

THE STATIST CONCEPTION OF POLITICS

Tony Skillen

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 prime 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 "apoliticalify". 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 so 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 seldom encumber 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 saviour of its lost and sinful people, and history is the exception which proves the rule. The English Idealists, such 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) think 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.M. 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-dispensing 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-politicize social life, already rationalized in "modern democratic" theories of "apathy",³ is reinforced and

1. Editorial introduction to "Political Philosophy: Oxford Readings 1967", page 3.
2. Problems of Political Philosophy, Macmillan 1970, page 27.
3. See Carole Pateman's Participation in Democratic Theory for a critique of these theories. Pateman develops the idea of the "participatory society".

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 with proprietary jealousy on a "tightly knit group of politically motivated men" who, he claimed, were trespassing on his professional territory during the 1966 British seamen's 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 (?TS) the strike movement in Russia in 1912-14 extended beyond the narrow trade union limits" and continues himself: "The reactionary laws against workers in Russia

These groups "in theory and in practice" are tending, even against tendencies within themselves, to bolster the departmentalism which is such a keystone of bourgeois political practice. Their antithesis are all those "Anarchists" and libertarians who turn bourgeois political thought directly on its head, deriding "politics" as the manipulative practice of power-mongering "politicians" and "politicos", projecting social evils and their own guilts onto the bureaucracy, and thus failing to develop a serious libertarian view of politics.⁵ In their different ways, then, the "politicos" and the "anti-politicos" reinforce and rationalise the retreat into the passive political practice of "apoliticality". They deserve each other.

Common to both these orientations are central elements in the conventional statist ideology. Both conceptually capitulate to the state's a priori claim to determine the channels of political life. Both accept that politics is for professional politicians. But to the extent that radicals respect this (reified, 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 active where they are, but inconsequently, 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 and movement of social forces is held up, making it more difficult to work our priorities in political struggle.⁶ 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 only that membership of the "political 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. Slavery, for example is presented 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 sub-political entity. Indeed, Hannah Arendt, with her characteristic love for the ancient ways, criticizes the modern confusion of polity, society and economy, of public and private, and criticizes the Roman and Medieval Christian translation of Aristotle's zoon politiken as Animal socialis. See The Human Condition Chapter 3. (Ironically, W.G. Runciman, while referring to Arendt's discussion does not notice that he is contradicting her when he writes that "a distinction between the political and the social is still recent in the history of ideas", Social Science and Political Theory (page 22).⁷

"impelled" the workers economic struggle into the sphere of politics. But spontaneously this politics could only be trade-unionist politics, the struggle for reforms. Strikes always take place under definite political conditions (whether it is laws protecting or suppressing union activity) and so have effects within bourgeois politics. The slogan 'make the strike political' is empty in that it is already political - but in a bourgeois sense. Similarly to say that "all strikes are political" is merely tautologous (i.e. presumably that they occur like everything else under definite political conditions T.S.). Graham Burchell, 7 Days, Feb 9, 1972.

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 group, of its potential significance or insignificance at different political levels, of the politics (academic, national, etc.) of "radical" "philosophy".
7. Runciman goes on to follow the explicitly statist definition of politics given by Weber and accepted by most "political scientists" - see for example, J.D.B. Miller's "The Nature of Politics". So called "pressure group" analysis common in political science departments is still focused on pressures on government.

In modern times statist conceptions have dominated both official and radical thought, both the proponents and opponents of the bourgeois state. Thus we can schematically see that the antitheses referred to in the first part of this article has a history. The outcome of the French Revolution, with its utopian project of a "political", that is, state, solution to social antagonisms provoked among radical liberals what was expressed as a revulsion from politics. Among those who did not retreat into private spirituality the anarchists gave clearest voice to this identification. Bakunin, though writing in the 1870s (to criticize precisely Marx's "statism") gives a good example of a well established "anti-political" tradition.

"...the workers of Germany and not their leaders will finish by joining us in order to demolish these prisons of peoples that are called states and to condemn politics which is indeed nothing but the art of dominating and fleeing the masses." ⁸

And Sorel, in Reflections on Violence, counterposes the "anti-political" syndicalist form of struggle to the "political" social-Democratic form in which "the politicians" would seek to climb on the backs of the rank and file to grab at state power for themselves. (See especially Chapters 4 and 5).

Now, in their struggle with the Proudhonists and Bakuninites Marx and Engels accepted the terms in which Bakunin presented the attack on Marxian "politicians". Engels, for example, spoke of Bakunin's "complete abstention from all politics"⁹ and, indeed, he and Marx fairly consistently identified politics and political struggle, in capitalist society at least, with activity centring on the state; whether this was state activity itself or activity oriented towards legislative change, or the revolutionary capture of state power.

For them "Economic" struggles are not necessarily political: "For instance, the attempt in a particular factory or even a particular trade to force a shorter working day out of the individual capitalists by strikes etc. is a purely economic movement. On the other hand, the movement to force an eight hour day etc. law is a political movement."¹⁰

For Marx, politics is a phenomenon of pre-history, of the epochs of oppression, not a permanent category of life. In communist society, he wrote, when "state power disappears and governmental functions are transformed into, simple administrative functions." "...there will no longer be any state in the present political sense of the word."¹¹

That Marx puts it this way, rather than saying there will be no politics in the present statist sense is not a merely verbal matter. For it goes with the utopian idea that social authority could be merely administrative, non-political (compare here Engel's On Authority) and with the omission of any notion of a radically democratic political life that would be characteristic of a communist society.

Marx's analysis of capitalism stresses the "superstructural" place of politics and of the state as an "organ" of class domination. Thus politics becomes one, more or less central, historical form or means of the class struggle. In a sense, then, Marx did not propose a "materialistic" account of politics; precisely contrasting material life with its more or less obscuring "politico-spiritual" (- the expression is Chris Arthur's, Radical Philosophy I p.27), forms and manifestations. Thus "political" power can be contrasted with "social" or "economic" power, and "political" freedom and equality can conceal "social" oppression and inequality. Now obviously this base/superstructure idea does not entail a purely "statist" understanding of politics. But by stressing more or less official and superficial forms of politics, it certainly goes with such a view. This I hope, will emerge by contrast when I try to show how, if we do break from a "statist" definition of politics we are naturally forced to locate politics in the depths of "concrete material life", and in a way which, I claim, is implicit in Marxian thought.

8. Marxism, 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 it. In other words to borrow Chris Arthur's metaphor (Radical Philosophy I, p27) Bakunin denies that "the problem of the State comes out in the wash".
9. Engels to Cuno, January 24, 1872.
10. Marx to Bolte, November 23, 1871. This letter should however be read as a whole.
11. "The alleged splits in the International" 1872 and "Marx on Bakunin 1875," extracts most available in D.McLellan's The Thought of Karl Marx, page 194-5.

In Marx's early thinking politics (= the State), like religion, is an alienated and "abstract" domain, a partial, deluded and destructive expression of man's 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 everyday life, his individual work and his individual relationships, has become a species-being, only when he has recognized 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 Prussia and Social 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 more¹³ political a country is, the less it is inclined to seek the basis and grasp the general principle of social ills 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 blinder it is to natural and spiritual restriction on the will, and the more incapable it is of discovering the source of social ills."

Op.cit., p. 350.

"We have seen that a social revolution involves the standpoint of the 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 unimportant classes to end their isolation from the state and from 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 organized 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."

Op.cit., p. 356.

From his early period, then, Marx tends to present politics, not only as a partial, but as a surface feature ("expression") of bourgeois society. "The capitalist economy" 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, whenever 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 has 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 icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single unconscionable freedom-Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation veiled by religious and political illusion it has substituted shameless, direct, brutal exploitation." 14

12. Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, C.D. Easton and K.H. Guddat Doubleday Anchor 1967. Original italics.

13. A central thesis of the present article could be hinted at by substituting, for this "more", its opposite.

14. Marx and Engels Selected Works, Vol.I, page 36. Make reference to Smith's "Invisible Hand".

Certainly Marx, in Capital I, stresses the primacy of state-political force "itself an economic power" (Ch.13, page 751) in "midwifing" capitalist society. Its "rosy dawn" "presupposed" laws whereby "the agricultural people were first turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible into the discipline necessary for the wage system." Thereafter

"the dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist. 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 conditions 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 denouement. 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 issue with Marx's dominant idea of politics, this is not a question that can be confronted in a simple empirical way. Nonetheless it is important to state that, even at the empirical level without a fundamental break from the conventional view of politics, we can see that the ways in which the capitalist order diverges from the Communist Manifesto presentation¹⁶ are too many and too important to be thought of as "aberrations", "survivals" etc.

Accepting a crude equation of state agency and political agency, and accepting the "economists" myths about a self-regulating market society, Marx and Engels presented society 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 industry¹⁷ 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 power. From the very beginning with striking success it 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 Royal 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. Certainly Engels especially wrote about these institutions and their changes but always in "economistic" terms. He ignores, for example, the political importance of the family, not 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 organ for reproducing class membership.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.)

15. But see The Civil War in France (Part III) 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 presentation. But it remains ad hoc qualification which, I suggest, never led to a "revision".

17. See e.g. the indignant and oversimple depiction of the movement to "collectivism" in the laissez-fairist Dicey's Law and Opinion.

18. See Reith The Police, A New History.

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.

In short, Marx and Engels hugely underrated 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, crisis and recession that have characterised 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 underestimate its depth. Bourgeois "civil society" is 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 prophetically what classical Marxism was constantly tempted 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 enabled to acquire the people, without being servile, must be tractable and obedient. The magistrate must have his reverence, the laws their authority. The body of the people must not find the principles of natural subordination by art rooted out of their minds.²⁰ They must respect that property of which they cannot partake. They must labour to obtain that which by labour can be obtained, and when they find, as the commonly do, the success disproportioned to the endeavour, they must be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal justice."

Reflections on the Rev in France,
(Pelican Classics edition, 1970, p.372).

These 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; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest 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 hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars.²¹"

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 presents trade unions, the mass 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 clearer to maintain the analytic distinction between the state and its allies and lackeys. Whereas I am also contending that if we operate with a broader conception of politics we are then able to examine the specific nature of the state's way of working in relation to other political forces in society,²² and to understand what it means for political movements to work through the state.

I am well 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 vulgarmarxism involves vulgar politics, but that it has the most respectable authority - Marx and Engels themselves. The problem of vulgarmarxism here might be abstractly expressed thus: 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 burst the superstructure that "political will" in the 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 such a way as to preserve a distinctive and thus useful idea of 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 to political power", of "economic, political, and ideological struggle" "practico-economic and political struggle" (Engels, Lenin)²³ 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 discrete types of activity, as if we could say "This is a political, that an economic institution", "This is a political, that an economic struggle (practice, relation, etc.)". But this is no good. Think of the ideological-political-economic activity involved in the maintenance of such ideological-political-economic²⁴ institutions as the British Royal Family. Think of the religious sanctification 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 are 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 co-operating 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 stresses that just as the wage contract presupposes the dominating social force of capital, so capital itself presupposes a "distribution" of forces of production, especially the expropriation of the masses and the concentration of control

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

21. Bruke 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".

22. Here John Anderson's "The Servile State" (*Studies in Empirical Philosophy*), and Rush Rhees' "Social Engineering" (*Mind*, 1947), and "Science and Politics" (*Aristotelian Society*, 1949), are useful works by philosophers.

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.

25. Marx and Engels Selected Works, Moscow, Vol.I, page 89.

over instruments of production in the capitalist' grip. 26 The "politics" of capitalism, the conflict of social forces, then, is basic to it, (Marx even goes so far as to say that it looks like a "pre-economic fact" (Critique) and is structurally inextricable from its "economics".

From an "economic" standpoint, then, the focus is on the "division of labour" in so far as it "co-operates" in production. From this standpoint the worker is simply a productive unit, more or less productive. His rebelliousness, under this aspect, is an economic variable like his physical strength. Power and authority relations are subsumed under the terms of "economic organization" (We can see here the technocratic thrust of Stalinist vulgarmarxism, reflected in the fact that "politics" is not an index entry in the Moscow Selected Works of Marx and Engels). The politics of the situation, however, involves a different, though not incompatible characterization. (This is not to say there is not a structural tension between "the economic" and "the political", that there are not "contradictions" here). This is a situation of domination and of more or less open struggle. Even a simple exchange situation presupposes that one party has control over some good, "over and against" others. From a political standpoint then the "economic" need of the worker to produce his means of existence gives the controllers of the means of production power over him. Thus, just as "force is itself an economic power" (Marx) so wealth is itself a political power, an instrument of domination.²⁷

(To assert that, not only are production relations political, but that politics is a fundamental aspect of them is not to reduce these relationships simply to authority relationships within the factory (a tendency in syndicalism). For these authority relationships cannot be assessed in isolation from the class and state power which capital means to the bosses. Thus the inadequacy of "workers control" within a capitalist society.)

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 activity of the ruling class work itself through the state. But it may not. It may work through campaigns to demoralise and discredit militants through the media, or through the development of industrial relations" institutes 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 all bourgeois societies as "fascist" which I argued Poulantzas 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 different sections of the state often in open conflict. Bureaucratic departments constantly clog up themselves and each other, finding themselves powerless to achieve even their official objectives. This clogging, 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 personal contacts, through "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 uncivilized practices characteristic of civil society. This fantasy is nowhere more powerful than in England. (Like all fetishism Statism lacks a true grasp of the object it puts

26. Capital Vol. III, Chapter 51 "Distribution Relations and Production Relations", p. 877 Moscow ed. Introduction to Critique, Part 2, p. 295 ff. N.I. Stone translation or p. 139 The German Ideology etc. edited by Chris Arthur. By expressing this in the "economic" terminology of "distribution" Marx to some extent covers the political character of the analysis.

27. Here c.f. Jerry A. Cohen's Critique of Acton and Plamenatz (Aristotelian Supplement 1970) and note that he analyses relations of production as power relations.

28. In advertizing vacancies for such positions, companies have no hesitation in stressing the "political aptitudes" required. A cursory check will confirm this in any "management" journal.

on a pedestal). Official descriptions of laws and the "appropriate" departments are a poor guide to the political powers of the state. For, apart from the unstatesmanlike conduct of states, we have to take into account also the degree of de facto grip it has on different sections of society, and them on it.

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 insist that this is only one level of politics. At one extreme "international relations" cannot be tacked on to political theory as if states had as much relation to each other as bourgeois neighbours in suburbia. The atomistic idea of independent "sovereign" states has always been inadequate. But this inadequacy is especially obvious now when states of western Europe are moving to 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 theory - nations may yet become to be the politics of late imperialism what tribes were to the politics of early imperialism.) "Below" the national level, within any society, 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 academics who are conservative straights in their jobs, and that people who vote conservative, belong to the church etc. can be radically militant in the local politics of their daily life and work situation making a mockery of the baptismal jargon of "politicization". What this implies is that education, for example, is political not just because it has key consequences for national politics. The struggles in a school are themselves political. And the same is true of conflicts in a particular family or factory. What is at issue then is not a simple dichotomy: political or 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" (including the "purely economic" worker) and to see that it is not so much a question of lack of politics but of political confusion, 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 especially 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 Women'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 of "political philosophy" 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". Production for example can be more or less 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 sorts of things we can say 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 make it up. That these structures persist amounts to the continuation of "co-operation" among the different forces within it, a co-operation given sometimes literally on pain of death. The carrying on of activities in society requires the continuing support, 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 democratic, more or less just way, and how activities interrelate will obviously depend partly on what these activities are (some of their very nature require dominance/submission relations). These are the political parameters of social life. In capitalist society, as is being increasingly realised, the domination of human by human characterizes not just the relation of capitalist to proletarian, but the whole fabric of life. Therefore the option is a political practice which takes all aspects of our oppression into account, or 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"?