

# Dull Compulsion of the Economic

## The Dominant Ideology and Social Reproduction

Conrad Lodziak

One of the most influential ideas amongst many Marxists, the Left and social theorists is what Abercrombie, Hill and Turner refer to as 'the dominant ideology thesis'.<sup>1</sup> This thesis has it 'that modern capitalist society ... maintains and reproduces itself through the effects of a "dominant ideology" which successfully incorporates the working class into the existing social system, thereby perpetuating its subordination'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the dominant ideology thesis is not so much a 'thesis' as a self-evident truth amongst a majority of the Left. The reproduction of relations of domination and subordination, it is claimed, cannot be sustained without the effects of a dominant ideology. Thus Mandel argues that

To consolidate the domination of one class over another for any length of time, it is ... *absolutely essential* that the producers, the members of the exploited class, are brought to accept the appropriation of the social surplus by a minority as inevitable, permanent and just.<sup>3</sup>

There is no need to labour the point here, but it should be clear that such a view attributes an enormous power to the dominant ideology as a *necessary* force in social reproduction. It is precisely this attribution which Abercrombie *et al* make the object of their critique.

### Ideological Incorporation – an empirical problem

The popularity of the dominant ideology thesis can be seen to arise, in the main, from the need to explain the failure of the class struggle to materialise into the revolution predicted by Marx. Not only has revolutionary consciousness remained under-developed and has not spread throughout the working class, but, more than this, many Marxists began to suspect that the working class were actually accepting their subordination. Much hinges on what is meant by 'acceptance'. Relevant here is the distinction which Mann makes between 'pragmatic' and 'normative' acceptance. In pragmatic acceptance 'the individual complies because he perceives no realistic alternative', whereas in normative acceptance 'the individual internalizes the moral expectations of the ruling class and views his own inferior position as legitimate'. Mann goes on to note that 'Though pragmatic acceptance is easy to accommodate to Marxism, normative acceptance is not, and the unfortunate popularity of the latter concept has contributed to the inadequacies of much modern Marxist theory'.<sup>4</sup> These inadequacies refer to those tendencies in theories of social reproduction in which the *assumed* normative acceptance of the working class 'explains' their pragmatic acceptance, and in which the *assumed* normative acceptance is *assumed* to be a product of the

dominant ideology.

For Abercrombie *et al* whether or not the working class accepts the dominant ideology is essentially an empirical problem.

### The dominant ideology – What is it?

Prior to assessing the empirical evidence relevant to the acceptance or otherwise of a dominant ideology by the working class, Abercrombie *et al* were frustrated in their task by the absence of definitive statements as to what the dominant ideology actually is. Texts which make frequent reference to the power of 'the dominant ideology', 'ruling ideas' or equivalent notions, rarely provide these concepts with adequate substance. In view of this problem, Abercrombie *et al* construct a dominant ideology which, in the main, satisfies what many might consider a dominant ideology to be. Their construction includes a range of beliefs which are held by various fractions of the capitalist class, for example, the right to transfer property by inheritance, existing principles of capital accumulation, etc., and beliefs which, while not necessarily those of the capitalist class, might nevertheless be seen as relevant in justifying the subordination of the working class, for example, deference to authority, the neutrality of the state, etc. The beliefs included in their construction are classified under four broad elements which constitute the dominant ideology. These four elements are the ideologies of accumulation, of state neutrality and welfare, of managerialism, and the penetration of bourgeois ideology into working-class culture.

### On to the evidence ...

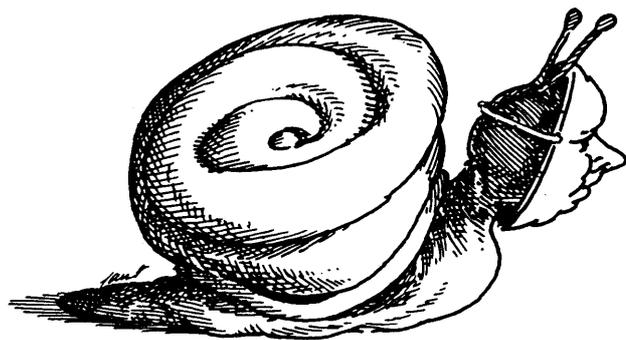
Drawing upon a wide range of survey data and ethnographic studies on working-class beliefs relevant to, for example, property rights, ownership, profits, the means of accumulation, the occupational structure, the distribution of income, the right to manage, the responsiveness of the state to 'demands from below', the electoral system, individualism *versus* collectivism, respect for hierarchy, deference to authority, etc., Abercrombie *et al* find little empirical support for the dominant ideology thesis. They note that 'value dissensus can be found throughout the working class', and conclude that 'social order cannot be explained primarily by ideological incorporation and value consensus'.<sup>5</sup>

In order to avoid possible confusion I want to make it absolutely clear that I too reject the dominant ideology thesis, and that I accept much of Abercrombie *et al*'s arguments, particularly their emphasis on the power of economic compulsion

and state coercion in reproducing relations of domination and subordination. However, I cannot accept their interpretation of the empirical data relevant to whether or not the working class accept the dominant ideology. This interpretation suffers from what might be called a 'one-dimensional' concept of ideology. What I mean by this is that Abercrombie *et al* treat all the beliefs they identify as constituting the four elements of the dominant ideology as being of equal ideological value. Thus, while there is little support amongst the working class for excessive profits and incomes, and little support for the idea that profit should be the motor of economic activity, Abercrombie *et al* admit that the empirical evidence does suggest a consensus which accepts both the occupational structure and the structure of incomes. They further admit that this 'implies some endorsement of the meritocratic version of inequality ... an agreement that inequality *ought* to be meritocratic'.<sup>6</sup> Even though there is disgruntlement with the manner in which the meritocracy works, it is nevertheless judged in terms which strongly suggest acceptance of bourgeois values. Mann notes that 'almost all persons, of whatever class, will agree with statements like "It is important to get ahead"'.<sup>7</sup> Significantly Abercrombie *et al* observe that 'large numbers of people agree ... on the significance of education, training and skill as criteria of economic worth and social honour'.<sup>8</sup> Further, these criteria are soaked in dominant definitions of 'merit', 'ability' and 'intelligence', which are closely bound up with the development of identities and expectations. The acceptance of 'inequalities based on meritocratic principles' is, in my view, the acceptance of part of an underlying 'ideological framework', or ideological core at the centre of the dominant ideology.

Similarly, while it can be agreed with Abercrombie *et al* that 'the conduct of industrial relations reflects value dissensus, the rejection of hierarchy and submissiveness ...',<sup>9</sup> it also reflects, again by their own admission, 'on the labour side, ideas about what is a just wage...'.<sup>10</sup> This not only reflects acceptance of meritocratic principles, but the very acceptance of the idea of 'a wage' implies the acceptance of the domination of capital over labour, and of the division between employer and employee. Again this is basic, it is a core element of the underlying ideological field. It is this element which legitimates the existing principles of accumulation, even though the 'surface' ideologies of accumulation are widely rejected by the working class. Further, in conjunction with the acceptance of meritocratic principles, it implies the acceptance of the existence of a managerial level.

The empirical evidence on working-class beliefs, I am claiming, can be interpreted in a way which suggests that the working class accepts core elements of the dominant ideology, which I have identified as acceptance of meritocratic principles, and acceptance of the domination of capital over labour. These core elements provide the ideological framework *within* which the dissensus referred to by Abercrombie *et al* is located.



Additionally there are deeply-embedded ideological elements within the working class, which though not class-specific are nevertheless class-relevant, in that they can be seen to have a role in diluting class antagonisms, and in fragmenting working-class solidarity. These elements include sexism, racism, aspects of nationalism, cold war ideology and anti-Soviet/anti-communist sentiments. I would thus conclude that a majority of the working class do accept a dominant ideology, at least in the manner in which I have identified it. Whether or not this 'acceptance' confirms the dominant ideology thesis is quite another matter.

### The problem of commitment

In order to satisfy the requirements of the dominant ideology thesis it is not only necessary that the working class accepts the dominant ideology, but more than this, *it is necessary that this acceptance is sufficiently powerful to secure the reproduction of class domination*. In other words the 'acceptance' of the dominant ideology must approximate something like a commitment to the dominant ideology.

As I have argued extensively elsewhere, there are methodological problems involved in surveying beliefs, attitudes, values, opinions, etc.<sup>11</sup> Responses to questionnaires and interviews are not necessarily valid indicators of an individual's beliefs, values, etc. Further, questionnaires and interviews are widely regarded as unreliable. Far more important, however, is that questionnaires and structured interviews are particularly insensitive to registering the degree of commitment to the particular responses recorded. It is not enough to enable respondents to declare the degree of their agreement/disagreement with particular questionnaire items. What is required is an indication of *the degree of correspondence between questionnaire items and the respondent's own priorities*. In other words the survey data drawn upon by Abercrombie *et al* was generated by the administration of questionnaires which contained items of relevance to the dominant ideology. The extent to which these items corresponded to what is most relevant to the concerns of the respondents is another matter altogether. As Mann emphasises, 'we have to consider not only a person's stated attitude but also its importance for him'.<sup>12</sup>

With this in mind, Mann has closely scrutinised relevant ethnographic studies. He suggests that 'beliefs might not be of great significance for the respondents'.<sup>13</sup> He cites research by Veness which drew upon schoolchildren's essays 'describing imaginary "successes" in future life'.<sup>14</sup> He notes that 'it seems probable that, though lower class children may endorse general platitudes about the importance of ambition, these have little relevance for their own life-projects'.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, one searches in vain for empirical evidence which supports the dominant ideology thesis. The required degree of ideological motivation appears to be absent amongst a majority of the populations of advanced capitalist societies. Rather, one finds, as Simonds has observed, an 'absence of belief'. He continues,

... Passivity, resignation, bewilderment and confusion, disorientation, and marginalization have all been more consequential elements of effective systems of social domination than false consciousness in the strict sense of the word, and the conditions that produce and reproduce such incapacity are largely publicly identifiable features of the social environment, not some mysterious process of class brainwashing or collective hypnosis.<sup>16</sup>

I would prefer to talk of an 'ideological difference' amongst a majority of the subordinated, but, in agreement with Simonds, this indifference is attributable in the main to forces more powerful than the dominant ideology. Those ideas which are foregrounded in the consciousness of the subordinated tend to be directly relevant to the practical and immediate demands of the everyday life-world as experienced, and bear little relation to the ideas embodied in the dominant ideology. Wellershoff illustrates this point in commenting on life in Germany in the immediate post-war period.

The only problems that really mattered were those to which solutions could be found within one's own sphere of action and did not have to be sought via circuitous political routes or in some later transformation of society. Should one rent an apartment or build a house, change employers or wait for promotion, get divorced or remain together – these were the decisions that preoccupied people. Anything more than that, anything that was not manageable or 'achievable', was considered too remote.<sup>17</sup>

It can be argued that in focussing on the 'manageable' and 'achievable', and in being ideologically indifferent, the subordinated are serving the interests of dominant groups through their lack of commitment to opposition. However true this might be, it remains a far cry from the view that the subordinated are positively incorporated into the social system via their commitment to the dominant ideology. No, Wellershoff's reference to the 'manageable', the 'achievable' and to the finding of solutions 'within one's own sphere of action', is a reference to 'what is possible', that is, to the power/powerlessness of the individual. The consciousness and commitments of the subordinated say far more about their relative powerlessness in the total order of things, than about the influence of the dominant ideology.

However, the kind of commitment to the dominant ideology required by the dominant ideology thesis is to be found amongst dominant groups and their middle-class subordinates.<sup>18</sup> As Giddens notes,

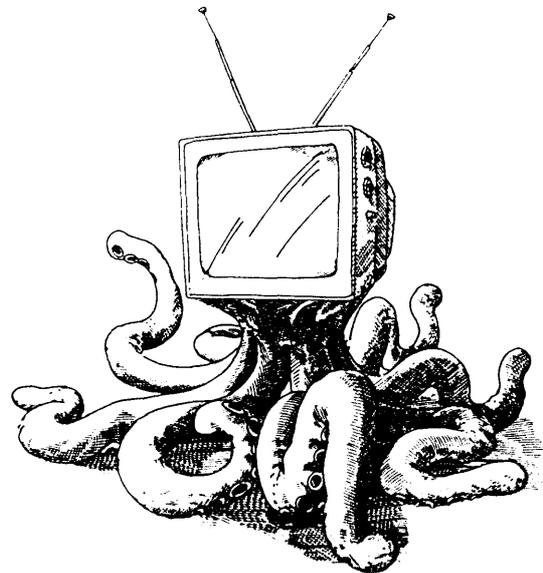
... the level of normative integration of dominant groups within social systems may be a more important influence upon the overall continuity of those systems than how far the majority have 'internalised' the same value-standards.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover the impact of the dominant ideology on dominant groups and their middle-class subordinates affects the subordinated – not as ideology, but as practice. Quite simply dominant groups and their immediate subordinates occupy positions of power which enable them to enact at least some of their ideological commitments. It is through this enactment that the dominant ideology becomes materialised.<sup>20</sup> But as I have already argued, the acquiescence of the subordinated to the social system, and their participation in social practices inscribed with the dominant ideology, has very little to do with their acceptance of the dominant ideology. Those occupying subordinated positions, though relatively powerless, are nevertheless able to draw upon some resources to enact their commitments. These commitments, however, tend to bear little relation to the dominant ideology.

### Consciousness, motivation and needs

One of the problems confronting those operating within the theoretical framework of the dominant ideology thesis is that of

explaining the wide discrepancy existing just prior to the 1987 General Election, between opinion surveys on the one hand, and voting intentions and behaviour on the other. It is irrelevant to the particular point I wish to make here that almost all items on opinion surveys, together with the policies of the major political parties, fall within the framework of the dominant ideology. The internal contradictions and flexibility of the dominant ideology do allow for the kinds of ideological differences existing between the major political parties. Under the assumption that the subordinated are ideologically motivated, one might have expected a landslide victory for the Labour Party. Results of opinion surveys showed a remarkable consistency in that time and again 70 per cent or more of those surveyed indicated support for the kinds of policies advocated by the Labour Party, and opposition to the bulk of the Conservative Party programme.<sup>21</sup> Yet random samples of adults from the same population made it quite clear that the Conservatives would be victorious.



Those subscribing to the dominant ideology thesis could argue that opinion surveys cannot be taken seriously, or that the reason survey results did not translate into votes was the lack of credibility of the Labour Party, or that the surveys failed to address the ideological damage suffered by the Labour Party by virtue of its association with gay issues, or on account of it being allegedly in the grip of the 'loony Left'. Although there is some truth in each of these possibilities, the essential truth is missed, namely that *intentions to act* (as in voting), *even where ideological choices exist, may be for reasons other than ideological ones.*

That this is so is borne out by that rather common occurrence in electoral politics in Britain: the voter who votes for one party in a local election, and for its opposition in a general election. Ah! The 'floating voter'. Of course, are not the majority of floating voters ideologically uncommitted? Wainwright's discussion of election results in Harlow is instructive here. Having won the parliamentary seat from Labour in 1983, the Conservatives increased their majority in 1987. 'Little of this rise,' she suggests, 'can be attributed to the middle-class voters who live in surrounding villages.' She continues:

... The local Labour Party calculates that at least three

thousand skilled or semi-skilled workers in employment voted Conservative for the first or second time. Carol Haslan describes the response of such converts to Labour canvassers: 'They saw our policies more as a threat than a benefit; they thought that if others were going to gain through more money spent on services, they would lose out.' *It is insecurity as much as prosperity which explains this view.* All the major firms in Harlow ... had cut back on jobs. There had been a little new employment in retailing ... and in warehousing, but most of this was part-time. *A significant number of workers felt they had something to hold on to, and they did not trust Labour to offer anything better...*

*All this points to a pragmatic shift to the Conservatives ... rather than a deep ideological attachment to Thatcherism.* Indeed, in local elections throughout the eighties, many of these same people in Harlow have continued to vote for a Labour Council whose policies are dominated by the radical left.<sup>22</sup>

We can anticipate one typical response to Wainwright's comments: 'Just as we thought. It's the "I'm alright, Jack - fuck you" morality. This is Thatcher's ideological effect.' No doubt there are those so entrenched in their orthodoxies that they will be unable to embrace alternative explanations. But surely the time has come to pay serious attention to the consciousness of the subordinated - not for reasons of engaging in that self-righteous exercise of ideology detection, but for reasons of finding out the kinds of motivations people have, and what the bases of these motivations are.

Wainwright hints at a privatistic, pragmatic motivation amongst a section of the working class, and suggests that this motivation is rooted in a need for security, or the avoidance of insecurity. Similarly, and consistent with Wainwright's view, Armstrong *et al* observe that 'deflation weakens workers' resistance ... *fear is the key. Workers rightly believe that opposition may lead to redundancies or closure, and that it may be impossible to get another job.*'<sup>23</sup> In the context of high unemployment and cuts in welfare benefits and provisions, Armstrong *et al* argue, it becomes

... more imperative for people to hold down a job. The more intolerable being unemployed is, the worse pay and conditions people will accept. Cuts in entitlement to benefits strengthens the link between work and the ability to acquire enough goods and services to survive. They thus help reinforce the central discipline which capitalism imposes on workers - the need to work for their employer on their terms in order to obtain a living.<sup>24</sup>

The very need to survive would appear to be a prime pragmatic consideration amongst at least some of the subordinated, underpinning their acquiescence to unfavourable work conditions, and to oppressive marriages and family life. Whether it be wanting to avoid material insecurity, 'holding onto the little security one has', or 'making hay while the sun shines', the underlying motive remains the same. Then there are increasing numbers of unemployed, the retired and the low paid, who are materially insecure, and are compelled for reasons of survival to give more or less continuous attention to the practical problems imposed by poverty.

We are hard pressed to find a strong commitment to the dominant ideology amongst the more affluent section of the working class. As Williams has noted of this section, '... politics ... are interpreted as mere generalities, mere abstractions, as at best rather boring interferences...'<sup>25</sup> No matter how

disturbing these observations may be to the Left, they must nevertheless be reckoned with if we are to understand the kinds of motivations, priorities and preoccupations existing amongst the subordinated. Further, I have intimated that the motivations of the subordinated are for the most part needs-based. Eventually I shall argue that the reproduction of relations of domination and subordination occurs principally through the 'manipulation of needs'. We can begin to see how this manipulation works in considering contemporary patterns of privatistic motivation.



### Privatism

Until recently, Habermas has argued, the social system promoted and supported two complementary patterns of motivation: 'family-vocational privatism' and 'civic privatism'. The former steered people toward 'a family orientation with developed interests in consumption and leisure on the one hand, and in a career orientation suitable to status competition on the other'.<sup>26</sup> The encouragement of an orientation toward family and career is at one and the same time an encouragement away from the development of an active interest in politics. The system thus steers people into civic privatism or political abstinence. From time to time we are invited to register a vote in electoral contests amongst parties whom we are to entrust with 'bigger' matters while we get on with our own lives, exercising consumer choice and pursuing careers.

But, as a consequence of social changes resulting from changes in the economy, Habermas argued that 'the market + administration cannot satisfy a whole series of collective needs'.<sup>27</sup> In particular, Habermas notes, 'possessive individualism' and 'status achievement' are 'now losing their basis as a result of social change'.<sup>28</sup> Habermas not only has in mind material needs, but also identity needs. Both are important sources of human motivation. Thus Habermas observes that

... fragmented and monotonous work processes are making increasing inroads even into sectors in which previously a personal identity could be formed by way of the occupational role. An 'inner-directed' motivation for achievement is less and less supported by the structure of the work process in areas of work which are dependent on market considerations; an instrumental attitude to work is spreading in the traditionally middle-class occupations...<sup>29</sup>

To this we can add that the breakdown of traditional communities and their replacement by depersonalised urban space further undermines another source of support, once available, for the development and maintenance of identities. Even so,

Williams has argued that an 'effective identity' is available to the more affluent subordinates.

... the identity that is really offered ... is a new kind of freedom in that area of our lives that we have staked out inside ... wider determinations and constraints. It is private. It involves, in its immediate definition, a good deal of evident consumption. Much of it is centred on the home itself.<sup>30</sup>

Williams goes on to note that this new freedom offers an 'unexampled mobility', hence his reference to this pattern of motivation as 'mobile privatization'.

But what of those who are unable, through lack of money, to take up this route of identity formation?



We have already seen how material insecurity can affect motivations. On top of this opportunities for a meaningful life beyond survival are scarce. In pursuit of meaning individuals turn inwards to themselves and to others, drawing upon depleted self-resources already heavily taxed with the burdens of daily survival. For the majority meaning is sought in those power-bound, privatistic spaces, in which there is the possibility of exercising some autonomy. Even so, such efforts are difficult to sustain – their success would seem to be dependent, at least, as Logan has argued, on a minimal ontological security and sense of personal worth.<sup>31</sup> These are the very identity needs which the social system can no longer satisfy, both for the poor and increasingly for the professional classes. In a sense then, support for these identity needs is sought from others similarly positioned in the social totality. Interpersonal demands tend to be experienced as 'excessive', and social relationships in which 'meaning' is sought, themselves become permeated with tension, thereby generating additional problems rather than providing the meaning, comfort and support originally sought.

The privatism of social withdrawal, a possibility anticipated by Habermas, which is, as Held suggests, 'both a product of, and (an) adaptive mechanism to, contemporary society', becomes 'a pre-occupation with one's own "lot in life", and with 'the fulfilment of one's own needs'.<sup>32</sup> This preoccupation, in contemporary society, tends to become intensified. Habermas explains:

The difficulties involved in identity formation are intensified in milieus that in their communicative infrastructure are simultaneously demanding – because differentiated – and impoverished.<sup>33</sup>

As more people are being thrust toward self-maintaining privatism, and are thus vulnerable to the intensification of self-crises (and with no hope of radical changes in their circumstances), we can perhaps understand the search for peace, and for relaxation and diversion in inexpensive entertainment as a common response.

In briefly considering some aspects of contemporary forms of privatism, I have suggested that the traditional pattern of

family-vocational privatism has given way to a self-seeking mobile privatism for some, and to a self-maintaining privatism for others. Both forms of contemporary privatism are also forms of civic privatism. For Habermas the failure of the social system to continue to support family-vocational privatism amongst a majority could lead to a 'legitimation crisis'. 'A legitimation crisis,' Habermas states, 'must be based on a motivation crisis.'<sup>34</sup> Thus Habermas, quite sensibly in my view, sees the legitimation of the social system as being rooted, not in the force of ideology, but positively in the support it attracts by virtue of supplying the motivational needs of the majority, and negatively through civic privatism. In contemporary forms of privatism the social system continues to generate and support the self-seeking motivations of the more affluent subordinates. Self-maintaining privatism, however, is indicative of the failure of the social system to meet the material and identity needs of an increasing minority who are becoming surplus to the requirements of the social system.

In the light of the patterns of motivation prevalent amongst the subordinated, the preoccupation with ideology amongst many on the Left appears to be misplaced. The consciousness of the subordinated is best understood not in terms of ideology, but more in terms of needs-based motivations. This is consistent with my earlier observation that the subordinated are essentially ideologically indifferent. This indifference, as Wainwright and Williams have indicated, may surface from time to time (as in general elections), amongst those pursuing self-seeking life-styles, as a 'disposition' not to oppose the social system. Amongst those caught up in self-maintaining privatism, one might expect an ideological disposition which is non-supportive and even opposed to the social system. But with energies and consciousness being directed toward the practical demands of everyday life, and toward those matters over which the individual can exercise some control, these ideological dispositions rarely develop into commitments. In probing this further, we shall see that the dominant ideology thesis, in addition to its inadequacies already exposed, by exaggerating the power of ideology in social reproduction, underplays the power of economic necessity and state coercion. As such the dominant ideology thesis displays an insensitivity to the lived experience of the most subordinated. While it is true that the reproduction of relations of domination and subordination can only be disrupted by effective oppositional practices inscribed with oppositional viewpoints, the failure of such practices to materialise, I shall argue, is a consequence of the power of economic necessity and state coercion, in conjunction with the absence of effective agencies of opposition.



### Social reproduction and the manipulation of needs

To act implies 'the power to act', and as Giddens puts it, 'resources are the media through which power is exercised'.<sup>35</sup> Our actions thus reflect the resources we can draw upon. More importantly, since the major resources enabling action are 'so-

cially available', and since their availability is controlled by dominant groups, we can say that our actions also reflect the resources we cannot draw upon. In other words, to act implies both the power to act *and* our powerlessness to do otherwise.

Money, in capitalist societies, is the major resource enabling action. For the vast majority, money or its exchange value in terms of material goods, is available *only* in relations of dependency on an employer, and/or an employed partner, spouse or parent, and/or on the State. To secure our own survival we are *forced* into a relation of dependency. This alone binds us in time and space, and the resulting spatial and temporal structuration of our lives imposes limits on our potential range of action. The employed, for example, may earn enough money to meet their own survival needs, and those of their dependents. The use-value of money which is available for beyond-survival purposes is severely restricted by lack of time. The unemployed, on the other hand, find the use-value of time restricted by their lack of money and other material resources.

Under present arrangements in capitalist-patriarchal societies, our very need to survive keeps us in subordination, thereby enabling relations of domination and subordination to be reproduced. Abercrombie *et al* thus claim that

... In late capitalism, as in the early variety, compulsion remains an important condition of system integration and of pragmatic apathy as an element of the subordinate culture. Compulsion is most obviously founded in the structure of economic relations, which oblige people to behave in ways which support the status quo and to defer to the decisions of the powerful if they are to continue to work and to live.<sup>36</sup>

This is not to say that there is no resistance to the experience of oppression in relations of forced dependency. Giddens warns that

... we should not conceive of the structures of domination built into social institutions as in some way grinding out 'docile bodies' who behave like the automata suggested by objectivist social science ... all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed there is considerable evidence of individual resistance in relations of forced dependence, as in the case of absenteeism from work, industrial sabotage, wives refusing the sexual demands of their husband, children lying to parents, etc. Some of this resistance becomes collectivised as in the proliferation of women's groups, or in strikes. However, as I have already stated, it is only through effective collective oppositional action that structures of domination can be changed. The question arises as to why it is that the most subordinated do not display a consistent willingness to participate in collective oppositional action.

A partial answer to this question has already been provided in the earlier discussion of privatism. For the most subordinated the expenditure of energy involved in 'doing what it takes' to maintain survival, leaves the individual with 'an energy deficit'. As Adorno and Horkheimer noted, 'the individual who is thoroughly weary must use his weariness as energy for his surrender to the collective power which wears him out'.<sup>38</sup> Further, whereas once the realm of necessity may have provided minimal support for identity needs and meaning, this is far less the case today in conditions of unemployment, deskilled work, and family relations overloaded with expectations. The devouring of energy in pursuit of the satisfaction

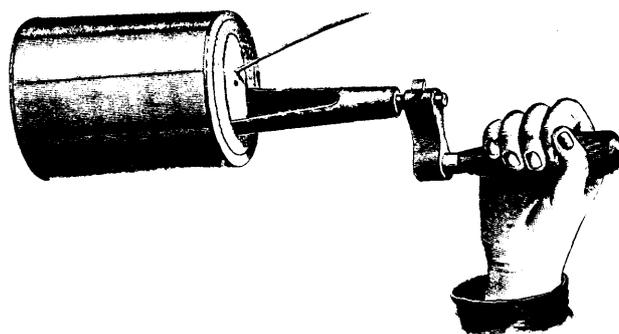
of identity needs contributes to the energy deficit. In these circumstances the prospects offered by the realm of freedom, including our freedom to participate in oppositional practices, falls under what Seve refers to as 'the intuitive evaluation ... of the possible effects of the act and the needs to be satisfied.' This, he argues, 'can be seen to be one of the most simple and universal regulators of activity'.<sup>39</sup> The relation between the possible effects of an act and the needs to be satisfied, he stresses, is not to be 'considered in isolation', but as 'mediated by the overall structure of activity'.<sup>40</sup> The latter, as I have claimed, is 'essentially mediated by the *laws of the social formation* in which this activity develops'.<sup>41</sup>

It would seem that 'the intuitive evaluation' to which Seve refers, incorporates knowledge of resource availability, including knowledge of self resources, and the anticipated expenditures of time and energy. The kinds of efforts required to participate in oppositional activity, and the likelihood that these efforts are unlikely to result in the immediate satisfaction of unmet needs, may be sufficient to deter participation. The withdrawal into private power-bound spaces, where some autonomy, however trivial, can be exercised, is for many, a more attractive alternative.

The realm of economic necessity leaves the most subordinated without the resources to engage in sustained oppositional practices. For those more favourably positioned in relations of forced dependency there is less incentive to oppose the social system. More than this the potential forces of opposition are weakened by their own fragmentation and by the State's repressive practices. Abercrombie *et al* remind us that

... economic force is not the only form of compulsion, since the State's coercive potential also has a significant role... The essence of this sort of compulsion ... is that it need rarely be manifest in action, since it is the *potentiality* of physical force which serves to maintain order for the most part.<sup>42</sup>

In recent times the State has been more willing to 'manifest this potential', as in the coal dispute of 1984-5, Wapping, the six counties in the north of Ireland, etc.



### Ideology reconsidered

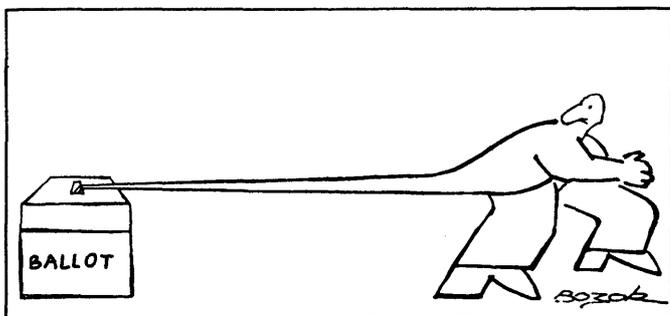
The reproduction of relations of domination and subordination can be explained without recourse to the dominant ideology thesis. The subordinated are *materially* rather than ideologically incorporated into the social system. Above all this material incorporation is powered by economic compulsion and the State's repressive machinery. The resultant manipula-

tion of survival and identity needs ensures, for the most part, that individuals pragmatically acquiesce to the social system. However, all of this does not mean that we can forget about ideology altogether.

Consistent with the empirical evidence and the arguments presented thus far, there are two areas in which ideology remains significant in social reproduction.

1. Dominant rather than subordinate groups display a commitment to elements of the dominant ideology. The positions of power occupied by the dominant (capitalists in relation to workers, males in relation to women, whites in relation to non-whites, adults in relation to children) enable them to enact elements of the dominant ideology. The subordinated experience the material consequences of this enactment. The value of ideological analyses of social institutions, social practices and discourses, resides not so much in helping the subordinated cleanse their minds of ideological contamination, but more in challenging the dominant.

2. The reproduction of relations of domination and subordination is helped by the absence of an effective opposition. An analysis of this absence is beyond the scope of this paper (I recommend Claus Offe's work as a useful starting place for such an analysis).<sup>43</sup> Needless to say several factors have to be taken into account. What we can be sure about is that effective oppositional politics requires the sustained and committed participation of many more people than currently involved. Broadening the participatory base of oppositional politics will require changes in the organisational structure of agencies of opposition in order to make participation sufficiently attractive to entice people out of their privatised worlds. If this can be achieved the forces of opposition will be better placed to engage in the ideological struggle necessary to win support, and maybe some participation, from those not yet involved.



An effective opposition is, amongst other things, *always* an effective ideological opposition. It seems to me that the latter involves vigorous and continuous ideological contestation in the public sphere, not only in challenging the dominant, but also in the advocacy of oppositional alternatives. I appreciate the difficulties this entails. The public have been fed on ideological discourses which are unable to disclose the intelligibility of opposition. The long history of the under-exposure of oppositional discourses in broadcasting, for example, makes it all the more difficult for the isolated voices of opposition to offer the public an interpretation of events which enables the transformation of populist oppositional sentiments into a coherent oppositional framework. Unless these difficulties are overcome, opposition is likely to remain fragmented, isolated and under-developed.

The development of committed support for oppositional politics is most likely to arise if the agencies of opposition are united, and offer a credible and attractive alternative. By this I do not mean that political programmes must be compromised, as for example in the case of seeking electoral support by tailoring programmes in ways to attract the safe middle-ground of public opinion. To do this is to divest the programme of its oppositional content. Credibility develops from the relentless public display of commitment to oppositional alternatives, and from the unwillingness of agents of opposition to compromise principles. Attractiveness comes from demonstrating the relevance of political programmes to the *experienced needs* of the vast majority. As Adams put it:

... most people will not struggle, never mind vote, for abstract things. They will not fight for ideas. They will fight to win material benefits to improve the quality of their lives and guarantee the future for their children.<sup>44</sup>

This suggests that if oppositional agencies are to win committed support, then the ideological struggle must be rooted in a sensitivity to the needs deficit which characterises the contemporary experience of subordination, and in ways which retain a vision of a qualitatively different future. Adams states it very clearly:

... If I have learned anything I have learned that you can only proceed on the basis of people's support, and that you can only enjoy that support if you are approaching people at a level and on ground which they understand. You have to find a common denominator between what you want to do and what people feel needs to be done.<sup>45</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, Allen and Unwin, 1930.
- 2 Tom Bottomore, 'Foreword', *ibid.*, p. ix.
- 3 Ernest Mandel, *Introduction to Marxism*, Pluto, 1982, p. 29.
- 4 Michael Mann, 'The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy', in Anthony Giddens and David Held (eds.), *Classes, Power, and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, Macmillan, 1982, p. 375.
- 5 Abercrombie *et al*, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- 7 Mann, *op. cit.*, p. 378.
- 8 Abercrombie *et al*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- 11 Conrad Lodziak, *The Power of Television: A Critical Appraisal*, Pinter, 1986, pp. 75-86.
- 12 Mann, *op. cit.*, p. 386.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 378.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 382. The research to which Mann refers is T. Veness, *School Leavers: Their Aspirations and Expectations*, Methuen, 1962.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 A. P. Simonds, 'On Being Informed', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 11, 1982, pp. 593-94.
- 17 Dieter Wellershoff, 'Germany - A State of Flux', in Jurgen Habermas (ed.), *Observations on 'The Spiritual Situation of the Age'*, MIT, 1984, p. 356.
- 18 Lodziak, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-92.

- 19 Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, Macmillan, 1979, pp. 86-92.
- 20 I have argued (*op. cit.*, pp. 86-92) that Hall's work on the rightward drift in British politics readily fits this framework. See, for example, Stuart Hall, 'Authoritarian Populism: A Reply to Jessop *et al.*', *New Left Review*, Vol. 151, 1985, pp. 115-24.
- 21 This was so prior to the Labour Party's 'successful' campaign. In a survey taken in Britain on a sample representative of the total adult population in 1984; 85% were opposed to reduced spending on health and education; 64% opposed the development of a two-tier health service; 89% favoured government job-creation schemes; 69% supported 'a programme whose first priority is combating unemployment rather than inflation'; 70% were in favour of price controls; and 72% supported import controls, and believed the gap between high and low incomes to be too great. From *British Social Attitudes: the 1984 Report*, cited in James Curran, 'Rationale for the Right', *Marxism Today*, February 1985, p. 40.
- 22 Hilary Wainwright, 'The Limits of Labourism: 1987 and Beyond', *New Left Review*, vol. 164, 1987, p. 42.
- 23 Philip Armstrong, Andrew Glyn and John Harrison, *Capitalism since World War II*, Fontana, 1984, p. 408.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 412.
- 25 Raymond Williams, 'Problems of the Coming Period', *New Left Review*, vol. 140, 1983, p. 16.
- 26 Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Heinemann, 1976, p. 75.
- 27 Cited in David Held, 'Critical Theory and Political Transformation', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 4, 1982, p. 159.
- 28 Jurgen Habermas, 'Problems of Legitimation in Late Capitalism', in Paul Connerton (ed.), *Critical Sociology*, Penguin, 1976, p. 381.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 382.
- 30 Williams, *op. cit.*
- 31 See Josephine Logan, 'Ontological Insecurity in Women', *Reflections*, no. 52, March 1985, pp. 1-41. See also her 'The Privatized Individual in Contemporary Society: the Problem of Existential Needs', *Reflections*, no. 54, June 1985, pp. 1-50.
- 32 Held, *op. cit.*, p. 158.
- 33 Habermas, 'Introduction', in Habermas (ed.), 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- 34 Habermas, 1976, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.
- 35 Giddens, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
- 36 Abercrombie *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55.
- 37 Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Polity, 1984, p. 16.
- 38 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, 1979, pp. 152-53.
- 39 Lucien Seve, *Man in Marxist Theory and the Psychology of Personality*, Harvester, 1978, p. 321.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 340.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 319.
- 42 Abercrombie *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
- 43 Claus Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, ed. John Keane, Hutchinson, 1984. See especially the essays 'The separation of form and content in liberal democracy', pp. 162-78, and 'Competitive party democracy and the Keynesian welfare state', pp. 179-206.
- 44 Gerry Adams, 'Presidential address at Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, 1987', cited in *The Irish Democrat*, December 1987, p. 5.
- 45 Gerry Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom*, Brandon, 1986, p. 157.

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