as a host of “voluntary” associations. The terrain of social relations in the broadest sense is the site of this constitution: it is a terrain of structured, institutionalized social practices to which correspond discourses of various effectivities. This terrain includes everything from family relations to trade unions, from social clubs to religious orders and political parties. It does not have a pre-given unity—in fact it is traversed by a multitude of contradictions and antagonisms—except to the extent that its various component parts are focused on the process by which individual and collective subjects are constituted.

By definition this terrain is also the site upon which the antagonisms of a social formation are manifested and fought out. Class location is one basis of antagonism, but by no means the only one, since capitalist societies are also divided on the basis of antagonisms relative to sex, race, generation, etc., as well. Each individual is a participant in a whole series of these social practices and antagonisms and is consequently “the locus of a plurality of determinations to which correspond subjective positions constructed through discourses and practices with their corresponding interests.”[36] Two important consequences flow from this formulation. First, individual consciousness is not structured around some internal organizing core, but is determined outside the individual by the power relations existing in society. Second, every individual’s subjectivity cannot be reduced to a single factor such as class; social relations cannot be reduced to class relations, and the mass of political subjects, while belonging to various social classes, cannot be understood by their class determinations alone.

Indeed, Neo-Gramscians assert that while the class determination has historically been the dominant factor in popular subjectivity and political consciousness in many European countries, it has not played this same decisive role in other countries, nor must it always or necessarily do so. Which factor in consciousness will play the dominant role depends on the totality of social practices in which an individual is inserted, and their relative weights. For a black woman worker in the US South, to give only one example, there is no a priori reason why her class, rather than racial or regional determinations should be the dominant factor in shaping her political consciousness.

Beyond Gramsci: New Socialist Strategy

(6) For the Neo-Gramscians, as for Gramsci himself, the key to developing a sound socialist strategy is the creation of a new political practice, qualitatively different from the politics of capital, which will further the struggle for non-commodity, cooperative, popular and planned forms of production, administration and social organization. Today such a strategy cannot be successfully constructed without taking into account the transformations which have occurred in Western society since World War II. Most significant of all has been the increased intervention of the Integral State in all areas of social life. In some countries there are now entire fields of social practice pervasively dominated by State control: health, housing, education, energy, etc. As a result of this intervention, social contradictions have now become explicitly political contradictions which directly confront the State.

With these changes, an intensification of pre-existing contradictions based on race, gender and nationality, and the on-going economic world crisis of capital, we have seen the rise of the new political subjects mentioned earlier: women, young people, students, racial, sexual and regional minorities, anti-institutional, disarmament and ecology struggles. The demands of these new subjects go far beyond the traditional

socialist demand for the nationalization and socialization of the means of production. They demand radical changes at all levels of society, and attack the very structures of social organization, the capitalist mode of industrial and technological development, political authoritarianism, patriarchy, and racial inequality, among so many others.

Traditional political forces, including socialists and communists, have been largely unable to adapt themselves to these new struggles and their demands. Lacking already existing institutional channels to express themselves, these new forces have created their own, and we have been witness to a tremendous proliferation of new movements and single-issue groups and causes. Coming to terms with these new political subjects, finding the means to unite them, together with traditional workingclass and popular democratic forces, in an effective bloc against capital is the principal challenge of socialist strategy today.

The Neo-Gramscian response to this challenge calls for a break with the classical Leninist conception of dual power. Instead it recognizes that the existence of the Integral State, and its expansion into all areas of social life, has resulted in a situation in which all the contradictions of society are represented inside the State itself. Thus, the struggles within society find their expression inside the State system, and it is therefore possible for a decisive shift in the balance of political forces to pass through the State itself. What is therefore required is a mass political movement which can take advantage of this new situation and combine struggles outside the State with struggles inside of it.

Continuing in the Gramscian tradition this perspective advocates the creation of a mass political movement of all popular democratic forces (the workingclass and new and old popular democratic political subjects), united by their mutual support and defense of each other's specific interests and the interests of the whole, but also cognizant of their differences and fortified with the institutional channels with which to amicably resolve these "contradictions among the people" in a principled manner, respecting the dynamic and autonomy of each. Such a movement would carefully articulate and coordinate political struggles within the official State system with the aim of intensifying its internal contradictions, provoking ruptures among and within its various branches and apparatuses, and polarizing significant sections of its personnel around a transition to socialism. At the same time it would develop political struggles at a distance from the official State system aimed at changing the balance of forces throughout society and within the State, and at building direct rank and file democracy and popular institutions at all levels.

(7) Neo-Gramscians insist that there is no necessary contradiction between representative and direct democracy. Even Lenin's writings on the Constituent Assembly prior to its dissolution do not indicate that he was opposed in principle to such a representative body, but rather to the concrete role in the class struggle which it might play in reactionary hands. What Neo-Gramscians perceive in socialism is not

the suppression of one kind of democracy by the other, but their effective combination in an expansion and transformation of popular participation and control at all social levels.

(8) Essential to this new strategy is the idea of an energetic and multi-dimensional ideological project. It starts from a sense of popular democratic ideology and the “social conditions that determine the ‘openness’ of subjects to specific discourses and/or make them structurally available for mobilization.”[37] Its goal is to draw together the workingclass and popular democratic subjects through the articulation of the demands of all these forces and the elements of popular and workingclass ideology in such a way that the process itself creates a new movement—a popular democratic movement for socialism— and a new ideology which at its core has an expanded conception of socialist democracy and society taking into account the necessity for genuine equality, freedom and participation at all levels.

(9) It is on this point that the Neo-Gramscians have most dramatically gone beyond their mentor’s work. For Gramsci, if he rejected much of the class reductionism of the Third International, continued to insist on the essential hegemonic and vanguard role of the workingclass as the only force capable of organizing and leading the struggle for socialism. In perhaps its most controversial passages, neo-Gramscianism challenges this assumption. Its proponents argue that once economism is abandoned, the privilege given to the workingclass in the revolutionary process can no longer be maintained. This is because, if economic location gives no guarantee of political position, and the struggle for hegemony is a political process taking place at all levels, then the fact of the workingclass’ specific location at the point of production does not a priori give it any political advantage or superiority over other political forces. No one is disputing that socialism in the developed countries is impossible without the workingclass. But the Neo-Gramscian perspective argues that if the workingclass is to play a hegemonic role; it will be because the class has developed a political and ideological practice the success of which is recognized by other subjects as essential to the realization of their own interests, and not because of its physical concentration at the economic level. This means that the leading role of the workingclass is not pre-given in every situation by definition, but can only come from its successfully contesting for that position with other political subjects on each of many political terrains.

This new perspective on the workingclass represents a further departure from Gramsci’s own work because the latter viewed political struggle in a way that reduced the popular democratic forces to the objects of the class struggle of two fundamental class subjects, fighting for hegemony. Such an assessment denied popular democratic forces either long term autonomy or basic effectivity outside the class struggle.[38] By breaking with this last vestige of class reductionism Neo-Gramscians recognize the autonomy and independence of the new political subjects of late capitalism and their

necessary right to assert their own demands and develop their own movements on par with the workingclass as no less essential to a democratic socialist society.

(10) If a democratic socialist society is the long-term goal, what about more immediate objectives? Obviously the answer to this question will differ from one society to another, and conjuncture to conjuncture. Several general points do merit the briefest mention, however. First and foremost, Neo-Gramscians advocate coming to terms with democracy, particularly the parliamentary form prevalent in the advanced capitalist countries, as a medium and form of political struggle. This does not mean passively accepting “bourgeois democracy” as is, but of recognizing the role that participation in it can play in creating the mass base and means of struggle for socialism. This course can be advantageously pursued, they argue, without falling into the parliamentary reformist trap, provided that participation in existing institutions of representative democracy is always subordinated to the development of mass struggles and new forms of direct democracy outside the State system. This is one of the most important critiques these theorists make of the failure of the Euro-communist strategy.

Given this two-fold struggle, within the existing system of representative democracy and the State, on the one hand, and the popular movements outside it on the other, short term struggles can be coordinated and developed to: (a) fight for specific reforms in the organization, circulation and investment of capital and the labor process that will create new and more favorable positions for struggle and control by working people; (b) fight for reforms in non-commodity areas such as education, welfare, social services, etc., that introduce elements of popular administration and control; (c) fight in every social institution against practices and relations of domination and exclusion, for full democratization and participation.

Conclusion

Grouplet politics is not an embryo of revolutionary politics. It is a substitute for it. – Goran Therborn[39]

Grouplet politics: what better way to describe the history of the US left over the past several decades? A small city could be entirely populated with the burned-out human wreckage that is, sadly, the most lasting product of this style of work. At least in the 1960s we had the civil rights, Black liberation, student and anti-war movements at home, and the Cuban revolution, Vietnamese war of liberation, the French May and Italian “hot autumn” abroad. Who was not an optimist then? If someone in those years would have predicted the current state of the revolutionary left, they would have scarcely been believed.

Yet capitalism has once again proven its great stability, resilience and flexibility, certainly more so than the left. Yet these same hallmarks are needed by the left, as well. Stability in dedication to socialist principles; resilience to come back from the nadir of our defeats; flexibility to transcend the limits of our past and meet the

challenge of the present crises of capitalism/crisis of Marxism. As Goran Therborn reminds us, we can no longer afford the luxury of small sect politics, with the delusion that it is revolutionary politics in embryo.

Making a break with grouplet politics calls for a qualitative change in past habits and practice and a shift of terrain out of the left ghetto and into the mainstream. In order to carry out this transformation four major problems must be confronted.[40]

(1) Coming to terms with representative democracy, and the electoral process, the problem of combining representative democracy with grass-roots democracy, mass movements with electoral politics. This means coming up with a perspective on left electoral practice which will avoid the twin dangers of oppositionism and exclusive reliance on vote-getting. It means building a socialist electoral presence which is articulated with and subordinate to the mass, grass-roots struggle for democracy and socialism.

(2) Coming to terms with the historical split between Communism and Socialism. The European experience is evidence that the struggle for socialism is not the exclusive domain of a single tradition, but involves both these historical movements. There is no reason to think that the United States will be any different. In this country the renovation of the democratic socialist movement and the development of a number of left formations outside of orthodox Social Democracy and Marxism-Leninism promise a new working relationship between the offspring of old rivals.

(3) Producing a realistic all-sided strategy which will confront the current capitalist crisis. Recently Eric Hobsbawm commented on the sad fact that the left has not been able to develop such a programmatic alternative to the capitalist restructuring plans now being debated. "Here we are socialists," he laments, "and we're standing on the sidelines, and what's more, not only do other people know we're standing on the sidelines, but we know we're standing on the sidelines." [41] Without a realizable working proposal to get us out of this situation, no serious mass movement for socialism can be created.

(4) Creating a new internationalism. This means, first of all, redefining our relations with so-called "presently existing socialism," and with the new workingclass movements which are challenging its ossified structures. It also means concretising our solidarity with the peoples and nations oppressed by US imperialism and actively developing ties with left and anti-capitalist struggles everywhere, particularly in Europe and Japan where capitalism's crisis shares many features with our own situation.

If this article has concentrated on the Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian strategic perspectives it is because they hold the greatest potential for addressing these problems and producing effective and meaningful solutions to them in the context of a new vision of democratic socialism.

Notes

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- [4] Karl Marx, *Capital*.
- [5] William Z. Foster, *History of the Three Internationals*, (International, 1955), 220.
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- [7] Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR Vol. 1* (MR, 1976), 498-99.
- [8] Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (RKP, 1979), 176.
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- [11] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, 29.
- [12] Lenin, *supra*, 34.
- [13] Buci-Glucksmann, *supra*, 199.
- [14] Anderson, *supra*, 55.
- [15] Buci-Glucksmann, *supra*, 194.
- [16] See *Theoretical Review*, No. 26.
- [17] Earl Browder, *Socialism in America*.
- [18] See "Toward a Contemporary Strategy, Lessons of the 1930s" *TR* No. 21.
- [19] Reprinted in *TR* No. 26.
- [20] Anderson, *supra*, 50.
- [21] Bob Jessop, *The Capitalist State* (Robertson, 1982), 148.
- [22] Mouffe, *supra*, 193.
- [23] Jessop, *supra*, 146.

[24] Buci-Glucksmann, "State, Transition and Passive Revolution," Gramsci and Marxist Theory, 212.

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[28] Gabriel Kolko, The Politics of War (Random House, 1968) 438.

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[31] Therborn, What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules? (NLB, 1978), 254.

[32] Anthony Cutler, Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst, Athar Hussair, Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today, Vol. 2, (RKP, 1978), 255 &

[33] Jessop, supra, 255.

[34] Supra. 220-28.

[35] Cutler et al., supra, vol. 1, 237.

[36] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Recasting Marxism. Socialist Review No. 66, 108.

[37] Jessop, supra, 202.

[38] Supra, 195.

[39] Therborn, "Prospect for the European Left," Marxist Today, November 1981.

[40] Therborn, "Eurocommunism, Can it Regain the Initiative?"

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