The Statist Conception of Politics

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Statism in its fullest sense is what Marx called the superstitious worship of the state. This sort of statism does flourish, with due Anglican moderation, in our departments of Political Philosophy. But the following essay does not take this as its target. It is not a critique of the state so much as a critique of conceptions of "the political" which define it in terms of the state. The anarchist who says he is "anti-political" is a victim of this "statist" notion of politics, as are the Marxist-Leninists who deride his "apoliticality". I try to show the thread of conceptual statism in Marx and Engels and counterpose a more implicit, non-statist, materialist view of politics that can be read in Marx's account of capitalism. I argue that a richer conception of politics enables us to appreciate more concretely the political movements of our time. People may find this essay peculiarly full, on one hand of empirical claims, on the other of verbal recommendations. But this, and a certain indefiniteness, may be a function of the sort of project attempted, which is to advocate a shift of emphasis in political thought and thus to assert the importance of "reclassifying" our experience as to connect things in a substantially different way.

Political Philosophy and Political Movements

Academic political philosophers take it more or less for granted that their duty is to justify the nation state ("Why ought I obey the State?"). They need encounter their political heavens with the empirical practices of earthly states, with chaos, oppression and war, attention to which might subvert our awe at the State's a priori achievements: order, liberty and peace. For academic as for governmental purposes the state is, by definition, the survival of its lost and sinful people, and history is the exception which proves the rule. Thus as Bosanquet (The Philosophical Theory of the State) used to say that they were speaking of the state only in so far as it matched its idea. In fact they spoke as if this match could be assumed. But statism minus the high flown rhetoric has survived the death of official idealism. Benn and Peters (Social Principles and the Democratic State) of governments as the expression of philosophical "principles". And all academic philosophers seem to assume that the state institution constitutes the subject of political philosophy's enquiries. Thus A.H. Quinton writes: "The central concept of politics is that of the State",1 and D.D. Raphael tells us that "the political is whatever concerns the State", so the State makes water holy just by brewing its afternoon tea.

According to this conception, the state is the one locus of politics. A gesture in the direction of a parliamentary building or ministerial office block is thought sufficient to ostensibly define this entity, minimally conceived as a special institution standing over and above society and if not "running" it, at least "umpiring" it (Benn and Peters: Social Principles and the Democratic State). In the style of the Teleological Argument, then, this institution is that which brings about the social-order. Thus, for example, when students write essays on the idea of equality they are asked to enquire into principles whereby the state "treats" people - the inequality of this very welfare-dependant situation not being at issue.

What we have then, is the ideological representation of a central empirical fact of modern social existence, political monopolization by the nation-state bureaucracy, in the timeless form of an abstract philosophical category. By thus treating the state as the "internal nominative" of politics they make it seem that the state has politics all to itself by logical necessity. Hence, the (very political) tendency to de-politicise social life, already rationalised in "modern democratic" theories of "apathy", 3 is reinforced and philosophically sanctified. Moral and Political Philosophy are taught as separate fields: evidently the problems of the politician (the Statesman) are not the problems of the ordinary chap, save at such times when the ordinary chap goes to the polls or lobbies his M.P. (the Citizen) or marches to the trenches (the Subject). (And throughout, the reality of political conflict in society and the fact that the political dominance of the state is maintained through struggle, in fact the whole fact of politics, is masked by the bland and brain-washing use of "we": "Why would we refuse to call this a case of legitimate use of force?" "Why, in punishing people, do we consider the criminal intention so central?" ask our phantasy philosopher-kings. Our political philosophers are all good first-person-pluralists).

This sort of situation is not peculiar to "Political Philosophy". Higher entities have abounded in all areas of thought (theology, psychology). And "Philosophy of Education" is largely the ideology of a specific institution: the school. Like the state, and unlike God or the soul, the school is real enough. What is mythical is its presentation. It becomes difficult, then, for a student to even entertain the proposition that these institutions, far from resolving the issues of freedom and reason in society, are themselves an important part of the political and educational problem.

But even our philosophers cannot freeze concepts forever, and the whole myth of logically proper channels of political life is in question. People are acting, consciously politically, outside the officially marked zones. Young people and women especially are making schools and families centres of direct political struggle, workers are getting rid of their phobias about seeing their strikes and occupations as political acts. It is now six years since Prime Minister Wilson rounded on "proprietary jealousy on a tightly knit group of politically motivated men" who, he claimed, were trespassing on his professional territory in a square strike. (Politicians need to claim to be above politics. At least as important is that the masses should see themselves as below politics).

Our political monopolists are having increasing difficulty in maintaining the illusion that politics is their proprietary right to be conducted in their proprietary way. Since statism involves not only appropriation of special "political matters" but the promulgation of special "political matters" too, the liberation of politics from the state involves political practices appropriate to issues which the state, with the best will in the world, could hardly deal with.

This breakthrough is not universal, nor is it stable. A statist conception of politics is by no means still confined to academic and other upholders of the status quo. If continues to infect the practice and thinking of dissidents and revolutionaries even when they are opposing or debunking the state. "Marxist-Leninists" preoccupy themselves with strategies for "capturing state power", form specialised "political parties" consisting of people who are 'political' and depict, often to deride, all other forms and goals of activity as apolitical.4

4. Two examples from this week's Marxist-Leninist press in Britain:

(i) From a Trotskyist report of an L.S.E. occupation: "A series of activities were announced by the union council; on the Saturday these consisted mostly of 'alternative education' classes, 'radical psychology' etc. No political meetings were arranged..." (Red Mole, February 7, 1972).

(ii) From a Leninist account of "The Economic Struggle": The author quotes Lenin (1914): "Unlike Europe, which has enjoyed political freedom for a long time (775) the strike movement in Russia in 1912-14 extended beyond the narrow trade union limits"
These groups "in theory and in practice" are tending, even against tendencies within themselves, to bolster the departmentalism which is such a cornerstone of the bourgeois political practice. They are, however, following in the footsteps of the anarchists and libertarians who turn bourgeois political thought directly on its head, deriding "politics" as the manipulative practice of power-mongering "politicians" and criticising the social evils and their own guilts onto the bureaucracy, and thus failing to develop a serious libertarian view of politics.

Common to both these orientations are central elements in the conventional statist ideology. Both conceptually capitulate to the state as a priori claim to authority over the channels of political life. Both accept that politics is for professionals. But to the extent that radicals respect this (refined, dualistic) form of the distinction between "politics" and other aspects of social life, they are hampered in breaking down social divisions. Either they will scorn or "instrumentalise" struggle in key political areas (factories, schools, families, "communities") in favour of an effectively militaristic strategy for a smash and grab raid on the bourgeois state, or at the other end they will be actors where they are, but in movement, often at the level of the intermittent theatre-politics, disorganised and without strategy. In either case the ready-made packaging of "the political" and the "non-political" preempts exploration of the actual political relations within and among social institutions. In either case the development of understanding of the balance of forces of social life is held to be more difficult to develop than in political struggle. We are seeing political struggle breaking out in all areas, including the bourgeois bedroom; it is crucial to overcome ideological inhibitions against a full political life.

Classical Anarchism and Classical Marxism

The reign of the "statist" view has been a long one, in some ways, an ancient one. The Greek polis, as every good student knows, cannot be simply translated by state in the modern sense. It is important however to stress, against any tendency to think of Athens as some sort of ideal community, not that the social community was narrowly restricted, but that so too was the area of life thought worth dignifying as "political". "Politics", then as now, officially picked out a circumscribed field of ruling class concern. The conception is still illustrated by Aristotle, not as itself a political fact, but as a pre-condition of political life. And the household "economy" is treated as an autonomous matter. In 20th century "politics", with her characteristic love for the ancient ways, criticises the Roman and Medieval thought worth dignifying as "political". Some ways, an ancient one. The Greek polis, as every good student knows, cannot be simply translated by state in the modern sense. For instance we need broad political terms to examine the question of the validity of the Radical Philosophy viewpoint, of its potential signficance or insignificance at different political levels, of the politics (academic, national, etc.) of "radical" "philosophy".

5. Until recently this line of thought was a standing feature of the "underground" press, e.g. Oz and IT in Britain.

6. For example we need broad political terms to examine the question of the validity of the Radical Philosophy viewpoint, of its potential signficance or insignificance at different political levels, of the politics (academic, national, etc.) of "radical" "philosophy".

7. Runciman goes on to follow the empirically statist definition of politics given by Weber and accepted by most "political scientists" - see for example, J.B.S. Miller's "The Nature of Politics". So called "pressure group" analysis common in political science departments is still focused on pressures on government.

8. Marx's Freedom and the State, Freedom Press, U.K., 1950, page 44. Bakunin's main theme is that the state cannot be seen as a passive organ of class rule, that it has its own way of working which will catch up movements that seek to work through in other words to borrow Chris Arthur's metaphor (Radical Philosophy, 1 p.27) Bakunin denies that "the problem of the State comes out in the wash".


10. Marx to Boile, November 25, 1871. This letter should however be read as a whole.

In Marx's early thinking politics (= the State), like religion, is an alienated and "abstract" domain, a partial, deluded, and detached expression of human, social essence. In On the Jewish Question, the limitations of citizenship and of "political emancipation" (= legal, civil rights) are exposed. Marx writes:

"Only when the actual individual man has taken back into himself the abstract citizen and in his every day life, his individual work and his individual relationships, has become a species-being, only when he has recognised his own powers as social powers so that social power is no longer separated from him as political power, only then is human emancipation complete." 12

The position is, if anything, more clearly put in Marx's critical notes on Arnold Ruge's "The King of Reform", a superb attack on statist panaceas which ought to disturb many Leninist voluntarists today. I will quote two passages:

"The more powerful the state and hence the more [political] a country is, the less it is inclined to seek the basis and grasp the general principle of social life in the principle of the state itself, thus in the existing organisation of society, of which the state is the active, self-conscious, and official expression. Political thought is political precisely because it takes place within the bounds of politics. The more acute and vigorous it is, the more it is incapable of comprehending social ills. The principle of politics is will. The more one-sided and thus the more perfected political thought is, the more it believes in the omnipotence of will. The leader is it to natural and spiritual restriction on the will, and the more incapable it is of discovering the source of social ills."


"We have seen that a social revolution involves the standpoint of the individual whole because it is a protest of man against dehumanised life even if it occurs in only one factory district, because it proceeds from the standpoint of the single actual individual, because the community against whose separation from himself the individual reacts, is the true community of man, human existence. The political soul of a revolution on the other hand consists in the tendency of politically unclassifiable classes to end their isolation from the state and free power. Its standpoint is that of the state, an abstract whole, which exists only through the separation from actual life and which is unthinkable without the organised antithesis between the universal idea and the individual existence of man. Hence a revolution of the political soul also organizes in accordance with the narrow and split nature of this soul, a ruling group at the expense of society."


From his early period, then, Marx tends to present politics, not only as a partial, but as a surface feature ("expression"
) of the class struggle. The class struggle, as the "bourgeoisie" is presented as autonomous in its dynamics, clearly visible beneath the thin political-ideological veil in all its ugliness (one hand only is invisible). Thus the famous passage in the Communist Manifesto:

"The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors" and left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash-payment". It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism in the ice-cold water of spottless calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless unconscionable indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single unconscionable freedom-Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions. It has reduced man to a 


15. But see The Civil War in France (Part I) where Marx recognised that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes" and notes the proposal that "the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet." And also the Critique of the Gotha Programme.

16. It would be dishonest to deny the extent to which Marx and Engels qualified this remain as an undercurrent of class collaboration. The trade unions, the schools, and the ticket qualification which I suggest, never led to a "reversion." 15

17. See e.g. the ignominious overstatement of the movement to "collectivism" in the Laisser-Fairest Dicey's Law and Opinion.


19. Thus I would argue that just as the working class had historically to be forced into existence as we have seen Marx stressed so each individual has to be forced into his class role. Thus the perpetual politics of "education" in class society.

Certainly Marx, in Capital I, stresses the primacy of state-political force itself an economic power" (Ch.13, page 751) in which he attack on statist panaceas which ought to disturb many Leninist voluntarists today. I will quote two passages:

"the dull compulsion of economic relations completes the whole economic life of society, and its political partner, the Direct force, outside economic conditions, is of course still used, but only exceptionally. In the ordinary run of things, the labourer can be left to the "natural laws of production", i.e. to his dependence on capital, a dependence springing from, and guaranteed in perpetuity by the contradictions of production themselves." (Ch.28, page 737).

Significantly, politics having been cast in a secondary role for the playing through of Capitalism's tragedy, abruptly re-occupies the centre of the stage at its revolutionary demoument. Indeed especially in the Communist Manifesto the "dictatorship of the proletariat", achieved through the capture of State Power is spelled out in totally statist terms. 15

Is politics then secondary in capitalist society to become crucial in its overthrow? Clearly, since I am taking it with a pinch of salt as the working out of a substructure as abandoned to naked economic struggle. It then appears anomalous that the British State, for example, developed precisely in capitalism's nineteenth-century heyday, penetrating not only heavy industry but all areas of social life. The State police force emerged to contain the working class, whole sections of which threatened precisely not to be subjected to the 'dull compulsion' of market forces. Nor is it sufficient to see this police force simply as a brute coercive weapon. It has begun by destroying the "natural" police force and has orientated itself towards winning the ideological support of the "honest public", 18 and towards reinforcing the ideological isolation of the "enemies" of "honest folk". To stress, thus, the central role of culture is already to widen the vision of political life - to think in terms of the "political order". In this wider context the political importance and character of the family (including the nuclear family, the school, the trade unions (stress their cultural aspect), the newspaper not to mention the churches can be assessed in their own rights as well as in their broader connections. Certain tendencies, especially nationwide, 19 especially wrote about these institutions and their changes but always in 'economicist' terms. He ignores, for example, the political importance of the family, race only in the bourgeoisie, but in the working class, where the family developed, not only as a defence against bourgeois domination at work, but, contradictorily, as a vehicle of bourgeois rule, as a principal engine for patriarchy. 19 Engels thought the monogamous family irrelevant to the working class and in effect redundant, since proletarians had no property to pass on. (See The Origins of the Family etc.)
In short, Marx and Engels hugely underestimated the capitalist political order’s mode of preserving itself and by implication of preserving the sheer existence of the proletariat as a productive force through the prolonged periods of transformation, war, and recession that characterized capitalist society from its birth. Despite their natural eye for politics seen most clearly in their empirical ‘studies of French and German struggles Marx and Engels’ way of thinking pushed them to seeing the political structure of capitalist society as a surface “superstructural” feature and to under- estimate its ideological “clarity” by no means the proper and exclusive field of Economic Science.

Burke, whose insight Marx certainly respected, writing of a time when according to Marx and Engels political ideology was in the process of annihilation, was able to present clearly and metaphorically what classical Marxism was content to play down. He reveals not the conscious politicking of the executive committee of the bourgeoisie, but the deep networks of oppressive structures which prop up and conceal domination and exploitation.

“good order is the foundation of all good things. To be in order, everything must be in its place, “about the servile, must be tractable and obedient. The magistrate must have his reverence, the laws their authority. The body of the people must not forget the principles of natural subordination by art rooted out of their minds. They must respect that property of which they are proud in the interest of their political power to obtain that which by labour can be obtained, and when they find, as the commonly do, the success disproportionate to the endeavour, they must be taught their consolation in the final provisions of eternal justice.”


There deep habits of thought and practice are transmitted and articulated so that every situation appears as a microcosm of the totality “community”.

“In this choice of inheritance we (the British) have given to our frame of policy the image of a relation in blood as the foundation of the constitution of the country with our nearest domesticities; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our states, our hearts, our sepulchres, and our altars.”

Now we could here follow Nicos Poulantzas (“The Problem of the Capitalist State” New Left Review No. 58, 1969) and, maintaining the idea that the state is the institution of political rule, widen the notion of the state to include all the institutions which maintain the social formation. Thus Poulantzas isolates unions, the media, the churches, the family as part of the state apparatus.

But, as Milliband himself pointed out in reply, identifying conservative social institutions as the state makes it difficult to see the specific process whereby the state, in its narrow sense, fattens itself by incorporating such institutions, as in fascism. It is the analytic to maintain the analytic distinction between the state and its allies and lackeys. Whereas I am aware that I have pushed a tendency in Marx’s thought. This will emerge more clearly later. But I think it important to insist, not only that vulgar Marxism involves vulgar politics, but that it has the most respectable authority — Marx and Engels themselves. The problem of vulgar Marxism here might be best abstractly expressed this: on one hand it asserts a one-way causality of base to superstructure. On the other hand its “base” (technology) is so inadequate to support let alone bury the “political will” in any form of the state or Party has to be magically re-introduced to bring stasis or movement into society. What will be proposed is that a richer conception of politics and a richer conception of productive relations bring politics into the centre of the picture. This after all is implicit in the whole Marxian idea of class domination, class rule, a political idea if ever there was one.

Now we can see how the kind of perspective being advocated here presents problems for our understanding of what politics is. I hope that further work will clarify these problems further than I can. They are problems for any one who, seeking to break from state fetishism, has to anchor the political in some way as to preserve the clear distinction between “what politics is about”. I have been arguing that politics cannot be defined in terms of a proprietary entity, but should be thought of in terms of social relations. But what aspect of social relations?

Two immediate problems present themselves:

1. Problems of relating politics to, for example, economics.

2. Problems connected with the claim that political relations exist at all levels, “macro” and “micro”.

1. Politics and Economics

We have seen how normally, and in the “ordinary language” of radicals too, “political” is contrasted with “economic”. Thus people write of “the relation of economic and political forces”. The characteristic of “economism” is poverty of political analysis; the comic-book style of “economic struggle” “practico-economic and political struggle” (Engels, Lenin) of “economic, political, ideological and theoretical practice” (Althusser).

In these formulations the suggestion is hard to avoid, even if avoidance were intended, that these notions pick out different types of activity that are political, that an economic institution”, “This is a political, that an economic struggle (practice, relation, etc.).” But this is the ideological activity involved in the maintenance of such ideological-political-economic institutions as the British Royal Family. This is of the religious practice of the state, the pompous rituals in law courts and the whole ideology of respectable business. Clearly it would be a crude view, that seriously attempted to split the world up in this fashion.

How about “economics” and “politics”, especially if one wants to claim that struggles in factories are political and that the characteristic of “economism” is poverty of political goals and methods rather than absence of politics. It seems to me most satisfactory to say that the social relations of production are political and economic relations, and that these concepts pick out different aspects of the “social totality”. Thus, to speak of “the economy” is to abstract; is not to be dealing with a discrete “part” of society. It is not, then, as if the social relations of production “give rise to” something else, namely political relations. Rather these productive relations and political relations, which in capitalist society are relations of domination by the capitalists over the workers. This I take to be implicit in Marx’s analysis.

Marx says in Wage Labour and Capital:

“In production, men not only act on nature, but also on one another. They produce only by cooperating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce they enter into definite connections and relations with each other and only within these social connections and relations does their action on nature, does production take place." (Section III)

The suggestion seems to be the functionalist one that the division of labour is a purely natural politically neutral one given by the “need to produce”. But this is obviously not Marx’s view: “relations of production” are relations among more or less antagonistic social forces. Both in Capital III and in the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy Marx points out just as the wage worker’s object is to produce use-value, so the worker’s subject is political will. He is the “free” agent of the state or Party has to be magically re-introduced to bring stasis or movement into society. What will be proposed is that a richer conception of politics and a richer conception of productive relations bring politics into the centre of the picture. This after all is implicit in the whole Marxian idea of class domination, class rule, a political idea if ever there was one.

20. It is to be doubted whether the implanting of such principles is entirely to be left to artless nature.

21. Brueke op.cit. p.120. The British New Left Review writers, Anderson and Nairn have stressed these things often, to be accused of “idealism”. They appeal to Gramsci’s notion of “hegemony”.


23. e.g. Lenin in What is to be Done? “The economic struggle of the workers against the employers for better terms in the sale of their labour-power, for better living and working conditions... Lending "the economic struggle itself a political character means, therefore, striving to secure satisfaction of these trade demands by means of administrative and legislative measures." (P61 Moscow edition).

24. Here I have the production of tourist particularly in mind.

over instruments of production in the capitalist' grip. 26 The political activity of the ruling bourgeoisie itself through the state. But it may not. It supports. 28 "Direct action" need not be foreign to the capitalist class - from assassinations to finance strikes it has its unofficial weapons of political struggle; its "private" worker) and to see that it is not so much a mere "economic" concept which takes all aspects of our social and political characterizes not just the relation of capitalist to worker. Thus, just as "force is itself an economic power" (Marx) so wealth is itself a political power, an instrument of domination.27

2. The Levels of Politics

The "state machine" and the conscious policies of those who work through it do not exhaust the political forces in society. State legislation, say to bolster up parental authority by a Children's Bill, far from constituting parental authority a political matter, far from simply giving it a new political significance, expresses the recognition of its national political consequences as well as of its intrinsic political character. The political apparatus of the state, its "class" work itself through the state. But it may not. It may work through campaigns to demonise and discredit militants through the medium of the industrial relations' institute with or without state support.28 "Direct action" need not be foreign to the capitalist class - from assassinations to finance strikes it has its unofficial weapons of political struggle; its ways of maintaining its ways of maintaining its position, its ways of managing the masses it needs to exploit. If this is the bourgeois state's official full-time job, it does not follow that it does the whole job. To try to make it do the whole job is to end up with the a priori view of a bourgeois society as "fascist" which I argued Paulantas is landed with.

Moreover, the idea common in academic thinking, that the state itself (or political parties) can be understood solely in terms of the official activities of people in official positions is obviously mistaken. Not only are there different sections of the state often on different lines. Bureaucratic departments constantly clog up themselves and each other, finding themselves powerless to achieve even their official objective. This bogging, moreover, notoriously penetrates the minds of officials, at all levels, blinding them to possibilities even when their institutions could deal with them. On the other hand, positions within the state, or in any bureaucracy generally determine the degree of informal unofficial influence, legal or illegal, that can be exercised through pressure tactics, such as "turning a blind eye", through all kinds of patronage.

State apologists characteristically write as if the state, whose "function" is to regulate civil society were above the "atomistic" idea of independent "sovereign" states having no hesitation in stressing the "political aptitudes" of political parties or "opportunities for political activity". This fantasy is nowhere more powerful than in England. (Like all fetishism Stalinism lacks a true grasp of the object it puts on a pedestal). Official descriptions of laws and the "appropriate" departments are a fiction of social relations, a fiction of political power of the state. For, apart from the unmentionable, like conduct of states, we have to take into account also the degree of de facto grip it has on different sections of society, and on them.

Following the statist lead we have so far focussed on the national level, the state's domain par excellence, and the near exclusive object of "political philosophy" and "political science". But we get a more realistic grasp of the world if we focus on that its importance for our political lives. At one extreme "international relations" cannot be tackled to political theory as if states had as much relation to each other as if they were a "common market", "internationalizing" official politics even as big firms have internationalised. ("Nationalism" in these circumstances becomes politically ambiguous, threatening to efficiency yet favourable to a divide-and-rule strategy nations may yet become to be the politics of late imperialism what tribes were to the politics of early imperialism.) Before the nation state the war army had no army, where there are political tensions in provinces, in towns, and within specific institutions, like universities. 29 Although these institutions are a more or less integral part of the national political infrastructure, conflict within them can have considerable autonomy from national alignments. We all know the international leftist who are radical elsewhere, but solid conservative in their jobs, and that people who vote conservative, belong to the church etc. can be radically militant in the local politics of their schools. Thus the state does not just represent a mockery of the baptismal gesture of "politicalization". What this implies is that education, for example, is political not just because it has key consequences for national political policies. The struggles on in schools on behalf of political freedom. And the same is true of conflicts in a particular family or factory. What is at issue then is not a simple dichotomy: political vs. non-political but understanding of the political complex, and of the consistency, breadth and depth of people's politics as they act in that complex. By breaking from a simple political/a political polarity we are able to grasp the politics of the "unpolitical" (the "purely economic" worker) and to see that it is not so much a question of lack of motivation but of the relation of resignation or even positive but unadmitted acceptance of the status quo. Here the "political" psychoanalysis of Reich, especially in What is Class Consciousness? (Agitprop) and Character Analysis is particularly relevant on getting behind "political" consciousness.

But despite the political activity of women, and young people especially in opposition to the structures of everyday life and experience (one Woman's Liberation article is entitled "The Personal is Political"), many strongly resist the idea that such small-scale, even "private" things as families or even factories and schools could be the arena of politics. ("Where do you Stop? Is every hold-up a political coup?"

In this connection it is striking that all the so-called classical questions "apply to factories, schools and families, indeed to any social relation: questions of obedience to authority, of freedom, justice, democracy, of "sovereignty", of the "social contract" and "the common interest". From the most elementary example of freedom, free, more or less democratic, more or less just in its forms. It is not a good sign that The State alone fills the category of "the Political" when "the rest of society" is simply written about it" can be said about so many things, let alone their inter-relationships.

By calling a social structure "political" one stresses the tension and at least potential conflict among the activities and interests that constitute it. On the one hand, persistent amounts to the continuation of "co-operation" among the different forces within it, a co-operation given sometimes literally on pain of death. A co-operation carrying on of activities in society requires the continued maintenance of co-operation, acquiescence, submission, or at an extreme the destruction of other activities. These activities then can interrelate in a more or less free, more or less autonomous way, just as two political parameters of social life. In capitalism society, as is being increasingly realised, the domination of human by human characterizes not the relationship of the real proletarian, but the whole fabric of life. Therefore the option is a political practice which takes all aspects of our condition into account, not a one-track politics which leaves much of that fabric intact.

29. Why do left academics who have no hesitation in speaking of their petty "department politics", become so upset at the thought that strikes are a form of politics? Is it that politics is for the "conscious"?