

The Dual Perspective: an examination of the origins, development and theoretical significance of Antonio Gramsci's theory of the State

Being a thesis submitted for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the University of Hull

by

Alan Ewen Scott Bairner, M.A. Hons. (Edin.)

This thesis evaluates Antonio Gramsci's political thought by focusing on the origins, development and theoretical significance of his theory of the State. It is shown that an important influence on Gramsci was an Italian tradition of political thought the main feature of which is the realistic acceptance that all political power rests on a fusion of force and consent. Also discussed are relevant aspects of the thought of Hegel and Marx and attention is paid to the contribution made by Second International Marxists to the ambiguous foundations upon which Gramsci's thought is partly based. The central concern of the thesis is Gramsci's prison writing. First, his theory of the State is examined in the context of his general conception of politics. Second, his expanded notion of the State based on a distinction between political and civil society is subjected to more thorough investigation. This is developed in a discussion of the analytical applicability of Gramsci's distinction to the Scottish political condition. It is argued that the distinction may be seen to be more than methodological and to be formalised in certain circumstances. Gramsci's theory of the State thus indicates a contradiction in human society which is not reducible to economic factors. Many of his arguments are consistent with those of Marx if not with Second International Marxist orthodoxy. His theory of the State, however, reveals how influenced he was by the "dual

perspective" of the Italian tradition. The political realism which Gramsci inherited from the Italian tradition ensures that his comments on the nature of political power in the West are more original and stimulating than his ideas about the revolutionary party and the future socialist society. It is this analysis of the dualism of political power in the West that represents Gramsci's major contribution to the history of political ideas.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I must thank Dr R.N. Berki for his supervision and his friendship during the period when this thesis has been in the making. He has made every effort to concentrate my attention when my own inclination has been to stray far and wide. I am grateful to the Social Science Research Council for funding my three years of research at the University of Hull and to my fellow postgraduate students for helping to make my stay there a happy one. I am indebted to Professors Robert Gavin and A.J.A. Morris for their advice and encouragement and to Miss Sandra Taggart for her careful typing of my final manuscript. Last, though by no means least, I must thank Tish for the consideration she has shown during the final stages of this project and my parents who have encouraged me throughout my life even when they have doubted the wisdom of my actions.

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INTRODUCTION

Although all Marxists have been concerned, of necessity, with political problems, only a few have helped to lay the foundations of a Marxist theory of politics. The failure of the majority to contribute to this enterprise is consistent with fundamental principles of what, by the end of the nineteenth century, had come to be regarded as Marxist orthodoxy - the demand that Marxism, as the theoretical weapon of the proletariat, should be action-oriented rather than contemplative, the emphasis on analysis of the economic base of society and the confident expectation that the political formation characteristic of advanced capitalist societies is destined to collapse along with the economic system which sustains it. The main ideas expounded by the orthodox Marxists of the Second International suggested that all detached analysis was irrelevant to the tasks confronting the workers' movement, that the study of politics should be secondary to economic research and that any examination of the politics of late capitalism, in particular, would be overtaken by events in the near future.

However, the optimism of Marxist orthodoxy was shaken by early twentieth-century developments; the successive failures of revolutionary movements in western Europe and the rise of Fascism. Capitalism seemed in much less imminent danger of collapse than Marxists had predicted. Consequently, their confidence appeared ill-founded and their other guiding principles, open to doubt. Their devaluation of the study of politics came under attack from a new generation of Marxists whose unorthodoxy stemmed from an interest in political problems per se and their belief that substantial analysis of the political systems, as well as other superstructural aspects, of advanced capitalism, was vital to the aims of revolutionary socialists. Foremost amongst these apparently unorthodox Marxists was Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937).

Because of their deviation from what was accepted as Marxist orthodoxy, what right had this new generation to be called Marxist? But then, what is orthodox Marxism? This thesis, in attempting to answer these questions with reference to Gramsci, outlines and analyses the context, genesis and theoretical significance of his theory of the State. Although much of Gramsci's supposed unorthodoxy is a reflection, not of a total revision of Marx's political thought, but of his critique of the Marxism of the Second International, nevertheless, his theory of the State reveals the extent to which he was influenced by non-Marxist political philosophy. This last suggests that, while Gramsci was a good Marxist in many respects, he employed non-Marxist political ideas to help him tackle problems arising out of the ambiguity of Marxist political theory. For this reason, there are theoretical implications in his writings for non-Marxist as well as Marxist students of politics.

The thesis begins by outlining the intellectual context within which Gramsci's political thought developed. It appraises the Italian tradition of political debate to which Gramsci was an heir together with the German (Hegelian and Marxist) foundations of his writing and the process by which a Marxist orthodoxy was established. Chapter Two is concerned with the revolutionary challenge to that orthodoxy and with Gramsci's emergence as a theorist. Chapter Three considers Gramsci's theory of the State within the context of his overall analysis of politics. Chapter Four examines the theory in detail and points of major theoretical significance are noted. In Chapters Five and Six, the possibility of applying Gramsci's theory to a particular area - political power in Scotland - is discussed with a view to discovering what this tells us about the nature of Gramsci's political thought. In conclusion, I shall concentrate on the argument that Gramsci, confronted with the

ambivalence of Marxist political thought¹, infused his own writings with a temper inherited from the Italian tradition of political discourse and described in this thesis as the "dual perspective". To be precise, Gramsci used the latter to extend the realistic dimension of Marxist political thought to the exclusion of some of the more utopian tendencies in Marxist orthodoxy. Thus, Gramsci's attempt to develop Marxist political analysis represents, if not a renunciation of Marxist orthodoxy, at least a major shift in emphasis.

This summary indicates what I consider to be the most important problem raised by Gramsci's political thought: the location of his doctrines in the context of the history of political ideas. Other, though lesser, difficulties make this major problem the more tantalising. First, Gramsci's thought has been accorded an uneven reception. Save in his native Italy, his ideas were seldom discussed until the 1960s. Not until 1971 were selections from his most important work, the Prison Notebooks, published in English². There has since been a rapid proliferation of analyses of Gramsci's thought in Britain and elsewhere which, while compensating for earlier underestimation, has made a qualitative contribution to his uneven reception. A few excellent studies of Gramsci's

¹ For an up to date examination of the dualism of Marxist theory, see Alvin W. Gouldner, The Two Marxisms. Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory, London, 1980. See also R.N. Berki, "The Retreat from Idealism: Reflections on some aspects of contemporary east European Marxist thought", Political Studies, XXVIII (1), March, 1980, pp. 1-19. Berki argues that the nature of Marxist doctrine can be explained by reference to the opposed tendencies of political idealism and political realism, each of which may be detected in Marx's own writings. Gouldner also suggests a tension in Marxian thought which has facilitated the development of two opposed traditions of Marxist thought: the critical and the scientific. More shall be said on this matter as the thesis progresses.

² Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, London, 1971. Where possible, I shall use the translation provided by Hoare and Nowell Smith but when it is necessary to refer to passages from Gramsci's writings which are not included in their selection, the translation shall be my own.

ideas have appeared in English, but many more have been written simply in response to the sudden demand for information about a theorist whose popularity derives from his apparent ability to reconcile socialism with democracy, thus providing an alternative to Stalinist bureaucratisation. Such studies have been hastily produced, selective in their treatment and aimed primarily at making statements about contemporary socialist theory and practice rather than analysing the origins, evolution and structure of Gramsci's political thought.³ Therefore, little has been done to solve the problems of interpretation posed by his work.

Some blame for this must be attached to commentators themselves, but most can be attributed to a second difficulty: the way Gramsci presented his ideas. He expressed his thought in two forms, neither of which facilitates a comprehensive exposition of his political philosophy. His journalistic and polemical writings of 1914-26 were responses to immediate issues; the First World War, the failure of the Italian revolutionary movement and the rise of Fascism. Though they provide fascinating insights into the early development of Gramsci's political thought, they bear the hallmarks of the work of an activist lacking the time and denying the need to articulate a comprehensive theory of politics. The arguments presented by Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks, written between 1926 and 1937, are more theoretical and developed but the style of their presentation also creates difficulties.

³ For detailed discussions of rival interpretations of Gramsci's work, see A.B. Davidson, "The Varying Seasons of Gramscian Studies", Political Studies, XX (4), December, 1972, pp. 448-61, and Joseph V. Femia, "Gramsci, the via Italiana, and the classical Marxist-Leninist Approach to Revolution", Government and Opposition, 14 (1), Winter, 1979, pp. 66-95. Femia also makes some interesting comments on the state of British Gramscian studies in "The Gramsci Phenomenon: Some Reflections", Political Studies, XXVII (3), September, 1979, pp. 472-83. My own estimation of the major analyses of Gramsci's thought to have been published in English will become apparent in the course of this thesis.

The Notebooks, as the title indicates, represent a fragmented elaboration of Gramsci's mature political thought. They were written subject to the numerous limitations imposed on Gramsci by prison life. He suffered constant ill-health and his access to materials was restricted. Aware of the possibility of Fascist censorship, he expressed ideas and names in codefied form. The prison writings are a magnificent testimony to Gramsci's courage, perseverance and intellect, but they are not the comprehensive statement of his ideas which would make an analysis of his thought more easy.

Gramsci remains, nevertheless, one of the few Marxists to have constructed a theory of politics, albeit incomplete. This fact requires explanation. Does it indicate a significant failing on the part of other Marxists? Or does it imply Gramsci's partial rejection of Marxism? To begin to answer these questions, it is necessary to turn immediately to the intellectual and political context in which the arguments set out in the Notebooks began to germinate.

There is an immediate problem when undertaking the analysis of a political thinker's work. How much is it necessary to say about that thinker's life and times? John Plamenatz has argued that attention should focus mainly on the theory rather than on the man. It is not essential to know why a man said something in order to understand what he said.¹ Yet, all political thought evolves in response to specific events and manifests the intellectual influences to which its author has been exposed. Events and influences, as well as relevant facts about the thinker's personal development, must be considered to comprehend fully a work of political philosophy. For this reason, the first and second chapters of this thesis are, in part, concerned with Antonio Gramsci's early years.

Biography is a difficult enough literary form even when the subject has not become a legend. But Gramsci, "even before he was safely dead, . . . was translated into a myth"². This was initially the work of the Italian Communist Party (P.C.I.) and, in particular, of Gramsci's successor as party leader, Palmiro Togliatti. Gramsci was presented not only as a great leader of the Italian proletariat but also as a man of peasant origins, a man of the people. Such a view had clear propagandist value for Italian communists but, significantly, it was uncritically accepted by many of Gramsci's academic analysts. However, the myth of Gramsci's peasant origins has been shattered, most notably

¹ John Plamenatz, Man and Society Volume 1, London, 1963, p. ix.

² Gwyn A. Williams, "The Making and Unmaking of Antonio Gramsci", New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci III, 1974, p. 7.

in Giuseppe Fiori's Antonio Gramsci - Life of a Revolutionary³. Gramsci was born in Sardinia in 1891. His family was well-connected. His parents were educated, his mother to a level inaccessible to most women in nineteenth-century Sardinia. According to Martin Clark, Gramsci "was born into a typical family of the Southern middle class"⁴ although, as Sardinia, even by the standards of southern Italy, was a deprived area, its middle class differed greatly from that of industrial Europe. When Antonio was seven, his family's fortunes slumped. His father was accused of corrupt practices in the Land office where he worked and, on 27 October, 1900, was sent to prison.⁵ His mother was obliged to bring up her seven children alone. The town of Ghilarza, where the Gramscis then lived, was unhealthy, "infested with malaria and having no sewers or municipal water supply"⁶ and their house had only the most primitive amenities. The constant tenderness which Gramsci felt for his mother was partly a response to the fortitude she showed during those years when the family's circumstances conformed to the P.C.I.'s myth. This period of his life and the events leading up to it marked Gramsci psychologically.

When four, he suffered a serious accident leaving him deformed for the rest of his life which was interspersed with periodic bouts of

³ Giuseppe Fiori, Antonio Gramsci - Life of a Revolutionary, trans. Tom Nairn, London, 1970. For biographical information, I have relied heavily on this work as well as on Alastair Davidson, Antonio Gramsci - towards an intellectual biography, London, 1977. As its title suggests, the latter provides valuable information about Gramsci's intellectual development but it limits its focus to the immediate intellectual context of his thought rather than considering the wider background with which Chapters One and Two of this thesis are concerned.

⁴ Martin Clark, Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that Failed, New Haven and London, 1977, p. 46-7.

⁵ For a full explanation of these events, see Fiori, op. cit., pp. 13-15 and 22-3.

⁶ John M. Cammett, Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism, Stanford, 1967, p. 4. This commendable work was something of a trailblazer in Gramscian studies in the English-speaking world and contains much useful biographical detail.

illness.⁷ Gramsci grew up a dwarf hunchback in a society where abnormality was viewed with hostility. At first, the superior social status of his parents protected him from the harsher realities of life but this was destroyed by his father's imprisonment. He was now "at the mercy of a peasantry whose hatred had formerly been kept in bounds"⁸. He became a solitary child who sought refuge in books, pets and his own imagination. He was forced to leave school prematurely to work with his elder brother, Gennaro, in the Land Registry office. The duties were especially demanding for a deformed child and were made all the more painful because he had been obliged to forsake his studies.⁹ "He became embittered, and even more isolated and cold. His manner became more biting and ironical: for the first time he began to feel a rebel."¹⁰

However, his studies were halted only temporarily. Supported by his mother and sisters, Gramsci was able to return to school and the completion of his education was guaranteed by his father's subsequent release from prison. He attended the ginnasio at Santu Lussurgiu and, from 1908 to 1911, the Liceo Giovanni Maria Dettori in Cagliari, the capital city of Sardinia. There, he first sampled urban life, became aware of the struggles of an emerging workers' movement and revealed an interest in socialist ideas. In October, 1911, he was awarded a scholarship to the University of Turin. He was seldom to return to his native island yet his early years had taught him much. He retained a lifelong interest in Sardinia's folklore and fairy tales, poems and songs. He spoke the Sardinian dialect. His prison correspondence reveals that, in

⁷ It is thought that Gramsci was dropped down a flight of stairs by a servant. See Fiori, op. cit., p. 4 and Cammett, op. cit., p. 16.

⁸ Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 26.

⁹ Gramsci recalled this ordeal in a prison letter to Tatiana Schucht, 3 October, 1932. See Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci II, 1974, p. 27.

¹⁰ Fiori, op. cit., p. 25.

later years, despite his bitter childhood experiences, he took delight in recalling the expressions and customs of his birthplace.¹¹

Gramsci's personal sufferings helped him to empathise with others who suffered hardship¹² including what he then saw as the ill-treatment of all Sardinians by foreign oppressors. It was this that caused his earliest political views to be nationalist rather than socialist. Years later, he admitted that he had been deeply affected by Sardismo. "I used to think at that time that the struggle for Sardinian national independence was a necessity. Continentals go home! - how many times have I myself repeated these words."¹³ Was it a consequence of his own early nationalistic sentiments that, in his mature political writings, Gramsci was to show greater sensitivity than most Marxists to the national question and, in particular, to the role which national consciousness can play in the struggle for socialism?¹⁴ Certainly other direct relationships can be traced between his youthful awareness of individual and collective suffering and the development of his political ideas.

The primitive rebellion of the Sardinian banditry provided him with an inspiring example of resistance to authority¹⁵ and this, combined with his Sardist sentiments, created in the young Gramsci a profound dislike of the Italian state as an agent of oppression and foreign domination.

¹¹ See, for example, his use of and reference to Sardinian words and phrases. See Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I, 1974, pp. 9, 32 and 37.

¹² See Gramsci's recollections of some of his fellow sufferers in Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci II, pp. 26 and 32.

¹³ Cited in Fiori, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁴ See further on this, pp. 140 and 171-2 and Chapters 5 and 6 passim. For a brief study of Gramsci's contribution to Marxist thinking on the national question, see Roger Absalom, "Gramsci's Contribution to the Debate", in Eric Cahm and Vladimir Claude Fisera (eds.), Socialism and Nationalism, Nottingham, 1978, pp. 27-32.

¹⁵ See Fiori, op. cit., p. 31.

Hatred of the state as the instrument of Italian rule was soon transformed into hatred of the state per se and led Gramsci to regard it as "a hostile entity, a monstrous machine mainly concerned with multiplying methods of strike - repression and breeding armies of tax officials, Prefects, and police inspectors in league with the mining companies"¹⁶. Gramsci later adopted a more sophisticated view of political power but it was its coercive nature which alone immediately manifested itself to him in events like the Sardinian miners' strike of 1904 which "marked the beginning of a transition from the days of banditry to a more effective form of collective struggle"¹⁷. Gramsci's growing awareness of class conflict made him receptive to the socialist ideas to which he was introduced by his brother whilst at school in Cagliari. Evidence of this can be found in an essay he wrote at that time. Gramsci writes that "the struggle waged by humanity from time immemorial is truly amazing. It is an incessant struggle, one in which mankind strives to tear off and break the chains with which the lust for power on the part of a single man or a single class, or even a whole people, attempt to shackle it."¹⁸ Although the French Revolution had simply replaced one class in power with another, at least it had taught the lesson that "social privileges and differences, being products of society and not of nature, can be overcome". He called for a new revolution. "Humanity will need another bloodbath to abolish many of these injustices - and then it will be too late for the rulers to be sorry they left the hordes in that present state of

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁸ Quintin Hoare (ed.), Selections from Political Writings, 1910-20, London, 1977, p. 3. Henceforth, this volume will be referred to as Gramsci, PW 1910-20. A further selection of Gramsci's political writings also edited by Quintin Hoare, Selections from Political Writings, 1921-26, London, 1978, will be referred to as Gramsci, PW 1921-26, and the Selections from the Prison Notebooks, edited by Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London, 1971, as Gramsci, PN.

ignorance and savagery they enjoy today."¹⁹ With this in mind, Gramsci set off for Turin where he would see at first hand the social and economic effects of the latest stage in mankind's development - industrial capitalism.

Gramsci was twenty when he left Ghilarza for Turin. The culture shock he experienced was never to be forgotten. In the early part of the twentieth century, Italy was a microcosm of European civilisation and the contrasts between North and South, city and village, factory and farm were stark. According to Victor Kiernan, "for Gramsci, removal to university life at Turin, the country's biggest manufacturing centre, was something like a Highlander of olden days coming to Edinburgh".

With his rustic background and his European culture he stood at a remarkable point of confluence of diverse epochs and social climates. Italy lay between Europe's eastern and western poles and partook of the character of both. It was itself a Europe in miniature, and every epoch that Europe has lived through was still alive on its soil, not merely buried beneath the pavements of its ancient cities.²⁰

In our modern terminology, Gramsci was going from the Third World to the First. This was to influence the later development of his political thought for, as Kiernan observes, "Sardinia and Turin between them put him in a better position than almost any socialist of this century to combine an understanding of both realms . . . and his grand political formula was a mobilisation of the peasantry under the leadership of the working class"²¹. Initially, however, the impact of life in a large industrial city was emotional rather than political or intellectual. He was poor, friendless and often depressed.

¹⁹ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 5.

²⁰ V.G. Kiernan, "Gramsci and Marxism", Socialist Register, London, 1972, p. 3.

²¹ Ibid., p. 4

Gradually, however, Gramsci began to acquire the intellectual foundations upon which he was to construct his theory of politics. He was introduced to the study of Marxism in the classes of Annibale Pastore but it is important to note that he received Marxist ideas through an Italian filter which was largely the creation of Benedetto Croce, the idealist philosopher to whose work Gramsci was led by Umberto Cosmo during his time at Turin University.²² Thomas Nemeth repeats a fairly common argument when he writes that "owing to the mediation of Croce, but also . . . that of the whole history of Italian Marxism prior to him, Gramsci stood in a rather curious relation to Marx"²³. Gramsci's relationship which was affected not only by the manner of Gramsci's reception of Marxism but also by his inheritance of an Italian tradition of political debate in addition to the Marxist tradition. The two constitute the intellectual context in which Gramsci's theory of politics developed. Before considering the Marxist foundations of his thought, it is vital to examine that Italian tradition by way of which some of his knowledge of Marxism initially arrived and which exerted great influence on the subsequent development of Gramsci's own Marxism.

²² For a detailed account of Gramsci's university education, see Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, pp. 57-81.

²³ Thomas Nemeth, Gramsci's Philosophy. A Critical Study, Sussex, 1980, p. 7. Nemeth does much to trace the intellectual roots of Gramsci's philosophy and to examine the nature of his Marxism. His interest in philosophy rather than political theory, however, leads him to neglect major features of Gramsci's thought and to fail to consider the influence on the development of Gramsci's thought of earlier Italian thinkers than Croce, Rodolfo Mondolfo, Antonio Labriola and Giovanni Gentile such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Nemeth's analysis is nevertheless original and stimulating.

Some might find the notion of a national tradition of political thought untenable. There is no denying the claim, however, that one of the difficulties involved in reading Gramsci derives from the weight of Italian culture in his work.²⁴ It has even been argued that one can speak of an Italian Marxism.²⁵ By outlining common themes in the work of four major Italian thinkers, it will be possible to show what characterises this Italian tradition which influenced Gramsci's thinking. Gramsci, indeed, pinpointed the essence of this tradition.

Of Gramsci's Prison Notebooks, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith write that "if there is one passage which perhaps more than any other encapsulates Gramsci's conception of the revolutionary party, it is the opening sentences of the section entitled 'Prediction and Perspective' in which he evokes Machiavelli's centaur as a symbol of the 'dual perspective' which must characterise the revolutionary party (and state)"²⁶. According to Gramsci, "the dual perspective can present itself on various levels, from the most elementary to the most complex; but these can all theoretically be reduced to two fundamental levels, corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur - half-animal and half-human"²⁷. These are the levels of force and of consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilisation, of the individual moment and of the universal moment ("Church" and "State"), of agitation and of propaganda, of tactics and of strategy. The "dual perspective" indicates that these levels

²⁴ See Anne Showstack Sassoon, Gramsci's Politics, London, 1980, p. 13.

²⁵ See Nemeth, op. cit., pp. 39-41. Nemeth proceeds to relate Gramsci's thought to this tradition but his interest is in Gramsci's epistemology rather than his political theory.

²⁶ Gramsci, PN, p. 124. Editors' comments.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 169-70.

consist not of two forms of "immediacy" which succeed each other mechanically in time but of a dialectical relation. Thus, "it may happen as in human life, that the more an individual is compelled to defend his own immediate physical existence, the more will he uphold and identify with the highest values of civilisation and of humanity, in all their complexity"²⁸.

Gramsci's comments reveal an aspect of his political thought which goes far beyond his theory of the revolutionary party and extends to influence his entire conception of politics. It is particularly apparent in his theory of the State in which the "dual perspective" is represented by the distinction between political and civil society. This feature of Gramsci's thought is inherited from the Italian tradition of political theory, the essential characteristic of which is the political realism of the "dual perspective"²⁹. To substantiate this claim, it is necessary to turn immediately to that passage in Niccolo Machiavelli's The Prince to which Gramsci himself alluded.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., p. 170.

²⁹ The "dual perspective" is perhaps the concept which best characterises the Italian political thought. Elsewhere, I have suggested that the Italian tradition exhibits a "Jekyll and Hyde syndrome". (See my unpublished paper, "The Jekyll and Hyde Syndrome: some themes in Italian political thought", presented at the University of Hull in 1977.) I have also tried to represent the essence of Italian political theory by using the concept of antiszygy, the yoking together of opposites. (See my paper, "Marxism and Political Analysis in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", presented at the Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association, held in April, 1981 at the University of Hull.)

³⁰ In addition to Machiavelli's thought, the contribution made by Croce, Gentile and Guicciardini to the development of a specifically Italian tradition of political debate will be examined. Other thinkers have contributed to this process but a consideration of these four major thinkers will be sufficient for present purposes.

(i) Machiavelli and Guicciardini

According to Machiavelli, "there are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts." However, "as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second". It is for this reason that Machiavelli suggests that "a prince must understand how to make a nice use of the beast and the man". Thus, "the ancient writers taught princes about this by an allegory, when they described how Achilles and many other princes of the ancient world were sent to be brought up by Chiron, the centaur, so that he might train them his way". "All the allegory means in making the teacher half beast and half man", says Machiavelli, "is that a prince must know how to act according to the nature of both, and that he cannot survive otherwise".³¹

It has been claimed that Machiavelli, having oscillated in the public eye between being an impious monster such as stalked the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage and a patriotic hero celebrated with fervour during the Risorgimento, has come to be regarded in much modern scholarship as a super-intellect and universal genius.³² According to Sydney Anglo, the mixed response is explicable in part by reference to the nature of Machiavelli's thought in which there are "disjunctive sentences and disjunctive ideas" so that "many of his most striking opinions were expressed, in terms of extreme polarities"³³. "In Machiavelli", he continues, "antitheses are not only part of the structure of an argument. They also represent, for the author, genuine and permanent polarities: force or fraud; virtù or fortune; praise or

³¹ Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, Harmondsworth, 1961, p. 99.

³² Sydney Anglo, Machiavelli - a dissection, London, 1969, p. 12.

³³ Ibid., p. 11-12.

blame; entirely good or entirely evil; love or fear. There are rarely any intermediate qualities, because Machiavelli does not think in such terms."³⁴

The more common view of Machiavelli is that he was an immoral thinker who regarded his fellow beings as equally devoid of morality and who advised rulers to act in a manner consistent with this observation. Yet, his "dual perspective" presents itself on the political level as the fusion of laws and force with the presence of the former hinting that Machiavelli did not have a fixed view of human nature. Indeed, he writes in The Discourses that "most men prefer to steer a middle course" and "they know not how to be wholly good or yet wholly bad"³⁵. Underlining this, Martin Fleisher claims to infer from Machiavelli's comedies "no unchanging essence at the core of man, nothing that is fixed and remains constant over time, a measure and a guide to which man may refer and return"³⁶. According to Fleisher, the world which Machiavelli depicts "is a world in continuous flux". Men change and situations change but "since trust is prudent only where one can count on constancy in desire and circumstance, fede cannot provide an adequate basis for human relations and social order in the world"³⁷.

Though some would regard this as evidence of Machiavelli's pessimism, it can be argued that here is an indication of his political realism which, as R.N. Berki suggests, is "the acceptance of the permanence and durability of basic contradictions in human

³⁴ Ibid., p. 247.

³⁵ Niccolo Machiavelli, The Discourses, London, 1950, p. 274.

³⁶ Martin Fleisher, "Trust and Deceit in Machiavelli's Comedies", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXVII (3), July/Sept., 1966, p. 379.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 380.

society"³⁸. Gramsci recognises this when he comments that "Machiavelli wrote books of 'immediate political action', and not utopias - which express the longing for a ready-made State, with all its functions and elements ready-made too"³⁹. Rulers must act in ways which are compatible with human contradictions. Politics must be a pragmatic skill for the polity, like the psyche, is the sum of conflicting passions. The ruler may have recourse to the use of force on occasions, not because he is immoral nor because it is the only instrument of political control but because it is necessitated by circumstance. Apparent too is Machiavelli's belief that human nature is such that political power must continue to be exercised through a fusion of force and laws.

Despite this, it has been noted that Machiavelli's great contemporary, Francesco Guicciardini, "found him not to be too cynical or 'realistic' but too impractical and 'idealistic'"⁴⁰. Of human nature, however, Guicciardini held a view similar to Machiavelli's. "Men's natures vary", he writes, "some hope so strongly that they regard as certain what they have not yet got. Others are so timid that they never hope for anything till it is within their grasp."⁴¹ Each man differs from the next and each has a character composed of contradictory forces. Thus, "nothing is so bad that it has not some good element, nothing so good that it has

³⁸ Berki, op. cit., p. 2. Berki argues that realism accepts that the basic determinant of politics is, always has been and always will be, power. Thus, the task of the practical politician lies in ever-renewed (and ever uncertain) endeavours to deal with power. He contrasts this with "political idealism" which is expressed in the belief that all the major problems of politics are capable of a definite, once-and-for-all solution. It is realism rather than idealism which, I believe, dominates Italian political thought.

³⁹ Gramsci, PN, p. 248.

⁴⁰ Dante Germino, "Machiavelli's Thoughts on the Psyche and Society", in Anthony Parel (ed.), The Political Calculus, Toronto, 1972, p. 78.

⁴¹ Francesco Guicciardini, Selected Writings, ed., Cecil Grayson, London, 1965, p. 19.

no drawback" and "everybody has faults, some more and some less"⁴².

Both Guicciardini and Machiavelli base their political philosophy on a realistic conception of man's inner conflict. In Machiavelli's comedies, Fleisher comments, "incapable of permanent satisfaction, men always grow weary with their fortune"⁴³. For man, "there may be happiness but it is not permanent" because "there is no final end, peace or harmony"⁴⁴. One reason for this, as Machiavelli points out in The Discourses, is that "in all human affairs one notices, if one examines them closely . . . it is impossible to remove one inconvenience without another emerging"⁴⁵. The achievement of a degree of permanence arises from man's ability to adapt to circumstances. Thus, "the reason men are sometimes unfortunate, sometimes fortunate, depends upon whether their behaviour is in conformity with the times"⁴⁶. But, this would "require one and the same person to perform such psychological gymnastics as to be, in quick and arbitrary succession, cruel and merciful, pious and impious"⁴⁷. No man can be successful in this ad infinitum. The presentation of the "dual perspective" in politics is an eternal truth and an awareness of this fact informs Machiavelli's teachings.

According to Giuseppe Prezzolini, "Machiavelli more than any other political writer believes that there can be no government without might"⁴⁸. In Machiavelli's view, the Prince need only "pretend to possess all those

⁴² Ibid., p. 54.

⁴³ Fleisher, op. cit., p. 366.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 379.

⁴⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, The Discourses, Harmondsworth, 1970, p. 121.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 430.

⁴⁷ Fleisher, op. cit., p. 365.

⁴⁸ Giuseppe Prezzolini, Machiavelli, London, 1968, p. 27.

qualities which men call virtue, without having them"⁴⁹. Prezzolini admits, however, that for Machiavelli "politics is both law and force and the art of politics consists in combining law with force"⁵⁰. This is the political wisdom of the "dual perspective".

A problem arises when Machiavelli sub-divides the coercive or beastlike element of political power. The Prince, he suggests, "must be a fox in order to recognise traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves"⁵¹. The distinction is made between the use of fraud and of outright force. Given Machiavelli's emphasis on the importance of illusion in successful political rule⁵², it might be suggested cynically that he may be inclined to equate the use of laws with the use of fraud. The latter would then coincide with acting like men as well as with acting like foxes. Ambivalence of this sort makes Machiavelli's reputation the more easy to understand. The fact remains, however, that on the basis of his observation of human nature, Machiavelli argues that if political stability is to be secured for any length of time it must rest upon the balanced use of force and persuasion, whether through good legislation or deception. How the good ruler acts will depend on circumstances. But he cannot hope to succeed by discarding one or other element. To act only as a beast is to incur the wrath of one's subjects. To act only as a man is to incur their contempt.

Guicciardini agrees that absolute political precepts cannot be set down to meet all contingencies at all times. It has been suggested that "it is the knowledge, acute in him as in Machiavelli, that virtue is not

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵¹ Machiavelli, The Prince, p. 99.

⁵² See Germino, op. cit., p. 77.

necessarily enough, that vice or ignorance often succeed, that fortune wrecks even the most just of enterprises, that makes Guicciardini focus his attention often on what is expedient or on the compromise needed for survival and success"⁵³. The more "idealistic" Machiavelli would have tended to deny ignorance a potential for success. He would not have disagreed, however, with Guicciardini's contention that, in the sphere of human relations, there is a need for both reward inducement and the threat of punishment.⁵⁴ Here is an example of the subdivision of the bestial element of political power and Guicciardini is eager to propose a balance between force and those principles like cunning, which offer a leader prestige and respect. Yet, he does not ignore the role of legality and writes that "security devoid of all humanity or, let us say kindness, is useless in those who rule others, and humanity or kindness not accompanied by some severity is just as bad"⁵⁵. In equal combination, however, these are effective and admirable. Guicciardini sought this middle ground because "the farther you move away from the mean to avoid one of the extremes, the more you will fall either into the extreme you fear, or into another equally harmful"⁵⁶. Perhaps Guicciardini is even more of a pessimist than Machiavelli. Arguably, the admiration of fraud in the work of each thinker indicates pessimism rather than simply realism. Overall though it is easy to apply to Guicciardini the assessment of his more famous contemporary offered by Dante Germino who writes that "if we must divide political thinkers into pessimists and optimists, Machiavelli could be ranked with either group"⁵⁷. The "dual perspective" which they

⁵³ Grayson in Guicciardini, op. cit., p. xv.

⁵⁴ Guicciardini, op. cit., p. 67.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 121.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

⁵⁷ Germino, op. cit., p. 65.

have on the question of how best to govern originates in their realistic acceptance of the permanence of basic contradictions in man and society and in their limited optimism that political stability can be lengthened in duration if the ruler adopts appropriate measures based ultimately on the fusion of force and consent. In arguing thus, Machiavelli and Guicciardini played a pioneering role in the development of the Italian tradition of political debate.

(ii) Croce and Gentile

It is argued frequently that Gramsci's political thought was heavily influenced by the ideas of Benedetto Croce. This cannot be denied. What should be stressed, however, is that Croce, like Gramsci himself, was heir to an Italian tradition of political thought. Croce's was not the only Italian influence on Gramsci's thinking nor was Croce's own political philosophy unaffected by writers such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini. The political writings of Croce and of Giovanni Gentile too include aspects which are not found in the work of their predecessors but common to each of their political philosophies is an acceptance of the presentation of the "dual perspective" in political life.

It is argued that Croce, like Gramsci, believed that modern philosophy "had begun with Machiavelli and Vico whose respective assaults on abstract Christian and Cartesian theories envisioned concrete man grounded in historical reality, a worldly humanism opposed to 'theologizing philosophy' (filosofia teologizzante) whether that philosophy was religious or secular, whether it worshipped God or Nature"⁵⁸. The essence of modern philosophy is realism. The philosopher is not concerned with the construction of utopias. Not surprisingly, therefore, Croce and

⁵⁸ Edmund E. Jacobitti, "Hegemony before Gramsci: the case of Benedetto Croce", Journal of Modern History, 52 (1), March, 1980, p. 70n.

and Gramsci shared an interest in Machiavelli's writings, particularly the centaur analogy. Considering the question of whether politics is diabolical or divine, Croce describes approvingly how "Machiavelli imagines it in the guise of the centaur (described by poets as a very beautiful creature) part man, part beast and . . . describes his prince as half man and half beast"⁵⁹. Croce is justified in his claim that brutality and treachery had become accepted ingredients of normal political activity but he agrees that these elements of political power are indispensable for the foreseeable future. Croce concurs with the implication of Vico's thought that they must be regarded "as part of the drama of humanity, which is in a perpetual state of creation and recreation"⁶⁰.

As with Machiavelli and Guicciardini, Croce's view of politics is based upon moral philosophy and a conception of human nature. He believed that contradictions are so fundamental to human society that life can be equated with the combination of good and evil, insofar as they are always present in life. ". . . the struggle between them, the triumph of good and the ensuing recovery of the antagonist ready to threaten new danger . . . are not the effects of the irruption of some forces extraneous to life, as portrayed in the mythological representations of a tempting and seducing demon"⁶¹. Just as Mr Hyde cannot be seen as an external agent acting upon Dr Jekyll, so the conflicting humours inherent in all men must never be conceived of as external forces. They should not even be regarded as hindrances to human development for they are, in fact, the essence of the latter. ". . . the Saint", Croce writes, "may not move in a sphere removed from the cares of the world, otherwise

⁵⁹ Benedetto Croce, Politics and Morals, London, 1946, p. 47.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

⁶¹ Benedetto Croce, Philosophy - Poetry - History, London, 1966, p. 582.

his sanctity will become a luxury and will reveal the lineaments of egotism"⁶².

For Croce, man is a combination of good and evil and this necessitates a realistic view of history and of politics. As Cecil Sprigge submits, "the Crocean philosophy renounces in its theoretical vision, as in its ethics, the image of a resting place to be won by perfect acceptance of truths and codes. Such a resting place would be the suicide of history, of wide-awake life. A tranquillity or serenity is indeed immanent in history as the holding of energies in reserve when the struggle calls for other energies"⁶³. The vision of man as an "eternal wanderer"⁶⁴ is as evident in Croce's thought as in that of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Man's history is the product of the fact that "mankind is inexhaustible, and has always a task in front of it, and every accomplishment is followed by doubt and dissatisfaction and the call for a new accomplishment" even if there are fleeting moments, temporary resting places, which pause for the delight of the contemplator.⁶⁵ The imperfection of man's works provides history with its motor force. Perfection is unattainable but the dream of perfection is a prerequisite for human progress. Croce's realistic philosophy of history, thus, contains an awareness of the soteriological basis of human action. But he himself refuses to contemplate ultimate salvation.

The formation of the journal, La Critica, in 1902, marked the beginning of Croce's association with Giovanni Gentile who was later to turn against his mentor's liberalism and become a leading Fascist

⁶² Ibid., p. 584.

⁶³ Cecil Sprigge, Benedetto Croce - man and thinker, Cambridge, 1952, p. 43.

⁶⁴ The phrase is taken from the writings of Erich Fromm. See in particular The Heart of Man, London, 1965.

⁶⁵ Croce, Philosophy - Poetry - History, p. 581.

theoretician. On the subject of human nature, Gentile found much in Croce's thought with which to agree, thereby maintaining the "dual perspective" of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. According to H.S. Harris, "reality in its moral aspect" was, for Gentile, "a dialectical unity of good and evil. The human good is a process: it is the gradual realization of the good will which occurs in the conquest of evil. Hence it can never exist in a state of final perfection, for its perfection would imply its annihilation - if the process were completed there would be an end to all value"⁶⁶. Without evil there can be no definition of what is good. Morality is without meaning. "There is no perfect way of life; the moral man is never without a sense of sin"⁶⁷. It can be shown that Gentile carries these ideas over into his theory of history in which war and peace are complementary. ". . . war, as the process of mediation, is the establishment of peace; and since mediation is always necessary, 'war' and 'peace' in this speculative sense are not empirical states but dialectical moments that are eternally necessary to each other."⁶⁸

According to Gentile, it is the human condition which determines "the instability of every political structure, the inevitability of change"⁶⁹, whereas, in Croce's view, the contradictions in human society had a more abstract source in the historical process itself rather than in the activity of mankind. Wherever its origin, however, this instability necessitated a certain style of politics.

Croce links the notion of authority with the concept of force and that of liberty with the elements of spontaneity and agreement. Politics,

⁶⁶ H.S. Harris, The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile, Urbana, 1960, p. 90.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶⁹ Giovanni Gentile, Genesis and Structure of Society, Urbana, 1960, p. 167.

he argues, must take each of these aspects into account for he believes that "in the field of politics, force and consent are correlative terms, and one does not exist without the other"⁷⁰. Like Machiavelli, he recognises the importance of illusion to successful political rule. Overtly coercive governments are doomed to failure because of their inability to offer their subjects real peace and because, if the loyalty of subjects is to be secured, governments must have more at their disposal than naked coercion. He observes that "even the absolute governments which we have come to recognise in history relied on some moral prestige - such as the sacred or priestly character of a king, the cult of the divine emperor, reverence for ancient custom, or worship of a man of genius - rather than on sheer force of arms, and only so could win consent"⁷¹. The point was to be taken up by Gramsci in his concept of hegemony which is fundamental to his political philosophy and which explains the consensual dimension of political power.⁷² Croce's argument, however, also echoes Machiavelli as he proceeds to comment that, because there is more to effective political rule than a sudden seizure of power, on account of the importance of laws and customs, "governments not founded on any right, but arbitrarily created do not grow any roots, or if they do, grow them slowly and with difficulty"⁷³. Effective government represents the manifestation of the "dual perspective".

⁷⁰ Croce, Politics and Morals, p. 15.

⁷¹ Benedetto Croce, My Philosophy, London, 1949, p. 118.

⁷² Gramsci's concept of hegemony will be discussed in full in Chapter Three. Suffice to say at present that he employs it to explain the fact that the bourgeoisie in advanced societies secure moral leadership over society and maintain political stability even during certain periods of crisis without recourse to the use of coercion. The resemblance to the Crocean formulation is immediately obvious but Gramsci's theory also echoes elements in Machiavelli's teaching.

⁷³ Croce, Politics and Morals, p. 12.

This is misunderstood at times by Gentile who regards highly Machiavelli's insights into "the role of force and deceit in politics"⁷⁴. He forgets that force and deceit have the same root in Machiavelli's doctrine, the bestial aspect of political power. Yet, Machiavelli does facilitate misinterpretation of his comments on the fox and the lion whereas Gramsci was to be quite explicit that "between consent and force stands corruption/fraud (which is characteristic of certain situations when it is hard to exercise the hegemonic function, and when the use of force is too risky)"⁷⁵. Gentile's misunderstanding of this point allows him to embrace the politics of Fascism and even to suggest that "consent may be spontaneous or it may be procured by coercion"⁷⁶. Elsewhere, however, his approach to the subject of political power is consistent with arguments put forward by other theorists in the Italian tradition.

The combination of force and consent remains the key to effective leadership. For example, Gentile comments on the confrontation between the naturalism of Spinoza who sees force as the means to the establishment of moral right and the moralism of Rousseau who opposed brute force against which he set the ideal character of law. According to Gentile, this controversy cannot be resolved because Spinoza is looking at force from within, that is from the standpoint of the agent, while Rousseau is regarding it from the position of the recipient.⁷⁷ He contends that "what is needed is a synthesis that takes account of the elements of truth contained in both views"⁷⁸. It is impossible that either consent

⁷⁴ See Harris, op. cit., p. 230.

⁷⁵ Gramsci, PN, p. 80n.

⁷⁶ Gentile, op. cit., p. 123.

⁷⁷ Harris, op. cit., p. 112.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 113.

or coercion should ever stand alone, unaccompanied by its opposite.⁷⁹

In some instances, one or other extreme may be emphasised but the balance between the two is the vital factor. It is true that ultimately Gentile's ideas prompted him to join in a movement which became largely dependent on extreme force. In major respects, his political philosophy differed from that of Croce. From Machiavelli and Guicciardini he was separated by time as well as by political attitudes. Nevertheless, he shared with each of these an awareness of the "dual perspective" which highlights the persistence of contradictions in human society and a political realism which is both the natural result of this awareness and the essential ingredient of the Italian tradition of political thought. The latter is characterised by an acceptance of the dual nature of man, a belief that this is a permanent condition so that a perfect society free from contradictions is unattainable and a suggestion that, as a result, successful political practice which secures stability for as long as possible requires a subtle balance of force and consent which takes into account the dualism of mankind. It was to this non-teleological tradition in political thought that Gramsci fell heir during his student years in Turin. It is ironic, therefore, that he also acquired knowledge of the more teleological doctrines of Hegelianism and Marxism which were to provide the other foundations upon which his own political philosophy was to be constructed.

Following Rousseau and Kant, Hegel and Marx expounded philosophies in which the dissolution of contradiction in human society is an essential postulate and, like Rousseau, they were concerned, in particular, with the abolition of the dualism between political and economic man, man as citizen and as bourgeois. In addition, Marx sought the abolition of the dualism within man expressed as alienation. In institutional terms,

⁷⁹ Gentile, op. cit., p. 124.

the contradiction which both Hegel and Marx perceived is represented by the distinction between political and civil society. Since this distinction is also the essential ingredient of Gramsci's theory of the State, the main concern of this thesis, it is important to know how it was conceived of by Hegel and Marx before one proceeds to examine the general character of Marx's political thought and the Marxist orthodoxy which grew from it which constitute the more important German dimension of the foundations of Gramsci's thought.

The German Foundations

(i) Hegel's idea of State and civil society

The concept of civil society has a long history but for much of the time it was used as a synonym for civilised society. Adam Ferguson, the eighteenth-century pioneer in the field of sociology, employed the term to represent "civilization"⁸⁰. His preference for "civil society" may have been the result of his desire to find a neutral concept which did not imply the equation of human progress and technical innovation for he argued that "civilization" had been a feature of nations which had made little progress in commerce or technology. As Duncan Forbes comments, "to have called it a history of 'civilization' would have begged some of the most important questions that Ferguson was anxious to raise" for "a true criterion of civilization is what he is looking for" and "'civil society' had the political as well as the wider connotation, which 'civilization' and 'society' had not"⁸¹.

For his definition of the term, civil society, Hegel turned not to

⁸⁰ See Adam Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society, Edinburgh, 1966. (First published in 1767.)

⁸¹ Ibid., editor's introduction, p. xx.

Ferguson but to the political economists⁸², regarding it as "an association of members as self-subsistent individuals in a universality which, because of their self-subsistence, is only abstract. Their association is brought about by their needs, by the legal system - the means to security of person and property - and by an external organization for attaining their particular and common interests."⁸³ Thus, according to Shlomo Avineri, civil society is regarded as "the clash of social forces"⁸⁴. It was this economic dimension of Hegelian civil society that Marx adopted in his political thought but it must be noted that Hegel's conception was wider than that of Marx in one important respect.⁸⁵ Hegel includes in civil society not only the sphere of economic relations and the formation of social classes but also the administration of justice, the organisation of the police force and of corporations. As Norberto Bobbio remarks, "civil society in Hegel is the sphere of economic relations together with their external regulations according to the principles of the liberal state, and it is at the same time bourgeois society and bourgeois state"⁸⁶.

⁸² According to Shlomo Avineri, "Hegel's definition of civil society follows the classical economists' model of the free market, and Hegel's early acquaintance with Steuart and Smith is evident". (Hegel's Theory of the Modern State, London, 1974, p. 142.)

⁸³ G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, London, 1967, p. 110. For the full outline of Hegel's conception of civil society, see pp. 122-55.

⁸⁴ Shlomo Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, Cambridge, 1969, p. 17.

⁸⁵ Although according to David McLellan "the concept of 'civil society' is one that Marx takes over from Hegel and uses constantly during 1843" (Marx before Marxism, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 152), it is vital for an understanding of how Gramsci understood the distinction between political and civil society to realise the difference between the Hegelian and Marxian uses of the conception of civil society. For an interesting analysis, relevant to the central concerns of this thesis, see Norberto Bobbio, "Gramsci and the conception of civil society", in Chantal Mouffe (ed.), Gramsci and Marxist Theory, London, 1979, pp. 21-47.

⁸⁶ Bobbio, ibid., p. 28-9.

For Hegel, civil society is the second element in a triad which constitutes Ethical Life. The first element is the family which initially inspires feelings of unity but which is affected eventually by forces of development so that it is either ethically or naturally dissolved, leaving the way open for the transition from family life to life in civil society. Hegel writes that "the family disintegrates (both essentially, through the working of the principle of personality, and also in the course of nature) into plurality of families, each of which conducts itself as in principle a self-subsistent concrete person and therefore as externally related to its neighbours"⁸⁷. This concrete person, whose goal is the actual attainment of selfish ends, becomes the key figure in civil society⁸⁸, though paradoxically Hegel sees the latter as a system of complete interdependence insofar as the attainment of selfish ends is increasingly the responsibility of others, especially once the division of labour has been established.

Three classes operate in Hegel's civil society. First, there is the substantial, immediate or agricultural class which is founded upon the family relationship and upon trust and which is active in providing for the future as well as for its own subsistence. Secondly, Hegel observes a reflecting, formal or business class which is the "true" class of civil society and is engaged in craftsmanship, manufacturing and trade. Much of the activity of certain elements of civil society (the administration of justice, the police and the corporations) is directed at ensuring the unimpeded progress of the business class so that "when civil society is in a state of unimpeded activity, it is engaged in expanding internally in population and industry"⁸⁹. In this form, however, civil society is

⁸⁷ Hegel, op. cit., p. 122.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

no more than a world of ethical appearance whereas the family had signified an ethical way of life. The problem, as seen by Hegel, was to mediate between the universality of the family and the particularism of civil society. The answer to the problem of dualism which had emerged in modern society would be provided by the State, "the actuality of the ethical Idea", which contains civil society but also surpasses it.⁹⁰ Hegel warns that "if the state is confused with civil society and if its specific end is laid down as the security and protection of property and personal freedom, then the interest of individuals as such becomes the ultimate end of their association, and it follows that membership of the state is something optional"⁹¹. This he cannot accept. The State, which constitutes the final working-out of the Abstract Idea, must come to be recognised as universal and representative of all. The process by which this comes about is facilitated by the presence of a third class in civil society.

According to Hegel, this third class corresponds to the State. It is the universal class, the class of civil servants, which has as its concern "the universal interests of all the community"⁹². Relieved of the necessity to labour directly for the satisfaction of its wants, this class participates in the executive sphere of the State and finds fulfilment in work carried out for the good of all. The State is the actuality of the ethical Idea, the highest level in human association and the embodiment of the moral essence of human nature. It does not destroy civil society in order to combat modern man's duality. It contains civil society but stands above the ordinary life of civil society like a

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 155.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 156.

⁹² Ibid., p. 132.

secular deity.⁹³ The concrete manifestation in history of this Hegelian State is constitutional monarchy. Hegel's political thought is, therefore, idealist in both senses of the word. He believes that mankind's development is guided by an abstract force and he claims that this force can ensure that the contradictions in human society can be overcome. Though Marx disagreed totally with Hegel's idealism, in the philosophical sense, it is less certain that he contested the view that the human condition carries within it the solution to all its problems. Before examining Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophical idealism, let us consider how he perceived the distinction between State and civil society and how he believed the dualism between political and economic man could be remedied.

(ii) Marx on State and civil society

There can be no doubt that Gramsci's distinction between political and civil society owes something to Hegel's political philosophy. Bobbio remarks that "Gramsci is the first Marxist writer who uses the concept of civil society for his analysis of society with a textual reference . . . to Hegel as well"⁹⁴. This thesis, however, is concerned with what Gramsci's use of the political society - civil society distinction tells us about his Marxism and it is important that the place of this distinction in Marx's thought be examined.

To some extent, it is only an aspect of Marx's more general critique of Hegelian philosophy which remains to be discussed. In addition, however, it reflects Marx's interest in the problem of duality in modern human society raised by Rousseau. He believed that the

⁹³ See R.N. Berki, The History of Political Thought. A Short Introduction, London, 1977, pp. 177-8.

⁹⁴ Bobbio, op. cit., p. 26.

phenomenon of the detachment of State from society (of politics from economics, of "public" from "private") is modern. In ancient times, the res publica was the real private concern of the citizens. There was a substantive unity between people and State.⁹⁵ The common interest coincided with the private interests of the citizens who participated directly in public decision-making through direct democracy.⁹⁶ In the Middle Ages, "property, trade, society and man were political; the material content of the state was defined by its form; every sphere of private activity had a political character, or was a political sphere, in other words politics was characteristic of the different spheres of private life"⁹⁷. Politics adhered so closely to the economic structure that socio-economic distinctions (serf and lord) were also political distinctions (subject and sovereign).⁹⁸ Thus, it was only in the modern epoch that the abstraction of the political State was born.⁹⁹

Like Hegel, Marx sought an end to the separation of political society from civil society. The latter he defined more simply than Hegel as the sphere of economic activity alone and the nature of its relationship with the State was also perceived differently by Marx. The political State cannot transcend civil society and so end modern man's dualism because it is dominated by civil society. According to Marx, "the relationship of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relationship of heaven to earth. The state stands in the same opposition to civil society and overcomes it in the same way as religion overcomes the restrictions of the profane world, i.e. it has to

⁹⁵ See Karl Marx, Early Writings, Harmondsworth, 1975, p. 91.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 33. Editor's introduction by Lucio Colletti.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 34. Editor's introduction.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

acknowledge it again, reinstate it and allow itself to be dominated by it."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the State is a reflection of civil society. When it incorporates the latter it does not surpass it but instead ensures that civil society will remain unhindered. Modern dualism cannot be healed by Hegel's prescription, for the situation which he describes accurately enough testifies to the secondary role of the State with regard to civil society. The two spheres are reconciled only in a relationship in which the one, the State, becomes a coercive instrument for the perpetuation of class relations in the other. How can the modern State be expected to abolish those contradictions upon which it is based? It can but pretend to represent the general interest because to really act in this manner would require the absorption of civil society in relation to which it is a subordinate moment with no independent existence. Thus, it is argued that Marx "demolishes through criticism the institutional structures which Hegel presents as the answer to Rousseau's question, and takes the first steps toward the formation of his own alternate answer - his own vision of a society adequate to man's social nature, and a programme for its achievement"¹⁰¹.

Marx contends that what alone can make the modern State truly representative of its citizens is "a total 'human emancipation'" which would destroy "the basis of the political state established on a merely partial liberation"¹⁰². Political emancipation is an illusion if unsupported by social emancipation for it is the latter which alters conditions in civil society and, thus, according to Marx's understanding of history,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁰¹ Karl Marx, Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right", Joseph O'Malley (ed.), Cambridge, 1977, p. xl. Editor's introduction.

¹⁰² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, C.J. Arthur (ed.), London, 1974, p. 12. Editor's introduction.

the circumstances in which men shape events.¹⁰³ Out of his critique of Hegel's claims for the State as the agency through which dualism can be transcended emerges Marx's own early political message.

It has been recognised that "Marx took seriously Hegel's notion of a universal class, that is a class within society whose interests are identical with the interests of society as a whole, and therefore of man himself as a naturally social, species-being"¹⁰⁴. For Marx, however, it was not the bureaucracy that exhibited this quality. As Avineri says, "tension between particularism and universality - between a class's appearance as a protagonist of the general will and its search for its own interests - comes to a head, according to Marx, with the emergence of the modern proletariat"¹⁰⁵. Marx argues that the possibility of total human emancipation exists "in the formation of a class with radical claims, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, a class (Stand) which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere which has a universal character because of its universal suffering and which lays claim to no particular right because the wrong it suffers is not a particular wrong but wrong in general"¹⁰⁶. The misery of the proletariat is the misery of mankind. The emancipation of the proletariat, which is the realization of universality, must be predicated, therefore, upon the emancipation of humanity. The latter is unattainable through the channels suggested by Hegel. Human emancipation can be achieved only as the result of the concrete activity of this universal class, the proletariat, which will culminate in a new type of society, a communistic one, in which the

¹⁰³ This point shall be clarified in the section dealing with Marx's historical materialism, the general framework from which his followers were obliged to extract a specific political message.

¹⁰⁴ Marx, Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right", p. lii. Editor's introduction.

¹⁰⁵ Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ Marx, Early Writings, p. 256.

dualism between political man and economic man will end with the withering away of the State.

Shared by Hegel and Marx apparently is the expectation that contradiction in human society can be overcome. In this, they differ radically from the Italian political thinkers discussed earlier. Common to the Italian tradition is the belief that contradiction is essential to human existence and cannot be surpassed once-and-for-all. Hegel, on the other hand, claims that the crucial contradiction resulting from the divorce of political society from civil society can be overcome by the rational, modern State whilst Marx, believing that social conflict causes all other important contradictions in human society, argues that the defeat of capitalism will usher in a society in which there will be no more social conflict and, hence, no contradictions of any kind.¹⁰⁷

There must be some qualification, however, of the notion that both Hegel and Marx were political idealists. It has been argued that Hegel's system retains the tension of conflict at the very core of the mediation between the State and civil society. There cannot be an end to "the drama of the human situation". Indeed, the idea which directs future developments is located in an existential drama of history.¹⁰⁸

Taking economic conflict as basic to all other human contradiction, Marx was in a better position than Hegel to foresee the suppression of the tension or conflict in human society. Yet, it has been observed that together with his political idealism there is an element of realism in Marx's writings. On occasions, it appears that he did not envisage the complete unity of the individual and the species even in the state of

¹⁰⁷ See Berki, "The Retreat from Idealism", op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ See Jean Hyppolite, Studies on Marx and Hegel, John O'Neill (ed.), London, 1969, pp. 113ff.

fully matured communism.¹⁰⁹ As R.N. Berki observes, there is Marxist idealism, "the belief that capitalism is the last form of antagonistic society and that communism will solve all existential problems", and there is Marxist realism, "the belief that post-capitalist society will also be antagonistic and that existential problems will be present in communism"¹¹⁰. The former, however, is more clearly expressed. There is, in his early writings, a vision of man returning to perfect unity and, as Leszek Kolakowski suggests, "in all later writings which were to define his position in contrast to liberal, anarchist and communist totalitarian doctrines, the same eschatological concept of the unified man remains"¹¹¹. In addition, he had indicated, in general terms, how this might come about. The problem for his followers was to extract from Marx's political philosophy precise instructions as to the way forward. For this reason, his overall conception of history, as opposed to his actual deliberations on politics, is central to an understanding of subsequent Marxist political theories including that of Gramsci.

(iii) Marx's materialist conception of history

(a) the critique of idealism

One of the main difficulties in assessing Marxist political philosophy is the result of the ambiguous nature of the general framework within which it is set, i.e. the materialist conception of history. Though the latter must be considered first and foremost as a critique of

¹⁰⁹ See Berki, "The Retreat from Idealism", op. cit., p. 4. In support of this argument, Berki quotes from The German Ideology and from what he describes as "the otherwise highly idealistic" Paris Manuscripts.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹¹ Leszek Kolakowski, "The Myth of Human Self-identity. Unity of Civil and Political Society in Socialist Thought", in Leszek Kolakowski and Stuart Hampshire (eds.), The Socialist Idea. A Reappraisal, London, 1974, p. 21.

idealism, especially that of Hegel, it is also based on a critique of certain forms of materialism, the tendency generally thought to be diametrically opposed to idealism. In Marx's writings, at least, historical materialism remains a complex idea creating problems for those who attempt to derive a guide to political strategy from his general principles and for those interested in assessing a particular Marxist's orthodoxy. It is essential, nonetheless, to outline the main themes in Marx's conception of history.

This conception originates in his critique of Hegel's theory of the State. Indeed, it has been argued that the course of Marx's later researches was directed by the conclusions of that critique for he "turned to economic and historical studies only after his exegesis of Hegel had proved to him that the economic sphere ultimately determines politics and makes the Hegelian postulate of the universality of political life into a mere dream"¹¹². Like Croce, Hegel had taken the idealist standpoint that, ultimately, activities such as politics are the manifestation of the workings of an abstract idea. Marx's critique of this view is informed by the belief that all such (superstructural) activities are determined, in the last resort, by the economic or productive sphere (the base or substructure). It is no surprise, then, that Marx devoted the greater part of his life's work to an analysis of that determinant realm. That he turned away from the direct study of politics in his later writings does not indicate, however, a total break with his earlier concerns and, as David McLellan observes, "it should be remembered that 'Capital' is only an unfinished fragment of the task that Marx set himself" and that "he complained frequently to Engels of the time he was forced to spend studying economics"¹¹³. It may be that Marx

¹¹² Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, p. 38-9.

¹¹³ Karl Marx, Early Texts, David McLellan (ed.), Oxford, 1971, p. xxxvii. Editor's introduction.

would have returned to the subject of politics had time allowed. What should be stressed is that Gramsci was familiar with Marxian texts of both the early and the later period. His own interest in politics does not reflect an awareness of Marx's early writings to the exclusion of the works on economics.¹¹⁴ What made his task and that of other later Marxists who attempted to construct a theory of politics doubly difficult was that Marx's ideas had been subjected already to a number of revisions and reinterpretations permitted by the ambiguity of Marx's theoretical legacy.

In The German Ideology, there is a clear expression of historical materialism as an attack on idealism. It is claimed that "men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be" and, hence, men, the creators, "have bowed down before their own creations"¹¹⁵. Aimed at the idealism of German philosophy, this claim explains the intention of Marx and Engels to develop a view of the world which will liberate men "from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away"¹¹⁶. "In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth", they write, "here we ascend from earth to heaven"¹¹⁷. Their aim is "to set out from real-active men, and on the basis of their real-life process, which is empirical, verifiable and bound to material premises"¹¹⁸. These men "begin to distinguish

¹¹⁴ With him in prison Gramsci had most of Marx's early writings with the exception of The German Ideology and the Paris Manuscripts. In addition, he had the 1859 Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, a substantial part of Capital, Hegel's Philosophy of Right and Engels's Anti-Dühring.

¹¹⁵ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 37.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence" and the manner in which they do this is determined by the actual means at their disposal so that it can be seen that "the nature of individuals . . . depends on the material conditions determining their production"¹¹⁹.

This is the basis of the materialist conception of history and it is easy to see how this conception provided the general framework for Marx's critique of Hegelian political thought. In that idealist system, according to Marx, "the so-called 'actual Idea' (mind as infinite and actual) is described as though it acted according to a determined principle and toward a determined end"¹²⁰. Thus, "the Idea is given the status of a subject, and the actual relationship of family and civil society to the state is conceived to be its inner imaginary activity"¹²¹. Hegel fails to see that civil society, the economic sphere, is the active element which dominates the State. Therefore, it can be argued that, for Marx, "Hegel inverts the true subject into the predicate and the true predicate into the subject, such that the conditions are established as the conditioned, the determining as the determined, the producing as the product of its producer"¹²². This explains the inadequacy of Hegel's proposed solution to modern society's contradictions.

What Hegel fails to realise is that "men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc - real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

¹²⁰ Marx, Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right", p. 7.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹²² See ibid., p. xxxii-xxxiii. Editor's introduction.

can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process"¹²³. The ethereal guiding forces of history so beloved by the idealists are but the imaginings of man, responses conditioned by the world of production since "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life"¹²⁴ and "consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all"¹²⁵. Thus, a materialist conception of history depends on an ability "to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production . . . , as the basis of all history; and to show it in all its action as State, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. etc., by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality"¹²⁶. To understand historical development necessitated empirical investigation of social reality; hence, Marx's subsequent concentration on economics. It was this investigation which sustained Marx in the belief that the soteriological element in his political philosophy was more adequate than the one contained in Hegel's Philosophy of Right.

A full explanation of this, related to the critique of Hegelian idealism, is provided by Marx in the 1859 Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. His early inquiry had led him to the conclusion that "neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in

¹²³ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 47.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term 'civil society'"¹²⁷. The general conclusion which became the guiding principle of Marx's studies was that "in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life."¹²⁸ There has emerged under capitalism a conflict between the material productive forces of society and the existing relations of production and this conflict creates the contradictions which exist in modern society. The way is cleared for a social revolution for, according to Marx, "the changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure"¹²⁹. The social revolution led by the universal proletarian class results in the return of man to himself and, thus, the dissolution of all contradictions in human society. What is unclear in Marx's formula, as the product of a critique of idealism, is the degree of independent action allowed to the proletariat in bringing about man's salvation. This fundamental problem in Marx's thought can be resolved only if one considers historical materialism as an attack on pre-Marxian materialist philosophy as well as on idealism.

¹²⁷ Marx, Early Writings, p. 425.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 426.

(b) the critique of materialism

Materialists before Marx had argued simply that matter is the determinant of the mental or spiritual sphere. It has been suggested that according to Marx's historical materialism too "everything that exists can be reduced to matter; all events can be reduced to material processes" and "if there is mind or spirit, if there are traditions and beliefs and psychological processes, these are either products, or derivatives, of matter, or else they are themselves considered to be a part of matter"¹³⁰. Numerous similar attempts have been made to attribute to Marx's conception of history a rigid, mechanical quality reflecting the determination of the superstructure by the base in a cause-and-effect relationship. The success of these attempts owes much to the revision of Marx's conception by his immediate followers, including Engels. It was the latter who devised the phrase, "the materialist conception of history", and thus, it has been claimed, "brought Marxism into existence"¹³¹. According to Shlomo Avineri, "much of what is known as 'Marxist materialism' was written not by Marx but by Engels, in most cases after Marx's own death"¹³². Faced with the concrete requirements of political strategy, Engels stressed one aspect of Marx's original conception, thus ignoring the key role of the critique of materialism in the development of Marx's thought.¹³³

¹³⁰ Alfred G. Meyer, Marxism. The Unity of Theory and Practice, Cambridge, Mass., 1970, p. 6.

¹³¹ Terrell Carver, Engels, Oxford, 1981, p. 38. More will be said about Engels's contribution to Marxist political philosophy in the final part of this chapter. At present, I am concerned with indicating what I take to be the major themes in Marx's own conception of history before going on to consider the changes which it underwent in the course of becoming Marxist orthodoxy.

¹³² Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, p. 65.

¹³³ See Z.A. Jordan, The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism, London.

The immediate object of Marx's scorn was the materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach. Though Marx praised the latter's reversal of Hegel's subject-object relationship, he himself rejected that Hegelian system which Feuerbach had merely reversed. Had he not done so, he would have formulated only what is described by Roger Garaudy as "a naturalized Hegelianism" in which the word "matter" would replace Hegel's "spirit"¹³⁴. If Marx's conception had remained at that level, it would have represented no advance on older forms of materialism. But, in his Theses on Feuerbach, Marx writes that "the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism - that of Feuerbach included - is that the thing (Gegenstand), reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object (Objekt) or of contemplation (Anschauung), but not as human, sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively".¹³⁵ Feuerbach's reversal of Hegel's subject and predicate amounted to no more than a change of function in a causal relationship which fails to describe how the effect actually comes about.

Despite his opposition to idealist philosophy, therefore, Marx gives qualified approval to its tendency to emphasise the active rather than the passive, an emphasis which is absent from pre-Marxian materialism. According to Garaudy, "one of the major merits of Marxist materialism is that it does not treat materialism as if Kant, Fichte and Hegel had never existed"¹³⁶. Evidence of this can be seen in Marx's contention that whilst Feuerbach differentiates between sensuous objects and thought objects, he fails to conceive of human activity itself as objective, and to "grasp the significance of 'revolutionary', of 'practical-critical'

¹³⁴ Roger Garaudy, Karl Marx. The Evolution of his Thought, London, 1967, p. 78.

¹³⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Selected Works, London, 1968, p. 28.

¹³⁶ Garaudy, op. cit., p. 80.

activity"¹³⁷. Marx admits that "Feuerbach has a great advantage over the 'pure' materialists in that he realises how man too is an 'object of the senses'" but his theory remains sterile for all that.

. . . apart from the fact that he (Feuerbach) only conceives him (man) as an "object of the senses", not as "sensuous activity", because he still remains in the realm of theory and conceives of men not in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them what they are, he never arrives at the really existing active men, but stops at the abstraction "man", and gets no further than recognising "the true, individual corporeal man" emotionally i.e. he knows no other "human relationships" "of man to man" than love and friendship, and even then idealised.¹³⁸

The starting-point of Marx's materialism is, precisely, real and active man. Man is not the passive plaything of inanimate material forces. It is true that "as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being he is a suffering, conditioned and limited being, like animals and plants". But, "as a natural being and as a living natural being he is . . . equipped with natural powers, with vital powers, he is an active natural being; these powers exist in him as dispositions and capacities, as drives"¹³⁹. Accordingly Marx argues that "the materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating"¹⁴⁰. Because the relationship of man to his material condition provoked philosophical imaginings, the hypostatization of which came to represent a fundamental element in the contradiction in modern human society, it is necessary that the educative material circumstances

¹³⁷ Marx and Engels, Selected Works, p. 28.

¹³⁸ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 63-4.

¹³⁹ Marx, Early Writings, p. 389.

¹⁴⁰ Marx and Engels, Selected Works, p. 28.

be altered in order that contradictions may be brought to an end. This transformation required a practical-revolutionary process because "the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice"¹⁴¹. Thus, it is stated that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it"¹⁴². To do this, they must distance themselves from "all materialism that does not start by comprehending this 'active' side . . . and professes to speak of things while making an abstraction of man"¹⁴³. As Garaudy suggests, Marx saw in precritical materialism, just as in idealism, an abstraction which had to be surmounted "not by abandoning materialism, but by integrating into materialism (considered in terms of human practice) all the 'active side' hitherto developed only abstractly by idealism alone"¹⁴⁴.

It is essential to guard against interpreting Marx's historical materialism as economic determinism. As we shall see, some of his followers, including Engels, were to stress those aspects of his conception which tended in this direction with important repercussions for the development of Marxist political strategy, notably that of the German Social Democratic Party. They were able to do so because there is an obvious tension between activism and determinism in Marx's thought. But, economic determinism is a form of "naturalized Hegelianism" to the extent that it excludes human creativity from the determinant realm. Had Marx taken his conception to this conclusion, he would have denied his own critique of Feuerbach and older forms of materialism. Instead, it can be argued that "his distinction between 'material base' and

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 30

¹⁴³ Garaudy, op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

'superstructure' is not a distinction between 'matter' and 'spirit' (as Engels in his later writings would have had it), but between conscious human activity, aimed at the creation and preservation of the conditions of human life, and human consciousness, which furnishes reasons, rationalizations and modes of legitimization and moral justification for the specific forms that activity takes"¹⁴⁵. Man's creative role in the making of history is given a significant place in Marx's conception of history.

Man is no mere puppet in the drama of history whose plot is the work of a god or of immutable material laws. Yet, an overly activistic interpretation of Marx's conception is as erroneous as that which leads to economic determinism for, though man is not a puppet, neither is he an absolutely free actor who himself writes the script of the drama of history. Despite his emphasis on the active human element, Marx remains a materialist so that it can be argued that "any Marxian attempt to resolve the apparent antithesis between mechanical determination and self-conscious activity must include the point that in the first instance material circumstances condition us, however much we revolutionise those conditions later" for "we cannot create our being by some undetermined pure act" and "we have to be produced as living substantial beings before we can begin to act"¹⁴⁶. According to Marx, "men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past"¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁵ Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, p. 76.

¹⁴⁶ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 23. Editor's introduction.

¹⁴⁷ Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Moscow, 1972, p. 10.

The framework of Marx's political theory is constructed on a dual critique which creates a tension between voluntarism and determinism in subsequent Marxist thought. Alongside this are two other major tensions in Marxism. First, there is the relationship between political realism and political idealism. Second, a tension arose from Marx's apparently contradictory thoughts on the role of violence in the struggle which would bring about, according to his more idealistic pronouncements, the end of all contradictions in human society. There is no doubt that Marx remained committed to the idea of revolutionary change and the belief that "the weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons"¹⁴⁸. Yet, in his last speech, made in Holland, he stated, "we do not deny that there exist countries like America, England, and if I knew your institutions better, I would add Holland, where the workers may be able to attain their ends by peaceful means"¹⁴⁹. It is important to note that Marx uses the word "may". Nevertheless, the ambiguity is there. Like the tensions between voluntarism and determinism and realism and idealism, it was to be reflected in the subsequent evolution of Marxist thought. As Marxism became the ideology of a mass political movement, however, it became necessary to attempt to resolve these tensions. The result was the creation of so-called Marxist orthodoxy, the origins of which can be located in the work of Friedrich Engels.

Towards a Marxist Orthodoxy

The incompleteness of Marx's political thought and the ambiguity of the general interpretation of history from which a political message might best be divined caused serious problems for his followers as they endeavoured to provide leadership for the universal, proletarian class

¹⁴⁸ Marx, Early Writings, p. 251.

¹⁴⁹ See Lewis F. Feuer (ed.), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Basic Writings, London, 1969, p. 38.

and to articulate a political theory on its behalf. The nature of Marx's legacy explains the development of rival Marxisms in the years after his death and the complexity of deciding what is orthodox Marxism. Above all, there was the problem of how to steer a course between the Scylla of doctrinaire materialism which invests material existence with a creative power attributed by idealists to ethereal elements and which might deny to Marxists and non-Marxists alike a role in the making of history and the Charybdis of an anthropomorphism in which man as an independent agent replaces both material existence and spiritual forces as the shaper of historical development, apparently unrestricted and even unaffected by the conditions of his own material life. In trying to solve this problem, theoreticians of the workers' movement became entangled in a debate about whether the message of Marx's teaching was determinist or voluntarist. The inclination of Marxist orthodoxy towards the former view was due, in no small measure, to Engels's theoretical contribution.¹⁵⁰

(i) Engels

It is not surprising that Engels, Marx's friend and collaborator over a number of years, came to be regarded as the grand old man of the workers' movement after his comrade's death in 1883. Others turned to him for guidance. He made a substantial contribution to socialism in his own right.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ I do not intend to examine in detail the relationship between Marx and Engels. For interesting discussions of this subject, see Carver, op. cit., pp. 62-78, and David McLellan, Engels, Glasgow, 1977, pp. 65-75. A fuller analysis which observes a gulf between the two thinkers can be found in Norman Levine, The Tragic Deception: Marx contra Engels, Oxford, 1975, whilst John Hoffman, Marxism and the Theory of Praxis, London, 1975, argues that Marx's own thought does not depart significantly from what became known, under Engels's aegis, as Marxist orthodoxy.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Gareth Stedman Jones, "Engels and the Genesis of Marxism", New Left Review, 106, Nov./Dec., 1977, pp. 79-104. According to Stedman Jones, "the importance of Engels's contribution derived less from his moments of theoretical originality than from his ability to transmit elements of thinking and procedure developed within the working class movement itself in a form in which it could become an intrinsic part of the architecture of the new theory", p. 103.

It has been argued that "when we consider his independent theoretical grasp of communism, his independent authorship, his implementation of and supplementation to Marx's thoughts, his major original contributions to political theory, and above all, the mutually beneficial co-operation between Marx and himself, Engels rates a far more distinguished place among the founders of the political theory of socialism than previous literature has accorded him"¹⁵². However, what must alone concern us in this thesis is Engels's construction of a Marxist orthodoxy out of Marx's ambiguous theoretical legacy. It will be argued that this orthodoxy did not retain the essence of Marx's own conception of history.

The latter was transformed by Engels into dialectical or modern materialism which testifies to his personal interests in science and in Darwinian thought and which, to that extent, is not even the result simply of Engels's interpretation of ideas, explicit and implicit, in Marx's theory. Thus, it is argued that "in his last ten years, with Marx's darker and more passionate temperament removed from the scene, Engels developed the 'scientific' and 'inevitalist' side of the schizoid doctrine further in the direction of 'scientific socialism'"¹⁵³. Yet, he recognised the danger of lapsing into economic determinism and wrote, in 1890, that he and Marx were themselves partly to blame "for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principles vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction"¹⁵⁴.

¹⁵² Fritz Nova, Friedrich Engels - his contribution to political theory, London, 1968, p. 96-7.

¹⁵³ Bertram D. Wolfe, Marxism. One hundred years in the life of a doctrine, London, 1967, pp. 161-2.

¹⁵⁴ Marx and Engels, Selected Works, p. 683. Engels expressed this opinion in a letter to Joseph Bloch, 21 September, 1890.

Nevertheless, the drift of Engels's conception of history was towards determinism. To put it another way, by transforming historical materialism into what amounted to a predictive science, Engels emphasised the political idealism of the Marxian canon at the expense of political realism. Thus, he "distorted the character of historical materialism itself and unwittingly transformed it from an open-ended infant science in the course of elaboration into the appearance of a finished system already capable of explaining all events, great and small"¹⁵⁵. The greatest of these was the supersession of human tensions in the future communistic society which now became a historical necessity rather than the historical tendency requiring the active intervention of mankind that it had been in Marx's conception. Thus, the idealism which forms part of the dualism in Marx's thought is transformed into the sole principle of Engels's theory. It can be argued, of course, that Engels's resolution of the dualism in Marxism was based firmly upon Marx's own tentative conception but, as Gramsci was to comment on Marxism's founding fathers, "there is no need to underrate the contribution of the second (Engels) but there is no need either to identify the second with the first (Engels with Marx) nor should one think that everything attributed by (Engels) to (Marx) is absolutely authentic and free from infiltration. The point is that (Engels) is not (Marx), and that if one wants to know (Marx) one must look for him above all in his authentic works, those published under his direct responsibility"¹⁵⁶. The simple fact is that in Marx's writings the dualism between political idealism and realism and between determinism and voluntarism remains whereas for Engels these tensions are resolved in favour of political idealism and determinism.

¹⁵⁵ Gareth Stedman Jones, "Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy", New Left Review, 79, May/June, 1973, p. 28.

¹⁵⁶ Gramsci, PN, p. 385.

Furthermore, though Engels remained a revolutionary, he was able to witness, unlike Marx, the peaceful advances being made towards the reform of society and the optimism which these engendered found theoretical expression in his interpretation of historical materialism. The path was clear for Marxist orthodoxy to become reformist, in spite of Engels, and determinist, because of him. What is more, a new generation of socialist theoreticians were coming to Marxism not through Marx's own writings but by way of Engels's work, particularly his Anti-Dühring.¹⁵⁷ Their orthodoxy would be based upon Engels's Marxism to a greater degree than upon Marx's political philosophy and when Engels died they had to ask themselves "who was authorized now to make changes in a doctrine on which great movements rested, as an edifice rests on its foundations"¹⁵⁸.

(ii) Karl Kautsky and the S.P.D.

In the event, the theory of the most imposing of all the edifices of the late nineteenth-century working-class movement, the German Social Democratic Party (S.P.D.), remained close to Engels's formulations even after his death. It can be argued that political and socio-economic developments made it inevitable that it should do so whilst simultaneously encouraging S.P.D. theory away from the revolutionism which had remained part of Engels's theory. Progress appeared to be being made. Politically, the party was growing in strength and influence. Socio-economically, advances had been made towards the establishment of a more socially just :

¹⁵⁷ It is often argued that Marx approved of and had helped in the writing of Engels's Anti-Dühring. See, for example, Stedman Jones, "Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy", op. cit., p. 36. However, Terrell Carver, "Marx, Engels and Dialectics", Political Studies, XXVIII (3), September, 1980, pp. 353-63, convincingly argues that Marx did not necessarily approve of Anti-Dühring nor agree in principle with other works by Engels, e.g. Dialectics of Nature. According to Carver, "what Marx actually does say about social science and natural science . . . does not square with Engels's grandiose claims about matter in motion and dialectical laws", p. 363.

¹⁵⁸ Wolfe, op. cit., p. 83.

society. The economic contradictions which for Marxists lay at the root of all human problems were being resolved. According to the idealist tendency in Marxist thought, this indicated that the resolution of human conflict was at hand.

Engels's interpretation of Marxism had been enshrined in the party programme drawn up at the Erfurt Congress of 1891 and Karl Kautsky, Engels's successor in practical terms though nominally the position had fallen to Eduard Bernstein¹⁵⁹, became the party's leading theoretician on Engels's death. The Erfurt Programme was the first such document of a mass Marxist movement. Its rhetoric was Marxist and, to that extent, it was an advance on the earlier Gotha programme which Marx himself had condemned. Yet, it has been asserted that "nowhere in the Programme is there so much as a hint of violence or revolution to achieve its aims. Its tone is that of a party desiring peaceful constitutional progress towards socialist objectives - and many of them could more directly be described as liberal"¹⁶⁰. Implicit in the Programme are the ideas that progress towards socialism can be made through legal channels and that change is both imminent and inevitable. If this is not precisely what Engels had argued, it is certainly a possible inference from his general interpretation of historical materialism. Thus in Engels's own lifetime, Marxist thought lurched even further than he might have wanted towards reformist politics and determinist economics, both of which are absent from Marx's teachings and neither of which can be inferred from his work although the ambiguity of his conception helped to make this new state of affairs possible.

¹⁵⁹ See Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, London, 1971. By leaving Bernstein his papers and "political testament", Engels appeared to acknowledge him as his own and Marx's successor.

¹⁶⁰ Robert Kilroy-Silk, Socialism since Marx, London, 1972, pp. 38-9.

According to George Lichtheim, what happened after Engels's death "was foreshadowed in the fatalistic spirit of the 'Erfurt Programme'"¹⁶¹. After 1895, however, Marxist orthodoxy was in the hands of the leading theoreticians of the Second International, such as Kautsky and George Plekhanov, who had to tailor their doctrine to the needs of the growing workers' movement. In so doing, they established that interpretation which was to come under attack from later Marxists, reacting against the passivity of orthodoxy and demanding the restoration to Marxist theory of its activistic dimension.

In Karl Kautsky's political philosophy "benign optimism replaced apocalyptic vision"¹⁶². The voluntaristic element which had been removed in part from Marxism by Engels now all but disappeared. Kautsky's modifications to Marxist theory, like those of Engels, responded to the new circumstances in which the workers' movement found itself and, thus, his determinism became "the ideological expression of a social movement that had grown rapidly within the framework of German industry and expressed its confident optimism in a historical process that was conceived as essentially benevolent"¹⁶³. According to Kautsky, it was possible to suggest the direction of historical development.¹⁶⁴ Less certain was the actual form that the transition to socialism would take. Full-scale class conflict was still possible as was a peaceful, constitutional route to the new society. On occasions, Kautsky talked in terms of the former¹⁶⁵ but he emphasised too the value of elections in

¹⁶¹ George Lichtheim, Marxism - an historical and critical study, 2nd edition, London, 1964, p. 263.

¹⁶² Lewis A. Coser, "Marxist Thought in the first quarter of the 20th century", American Journal of Sociology, 78 (1), July, 1972, p. 175.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 176-7.

¹⁶⁴ See Karl Kautsky, The Social Revolution, Chicago, 1916, p. 84.

¹⁶⁵ See Kilroy-Silk, op. cit., p. 47.

preventing "premature outbreaks" and he believed that parliamentarism would ensure that "the battle demands fewer victims, is less sanguinary and depends less upon blind chance"¹⁶⁶. A reasonable assessment is that Kautsky "envisaged the overthrow of the existing State and the proletarian conquest of power in terms of a peaceful advance by parliamentary means"¹⁶⁷. What is certain is that he regarded this advance as inevitable, hence his lack of enthusiasm for "premature outbreaks". As G.D.H. Cole claims, "it was Kautsky, more than any other thinker, who insisted that the time could not be ripe for the establishment of socialism in any country until the development of capitalism had gone far enough to bring the majority of people over to the socialist side, and that any attempt to establish socialism before the conditions were ripe would necessarily lead to a betrayal of democracy and to a perversion of socialism into a form of Blanquist tyranny"¹⁶⁸. Under Kautsky's leadership, "large scale enterprise, trustification, and the concentration of ownership in fewer hands were thus regarded by the Social Democrats as necessary stages on the road to socialism"¹⁶⁹. The movement could pursue its reformist policies secure in the knowledge that Marxism predicted the coming of a society in which there would be no contradictions in human existence.

It has been argued that Kautsky and Engels himself transformed Marx's thought "from the vision of a unique historical breakthrough into the doctrine of a causally determined process analogous to the scheme of Darwinian evolution"¹⁷⁰. In so doing, they created what was to be

¹⁶⁶ Kautsky, op. cit., pp. 80-1.

¹⁶⁷ Kilroy-Silk, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁶⁸ G.D.H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, Vol. III Part I, The Second International 1889-1914, London, 1967, p. 269.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁷⁰ Lichtheim, op. cit., p. 237.

recognised as orthodox Marxism. Kautsky's critics would claim that he became the doctrinaire defender of an outworn position while others would say that he completed the adaptation of theory to practice which Engels had begun and the urgency of which was proclaimed on all sides.¹⁷¹ In either guise, Kautsky, together with less important theorists of the Second International, ensured that Marxist orthodoxy would be certain in its political idealism in a manner in which the thought of Marx was not. With its determinism and its reformism, the new orthodoxy emasculated Marx's teachings and it could scarcely avoid provoking a critical response from within the movement.

(iii) Bernstein and Revisionism

Although the S.P.D. had become increasingly reformist in its political practice, as was consistent with the main precepts of Marxist orthodoxy, its leaders had continued to show a preference for revolutionary rhetoric. This irony together with the determinism of orthodox Marxism came under attack during the revisionist controversy which engulfed the movement at the turn of the century. Observing the advances already made through reformist channels, Bernstein and his fellow revisionists argued that, whilst the party's practice was correct, its continued revolutionary rhetoric was counter-productive. Theory and practice had to be brought completely into line. What we must keep in mind is that not only was "revisionism" born in the heart of Second International Marxist orthodoxy but also that "Bernstein's polemic is incomprehensible if we fail to grasp the particular character of that Marxism from which it originated and in relation to which it always remained, in a real sense, complementary"¹⁷². The challenge of

¹⁷¹ See *ibid.*, p. 270.

¹⁷² Colletti, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

revisionism was of a different order from that which was made on orthodox Marxism at a later date by the revolutionaries. Above all, revisionism and orthodoxy were to share a commitment to reformist politics.

Nonetheless, one aspect of Bernstein's revisionism did separate him absolutely from the position of Engels and Kautsky. He opposed their deterministic reading of historical materialism, arguing that "the interdependency of cause and effect between technical, economic evolution, and the evolution of other social tendencies is becoming always more indirect, and from that the necessities of the first are losing much of their power of dictating the form of the latter"¹⁷³. If socialism came about it would do so peacefully but there was no inevitability about this transition to a new society. Capitalism had proved its resilience. It need not of necessity give way to socialism. For Bernstein, the advent of the new society was "no more than ethically desirable and, therefore, dependent on will"¹⁷⁴. Thus, according to Christian Gneuss, Bernstein, in a Kantian elaboration, "transferred the justification of the struggle for socialism from the world of what is into the world of what ought to be"¹⁷⁵. It was for this element of his revisionism that Bernstein was condemned by the orthodoxy who trusted to the inevitability of socialism as foreseen by the scientific method of historical materialism.¹⁷⁶ Bernstein had gone beyond empirical reformism to "a

¹⁷³ Eduard Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism, New York, 1961, pp. 15-6.

¹⁷⁴ Kilroy-Silk, op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁷⁵ Christian Gneuss, "The Precursor: Eduard Bernstein", in Leopold Labedz (ed.), Revisionism, London, 1962, p. 37.

¹⁷⁶ For an outline of the empirical "evidence" which Bernstein brought forward to justify his revisionism, see Charles F. Elliot, "'Quis custodiet sacra?' Problems of Marxist Revisionism", Journal of the History of Ideas, 28 (1), Jan./Mar., 1967, pp. 71-86.

revision of the entire Marxist outlook"¹⁷⁷. In his attempt to imbue socialist thought with a voluntaristic dimension, however, he restored to Marxist debate an element of Marx's ambiguous legacy, the critique of uncritical materialism, which had been lost sight of in Second International Marxist orthodoxy and S.P.D. strategy.

Despite rediscovering a key element in Marx's thought, however, Bernstein followed the orthodox theoreticians of Second International Marxism in denying the revolutionary tactics suggested by Marx. According to G.D.H. Cole, Bernstein "was really arguing that Socialism would come, not as a system constructed by socialists on the morrow of their conquest of power, but by an accumulation of piecemeal changes which would be brought about by social action within the limits set by the sheer necessities of economic development"¹⁷⁸. Though the idea of social action within certain limits echoes Marx, the notion of piecemeal reform does not. Against Marxist orthodoxy, as Charles Elliot suggests, Bernstein's negations "had emasculated the Marxist pretensions to being an all-inclusive Weltanschauung, a messianic as well as a 'scientific' truth that provided an 'answer' for those 'true believers' seeking a sense of commitment in a rapidly changing world where rationalism, empiricism, and skepticism had undermined traditional belief"¹⁷⁹. Against Marx himself, Bernstein's revisionism retained the reformism which had become an integral part of Second International orthodoxy. It has been argued that, for this reason, "while his doctrine was officially rejected by the party, it still grew deep roots within it"¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁷ Julius Braunthall, History of the International 1864-1914, London, 1966, p. 261.

¹⁷⁸ Cole, op. cit., p. 277.

¹⁷⁹ Elliot, op. cit., p. 75.

¹⁸⁰ Coser, op. cit., p. 179.

Furthermore, though Bernstein's doctrines call to mind the tensions within Marx's thought, they lean towards the idealist belief that contradictions in human society can be brought to an end, albeit only through an act of the human will.

It was at this stage in its development that Marxist thought was encountered for the first time by Gramsci. As in Germany, socialism in Italy, with its varied forms of expression, reflected the ambiguity of Marx's legacy.

Italian Socialism

Because of Italy's political fragmentation before 1870 and, in reality, for some time after the so-called unification process, a socialist movement was formed later there than in other western European countries and in a unique setting. Socialists and bourgeois radicals acted in concert even after the practice had been discontinued elsewhere. In addition, the socialist movement was subject to strong anarchist (and, later, syndicalist) influence and was obliged to try to prosper in an environment of doctrinal disputes together with religious complications and the split between North and South.

For a variety of reasons, the Italian Socialist Party (P.S.I.), founded in 1892, originated as a popular rather than exclusively working-class movement. Much of its membership was middle-class and intellectual. During the 1890s, the ideas of this section of the party held sway with reformism being adopted and the anarchists expelled from the fold. The trade union movement remained weak. In the early 1900s, the P.S.I. suffered purges and schisms as reformists struggled with syndicalist members but, as in Germany, optimistic reformism seemed most appropriate to the situation of growing prosperity for all which characterised the first decade of the twentieth century. By the end of that decade, on the

eve of Gramsci's arrival in Turin, the reformist wing of the P.S.I. was in complete control. Political idealism dominated the theory of the Italian workers' movement.

This had not been the case, however, with the political thought of the most significant Italian Marxist thinker before Gramsci, Antonio Labriola (1843-1904).¹⁸¹ It has been rightly argued that in his political thought, Labriola anticipated many of the features of Gramsci's prison writings. According to Joseph Femia, "he - not Gramsci - was the first to interpret Marxism as a philosophy of historical praxis, thus stressing the humanistic, relativistic aspects of the doctrine and opposing the scientistic ideology that dominated orthodox Marxism"¹⁸². For Femia, "the theoretical contribution made by Labriola resided in his devastating attack on the positivist deformations of Second International Marxism"¹⁸³ and this attack consisted of five main points.¹⁸⁴

First, Labriola argued against simple reductionism in the reconstruction of historical and social events. Economic explanations, for him, are never enough. Second, there was his critique of the fatalism inherent in naturalistic materialism. What happens in history is the work of man and not of the logic of things. Third, Labriola subsequently condemned attempts to turn Marxism into a philosophy of systematic history claiming to provide all-embracing explanations. The

¹⁸¹ For an interesting discussion of Labriola's much neglected thought, see Leszek Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism. Its rise, growth, and dissolution, volume II, The Golden Age, Oxford, 1978, pp. 175-92. Paul Piccone provides a useful introduction in Antonio Labriola, Socialism and Philosophy, St. Louis, 1980. An excellent paper, entitled "Antonio Labriola: a Forgotten Marxist Thinker", was presented by Joseph Femia to the Political Studies Association Conference, 1981.

¹⁸² Femia, "Antonio Labriola: a Forgotten Marxist Thinker", op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. See pp. 3-10.

fourth feature of Labriola's critique of Second International orthodoxy resided in his "humanization" or "historicization" of knowledge. Human thought is bound up with living experience and, thus, cannot pretend to discover "truths" independent of time and circumstance. Finally, in opposition to other Second International theorists, Labriola called for an original and distinctive Marxist philosophy of life, or Weltanschauung. This philosophy should be free from materialism and idealism. According to Labriola, "historical materialism, then, or the philosophy of practice, takes account of man as a social and historical being. It gives the last blow to all forms of idealism which regard actually existing things as mere reflexes, reproductions, imitations, illustrations, results, of so-called a priori thought, thought before fact". In addition, "it marks also the end of naturalistic materialism, using this term in the sense which it had up to a few years ago". For Labriola, "the philosophical mind is no longer for any thinking man a fact which was never in the making, an event which had no causes, an eternal entity which does not change, and still less the creature of one sole act." But, neither is it a mere epiphenomenon of economic developments. "It is rather a process of creation in perpetuity."¹⁸⁵

The importance of Labriola's critique of orthodoxy was recognised by Gramsci in the Prison Notebooks where it is suggested that "one very useful thing would be an objective and systematic résumé (even of a scholastic - analytical kind) of all the publications of Antonio Labriola on the philosophy of praxis to replace the volumes no longer available"¹⁸⁶. Gramsci's admiration of Labriola clearly stems from the latter's critique of deterministic and reformist orthodoxy as evinced by thinkers like

¹⁸⁵ Labriola, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁸⁶ Gramsci, PN, p. 386.

Kautsky and Plekhanov.¹⁸⁷ It can be argued that in his critique Labriola is faithful to Marx's own conception of historical materialism before it was transformed into Second International orthodoxy. However, implicit in his critique of orthodox claims for Marxism as a predictive science is the suggestion that Labriola tended towards the realistic element in Marx's dualist conception and away from its idealism. According to Labriola, "socialism has so long been utopian, scheming, offhand and visionary, that it is well to repeat now all the time that what we need is practice. For the minds of those who adopt socialism should never be out of touch with the things of the actual world, should continually study their field, in which they are compelled to work hard for a clear road." Labriola argues that "too often it is true that all our contemporaneous socialism still contains within itself some latent germs of a new utopianism"¹⁸⁸. We might say that one of these was the belief that socialism was preordained and would bring with it the conclusion of all contradiction in human society. Labriola's scepticism led him to argue that progress "is not suspended over the course of human events like a destiny or a fate"¹⁸⁹. Marxism cannot explain future events as part of a universal, predetermined model. It should be used to understand and criticise existing affairs. Since they cannot predict the future, Marxists must avoid a complacent passivity based on optimistic, determinist formulations. They must become involved in the revolutionary creation of events. Unlike Bernstein, therefore, Labriola condemns both elements of Marxist orthodoxy, its determinism and its reformism - and, in so doing, he anticipated certain Gramscian arguments. What should be noticed, however, is that, like Gramsci, Labriola inherited an Italian tradition

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. See pp. 386-8.

¹⁸⁸ Labriola, op. cit., p. 159.

¹⁸⁹ Cited in Femia, "Antonio Labriola: a Forgotten Marxist Thinker", op. cit., p. 6.

of political debate in which realism based upon the "dual perspective" was a dominant element. According to Leszek Kolakowski, "the hopes aroused by the Risorgimento were not such as to encourage the conviction that progress was an inevitable consequence of 'historical laws', and Italian philosophers, including Marxists, tended to be more sensitive to the variety, dramatic complexity, and unexpectedness of the historical process"¹⁹⁰. To avoid seeing Gramsci as merely a latter-day Labriola it is necessary to bear in mind that both partook of a realist tradition which inevitably influenced the direction taken by their Marxism.

It was not always directly from Labriola, in any case, that Gramsci received the Italian variant of Marxism during his years as a student in Turin. His first taste of Marxist philosophy was provided in the classes of Professor Pastore. His subsequent acquaintance with Marxism was often through the writings of Croce. Indeed, it has been argued that, even in prison, Gramsci preferred to examine Marxism through the Crocean filter rather than directly.¹⁹¹ The way was clear for Gramsci to elaborate on themes outlined by Labriola and to make Marxism speak Italian.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism, volume II, p. 177.

¹⁹¹ See Nemeth, op. cit., p. 11. Nemeth writes that "despite his obvious access to many of Marx's writings Gramsci, nevertheless, concentrated, by and large, on those passages quoted by Croce in the latter's own book on Marxism". Two explanations are offered. First, Gramsci may have believed that Croce succinctly expressed Marx's essential ideas. Second, Gramsci was engaged in the self-confessed task of doing to Crocean philosophy what Marx had done to Hegel's thought. Thus, he realised that to attack effectively on the intellectual level one must meet the enemy on his own ground.

¹⁹² See ibid. Nemeth argues that there is a Marxist tradition peculiar to Italy. In addition to Labriola and Gramsci, Mondolfo made a significant contribution to it and, indeed, suggested three principal characteristics of the Italian interpretation: the separation of historical materialism from metaphysical materialism, opposition to economic determinism and the idea of freedom as a fundamental ethical requirement. It must be pointed out, however, that not all Italian Marxists have subscribed to these beliefs. Rather than claim that there is an Italian Marxism, this thesis argues that there is a general Italian tradition of political thought of which certain Marxists have partaken thereby influencing the form taken by their Marxist political ideas.

Italian foundations existed. His childhood in Sardinia had formed his character, making him conscious of all who suffered and of the problems inherent in Italian regionalism. His university studies had provided him with the opportunity to draw upon an Italian tradition of political debate in which the "dual perspective" was presented in political life as an unending tension between force and consent and in which political realism abounded. Yet, Gramsci joined the Italian socialist movement in the second decade of the twentieth century at a time when idealism inspired by economic determinism and the apparent progress made by reformist tactics dominated orthodox Marxist thinking. Though Labriola had stressed the realistic tendency on Marx's thought, refusing to join the P.S.I. in part as a result, he had been out of touch with the main strands of Second International theory. The movement which Gramsci joined was highly idealistic and Gramsci was to share in the idealism, albeit in a revolutionary form opposed to the reformist ideas of the prevailing Marxist orthodoxy.

CHAPTER TWO. GRAMSCI THE ACTIVIST: THE REVOLUTIONARY CHALLENGE TO
MARXIST ORTHODOXY

In 1913, Gramsci broke with his youthful Sardinian nationalism. Having become increasingly interested in the study of Marxism, he began to contribute to the socialist press and, in 1916, decided to abandon his university career for the life of a full-time journalist and political activist. He joined the P.S.I. which, despite peculiarly Italian features, resembled other major social democratic parties of the time in its commitment to reformism and its confident expectation that socialism was inevitable and that it would usher in a society free from contradictions.

In the years ahead, Gramsci was to challenge from a revolutionary standpoint the orthodoxy of the movement he had joined. In part, his critique represents a return to the Marxist principles of his Italian predecessor, Antonio Labriola, but it must be seen also in the context of two separate phases in the history of Marxism when orthodox ideas were subject to revolutionary criticism. The first period sees orthodox Marxism's reformism being challenged by the left opposition in Germany and by the Bolsheviks in Russia. To this period belong the writings of Gramsci's politically active years (1916-26). The general tone of this first revolutionary phase continued to stress the idealistic, soteriological dimension of Marx's thought and parts with the prevailing orthodoxy more on tactical issues than on the overall vision of the future. The second period of revolutionary criticism, however, covers the years after the failure of the workers' movements of western Europe and the rise of Fascism and is altogether more sober in its judgements. It is to the second phase that Gramsci's Prison Notebooks must be assigned.

This chapter examines Gramsci's writings as a political activist in the context of the first period in which Marxist orthodoxy came under

attack from revolutionaries. In Germany, the challenge was mounted inside the S.P.D. by a left opposition which condemned all reformism, that of Bernstein included.

The Enemy within: the revolutionary thought of Rosa Luxemburg

According to Rosa Luxemburg, "Bernstein was not just in error but in sin"¹. Together with fellow radicals in the S.P.D., Liebknecht, Parvus, Radek and Zetkin, Luxemburg was as unhappy as Bernstein with the relationship between the party's theory and practice. But, whereas Bernstein had argued that the theory should be brought into line with reformist practice, the left opposition wanted party strategy to conform to the revolutionary theory. Luxemburg and her associates were adamant that Marx's revolutionary message should not be lost in the quagmire of false optimism stemming from a determinist interpretation of history and leading to reformist tactics and, ultimately, to political passivity. Despite the optimism of the orthodox Marxists, socialism did not appear to be near at hand and it could be argued that "the turn away from reformism practised during the late 1880s and 1890s was in part the result of a rigid class structure (allowing for limited mobility), lack of continuing electoral successes, and a sustained economic upswing causing prices to rise faster than wages"². Thus, like reformism itself, the revolutionary challenge to Marxist orthodoxy can be explained to some extent by the influence on theory of changed socio-economic and political conditions. It must be seen too, however, as a reflection of the revolutionary dimension in Marx's own ambiguous teachings which had been neglected for some time. The challenge to orthodoxy has even been represented as a symbol of the establishment of eastern Europe as Marxism's

¹ Coser, op. cit., p. 182.

² Leslie Derfler, Socialism since Marx. A Century of the European Left, London, 1973, p. 64.

new epicentre.³ The reformist aspect of Marxism, it is argued, had less appeal for activists reared in feudal, autocratic societies than for those who had grown up with parliamentary democracy and social welfare reform. Thus, it is suggested by Lewis Coser that "the variants of Marxist ideas that emerged in the developed and industrialized parts of Europe differed significantly from those that had their origin in the non industrialised rimland of Europe and that attempts to transfer Marxian ideas originating in that rimland failed to gain acceptance in Europe's industrial heartland"⁴.

True, Luxemburg's arguments were not destined to win over the majority in the S.P.D. in spite of her stand alongside the party leadership in opposing Bernstein. In fact, her attack on revisionism served to widen the gulf between herself and the exponents of Marxist orthodoxy who, though eager to denounce Bernstein as a renegade, shared the revisionists' trust in reformism. Luxemburg, on the other hand, argued that the bourgeoisie would tolerate democracy only so long as there was no serious proletarian attempt to seize power and that faith in social reforms is misplaced since these do not alter the system fundamentally but simply blunt the contradictions of capitalism, as do certain forms of trade union activity. What reformists regarded as advances towards socialism were actually devices used by the capitalists to slow down the rate of their system's decline. Luxemburg's critique of the reformism of Bernstein must be seen as part of a wider condemnation of all reformist socialism, of which the political practice of the party orthodoxy was an example. She resolved the tension in Marxist thought between

³ See Coser, *op. cit.*, p. 174. Though flawed, this is an interesting analysis. There are too many exceptions to Coser's general rule to make the latter any more than a stimulating generalisation. However, the article does suggest another way of approaching the problem of contradictions and tensions within the Marxist tradition.

⁴ Ibid.

revolutionism and reformism in favour of the former. Less clear, however, is her position as regards the tension between voluntarism and determinism.

Luxemburg claimed that Bernstein's interpretation of Marxism represented a negation of the objective necessity of socialism. This suggests a deterministic element in her thought and it has been argued that "the same optimistic and passive fatalism which was the central axis of Kautsky's vision of the world and dominant in the S.P.D.'s theory and practice represented a 'temptation' in Luxemburg's thought prior to the outbreak of the First World War"⁵. Her theory of capitalist breakdown indicated a belief in the inevitability of a change in the economic organisation of society. In this it would seem that Luxemburg's Marxism was consistent with the prevailing orthodoxy.

However, according to Norman Geras, "amongst the misconceptions by which Rosa Luxemburg's thought has been deformed, the most widespread and tenacious is, without doubt, that which attributes to her a thesis going variously under the names of determinism, fatalism and spontaneism"⁶. Geras accepts that Luxemburg's "breakdown thesis" suggests a certain degree of determinism but he argues that in her political thought are "concepts and arguments which radically separate her Marxism from that science of iron economic laws which is the usual foundation of fatalism and spontaneism"⁷. Though the collapse of capitalism was assured, the triumph of socialism was not seen by Luxemburg as the inevitable outcome of the changed circumstances that would follow. Equally conceivable was what Luxemburg envisaged as a descent into barbarism. If socialism rather

⁵ Michael Löwy cited in Norman Geras, The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, London, 1976, p. 27.

⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

than barbarism was to emerge from the demise of capitalism it would do so only as the result of a conscious political struggle on the part of the working class. Thus, it can be asserted that there was some distance between Rosa Luxemburg and a full-blown fatalistic problematic.⁸

Luxemburg argued that "socialism is not the inevitable product of iron economic laws but an 'objective possibility' defined by the socio-economic conditions of capitalism. In the actualisation of that possibility, the subject factor, the conscious political intervention of the proletariat, is decisive, and not an auxiliary element"⁹. Like Marx, she regards as vital in the making of history, the active human element. What is deterministic about her conception, however, is her belief that the proletariat would inevitably acquire the revolutionary consciousness which would inform its intervention. She was convinced, as Charles Elliot remarks, that "the proletariat would by itself attain revolutionary class-consciousness, that it would not be sidetracked or 'corrupted' by rival claims of nationalism or reformism"¹⁰. According to Geras, Luxemburg's theory was not spontaneist because she did not have in mind a "working class without organisation and leadership whose elemental power alone permits it to storm heaven"¹¹. If the age of barbarism was to be avoided after the collapse of capitalism the proletariat would need both organisation and leadership. Yet, her faith in the ability of the working class to acquire revolutionary consciousness spontaneously was such that, as Coser suggests, "when, during the war, practically the entire party betrayed the cause of socialist

⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹ Luxemburg quoted in *ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Charles F. Elliot, "Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and the dilemma of the non-revolutionary proletariat", Midwest Journal of Political Science, 9 (4), Nov., 1965, p. 338.

¹¹ Geras, op. cit., p. 20.

internationalism Rosa Luxemburg was saved from utter despair by her belief that the masses had been betrayed by their leaders but that they would, in due time, rise from the ashes to realize the vision the party had abandoned"¹². So strong was this conviction that she condemned outright the idea of élite, vanguard parties which would assist the proletariat to acquire the necessary consciousness to carry out its historic mission. As F.L. Carsten argues, "the course of the German revolution was to show how unjustified her faith in the masses and her revolutionary optimism had been, and when the masses in Germany moved they moved in a direction totally different from that which she had so confidently predicted"¹³. The Spartakist Revolt, in which Luxemburg played a key part, failed to gain sufficient support and was crushed. In 1919, Luxemburg was murdered by the agents of a government committed to socialism.

It has been said of Luxemburg that she belonged "neither to the victorious revolutionaries nor to those who finally accommodated themselves to reality"¹⁴. In the light of this assessment, a number of points can be made. First, Luxemburg shared with those who had accommodated themselves with reality, the reformists of the S.P.D. who had helped to create Marxist orthodoxy, idealistic hopes for the future. Second, she shared with the so-called victorious revolutionaries a belief that this future could be guaranteed only by revolutionary action. Finally, because she refused to accept orthodox reformism and also the élitism of other revolutionaries, Luxemburg was obliged to steer a very

¹² Coser, op. cit., p. 183.

¹³ F.L. Carsten, "Freedom and Revolution: Rosa Luxemburg" in Labedz, op. cit., p. 65.

¹⁴ Postscript by Iring Fetscher in Paul Fröhlich, Rosa Luxemburg, London, 1972, p. 304.

difficult course through twin reefs.¹⁵ What is interesting is that these reefs are represented in the tension inherent in Marx's own work. Indeed, with her revolutionary zeal and her attempt to balance determinism and voluntarism, Luxemburg is more true to Marx's teachings than virtually any other Marxist. It becomes clear, however, that the balancing act necessitated by dualistic elements in Marxist thought is easier to perform philosophically than in political practice. Luxemburg's idealism is attested to by the fact that she tried to carry over conflicting tendencies in Marxist thought into her political activism. The exponents of Marxist orthodoxy, on the other hand, settled for reformism and determinism despite the danger that political passivity would result. In Russia, the victorious revolutionaries had moved to the opposite extreme, embracing the revolutionism of Marxism together with a belief that spontaneity was not enough and that revolutionary leadership was an essential feature, albeit of an inevitable struggle for socialism.

Lenin, the Party and the Revolution

Lenin, like Luxemburg, launched an attack on the reformist practices of social democratic orthodoxy. Unlike her, however, he was to form a successful revolutionary movement and to find himself in the ranks of the victorious revolutionaries. Since one cannot claim that he was simply more revolutionary than Luxemburg, it is necessary to seek the foundations of his success elsewhere, particularly in his interpretation of the Marxist conception of history which permitted him to accept what Luxemburg had opposed - the need for a revolutionary vanguard which would imbue the proletariat with revolutionary class-consciousness - and in the very different socio-economic and political conditions in

¹⁵ For an illuminating discussion of Luxemburg's thought in the context of the ambiguity of Marxist doctrine, see Dick Howard, "Re-reading Luxemburg", Telos, 18, Winter 1973-4, pp. 89-106.

which he was working.

Lenin's revolutionism can be seen as an aggressive response to the reformism of Marxist orthodoxy in the West. Of the exponents of that doctrine, Lenin wrote, "those vulgarisers of Marxism have never given thought to what Marx said about the need to replace the weapon of criticism by the criticism of weapons"¹⁶. They had failed to maintain Marxism's revolutionary dimension. In addition, their reformism was often linked to economic determinism which Lenin also opposed. It was his belief that "from the correct Marxist premise concerning the deep economic roots of the class struggle in general and of the political struggle in particular, the Economists have drawn the singular conclusion that we must turn our backs on the political struggle and retard its development, narrow its scope, and reduce its aim"¹⁷. Determinism led to an underestimation of the value of the political struggle or an unwillingness to pursue the political struggle in a revolutionary way. Neither is consistent with Marx's teachings. According to Lenin, deterministic interpretations debased Marx's conception "by ignoring the active, leading, and guiding part which can and must be played in history by parties that have realised the material prerequisites of a revolution and have placed themselves at the head of the progressive classes"¹⁸. Marx's historical materialism did not indicate that capitalism would collapse and give way to socialism as a matter of course. What it did indicate was that economic changes would take place which would have repercussions in the superstructure tending towards a socialism revolution. According to Lenin, these changes had begun to take place. But, was it not the case that the

¹⁶ V.I. Lenin, Selected Works, London, 1969, p. 113.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

European proletariat remained non-revolutionary, as Luxemburg had discovered to her cost? How was this dilemma to be resolved?

Lenin came to the conclusion that revolutionary leadership was indispensable and, from then, on, in Coser's words, "the revolutionary will became the main drive of history"¹⁹. The leaders of the revolutionary parties would be expected to proclaim slogans in advance of the revolutionary initiative of the masses - slogans which would serve as beacons, indicating to the proletariat the shortest and most direct route to absolute and decisive victory. It was unforgiveable that, though the proletariat appeared to be in the mood to revolt, leaders of social democratic parties, frightened of premature outbreaks, sat back and waited for socialism to come about as if by magic. It was Lenin's belief, indeed, that "since the proletariat, untutored by a revolutionary group of Marxists, could not arrive at the correct (revolutionary) understanding of Marxism, this truth should be imposed upon the workers 'from without'"²⁰. It is this contention that distinguished Lenin's revolutionary critique of Marxist orthodoxy from that of Luxemburg. The source of their dispute is the ambiguity of Marx's political legacy.

It has been argued that "Marx had reconciled economic determinism with revolutionary activity - as against merely waiting for things to happen of themselves - by including the revolutionary activity of the working class as a part of the determined evolutionary process"²¹. Both Luxemburg and Lenin accepted this. However, whilst the former understood that revolutionary activity to be the direct result of spontaneously

¹⁹ Coser, op. cit., p. 190.

²⁰ See Elliot, "Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and the dilemma of the non-revolutionary proletariat", op. cit., p. 338.

²¹ Cole, op. cit., p. 278.

acquired consciousness on the part of the working class, Lenin argued that changes in the base of society made it possible for the proletariat to understand the truth taught to them by the revolutionary vanguard and to act under its leadership. In each perspective there was an element of determinism. Both Luxemburg and Lenin, moreover, shared an idealistic conviction that socialism would bring salvation to mankind. In that respect the revolutionaries agreed with the reformists about the future though not about the manner in which it would come about. It can be seen that all the theoreticians of the socialist movement were confused by the ambiguities of the Marxist foundations. With the successful Russian Revolution of 1917, however, it seemed that Lenin had made the correct interpretation.

For Marxists in the post-First World War era, the victory of the Bolsheviks, according to Perry Anderson, established Lenin's "concrete analysis of a concrete situation" as the new, "living soul of Marxism"²². It was not yet realised, as it was to be by Gramsci many years later, that Leninism could not be easily transferred from Russian to western European conditions.²³ Lenin certainly did not entertain this possibility. It has been argued that because characteristics of Russian historical development formed the parameter of Lenin's Marxism, he failed to grasp, amongst other things, the relationship between the workers' movement and democracy in the capitalist countries of the West.²⁴ This

²² Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism, London, 1976, p. 14.

²³ As we shall see, it was to be a central feature of Gramsci's theory of the State that in Russia the consensual element of political power was undeveloped; hence, the struggle for socialism could be waged in a very different way there than in the West where political power rested on a balance between force and consent. See Gramsci, PN, p. 238 and pp. 131-40 of this thesis.

²⁴ For more discussion on this subject, see Fernando Claudin, "Democracy and Dictatorship in Lenin and Kautsky", New Left Review, 106, Nov./Dec., 1977, pp. 59-76.

helps to explain Lenin's optimism about the entire European working class following the example of the Bolsheviks. But, Lenin was not alone in holding this opinion. Many socialists in the West saw the Russian Revolution as the starting-point. Even Luxemburg could not deny its importance. During Gramsci's early years in the workers' movement, Marxism-Leninism began to challenge Marxist orthodoxy's claim to be called true Marxism. Ironically, however, despite his admiration for the Bolsheviks, Gramsci soon found himself involved in a movement which was imbued with a more Luxemburgist than Leninist conception of Marxism.

Gramsci the activist

(i) First steps

Any analysis of Gramsci's contribution to Marxist political theory must take account of his role as a revolutionary activist. His mature political thought is intimately related to the experiences and, as it transpired, the failures of the post-war, revolutionary struggles in Italy. The story of Gramsci the activist begins, however, before the outbreak of hostilities. As early as 1913, his vague feelings about human suffering and the need for social justice together with his growing interest in Marxism had begun to come together in a more coherent socialist outlook. He contributed sporadically to the socialist press, though an article of 1914, in which he supported the call of Benito Mussolini (a P.S.I. member at that time) for Italian intervention in the Great War, did little to help establish the young student in the socialist movement.²⁵ Having decided on his new career, however, Gramsci began to write a regular column for Avanti! and to contribute to Il Grido del Popolo. According to Fiori, "a new writer now emerged on the pages of these papers, a writer radically different from any known to past readers

²⁵ See Gramsci, PW 1910-20, pp. 6-9.

of the socialist press"²⁶. By 1918, Gramsci was revealing "a hitherto unsuspected vitality and liberated energies never tapped before"²⁷.

Until 1919, it was through his writing rather than by direct political involvement that Gramsci made his contribution to the Italian workers' movement. He was a good journalist. His new life suited him. Censorship imposed during wartime restricted the bulk of his writings to cultural rather than specifically political themes but even in his later years Gramsci held the opinion that culture had a political relevance. Thus, the wartime articles were important because they helped "to educate the workers in the widest possible sense"²⁸. At the time, Gramsci's understanding of culture reflected the fact that Marxism had come to him through the Italian idealist tradition rather than directly in the form of the dogmatic determinism of Second International orthodoxy. Culture was the discipline of one's inner self and it does not come about "through spontaneous evolution, through a series of actions and reactions which are independent of one's own will - as is the case in the animal and vegetable kingdoms where every unit is selected and specifies its own organs unconsciously, through a fatalistic natural law"²⁹. Above all, man is mind and as such he is the product not of nature but of history which can be shaped by the self-conscious activity of men if only they can be persuaded to recognise what they want and the fact that they have the power to get it.³⁰ This message that history is not the product of immutable material laws is repeated time and again in Gramsci's early writings. If history appears to be beyond human control, this is because men have refrained from acting at those decisive moments

²⁶ Fiori, op. cit., p. 101.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁸ James Joll, Gramsci, London, 1977, p. 31.

²⁹ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 11.

³⁰ Ibid.

when the way was open for them to do so. "Indifference is actually the mainspring of history. But in a negative sense. What comes to pass, either the evil that afflicts everyone, or the possible good brought about by an act of general valour, is due not so much to the initiative of the active few, as to the indifference, the absenteeism of the many."³¹ The fatality that seems to dominate history is, in fact, the illusory appearance of human indifference. "Events should be seen to be the intelligent work of men, and not the products of chance, of fatality."³²

Though the influence of idealist philosophy is manifest in Gramsci's argument³³, there are obvious similarities between his conception of history and that elaborated in Lenin's condemnation of the determinism of certain social democrats which resulted in political passivity. The fatalism of many orthodox Marxists led to their absenteeism even when conditions favourable to social and political change had come about. Lenin, on the other hand, argued that it is in such circumstances that the revolutionary will becomes vital. Gramsci's response to the Russian Revolution indicates a grasp of this point together with the strains of idealism.

Of the February Revolution, he writes that "it has not replaced one power by another, it has replaced one way of life by another. It has created a new moral order and in addition to the physical liberty of the individual has established liberty in the mind."³⁴ This was the advance

³¹ Ibid., p. 17.

³² Ibid., p. 18.

³³ See Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 77. Davidson refers to Gramsci's "almost completely Crocean Salvemian orientation at this time". Though Gramsci later admitted the Crocean tendencies in his thought at this time, it is important to recognise that certain elements of the ambiguous Marxian legacy, including the tension between voluntarism and determinism, were also making their presence felt in his thinking by then.

³⁴ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 30.

on the French Revolution to which Gramsci had looked forward as a schoolboy in Cagliari - the revolution that overcomes social privileges and differences.³⁵ "New energies are released, new ideas which become historical forces are propagated. At last men - all men - are the makers of their own destinies."³⁶ At times, it is difficult to know whether Gramsci sees ideas or men with ideas as the agents of this great historical transformation. If the latter, his argument is consistent with one possible reading of Marx's conception of history; if the former, however, his interpretation of the Russian Revolution is clearly idealist. Supporting the second conclusion is Gramsci's description of the October Revolution as "the Revolution against Karl Marx's 'Capital'"³⁷.

He argues that in Capital Marx demonstrates "how events should follow a predetermined course". In Russia, however, events had overcome ideologies. "Events have exploded the critical schema determining how the history of Russia would unfold according to the canons of historical materialism. The Bolsheviks reject Karl Marx, and their explicit actions and conquests bear witness that the canons of historical materialism are not so rigid as might have been and has been thought."³⁸ This is clearly an attack by Gramsci on Second International orthodoxy but is it also a legitimate critical interpretation of Marx's historical materialism? So it would appear. Yet, in the following year, Gramsci reveals that his critique is not aimed directly at Marx. He denies that the latter is "a shepherd with a crook in his hand"³⁹ but insists that, nevertheless,

³⁵ See ibid., p. 5.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁷ See ibid., p. 34.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Pedro Cavalcanti and Paul Piccone (eds.), History, Philosophy and Culture in the Young Gramsci, St. Louis, 1975, p. 11.

he "plants himself in history with the firmness of a giant"⁴⁰.

According to Gramsci, the intrinsic defect of historical writing prior to Marx was that it presented history as "solely the domain of ideas" so that "man was seen as spirit, as pure consciousness"⁴¹. Though with Marx, history continues to be the domain of ideas, of spirit, and the conscious activity of individuals and groups, "spirit and ideas become substantial, lose their arbitrariness, and cease to be fictitious religions and sociological abstractions. Their substance is in the economy, in practical activity, in systems and relations of production and exchange."⁴² These are not the sentiments of a Crocean idealist. Gramsci's emphasis on ideas distances him from what had become the orthodox interpretation of historical materialism but his general argument is consistent with central themes in Labriola's Marxism and, more significantly, is faithful to Marx's own onslaught on uncritical materialism according to which "the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively"⁴³. Gramsci's description of the Russian Revolution as being in opposition to Marx's Capital should be taken to indicate a belief that uncritical materialist interpretations of history caused the workers' movement to stagnate whereas a different understanding of Marx's theory of history suggested the active role which men play in the making of history. Both inferences could be taken from Marx's teaching. Orthodox Marxists of the Second International had developed the former. Lenin had acted upon the latter. Marx's teaching was not in error but its ambiguity had made diverse

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 10.

⁴³ Marx and Engels, The German Ideology, p. 121.

interpretations possible. In his reaction to the Russian Revolution, Gramsci was expressing what he took to be the true meaning of Marxist thought which had been contaminated by "positivist and naturalist encrustations"⁴⁴.

This thought sees as the dominant factor in history, not raw economic facts, but man, men in societies, men in relation to one another, reaching agreements with one another, developing through these contacts (civilization) a collective, social will; men coming to understand economic facts, judging them and adapting them to their will until this becomes the driving force of the economy and moulds objective reality, which lives and moves and comes to resemble a current of volcanic lava that can be channelled wherever and in whatever way men's will determines.⁴⁵

It has been suggested that "for Gramsci, Lenin and the Bolsheviks could be defined as living rather than abstract Marxists who seized historical initiative through self-conscious action, who acted upon the actuality of the Revolution instead of waiting for material conditions to 'ripen'"⁴⁶. To dismiss Gramsci's reaction to the Russian Revolution as idealist is to ignore the fact that Marx's interpretation of history is based upon a double critique - of idealism and of uncritical materialism. Marxist orthodoxy had underemphasised Marx's attack on the latter and, consequently, evolved into an economic determinist conception of history. It is almost unavoidable that critiques of this orthodoxy appear to lapse from time to time into idealist language. This is especially so when the theorist who develops the critique has received Marxism through an idealist filter as Gramsci had done. But, Gramsci does not deny the importance of materialism in his understanding of the Russian Revolution. Lenin and the Bolsheviks had not acted in circumstances

⁴⁴ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 34-5.

⁴⁶ Carl Boggs, Gramsci's Marxism, London, 1976, p. 26.

of their own making. However, they had understood the prevailing conditions and had acted accordingly whereas orthodox Marxists had too often failed to correctly interpret circumstances thereby condemning themselves to political impotence. Furthermore, human creative power is a part of the substructure of society. It must be unleashed rather than forced to await changes in material conditions. Lenin, of course, took the revolutionary party to be the solution to this problem. For the time being, however, Gramsci believed that education and propaganda alone could encourage the Italian proletariat to make history in the conditions in which it found itself.⁴⁷

Much of his journalism was aimed at educating the workers. He knew, however, that intellectual and practical activity could not be kept separate and, in 1919, he became involved in a political struggle the outcome of which was to have a profound influence on the subsequent development of his political thought.

(ii) Ordine Nuovo

In the years 1919-20, Gramsci was, as Carl Boggs suggests, "more intimately involved in the everyday life of workers than at any other time in his political experience"⁴⁸. This is the period in which he adopts what approximates to a Luxemburgist approach to the problem of revolutionary action. These are "the two Red Years" which culminate in the failure of the Italian Revolution, an event which ironically was to strengthen Gramsci's revolutionism whilst forcing him to alter his views

⁴⁷ See Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 73. Davidson shows that, at this time, Gramsci also came under the influence of the ideas of Charles Péguy and Romain Rolland and that this affected his interpretation of socialism and his estimation of the type of activity required to bring it about.

⁴⁸ Boggs, op. cit., pp. 13-4.

on revolutionary strategy. For this reason, the events of 1919-20 loom large in the Prison Notebooks.

The so-called "revolution that failed" developed out of a severe economic and social crisis which beset post-war Italy. A return to pre-war conditions was impossible. Industrial life had changed immeasurably with workers now realising their importance to the nation's economy and using their new-found strength as a bargaining tool. Italian capitalism had made rapid progress, especially in advanced sectors of manufacturing. Peasants had seized land. It was only the middle classes who hoped for a return to the old days. They felt left behind by events, let down by their fellow countrymen (in particular those workers who had opposed Italian war intervention and, yet, had reaped more benefit from the war and its aftermath than they, the patriots, had done) and ashamed at the lack of territorial gain made by Italy in return for services rendered during the war. For these middle-class Italians, the war had been won but the peace lost.

For the Left, on the other hand, there was reason for optimism. It has been shown that "many of the necessary conditions for labour militancy and conflict were present in Northern Italy by the end of the First World War"⁴⁹. There was the example of pre-war working-class militancy, the relaxation of the severe factory discipline of wartime, the general "crisis of régime" and the concomitant fragility of all social and political institutions, class antagonism and an absence of national solidarity caused, above all, by the vast gulf which separated those who had supported Italy's war intervention and those who had condemned it in the name of socialist internationalism. These problems conspired with more universal difficulties associated with rapid industrialisation to

⁴⁹ Clark, op. cit., p. 35.

create a novel situation in which, as Gramsci realised, "immense social forces" were unleashed.⁵⁰

This caused Gramsci to write at times as a determinist.

Capitalist concentration, determined by the mode of production, produces a corresponding concentration of working human masses. This is the fact that underlies all the revolutionary theses of Marxism, that underlies the conditions of the new proletarian way of life, the new communist order destined to replace the bourgeois way of life and the disorder of capitalism arising from free competition and class struggle.⁵¹

He shared with many Italian socialists the view that the post-war crisis was almost certain to result in a revolution. Trade union membership was on the increase. The P.S.I. had enjoyed considerable parliamentary success. Despite the euphoric atmosphere, however, Gramsci did not forget all the lessons he had learned from observation of events in Russia. He believed that the situation in Italy in 1919 was not so very different from that which had confronted the Bolsheviki but was worried that "the revolution finds the broad masses of the Italian people still shapeless, still atomized into an animal-like swarm of individuals lacking all discipline and culture, obedient only to the stimuli of their bellies and their barbarian passions"⁵². If the revolution was to be successful, the proletariat had to be transformed into "an organized society that can educate itself, gain experience and acquire a responsible consciousness of the obligations that fall to classes achieving State power"⁵³. As an admirer of the Bolshevik Revolution, Gramsci believed that the workers needed assistance to make this transformation. But, he stopped short of

⁵⁰ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 65.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 73.

⁵² Ibid., p. 128.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 66.

adopting the Leninist solution, continuing to believe, with Luxemburg, that the proletariat could acquire a revolutionary consciousness provided the conditions were right. In part, these conditions would be determined by economic crisis but they would also be the result of revolutionary, educational work. Education rather than an injection of consciousness was required by the working class if it was to show itself capable of running a society and part of that education was to be provided by Gramsci and some comrades through the pages of a new journal, first published in May, 1919.

L'Ordine Nuovo was intended to be an organ of proletarian culture, linking the theme of culture with practical political activity. The objectives of the journal were outlined by Gramsci in an editorial of 23 August, 1919. He writes that "such a paper must aim to become, in miniature, complete in itself, and, even though it may be unable to satisfy all the intellectual needs of the nucleus of men who read and support it, who live a part of their lives around it, and who impart to it some of their own life, it must strive to be the kind of journal in which everyone will find things that interest and move him, that will lighten the daily burden of work, economic struggle and political discussion"⁵⁴. Thus, the early work of the ordinovisti, most of whom, including Palmiro Togliatti, Gramsci had known since his student days, was primarily educational. However, Gramsci became increasingly aware of the dangers of their approach. The workers loved the new journal because in it "they found something of themselves, their own better selves; because they felt that the articles in it were permeated with their own spirit of self-searching"⁵⁵ but much of the journal was devoted to

⁵⁴ Antonio Gramsci, The Modern Prince and other writings, L. Marks (ed.), New York, 1957, p. 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

"abstract culture and abstract information" and dominated by what Gramsci described as "mediocre intellectualism"⁵⁶. As Martin Clark points out, "these café intellectuals (the ordinovisti) were aware of their weaknesses and were very anxious to immerse themselves in industrial reality"⁵⁷. Nevertheless, Gramsci did not turn to the Leninist conception of the party immediately after deciding that educational work was not enough.

Yet, events in Russia did influence the strategy which he now adopted for he had become interested in the revolutionary potential existing in the workplace as opposed to the accepted institutions of proletarian power. Here was where the proletariat was already organised and united as a consequence of shared experience so that essential pre-conditions for the achievement of socialism existed at the heart of the capitalist system. Indeed, Gramsci claimed that "the socialist State already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class"⁵⁸ and, for this reason, he planned to study the capitalist factory "as a necessary framework for the working class, as a political organism, as the 'national territory' of workers' self-government"⁵⁹.

Gramsci was asked by a Polish comrade if there was anything in Italy which could serve as a focus for the development of the proletarian State as the Soviets had done in Russia. From his analysis of the capitalist factory, he arrived at the conclusion that this role could be played by the internal commissions which, in the past, had been no more

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁷ Clark, op. cit., p. 54.

⁵⁸ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 65.

⁵⁹ Gramsci, The Modern Prince, p. 23.

than grievance committees.

It is important to note that Gramsci turned his attention to these institutions rather than to the P.S.I. or the organised trade union movement in his search for potentially revolutionary outlets. Events, he believed, had shown the inadequacy of existing working-class organisations for developing revolutionary strategies. The reformism of the P.S.I. was plain to see. It did not surprise Gramsci who even as a young man had come to believe that, under capitalism, the State is the basic protagonist of history. The P.S.I., and the unions, had grown in strength but "the development of these proletarian institutions and of the whole proletarian movement in general was not, however, autonomous"⁶⁰. Their laws of development "were laid down by the property-owning class organized in the State". "Proletarian institutions", writes Gramsci, "developed in the way they did not through inner necessity, but through external influences: under the formidable pressure of events and compulsions dependent upon capitalist development"⁶¹. Instead of mastering reality, the reformist politicians and trade union leaders had allowed themselves to be absorbed by it.⁶² One alternative was presented by the Leninist vanguard party through which the revolutionary will could act on reality; another, chosen initially by Gramsci, was offered by those institutions in the capitalist factory which had not become inextricably linked with the capitalist economic system nor with the bourgeois State.

According to Fiori, "Gramsci's central idea was that all workers, (both blue- and white-collar), all technicians, all peasants - all the

⁶⁰ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 73.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁶² See ibid., p. 75.

active elements in society, in fact - should stop being instruments of the productive process and become its masters, stop being cogs in the capitalist machine and become responsible free agents"⁶³. The internal commissions (or factory councils as they became known) would be used to this end. Some might argue that in indicating that organisations of some kind were needed to direct the spontaneous energies of the Italian workers, Gramsci was moving towards a Leninist position. Thus, Anne Showstack Sassoon writes that "rather than the expression of spontaneism or of a political theory reduced to workers' control, it can be argued that Gramsci developed the concept of the factory council as that working-class institution in Italy capable of unifying and educating the working class to fulfil its revolutionary role, and of serving as the model of the workers' state"⁶⁴. Yet, it must be stressed that these institutions were part of the experience of the Italian workers. They would be run by the workers. These were not the artificial creations of professional revolutionaries. In his advocacy of them, therefore, Gramsci adopted a more Luxemburgist than Leninist tactic. Thus, he emphasised the dialectical relationship of the institutions to the workers' consciousness, writing that "a network of proletarian institutions must be set up without delay, a network rooted in the consciousness of the broad masses, one that can depend on their discipline and support, a network in which the class of workers and peasants, in their totality, can adopt a form that is rich in dynamism and in future growth possibilities"⁶⁵.

Gramsci believed that a process of mutual education would take place in the councils and that a new social spirit would be forged. This would signify "a joyous awareness of being an organic whole, a homogeneous

⁶³ Fiori, op. cit., p. 119.

⁶⁴ Showstack Sassoon, op. cit., p. 33.

⁶⁵ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 78.

and compact system which, through useful work and the disinterested production of social wealth, asserts its sovereignty, and realises its power and its freedom to create history"⁶⁶. Organisation based on the factory would embody "the proletarian dictatorship, the communist State, that destroys class domination in the political superstructures and throughout its entire fabric"⁶⁷. The trade union movement would continue to constitute the backbone of the proletarian body but the factory council movement provided the framework through which workers could challenge the existing system and, in addition, prefigured the new, socialist order in which contradictions in society would be brought to an end.

At this stage, Gramsci is clearly a political idealist. Despite his talk of organisation, furthermore, his optimism is based, to a large extent, upon a deterministic view that the working class could acquire revolutionary consciousness spontaneously although institutions were needed to harness and direct the energies produced. As integral parts of the prevailing economic and political system, trade unions and the socialist party respectively misdirected and, on occasions, subdued these energies. The factory councils, however, were independent of capitalism and parliamentary democracy. They were truly proletarian in that they belonged to that sphere of activity in which the proletariat is defined as a class. They would give form and leadership to a working-class which by its own efforts had acquired revolutionary consciousness but not responsible consciousness of its obligations as a class. Education could assist it to discover the latter but what was more important was that workers should be provided with an institutional framework in which they could come to realise their capabilities and strength. The "New Order" could be established.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 100-1.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

In July, 1920, Gramsci described the Turin factory council movement as "a glorious chapter in the history of the European proletariat"⁶⁸. Claiming that the councils quickly took root as organs of proletarian power despite their earlier purely technical and industrial character, he writes that "the masses greeted this form of communist organization with enthusiasm; they aligned themselves with the executive committees and energetically supported the struggle against capitalist autocracy"⁶⁹. Strikes as early as December, 1919, had testified to the councils' capability of leading a mass movement. "Acting on orders from the Socialist section, which held control over the whole of the mass movement in its hands, and without any preparation whatsoever, the Factory Councils were able to mobilize 120,000 workers, called out factory by factory, in the course of just one hour. This armed proletariat was launched like an avalanche into the city centre and soon cleared the streets and squares of all the nationalist and militarist riff-raff."⁷⁰ Gramsci's comments raise a number of pertinent points.

First, there can be no doubt that the northern Italian proletariat did enjoy successes during 1919-20. In April, 1920, for example, a general strike in Turin won massive support and a state of affairs existed which, if it could not be described as a revolutionary situation, was sufficient to instil a fear of revolution in the already aggrieved middle classes. Second, it should be noted that some of the latter had begun to turn for help to nationalist and other right-wing groupings, "the nationalist and militarist riff-raff" as Gramsci describes them. Gramsci's description may indicate the extent to which socialists,

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 310.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 318.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

blinded by their own optimism, underestimated the threat of the right. Finally, it is noticeable that Gramsci suggests that the factory councils acted on the orders of a socialist, political leadership. Spontaneity was clearly not enough and it may be that even in 1920 Gramsci was beginning to move towards a more Leninist standpoint. Soon he was obliged to do so by the failure of the Italian "revolution".

The council movement failed to make the headway in other Italian areas that it had done in Turin and Piedmont generally. Gramsci himself had described Turin as "the industrial city, the proletarian city, par excellence"⁷¹ and he had always realised the importance of its role in Italian political development. The city's working class was well organised and militant so that these factory councils could be made proper use of. Gramsci writes that "the Turin proletariat was able to advance so far along the road of Soviet-type mass organisation precisely because of this powerfully unified character of the city's industry; precisely because, through its experiences of class struggle, it has acquired a vivid awareness of its homogeneity and solidarity"⁷². He recognised that Piedmont would have an important part to play in the coming Italian revolution but believed that the struggle would not be confined to one region. "The fight is not only in Turin, but all over Italy, all over the world - and if anything assists in making intentions more steadfast and determination more dogged, then this is a tool in the preparation of the masses, even if it is won at the cost of sacrifices and apparent losses."⁷³

The losses were, in fact, to be more real than apparent. The very successes achieved in Turin serve to underline the overall failure of the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 151.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 183-4.

Ordine Nuovo movement for they stand out clearly against the backdrop of political passivity in much of the rest of Italy. The eventual defeat of the April strike revealed the extent to which the Turin proletariat was in revolutionary advance of other Italian workers and peasants. As Gramsci acknowledged, "it is certain that the Turinese working-class was defeated because in Italy there did not exist, or have not yet matured, the necessary and sufficient conditions for an organic and disciplined movement of the working class and peasants together"⁷⁴. Thus, in searching for an immediate explanation for the failure of the Italian workers' movement to create the "New Order", Gramsci, like a true orthodox Marxist of the Second International, falls back on economic determinism. The revolution had failed because economic conditions in parts of Italy other than Piedmont had not matured sufficiently to create in the proletariat the necessary consciousness. This determinism even made Gramsci wary of the Occupation of the Factories in September, 1920, described by Fiori as "the last revolutionary outburst of the Italian working class"⁷⁵. Clark shows that Gramsci did not think a revolutionary outcome was likely although his initial hesitation gave way to muted enthusiasm for the revival of factory council activity.⁷⁶ With the defeat of the Occupations, the failure of the Ordine Nuovo movement was complete and, according to James Joll, "from Gramsci's point of view in fact the year 1920 ended in disaster and disappointment"⁷⁷.

There were many reasons why the Italian revolution failed. Divisions in Italian society had been reflected in Turin's comparative isolation during the "Red Years". Reaction had always been likely and

⁷⁴ Cited in Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 129.

⁷⁵ Fiori, op. cit., p. 137.

⁷⁶ See Clark, op. cit., pp. 162-3.

⁷⁷ Joll, op. cit., p. 44.

the employers had proved themselves to be better organised than the socialists. According to a deterministic Marxist analysis of the situation, conditions had simply not matured enough for the advent of socialism. But, despite Gramsci's immediate response to the events of 1919-20, his reaction to the Russian Revolution indicates that he was not a determinist of the type which dominated Marxist orthodoxy. His understanding of Marxist materialism did not lead him to embrace passive fatalism. Conditions for a revolution had to exist if the revolution was to be made but the important point is that it had to be made. In 1919-20, he had pinned his hopes on the factory councils as the organisations through which the Italian proletariat would make its revolution. Now Gramsci, and other Italian revolutionaries, began to see that, vital as the educational and organisational activity of the factory council period had been, what was lacking throughout the "Red Years" was political leadership. The councils may have been the Italian equivalent of the Russian Soviets, but where was the equivalent of the Bolshevik party? The P.S.I., fearing the spontaneity of the Ordine Nuovo movement, had voted against revolution and joined with the liberal government and the employers in their efforts to divert the workers' demands into parliamentary channels.

It was time for Gramsci and his comrades to reflect on the failed revolution. Elsewhere in western Europe, socialist optimism had also shown itself to be ill-founded. One apparently obvious reason was that, though revolutionaries had correctly condemned the reformism of the main socialist parties, they themselves had expected too much from the spontaneous energies of the proletariat. Rosa Luxemburg was prevented from reconsidering her attitude to the vanguard party as a solution to the problem of the non-revolutionary proletariat. In Italy, however, Gramsci could now take stock. He came to the conclusion that what had been

missing in the "Red Years" was a communist party, thus moving from Luxemburgism to Leninism. This latter was more consistent with his own earlier comments on Marxism and on the Russian Revolution and in the years subsequent to the failed revolution he became involved in the creation of the P.C.I.

(iii) Towards the P.C.I.

It can be argued that "the 'Revolution that failed' in 1919-20 was a constant theme in Gramsci's later writings, and led to many of his reflections about why revolutions fail, how political parties should be organised, and the role of ideology"⁷⁸. Of course, at this time, Gramsci did not believe that the revolution was over. It was only when he found himself in prison after the triumph of Fascism that he really began to analyse a failed revolution. In the early 1920s, his theoretical interest was in devising a strategy which would bring about the successful completion of developments started in 1919-20.

He decided immediately that the revolution could not be divided into economic and political stages. Both elements had to be dealt with simultaneously and a manifest defect of the factory council movement was that it had not expressed itself politically. The political aspect of the revolutionary struggle had been almost wholly neglected despite Gramsci's hopes that the P.S.I. might provide some leadership. In fact, he was obliged, after the event, to describe the unpreparedness of the Italian proletariat as "undoubted evidence of the 'superstition' and mental limitedness" of the guidance they had been given.⁷⁹ As Davidson remarks, "Gramsci concluded that the P.S.I. leaders who could have, if not secured the success of the strike (of April, 1920), at least

⁷⁸ Clark, op. cit., p. 2.

⁷⁹ See Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 129.

maintained and secured the gains the workers had made in the factories, had done nothing, and the Turin workforce would now have to fight on two fronts: for the conquest of industrial power and for the conquest of the trade unions and proletarian unity"⁸⁰. Joll writes that "in the years after the failure of the great protest movements of 1920, Gramsci's first reaction was to blame the Socialist Party leaders and to stress the need to correct the errors into which the masses were all too easily led"⁸¹. It may not actually have been his first reaction but he could not forgive the part which the P.S.I. had played for, according to Gramsci, "events occur and the Party is absent"⁸². In keeping with Leninist determinism, Gramsci could see no greater revolutionary crime than that of failing to act when conditions were suitable.

He had doubted for some time the ability of the P.S.I. to act in a revolutionary manner and, although he had continued to recognise the party as the political agent of the proletariat even during the factory council movement, his misgivings had been confirmed by the events of 1920. At the close of that year, Gramsci described the P.S.I. as "a conglomeration of individuals who had sufficient class consciousness to be able to organise themselves into a trade union, but for the most part did not have the political ability or preparation required to organise themselves into the sort of revolutionary party that the present historical period demanded"⁸³. His criticisms echo Lenin's condemnation of the vulgarisers of Marxism who ignore Marx's statements about the need to replace the weapon of criticism by the criticism of weapons and his belief that without political leadership the working class can acquire only trade

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

⁸¹ Joll, op. cit., p. 51.

⁸² Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 154.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 364.

union consciousness. According to Gramsci, the P.S.I. was unable to go beyond parliamentarism and had "systematically neglected and ignored each and every movement of the mass of the people, whether they were industrial workers or politically backward poor peasants"⁸⁴. As he had commented during the "Red Years", "the party of revolutionary workers and peasants, it allows the permanent army of the revolution, the workers' union, to remain under the control of opportunists who can at will bewitch its ability to manoeuvre; who systematically sabotage every revolutionary action; who form a party within a Party - and the stronger party, because they control the motor ganglions of the working-class today"⁸⁵. The P.S.I. was decidedly not one of those parties which, according to Lenin, "have realised the material prerequisites of a revolution and have placed themselves at the head of the progressive classes"⁸⁶.

Gramsci's hopes that the party could renew itself had been dispelled and he came to the conclusion, at the end of 1920, that there did not exist in Italy "any broadly organized force, equipped with a clear and precise will, capable of initiating and pursuing a plan of action which is consonant with the historical process and at the same time an interpretation of real and immediate history - i.e. not a plan coldly predetermined in an abstract fashion"⁸⁷. From December, 1919, to the beginning of 1921, according to Gramsci, there had been a "continual demonstration of the party's inability to organize the political life of the Italian people, to give it a direction, to guide the vanguard of the popular revolution so as to provide it with a precise awareness of its concrete tasks and specific responsibilities. The Socialist Party has shown that it does

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 370.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 156-7.

⁸⁶ Lenin, Selected Works, p. 72.

⁸⁷ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 356.

not have any ideas of its own concerning the state, that it does not have a programme of its own for revolutionary government"⁸⁸. Much had been achieved during 1919-20 but only through the spontaneous efforts of the workers, "given the incapacity of the Socialist Party to carry out its historical task"⁸⁹. The crisis which had developed was inevitable but its outcome was not predetermined and could be vouchsafed only by the efforts of revolutionaries such as those who had instigated the "revolution against Capital". Gramsci came to believe that in Italy hopes for the future rested on those communists in the P.S.I. who, "through their clear and precise political positions and their unyielding intransigence, seek to protect the frail body of the world workers' state from Italian corruption, from Italian scepticism, from the bad practices of Italian political life"⁹⁰. In some respects, these bad practices to which Gramsci refers are reflected in the realism of Italian political thought which refutes suggestions that all mankind's problems are surmountable and considers only how best stability may be achieved for as long a period as possible. Gramsci had already studied this tradition and, in due course, would reveal its influence on his political thinking but, for the time being, his attitudes were imbued with Marxism in its politically idealist form and pragmatic policies and realistic expectations were anathema to him as he strove to complete the Italian revolution. Thus, it is argued that "the failure of the Turin factory movement to spread to other cities and the attitude of the leadership of the existing party convinced Gramsci that only the organization of a new workers' party could coordinate revolutionary action and transform the councils into a national phenomenon: and this became his main concern"⁹¹.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 369.

⁸⁹ Gramsci, PW 1921-6, p. 3.

⁹⁰ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 371.

⁹¹ Alberto Martinelli, "In Defense of the Dialectic: Antonio Gramsci's theory of revolution", Berkeley Journal of Sociology, XIII, 1968, p. 16.

(iv) Gramsci the Communist

As in other European socialist parties, divisions had long been present in the P.S.I., especially between those who favoured a revolutionary strategy and those who, while tolerating the revolutionary language of the party programme, were content to use reformist tactics to achieve minimum goals. At the party congress at Livorno, in January, 1921, these divisions finally created a split in the P.S.I. which was to result in the formation of a separate communist party. This was in line with Gramsci's own hopes and it is ironic, therefore, that the party which emerged did not meet with his unqualified approval.

The new proletarian organ was largely the creation of Gramsci's sometime rival on the left of the Italian workers' movement, Amadeo Bordiga, leader of the Neapolitan section of the P.S.I. and a critic of the ideas behind the Ordine Nuovo movement. Both men were of the opinion that a communist party was needed urgently but, as Fiori maintains, "apart from their shared dislike of the reformists, Gramsci and Bordiga differed on practically everything: on the factory councils, on the problem of the revolutionary party, and on the question of the correct socialist attitude towards elections"⁹². On the latter point, Bordiga wrote, "we are against the participation of communists in elections for parliaments, or bourgeois municipal and provincial councils, or constituent assemblies, because we are of the opinion that it is not possible to carry out revolutionary work in such bodies; we believe that electoral work is an obstacle in the path of the working masses, forming a communist consciousness and laying the preparations for the proletarian dictatorship as the antithesis of bourgeois democracy"⁹³. So Bordiga called on the

⁹² Fiori, op. cit., p. 130.

⁹³ Quoted in Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 211.

Communist Party to "abandon its participation in elections to organs of bourgeois democracy"⁹⁴.

Gramsci argued that abstentionism was acceptable only if an alternative form of government is already established. In Russia, the Soviets had provided this alternative but the failure of the factory council movement in Italy meant that no corresponding institutions could be seen to exist so that abstentionism had to be condemned. In any case, parliamentary action could lead paradoxically to the immobilisation of parliament because it "strips the democratic mask away from the ambivalent face of the bourgeois dictatorship and reveals it in all its horrible and repugnant ugliness"⁹⁵. The individual passions of the Italian working masses had to be given "a unity and elemental form" and it was for this reason that "conscious revolutionaries have accepted the electoral challenge"⁹⁶.

Gramsci was not becoming a reformist. He feared that too much contact with bourgeois institutions could divert the working class from its revolutionary objective. Thus, he attacked the "electionist" wing in the breakaway party as well as the abstentionists and found himself all the more isolated as a result. According to Joll, Gramsci and Bordiga shared Lenin's general conception of what form a revolutionary party should take but "they differed on what this meant in the situation of Italy in the 1920s"⁹⁷. These differences were not confined to the question of the correct position on elections.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

⁹⁷ Joll, op. cit., p. 54.

Bordiga argued that the work of creating a "communist party that is worthy to affiliate to Moscow" should begin "with the elaboration of a consciousness, a political culture, in the leaders, through a more serious study of the problems of the revolution, with fewer distractions from spurious electoral, parliamentary and minimalist activities"⁹⁸. The important point is Bordiga's emphasis on "the leaders". He argued strongly for a small party of professional revolutionaries, single-minded in their purpose and unconcerned with side issues like factory council activity, educational work and parliamentarism, who would lead the proletariat to the acquisition of revolutionary consciousness.

An élitist party of this type was precisely what Gramsci did not want. "We must strive to promote the organic creation of a communist party that is not a collection of dogmatists or little Machiavellis, but a party of revolutionary communist action; a party with a precise consciousness of the historical mission of the proletariat and the ability to guide the proletariat to the accomplishment of that mission."⁹⁹ His pejorative use of Machiavelli's name indicates how far Gramsci was, at that time, from being influenced by the "dual perspective" which corresponds in political life to the combined use of domination and consent. Yet, together with Bordiga, Gramsci accepted that the spontaneously acquired attitudes of the proletariat could not sustain the revolutionary effort and that some degree of leadership was necessary. Only a communist party could provide this and for that reason Gramsci agreed to join a party which was more élitist than he would have wished and certain to be dominated from the start by Bordiga and his followers. Gramsci lacked both the self-confidence and the support needed to challenge the latter at Livorno and "the party was consequently organized on a rigidly disciplined

⁹⁸ Quoted in Gramsci, PW 1910-20, pp. 232-3.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 309.

centralist basis"¹⁰⁰.

Gramsci could not have been happy with this outcome. As early as July, 1920, he had argued that the communist party must be "a party of the masses who, through their own efforts, are striving to liberate themselves autonomously from political and industrial servitude through the organization of the social economy, and not a party which makes use of the masses for its own heroic attempts to imitate the French Jacobins"¹⁰¹. In later years, Gramsci's estimation of Jacobinism was to be considerably more favourable¹⁰² but his belief in the spontaneity of the working class had not diminished to such a degree by the time of the Livorno Congress to tempt him to accept the Bordigan conception of the party. Yet, at the end of January, 1921, he argued, in Leninist terms, that Communist Party militants "must show that they are truly capable of dominating events; that they are truly capable of filling every hour and every minute with the activity which that hour and that minute require; that they are truly capable of welding together the links in the historical chain which must end with the victory of the proletariat"¹⁰³. The first link to be forged was the Communist Party and, thereafter, if the revolutionary will was strongly dedicated to the patient work of organization, then the other links would also be forged and welded.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 154.

¹⁰¹ Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 309.

¹⁰² Gramsci, PN, p. 130. Gramsci claims that the Jacobins were a "categorical embodiment" of Machiavelli's Prince and that in his political writings there must be a place for Jacobinism "as an exemplification of the concrete formation and operation of a collective will which at least in some aspects was an original, ex novo creation". Another example of his qualified admiration for Jacobinism may be found in his comments on the inadequacies of the Action Party in Italy during the development of the modern State. Compared with the Jacobins, according to Gramsci, this party failed to unite town and country and organise a national-popular collective will. See Gramsci, PN, pp. 55-90 and pp. 125-33.

¹⁰³ Gramsci, PW 1921-6, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ See ibid.

However, Gramsci's qualms about the Bordigan organisation and outlook of the new party increased when he came to consider the growing presence of Fascism in Italian political life for it can be argued that Gramsci was afraid, even at this early stage in the rise of Fascism, that the Communist Party would remain a small and isolated group which would be unable to win mass support in order to combat this new threat to the Italian revolution. This problem was accentuated by what Gramsci considered to be Bordiga's erroneous analysis of Fascism, according to which the new movement was a transitory phenomenon which itself had no mass support. Gramsci, however, quickly came to recognise Fascism as a more deeply-rooted and permanent aspect of Italian life and increasingly argued, in opposition to Bordiga, that in a period in which, as it appeared to him, the main problem was to defeat this counterrevolutionary tendency, it was necessary for communists to extend the appeal of their party to all workers and peasants and to sections of the liberal bourgeoisie.¹⁰⁵ Although Fascist support was dominated by the petty-bourgeoisie, it included members of all classes. It had to be opposed by an equally broad movement coordinated by the Communist Party. Nevertheless, Gramsci accepted Bordiga's Rome Theses of 1921 which constituted the new party's programme despite the distance between himself and the party leader on numerous issues.

Gramsci's acknowledgement of Bordiga's leadership led to his being chosen as the Communist Party's representative on the Executive Committee of the Communist International in Moscow. What helped to secure his selection was his opposition, shared by Bordiga, to the strategy suggested by Lenin and Comintern in 1921-2 to the effect that the revolutionary objective should be set aside in Germany and Italy until Fascism was defeated. Despite Gramsci's interpretation of Fascism which

¹⁰⁵ See Gramsci, PW 1910-20, p. 60.

had led him to accept that a broad oppositional force was needed, he felt that the united front suggested by the Comintern was too broad, perhaps even encompassing reactionary elements of the traditional right. His own view of the situation fell somewhere between Lenin's and Bordiga's making him acceptable to the P.C.I. and also to the Russians who had opposed Bordiga's leadership of the Italian communists. Though it was realised that "Bordiga's tendency towards a closed sectarianism rather than the kind of wide-ranging mass action which alone could have stayed or defeated Fascism was shared by most of the party's leaders"¹⁰⁶, it was felt in Moscow that the Livorno split was a leftward lurch which needed to be corrected. A right-wing minority in the new P.C.I. had opposed the Bordigan tendency but of more interest to the Comintern was Gramsci's revolutionary opposition. There was, therefore, agreement on all sides to Gramsci's new appointment.

During the following two years, he met and fell in love with Julia Schucht who was to bear him two sons.¹⁰⁷ He also saw at first hand the system created by the men whose revolution had so inspired him. He was obliged to study developments in Italy from afar and perhaps with greater objectivity than before, becoming even more aware of the novelty and the significance of Fascism. In October, 1922, his worst fears were realised when Mussolini set up a national Fascist government and before the year was over the Fascists even controlled Turin, the centre of the revolutionary activities of the Italian workers' movement just over a year earlier.

¹⁰⁶ Fiori, op. cit., p. 153.

¹⁰⁷ Both Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 185 and Fiori, op. cit., pp. 154-7, argue that Gramsci's relationship with Julia precipitated a fundamental change in his personality. He had thought of himself as incapable of being loved and the changed situation strengthened his self-confidence. It is claimed that this was a key factor in his subsequent struggle with Bordiga for the leadership of the P.C.I.

Bordiga continued to believe that Fascism signalled capitalism's imminent collapse. Gramsci was pessimistic, arguing that Fascism could be defeated only by a determined movement consisting of workers and peasants. It can be argued that "Gramsci's analysis of fascism had turned his attention to the problem of the peasants and the South" and "was driving him away from a purist position where the exclusively proletarian party kept itself isolated from the corrupting groups of 'non-believers'"¹⁰⁸. This tendency had been apparent since the Livorno Congress but, as Davidson claims, Gramsci's ideas on the tactics needed to fight Fascism "confirmed the decisive turn in his theoretical outlook which had been implicit since 1920"¹⁰⁹. Arguably, Gramsci was becoming less of a political idealist and the process was to continue when he found himself more closely involved in events in Italy once more.

Bordiga was arrested in 1923 and, in December, 1924, Gramsci left Moscow for Vienna in order to be better able to monitor developments at home. His analysis of Fascism and his opposition to Bordiga's élitist conception of the party remained constant, but a growing element in Gramsci's theory was an interest in the nature of the State and the other superstructural realms characteristic of capitalism. According to Gramsci, Bordiga seemed to think that because capitalism was more developed in western Europe than it had been in Tsarist Russia, the victory of the socialist revolution was all the more certain. For Bordiga, "there exists the historical determinism which was lacking in Russia, and therefore the over-riding task must be the organization of the party as an end in itself"¹¹⁰. According to Gramsci, however, "the determination, which in Russia was direct and drove the masses onto the streets for a

¹⁰⁸ Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 196.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Gramsci, PW 1921-6, p. 199.

revolutionary uprising, in central and western Europe is complicated by all these political super-structures, created by the greater development of capitalism"¹¹¹. "This makes the action of the masses slower and more prudent, and therefore requires of the revolutionary party a strategy and tactics altogether more complex and long-term than those which were necessary for the Bolsheviki in the period between March and November 1917."¹¹² This point, communicated by Gramsci to Togliatti, Umberto Terracini and others from Vienna in February 1924, was precisely the one missed by Lenin when he prophesied that revolutions in the West would follow soon after the success of the Bolsheviki. Gramsci recognised the existence of a higher proletarian stratum, the labour aristocracy, with appendages in the trade-union leadership and the social democratic movement and recognised it as a product of capitalist development and, therefore, an integral part of it.¹¹³ Gramsci, thus, began to elaborate, in embryonic form, the ideas which would underlie the theory of revolution developed in his prison writings.¹¹⁴

In career terms too, a change had taken place. Gramsci had advanced in the Party to such an extent that "at the age of thirty-two, he was effectively leader of the Italian communist movement, at least in the eyes of the International"¹¹⁵. However, Bordiga had been acquitted in October, 1923, and it was unlikely that he would readily relax his grip on the reins of power. In March, 1924, therefore, Gramsci was forced to admit publicly his break with his rival. According to Davidson, Gramsci's firm conviction that "no compromise was possible with Amadeo

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 199-200.

¹¹³ See ibid., p. 199.

¹¹⁴ Further to this, see pp. 162-72.

¹¹⁵ Fiori, op. cit., p. 163.

might have completely isolated him again, had he not been elected for the Veneto electorate on 13 April"¹¹⁶. This allowed him parliamentary immunity from prosecution and he was able to return to Italy to engage in the struggle for the leadership of the party. Bordiga's influence was still great and he remained a stern critic of all broadly-based strategies. Gramsci's task would be difficult. Furthermore, he himself was not convinced by every aspect of Comintern policy and, indeed, after the assassination in 1924 of Giacomo Matteotti, a Socialist deputy, and the subsequent withdrawal of opposition parties from parliament, Gramsci renounced his opinion that the Communist Party should play a part in the united front tactic and insisted that its deputies return, alone if need be, to the Fascist-dominated chamber.

In general, however, Gramsci followed the Comintern line, in spite of his condemnation of the ostracisation of Trotsky, and he was permitted to do so by his own analysis of Fascism and his critique of Bordiga. His triumph came in January, 1926, when, at the party's Lyons Congress, many of his ideas were accepted as party policy. As Joll comments, "the Lyons Theses and the discussion of them at the congress, at which Gramsci is said to have spoken for four hours and Bordiga for seven, mark both Gramsci's victory over Bordiga and his commitment to the line of the International"¹¹⁷. Among the Gramscian arguments accepted by the congress was that the Party should lead a broad anti-fascist struggle, that the peasantry should play a vital role in that struggle and that a cellular-structured Communist Party should remain at the head of the working class and its allies.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Davidson, Antonio Gramsci, p. 212.

¹¹⁷ Joll, op. cit., pp. 66-7.

¹¹⁸ See Gramsci, PW 1921-6, pp. 313-75, for minutes of the Lyons Congress.

Gramsci's concern with the peasantry led him into further researches into the whole problem of the South.¹¹⁹ But, his triumph within the P.C.I. was to be short-lived.

On 31 October, 1926, an attempt was made on Mussolini's life. Fascist violence erupted. A series of laws were enacted which marked the final blow to what democratic rights yet remained in Italy. Gramsci's confidence that he would continue to receive the protection granted by parliamentary immunity was soon shaken when the Fascists, angered by his frequent attacks on their policies, decided to silence the P.C.I. leader. He was arrested on 8 November. Gramsci was sent for trial on 9 February, 1927, and again in May when he was charged with encouraging mayhem, civil war and looting within the realm. He was found guilty on 4 June and sentenced to twenty years, five months and five days imprisonment. As Davidson comments, "his active political practice had finished" and "he now had four and a half thousand days to think on its theoretical implications for Marxism and revolutionary socialism"¹²⁰. Gramsci's contribution to the first phase of revolutionary criticism of Marxist orthodoxy was at an end. His subsequent reflections are part of that second phase which emerges in the shadow of Fascism when revolutionaries became less optimistic than they had been in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The initial revolutionary response to Marxist orthodoxy had shared the latter's optimism. The social revolution was either an inevitability or, at the very least, a real possibility given the developments taking place in the economic substructure of capitalist societies.

¹¹⁹ As Fiori, *op. cit.*, p. 208, suggests, this interest marks a transition from the journalism of his early period as a political activist to a more contemplative style and attitude.

¹²⁰ Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci*, p. 231.

Where the revolutionaries parted company with the orthodox Marxists of the Second International and also with one another was on the subject of strategy. Luxemburg, Lenin, Gramsci and the rest agreed that reformism was incapable of bringing about the revolution and revolutionary action was required. Despite a shared determinism of sorts, Luxemburg and Lenin disagreed as to how this action would come about; Luxemburg remained convinced that it would evolve spontaneously out of the material conditions in which the working class found itself whereas Lenin argued that an extra dimension was required in the shape of a vanguard party. The development of Gramsci's strategic outlook represents a gradual shift from Luxemburg's position to Lenin's following the collapse of the factory council movement. For most of his years as a political activist, irrespective of which strategy he embraced, he appeared confident that the socialist revolution would succeed in Italy and elsewhere. What is significant for the later development of his political theory is that he began to turn away from the Leninist position too inasmuch as he came to argue that the revolution in the West could not be carried out at the same rate and in the same way as in Russia. Furthermore, he had shown an unwillingness throughout the period to accept in full the idea of a vanguard party unless that party was organically linked to the working masses. Hints of a growing political realism had begun to appear in Gramsci's writings even as he struggled to become leader of the P.C.I. In prison, obliged to come to terms finally with the failure of the Italian revolution, Gramsci was to develop this realism, thereby revealing his mature political thought to be influenced by the Italian tradition of political debate as well as by the ambiguous Marxian and revolutionary Marxist foundations.

The most convincing evidence of the influence exerted by the Italian political debate tradition on Gramsci's thought is provided by his theory of the State in which he grapples directly with the problematic nature of political power. His entire political theory, however, is infused with the realism of the "dual perspective". Before examining in detail his theory of the State and its significance as a contribution to Marxist political thought, therefore, it is worthwhile considering Gramsci's general approach to political themes in the Prison Notebooks, especially in view of the fact that it is difficult to study individual elements of these fragmented writings in isolation given that each is interwoven with the rest. It has been argued that "the genuinely complex nature of Gramsci's thought and the form of his work in prison, where a single fragment usually contains several intertwined concepts, requires a special kind of effort to establish Gramsci's fundamental problematic"¹. According to another commentator, Gramsci's political theory "lies fragmented and dispersed throughout his 'Quaderni del Carcere', waiting to be pieced together like an old jigsaw puzzle"². It is difficult to distill the political wisdom contained in the Notebooks. Attempts to summarize Gramsci's thought can lead to innocent distortions. Worse still, the complexity of the presentation of Gramsci's ideas facilitates selective treatment and conscious distortion, often with a view to claiming Gramsci's authority for a particular political position. It may be true, as Joll argues, that "for all the scattered, fragmentary and often difficult nature of Gramsci's writings, he is a thinker who is interesting enough

¹ Chantal Mouffe and Anne Showstack Sassoon, "Gramsci in France and Italy - A Review of the Literature", Economy and Society, 6 (1), Feb., 1977, p. 31.

² Thomas R. Bates, "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXVI (2), Apr./June, 1975, p. 351.

to bear many rival interpretations"³ but this does not make it any easier to know how to present a critical analysis of Gramsci's general theory of politics or even where to begin.

Most commentators take one key element to be fundamental to an understanding of Gramsci's thought. The majority emphasise the centrality of the concept of hegemony⁴ but there are also advocates of the notion of the historic bloc⁵, Gramsci's theory of the intellectuals⁶ and, of course, the theory of the State⁷. A similar approach is taken in this thesis in that attention will be focussed increasingly on the latter and on Gramsci's distinction between political and civil society which is its central feature. However, it is vital that this is preceded by a general examination of Gramsci's political thought and this, in a wider context. For that reason, one must begin by considering the phase of revolutionary, Marxist theory to which Gramsci's prison writings belong for, as Carl

³ Joll, op. cit., p. 14.

⁴ See, for example, Bates, op. cit., Showstack Sassoon, op. cit. and Anderson, op. cit.

⁵ See Hughes Portelli, Gramsci et le bloc historique, Paris, 1972.

⁶ See Jean-Marx Piotte, La Pensée politique de Gramsci, Paris, 1970.

⁷ In Gramsci and the State, London, 1980, Christine Buci-Glucksmann argues that the theory of the State and the concept of hegemony are the two central features of Gramsci's thought. Her overall analysis of Gramsci's theories is influenced greatly by the work of Louis Althusser. The Althusserian critique of Gramsci is not dealt with in this thesis, the main objectives of which are to reveal the development and theoretical significance of Gramsci's theory of the State and to indicate what this means for an overall evaluation of Gramsci's contribution to political thought. Less attention is paid to the strategic implications for revolutionary activism of Gramsci's thought than a proper study of Althusser's critique would necessitate and, indeed, the examination of the analytical applicability of Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction which follows is aimed less at assessing the adequacy of his analysis of the modern State than with establishing what the use to which his ideas have been put may tell us about the essence of his political vision. Because Gramsci is discussed here as a political thinker as well as a Marxist, only touched upon are matters concerning his contribution to Marxist strategy which could be fully dealt with only in a thesis devoted entirely to critiques of Gramsci put forward by Althusser and Poulantzas amongst others.

Boggs suggests, "the central and guiding theme of the 'Notebooks', which combined fragmentary notes and observations with systematic analysis, was the development of a new Marxist theory applicable to the conditions of advanced capitalism"⁸. It was around this problem, confronting revolutionary Marxists in the wake of the failures of the western European workers' movement and the rise to power of right-wing authoritarianism, that Gramsci's general theory of politics is constructed rather than around any single concept. Thus, in the words of Joseph Femia, "to assess his contribution, it is important to understand the condition of Marxism in the early part of this century"⁹.

It is vital to bear in mind the ambiguity of Marx's political teachings with their inherent tensions and the resultant conflicts in the elaboration of what was to be a correct Marxist political approach. By the end of the nineteenth century, Marxist orthodoxy was dominated by determinism and reformism but both had been challenged, the latter in particular, during the initial period in which orthodox Marxism came under attack. By the time of Gramsci's arrest, however, the optimism which had been shared by all Marxists, revolutionary and reformist alike, had evaporated and it was left now to revolutionary socialists to reflect on what had gone wrong and to develop a Marxist theory of politics as a continuing critique of reformism and as a basis for a revival in the fortunes of the workers' movement. It is in this context that Gramsci's political theory can best be understood.

⁸ Boggs, op. cit., p. 14.

⁹ Joseph Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", Political Studies, 23 (1), March, 1975, p. 29.

As John Merrington claims, "there has been a growing interest among European socialists in those Marxist writers and activists of the period immediately preceding and following the October Revolution, whose theories grew out of the collapse of the Second International and the failure of the revolutionary wave which swept Europe in 1917-20"¹⁰. Initially, many of these thinkers had concluded that what had been missing from the struggle in the West were vanguard parties of the type which had been successful in Russia. Their attention turned to the task of creating such parties in their own countries. The founding of the Italian Communist Party belongs to this period in the history of socialism - a period which was brought to a close in Italy by the triumph of the Fascists, one of the main events which prompted yet another change in the direction of revolutionary theory in western Europe. Nonetheless, in the words of Paul Piccone, "in the early 1920s, before Stalinism and Fascism combined to end all theoretical debates concerning Marxism, three Hegelian Marxists dominated the scene: Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci"¹¹.

It has been argued that they responded to the need, so apparent in the aftermath of failed revolutions, for radical departures in theory and practice and, consequently, they went "beyond the terms of the earlier 'revisionist debate' - both 'revolutionaries' and 'reformists' had remained locked within the same problematic - carrying out a new diagnosis and prognosis from their experience of the postwar defeat, placing a renewed stress on the active, voluntary component of historical change, on the problem of agency in the making of a revolution"¹². It can be

¹⁰ John Merrington, "Theory and Practice in Gramsci's Marxism", Socialist Register, 1968, p. 145.

¹¹ Paul Piccone, "Gramsci's Hegelian Marxism", Political Theory, 2 (1), Feb., 1974, p. 32.

¹² Merrington, op. cit., p. 145.

argued too that these theorists began to push Marxism in a realistic and, at times, pessimistic direction despite their own efforts to retain confidence in the proletariat, the revolutionary movement and the socialist future. This was to be an important legacy of so-called Hegelian Marxism.

It has been pointed out that Gramsci, Korsch and Lukács came to Marxism initially along similar paths.¹³ Having absorbed considerable quantities of idealist philosophy, they became interested in revolutionary theorists like Labriola and Georges Sorel "who injected a dose of 'idealism' into Marxist theory and counted on the spontaneous creativity of the masses"¹⁴. According to Richard Kilminster, "it is a commonplace that, like Lukács and Korsch in the 1920s, Gramsci too can be seen from the standpoint of theory as reacting against orthodox, 'vulgar' materialist Marxism"¹⁵. Yet, despite the obvious similarities between the revolutionary responses of these three thinkers to a variety of practical and theoretical problems, their overall theories diverge in significant ways and, for this reason, it is illuminating to examine Gramsci's thought in the context of Hegelian Marxism.

Each of the most prominent Hegelian Marxists attempted to formulate a revolutionary response to such phenomena as the determinism of Marxist orthodoxy, the failures of the workers' movement in the West to follow the Bolsheviks' lead and the rise of Fascism. Korsch, for example, tried to explain these interrelated problems by way of a periodization of the history of Marxism into three distinct eras. The first stage saw Marxism

¹³ See Henry Pachter, "Gramsci - Stalinist without dogma", Dissent, Summer, 1974, p. 448.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Richard Kilminster, Praxis and Method. A Sociological Dialogue with Lukács, Gramsci and the Early Frankfurt School, London, 1979, p. 109.

reach a high theoretical level with the writings of Marx and Engels. In the second era, which coincided with the latter part of the nineteenth century, Marxism was adopted as the official ideology of the workers' movement but, according to Korsch, the "broadening of its base was matched by a proportional lowering of its theoretical level"¹⁶. Only in the third period, after 1905, was it possible "to re-elaborate a genuine Marxism by rediscovering its Hegelian philosophical bases" and the result of this re-elaboration would be the coincidence of high quality (theory) and high quantity (practice), resulting in successful socialist revolution ¹⁷.

Paul Piccone suggests that Korsch's analysis represents "a materialist explanation of the failures of the Second International - at least to the extent that theoretical (or ideological) phenomena are related to the sociohistorical development of the labor movement"¹⁸. On this point, Kilminster writes that "Korsch's central argument was that, 'applying' historical materialism to itself, it could be seen that at the stage of development of the dialectic of society reached by the time of the Second International the various components of the total scope of the theory (economy, politics, economics) became, incompatibly with their original unity, separated out as sets of purely scientific observation without any immediate connection with the dialectic in which they were embedded and their original practical, philosophical revolutionary

¹⁶ Piccone, op. cit., p. 37. According to Korsch, "this was due to the fact that, after the ebb of revolution in 1848, the 'theory' of Marx and Engels was progressing towards an even higher level of theoretical perfection although it was no longer directly related to the practice of the workers' movement". (See Karl Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy, London, 1970, p. 104.)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

intention"¹⁹. One wonders, with Piccone²⁰, if Korsch's analysis succeeds in explaining the separation within Marxist theory and the separation of theory from practice which he claims to reveal in his periodization. What is clear is his critique of the position of orthodox Marxism prior to 1905. What is left unexplained is the failure of the workers' movement in the West after 1905, when according to Korsch theory and practice had been reunited.

Was this failure only the result of the absence in the West of revolutionary, Bolshevik-type parties? So it had seemed to revolutionaries in the West immediately after the failed revolutions. But, what was the explanation for this in the context of Marxist theory? Implicit in Gramsci's response to the Russian Revolution is the view that Lenin had revitalised Marxism, thereby allowing him to see the need for the will of the revolutionary party to exert itself on events. Marxist orthodoxy, on the other hand, precluded such a realisation. It was not only the vanguard party which had been lacking in the West, therefore, it was an understanding of Marxism which could appreciate the value of such a party. For Korsch, as Piccone points out, the significant fact was that "Lenin . . . broke with his mechanistic and positivistic past ('Materialism and Empirio-criticism') and dove into Hegel in order not only to re-examine the foundations of Marxism, but also to work out an explanation for the monumental failure of the social democratic movement"²¹. According to Patrick Goode, "Korsch was heavily influenced by Lenin's recent pronouncements on philosophy, in favour of studying

¹⁹ Kilminster, op. cit., p. 123.

²⁰ Piccone, op. cit., p. 37. "What is not explained", writes Piccone, "is why there occurred a separation of theory from practice (which is not altogether according to historical evidence, since Marx and Engels were quite active in the formation and running of the International after 1848) and why quantitative growth necessarily entails qualitative decline."

²¹ Ibid., p. 32.

Hegel"²². It is this that makes it possible to regard Korsch as a Hegelian Marxist and, yet, in his attempts to further explain the failed revolutions, he remains essentially a Leninist. This restricted his ability to explain events in post-war Europe for the Leninist tactic had been adopted. Perhaps it had been adopted too late but the Italian example suggests, as Gramsci had begun to argue, that the direct translation of Leninist political practice to the West was insufficient. The problem was not lost on Korsch who "always criticised particular ideologies as they presented themselves as concrete questions in the course of the class struggle" and argued that Lenin himself "was never concerned with 'the problems of the revolution in general', only with the specific problems facing the revolutionary movement"²³. However, Korsch did not provide solutions to the problems which beset the cause of socialism in inter-war Europe. Greater re-examination of Marxist theory and practice was demanded and other thinkers turned to the Hegelian roots of Marxism less because this was sanctioned by Lenin than because experiences and conditions necessitated this work of rediscovery.

Thus, according to Goode, "despite the importance of Korsch's work, the leading figure in this renaissance was Lukács"²⁴. In similar vein, Kilminster claims that Lukács's History and Class Consciousness "marks a watershed in Marxist thinking and has exercised a profound influence"²⁵. It represents "an activist attack against fatalistic, deterministic Marxism contemporaneous with Gramsci's, and informed by a similar anti-positivism"²⁶. Unlike Korsch, Lukács went beyond Lenin's

²² Patrick Goode, Karl Korsch. A Study in Western Marxism, London, 1979, p. 70.

²³ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁵ Kilminster, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁶ Ibid.

philosophical discoveries since, in the words of George Lichtheim, "Lenin's partial return to Hegel - itself induced by the catastrophe of 1914 and the collapse of the Second International - stopped short of that radical renunciation of positivism which Lukács proposed in 'History and Class Consciousness',"²⁷.

Lukács's intention in this collection of essays published in 1923 was more than theoretical. He writes that "the unity of theory and practice exists not only in theory but also for practice"²⁸. Much of the activism of his thought is essentially philosophical, and he argues, for example, that it had been left to Marx "to make the concrete discovery of 'truth as the subject' and hence to establish the unity of theory and practice"²⁹. But, he always demands that this unity must be translated into practice since "the historical process will come to fruition in our deeds and through our deeds"³⁰. It is not enough to know that we are historical subjects. We must act accordingly. Lukács writes that "we have seen that the proletariat as a class can only conquer and retain a hold on class consciousness and raise itself to the level of its - objectively-given - historic task through conflict and action"³¹.

His Hegelian "revision" of Marxism does not represent a return to speculation. It is part of a call for action. His idealism resembles the idealist element of Marx's own thought, especially the Marxian critique of uncritical materialism. Indeed, Lukács recalls that critique

²⁷ George Lichtheim, Lukács, London, 1970, p. 63.

²⁸ Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, London, 1971, p. 43.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 43.

³¹ Ibid.

when he writes that "the truth that the old intuitive, mechanistic materialism could not grasp turns out to be doubly true for the proletariat, namely that it can be transformed and liberated only by its own actions, and that 'the educator must be educated'. The objective economic evolution could do no more than create the position of the proletariat in the production process. It was this position that determined its point of view. But the objective evolution could only give the proletariat the opportunity and the necessity to change society."³² According to Lukács, "any transformation can only come about as the product of the free-action of the proletariat itself"³³. The fact that Lukács writes of the necessity to act indicates how far from being an idealist this Hegelian Marxist was. He adopts a determinist posture similar to that taken by Lenin and, in so doing, adheres faithfully to the principles developed in Marx's double critique of idealism and uncritical materialism. However, he had still not solved the problem of why the western European proletariat had remained inactive during the post-war period of crisis. For an economic determinist, the solution could be sought in the immaturity of objective conditions. But, what explanation could be provided by a determinist who included in his conception the notion that whether or not society is transformed depends on the free-action and revolutionary will of the proletariat itself?

It may be argued that Lukács believed that "industrial society has produced a social group whose energies are most thoroughly utilized by the 'laws' of machines and the 'laws' of the market; the working population". Lukács claimed that "in becoming conscious of its own position, this group is able to gain consciousness of the entire social

³² Ibid., pp. 208-9.

³³ Ibid., p. 209.

fabric, of its character as a human enterprise - which is a step toward the transformation of society" although the process "is a continuous challenge"³⁴. Thus, in Berki's words, "Lukács offers us a comprehensive philosophical diagnosis of the modern age and outlines what he thinks is the remedy. His diagnosis reveals the root of all our maladies to be in the phenomenon of 'reification' - by which he means a state of affairs in the world that generates a perverted view of the nature and relationship of human beings and the objects surrounding them"³⁵. With this concept, Lukács reveals himself as a politically idealist Marxist who regards this root of all human maladies to be "the necessary, immediate reality of every person living in a capitalist society"³⁶. To rid mankind of its maladies requires the dissolution of the capitalist system. How does Lukács think this dissolution can be attained?

Piccone makes the point that the "theory of reification is essentially an account of the spontaneous development of class consciousness through the self-activity of the working class"³⁷. The condition of reification could be challenged only by a self-conscious proletariat. It could be overcome "only by constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of these contradictions for the total development"³⁸. Thus, in Lukács's view, the fate of the revolution depended "on the ideological maturity of the proletariat,

³⁴ Fred Dallmayr, "History and Class Consciousness: Georg Lukács' Theory of Social Change", Politics and Society, 1 (1), Nov., 1970, p. 123.

³⁵ R.N. Berki, "Evolution of a Marxist Thinker", Problems of Communism, XXI (6), Nov./Dec., 1972, p. 54.

³⁶ Lukács, op. cit., p. 197.

³⁷ Piccone, op. cit., p. 36.

³⁸ Lukács, op. cit., p. 197.

i.e. on its class consciousness"³⁹.

Yet, events in post-war Europe had weakened the confidence of many revolutionaries in the proletariat's capacity to acquire ideological maturity spontaneously. Rosa Luxemburg had attempted to reconcile her revolutionism with a measure of spontaneism and had failed in her political objectives. Success had come to the Russian revolutionaries but only, it might be argued, after trust in the spontaneous development of revolutionary consciousness had been abandoned and a vanguard party established to bring this consciousness to the workers from outside. This had been taken into account by Korsch; hence, his stress on the activism or voluntarism of Lenin's Marxism. It had also been understood by Gramsci and other western Marxists who took as an immediate lesson of the Russian Revolution the need to set up communist parties. Indeed, reflection on the Russian Revolution had given momentum to the movement against the determinism and contingent political passivity of Second International orthodoxy. How then could this be reconciled with Lukács's argument that the condition of reification, and, therefore, all human ailments, could be defeated only by a revolutionary proletariat acting upon spontaneously acquired consciousness?

In fact, it could not. Lukács was trapped within his own problematic. He believed, as Kilminster says, that "until socialism, social life within the reifications of capitalism is the unreal, calculative, repetitive and decadent permutation and rehearsal of its own commoditized nothingness, a situation in which reification has utterly penetrated and dehumanized life to the extent that men are existing completely determined rather than self-determining"⁴⁰. "Without the

³⁹ Piccone, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴⁰ Kilminster, op. cit., p. 105.

active proletarian victory there is only the abyss"⁴¹ but such was the influence of reified existence that the proletariat was prevented from acquiring the consciousness of its situation necessary to bring about this victory. As Tim Patterson argues, "the effect of reification is not simply mental misperception, but political paralysis"⁴². Like Korsch, Lukács continued to believe for a while that conditions in capitalist society would develop in such a way that the working class would be obliged to acquire a revolutionary consciousness and to realise its universality through action. Despite the sophistication of his conception, however, Lukács was forced increasingly towards accepting that the real solution lay in the Leninist party, the agency which could assist the proletariat to overcome reified existence and create socialism. The communist party was the key and, as G.H.R. Parkinson comments, "by 'the Communist Party' Lukács meant a party of the type that Lenin had fashioned; a disciplined body of revolutionaries, submitting themselves to a collective will, committing their whole personality to the Party, and existing as a separate organisation - separate, that is, from the proletariat"⁴³. Initially unwilling to abandon totally his faith in the masses, arguing that the Party merely gave shape to the latter's class consciousness, Lukács eventually accepted the rectitude of Soviet orthodoxy. It was this that kept alive his political idealism. Leninist tactics had not been used properly in the West. The main immediate problem, however, was to consolidate the successful revolution in Russia which had created the situation in which reification, the root of all human ailments, could be eradicated. Thus, Lukács became an apologist for Leninism and, thereafter, for Stalinism.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Tim Patterson, "Notes on the Historical Application of Marxist cultural theory", Science and Society, XXXIX (3), Fall, 1975, p. 265.

⁴³ G.H.R. Parkinson, Georg Lukács, London, 1977, p. 54.

If he was to remain politically idealistic, it was doubtful that Lukács could have done any other. Later critical theory which emerged partly out of his insights tended towards political pessimism or realism, the only other possible alternative vision stemming from Lukács's concept of reification. Korsch, for his part, became so disillusioned that he deserted left-wing politics. Overall, Piccone is correct to argue that neither he nor Lukács had explained fully why the workers' movement in post-war western Europe had failed to create a revolution.⁴⁴ Their initial trust in Leninism was shared by Gramsci. When even that trust was shaken, however, Korsch abandoned all hope and ceased to be a Marxist whereas Lukács sought solace in Marxist soteriological theory. Neither was prepared to study in great depth the actual problems which had confronted the workers' movement in western capitalist societies even when Leninist-type parties had evolved.

Korsch's emphasis on the need to be concerned with specific problems suggests that he had seen what was demanded. Indeed, it has been claimed that "perhaps what underlay Korsch's argument was a notion that was to become dominant later in 'Western Marxism': that the problem of ideology was much more important for the revolution in western Europe than it had been for Lenin and the Bolsheviks"⁴⁵. Gramsci had hinted at this possibility when he wrote, in 1924, that "the determination, which in Russia was direct and drove the masses onto the streets for a revolutionary uprising, in central and western Europe is complicated by all these political super-structures, created by the greater development of capitalism"⁴⁶. Of the Hegelian Marxists, it was Gramsci, not Lukács

⁴⁴ See Piccone, op. cit., p. 37.

⁴⁵ Goode, op. cit., p. 72.

⁴⁶ Gramsci, PW 1921-6, p. 199.

nor Korsch, who expanded on this argument. Arguably he was pushed in this direction by his forced separation from political life, which provided him with the opportunity to reflect more objectively on the subject of how political power is maintained in advanced capitalist societies. The product of this reflection is his general theory of politics which is infused not with the political idealism of Lukács nor with the non-Marxist political realism of the later Korsch but with a reasonable interpretation of Marx's teachings combined with a political realism inherited from the Italian tradition of political thought. According to Piccone, "of the three leading Hegelian Marxists of the period, Gramsci stands head and shoulders above the other two" in providing a critique of the deterministic and reformist orthodoxy of the Second International and an explanation of the failure of the revolutionary movement in the West.⁴⁷ Gramsci's achievement is the direct result of the combination of doctrines which influences his conception of politics. It is this combination which leads him towards the politically realistic side of Marxist political thought.

Gramsci's materialist conception of history

In the first part of this critical analysis of Gramsci's general theory of politics, it is necessary to examine his interpretation of historical materialism in an effort to substantiate the claim that he offers an accurate interpretation of Marx's own teachings as the basis for his critique of Second International orthodoxy. In Femia's words, "like Lenin and Lukács Gramsci reacted strongly against this scientific ossification and its attendant political passivity"⁴⁸ and it can be

⁴⁷ Piccone, op. cit., p. 35.

⁴⁸ Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 29.

argued that he did so not as an idealist challenging materialism but as a follower of Marx who condemned the fact that in the hands of many Second International theorists Marxism had been equated with the traditional types of materialism which Marx himself had criticised.⁴⁹ It has been argued, of course, that Gramsci's general outlook was idealist but he was scornful of the attempts of Croce, Gentile, Sorel and Bergson to imbue Marxism with idealism and saw his own task as that of formulating a critique of Croce as Marx had done with regard to Hegel. According to Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Gramsci's materialist position is "unequivocal and unarguable . . . except for those who deliberately seek an idealist interpretation of the Prison Notebooks"⁵⁰. Yet, if we are to understand Gramsci's materialist conception of history, this claim must be scrutinised for there are many varieties of materialist philosophy.

The important point is that Marx himself had condemned earlier materialist outlooks and, as Boggs indicates, "Gramsci's philosophical work . . . sought to revitalise Marxism by returning to the spirit of Marx himself and opposing him to the one-dimensional theoretical current that developed after his death"⁵¹. Thus, the dual critique which is present in Marx's conception influences Gramsci's dismissal of one-way determinist theories.⁵² According to Alberto Martinelli then, "Gramsci's intellectual position can be basically characterised as an effort to reconstruct the dialectical unity of Marxism by fighting against neo-idealism on the one hand, and 'vulgar' materialism on the other"⁵³.

⁴⁹ See chapter 1, pp. 43-8.

⁵⁰ Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., p. 75.

⁵¹ Boggs, op. cit., p. 23.

⁵² See Kolakowski, Main Currents in Marxism. Volume III, p. 231.

⁵³ Martinelli, op. cit., p. 2.

Boggs writes that "Gramsci sought to restore the meaning of the dialectic as a unifying force in a new revolutionary Marxism, as a corrective to both speculative idealism and narrow empiricism, either of which could only capture history from the perspective of detached, inert categories"⁵⁴. Indeed, it might be suggested that rather than reconstruct the dialectical unity of Marxist materialism, Gramsci set out to transcend the tension which existed within the original Marxian conception. Thus, he writes that Marxism could open up a new phase of history, in general, and of the history of world thought, in particular, "to the extent that it goes beyond both traditional idealism and traditional materialism, philosophies which are expressions of past societies, while retaining their vital elements"⁵⁵.

Some of Gramsci's critics might say that his conception of history retained more idealist elements than Marx himself would have wished and it is true, as Femia suggests, that for Gramsci "ideas had consequences which could not be dismissed or reduced to a more 'real' world of social and political phenomena"⁵⁶. Gramsci writes that "the claim, presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works"⁵⁷. Thus, though Gramsci can be said to seek a reformulation of the doctrine of historical materialism "in such a way as to allow room both for the

⁵⁴ Boggs, op. cit., p. 23.

⁵⁵ Gramsci, PN, p. 435.

⁵⁶ Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 29.

⁵⁷ Gramsci, PN, p. 407.

influence of ideas on history and for the impact of the individual human will"⁵⁸, it is clear that he did so in the belief that this was in line with Marx's own conception. As Kolakowski indicates, Gramsci believed it to be absurd "to tax Marxists with holding that the 'superstructure' was a world of mere appearances or a 'less real' side of life than productive relations"⁵⁹.

Marxist orthodoxy itself had tended to create this impression. The ambiguity of Marx's theoretical legacy was partly responsible, as were the transformed socio-political conditions and the personal interventions of thinkers such as Engels and Kautsky. Marxism had begun to be represented increasingly as an economic determinist and vulgar materialist doctrine. But, Marx's ambiguous legacy also pointed in the opposite direction and, for this reason, Gramsci was able to claim the authority of Marxism's founder for his critique of contemporary Marxist orthodoxy.

In particular, his critical gaze was turned on the work of Nikolai Bukharin as an influential exponent of this so-called orthodoxy. As Kilminster shows, Lukács's interpretation of historical materialism also centred around a critique of Bukharin⁶⁰, but it must be stressed that the criticisms expressed by Lukács and by Gramsci were directed at the entire prevailing Marxist orthodoxy rather than at one of its representatives alone.

There is no doubt, however, that Gramsci particularly disapproved of Bukharin's attempt, in The Theory of Historical Materialism: A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology, to transform the materialist conception of history into a science capable of predicting the future.

⁵⁸ Joll, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵⁹ Kolakowski, Main Currents in Marxism. Volume III, p. 231.

⁶⁰ See Kilminster, op. cit., p. 109.

According to Gramsci, "in reality one can 'scientifically' foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the struggle, which cannot but be the result of opposing forces in continuous movement, which are never reducible to fixed quantities since within them quantity is continually becoming quality". Thus, "in reality one can 'foresee' to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes to creating the result 'foreseen'"⁶¹. In this sense, the Bolsheviks could be said to have "foreseen" the Russian Revolution for they acted at a time when conditions made it possible to foresee scientifically the struggle if not the form that it would take. Despite Gramsci's youthful reference to the events of 1917 as being "against Marx's 'Capital'", his critique of Bukharin echoes Marx's condemnation of uncritical materialism which fails to see reality as human activity and, therefore, does not start as Marx himself does with real and active man.⁶² This is an argument which is developed in Lenin's determinism which accommodates the revolutionary will.⁶³ Gramsci's critique of Bukharin's claims that historical materialism be turned into a science also calls to mind Rosa Luxemburg's assertion that even if the collapse of capitalism is "written" as a blind fatality, the creation of socialism is not, with barbarism being the alternative.⁶⁴ Writing in prison after the triumph of barbarism, Gramsci's lack of enthusiasm for the "scientific predictions" of Marxist orthodoxy is understandable. What is also apparent, however, is that his critique of Bukharin develops a line of thought which had appeared in the writings of other Marxists and which was consistent with Marx's materialist conception of history.

⁶¹ Gramsci, PN, p. 438.

⁶² See Chapter One, pp. 43-8.

⁶³ See Chapter Two, pp. 71-5.

⁶⁴ See Chapter Two, pp. 66-71.

It is wrong to assume that Gramsci's condemnation of the determinism and vulgar materialism of certain other Marxists implied or forced him towards an idealist viewpoint. Gramsci did not believe that history was the work of an invisible hand or even freely-operating human will. Like Marx, he argued that man makes history but only in given circumstances which place material limits on human action. Gramsci's interest in the relationship of idealism to Marxism must be explained as a natural outcome of the context in which he had become acquainted with Marxism and not as an indication of an idealist interpretation of history on his part. Marxism had come to him through an Italian filter, dominated by philosophical idealism. He saw it as one of his major tasks to combat that tradition especially as represented in writings of Croce. At the same time, however, he also sought to mount a second challenge, as Marx had done - a challenge to the materialism of Marxist orthodoxy which had pervaded the context in which his Marxism had developed almost as much as Italian idealism. Gramsci found it "surprising" that there had been "no proper affirmation and development of the connection between the idealist assertion of the reality of the world as a creation of the human spirit and the affirmation made by the philosophy of praxis of the historicity and transience of ideologies on the grounds that ideologies are expressions of the structure and are modified by modifications of the structure"⁶⁵. Gramsci saw in this connection not the confirmation of idealism's superiority over materialism but the significance of Marx's conclusion, based on his twin critique, that man makes history but objective conditions create the environment in which he does so. Thus, as Victor Kiernan says, Gramsci insists that "Marxism must learn to transcend both idealism, the fetishism of ideas, and crude materialism, the denial of ideas"⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ Gramsci, PN, p. 442.

⁶⁶ Kiernan, op. cit., p. 8.

Gramsci's materialist conception of history results from his attempt to steer the same difficult course which had confronted Marx and upon the rocks on either side of which Marxism had been often dashed since Marx's death. As Nemeth comments, "Marx, at least, never simply takes for granted that the realm of freedom will be realised regardless of what we presently do"⁶⁷. But, neither does he indicate that what happens in the future will be the outcome solely of man's actions, freely-chosen. The two positions must be mediated and, as Kiernan argues, "no one can be perfectly equidistant from the two poles, and it is not surprising that Gramsci has often seemed to his readers a man brought up in the watery realm of ideas and finding his way from it to the terra firma of economics, rather than the other way about"⁶⁸. His critique of Croce, however, reveals his desire to escape from the idealist extreme rather than to embrace it.

It can be claimed that his polemic with Croce resembles Marx's critique of Hegel.⁶⁹ Gramsci writes that, though Croce's book on Hegel is good, "it must be borne in mind that in it Hegel and the Hegelian philosophy go one step forward and then two back: the metaphysical side is got rid of, but there's a backward march as regards the question of the relation between thought on the one hand, and natural and historical reality"⁷⁰. Gramsci becomes involved in the task of putting idealism on its feet once more. According to Martinelli, "Gramsci's central criticism of Croce's philosophy is that it creates a dialectic of the ideal not of the real, and confuses historical development with the concept of

⁶⁷ Nemeth, op. cit., p. 186.

⁶⁸ Kiernan, op. cit., p. 8.

⁶⁹ See Martinelli, op. cit., p. 6.

⁷⁰ Gramsci, Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I, p. 24. (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 25 March, 1929.)

development. Like Hegel, Croce is concerned less with the historical movement of real man than with the movement of mind with itself"⁷¹. Gramsci's concern is with substantial man and with the relationship between his structural and superstructural spheres of action, arguing that these "structures and superstructures form an 'historical bloc'"⁷².

Ultimately, like Marx and Engels, Gramsci acknowledged the determining role of the base or substructure. He writes that "the proposition contained in the 'Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' to the effect that men acquire consciousness of structural conflicts on the level of ideologies should be considered as an affirmation of epistemological and not simply psychological and moral value"⁷³. He argues that "the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production"⁷⁴. And yet, he persisted with the denial that the relationship between these ensembles is one of mechanical causality. He is at odds with "all mechanism" together with "every trace of the superstitiously 'miraculous'"⁷⁵. The substructure is fundamental but it contains within it, as Labriola had maintained, human creativity. Furthermore, although changes in the substructure make possible certain repercussions in the superstructural realm, with politics being "at any given time the reflection of the tendencies of development in the structure, . . . it is not necessarily the case that these tendencies must be realised"⁷⁶.

⁷¹ Martinelli, op. cit., p. 7.

⁷² Gramsci, PN, p. 366.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 365.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 366.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 432.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 408.

The elaboration of Gramsci's materialist conception of history resembles that of Marx in that it is based on a double critique. He aims his attack at Second International vulgar materialism and Crocean philosophical idealism whereas Marx addressed himself to the distortions created in the study of history by uncritical materialism and German idealism. Essentially the aim of each was to express a dynamic rather than static materialist conception of history: one that would acknowledge the determining power of objective conditions but which would not deny man's involvement in these conditions nor his potential for action. Orthodox Marxism had turned Marx's original conception into a more rigid view, claiming that the superstructure was a mere epiphenomenon of the substructure and that changes in the former could be predicted on the basis of the observation of changes in the latter. In seeking a different interpretation of historical materialism, Gramsci reveals the tension within Marx's thought but can claim its authority nevertheless. Furthermore, his emphasis on the active side of Marx's conception is shared with other Marxist revolutionaries, notably Lenin. In the elaboration of his materialist conception of history, Gramsci proved himself to be a good Marxist, albeit an unorthodox one given the central tenets of Marxist orthodoxy in his day.

He, like other Marxists such as Korsch and Lukács as well as Lenin himself, was faced, however, with explaining the failed revolutions and examining what should be done in the future on the basis of a materialist conception of history which appreciated the role of human action but recognised that it was restricted by material conditions.

Revolution in post-war Italy had been a possibility. The question was why other tendencies had been actualised instead. Immediately after the "Red Years" Gramsci had contented himself with the thought that the proletariat had lacked the necessary revolutionary leadership. Thus, at

times, as has been suggested, Gramsci "confronts the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, not to give primacy to the subjective, but to revitalise subjectivity in a revolutionary sense"⁷⁷. The revolutionary party could assist the proletariat to actualise historical potentialities. Still clinging to the political idealism of Marxism, Gramsci, like Lenin and Lukács, continued to hope that the party would find the solution to the apparent stranglehold in which the proletariat found itself. This hope influenced directly his political career after the "Red Years" and remained as an aspect of his thinking during his imprisonment. While still at liberty, however, Gramsci had indicated that he was aware of another problem, namely that the conditions in western Europe in which the party would operate were different from those which had existed in Tsarist Russia.⁷⁸ It was this awareness that took Gramsci beyond the politically idealist perspectives of Lenin and Lukács to an acceptance of a rather more realistic position clearly influenced by the "dual perspective" of the Italian tradition. In prison, Gramsci turned his attention to the specific political problems confronting the revolutionary movement in the West and, in so doing, he developed a theory of politics, the unorthodoxy of which is real rather than relative to a particular prevailing Marxist orthodoxy. To explain this, it is necessary to move from the context and general framework of his theory of politics to his precise analysis of political power in advanced capitalist societies.

State, civil society and the theory of hegemony: reflections on the revolutions that failed

Paul Piccone writes that "Gramsci's reexamination starts out from the realisation that, although by the 1920s the objective conditions for revolution had already been around for at least fifty years, yet there

⁷⁷ Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, Pour Gramsci, Paris, 1974, p. 14.

⁷⁸ See Gramsci, PW 1921-6, pp. 199-20.

had been no revolution"⁷⁹. According to his political idealism and his particular form of Marxist determinism, this "fact" had to be explained. It could not be that these objective conditions were not present and it was inconceivable in his view that there were no such things as objective conditions for revolution. In part, the failure of the workers' movement could be attributed to the overly deterministic and, hence, politically passive Marxism of the social democratic orthodoxy. This difficulty could be surmounted by the adoption of a more active interpretation of historical materialism which, in practical terms, indicated the need for vanguard-type parties. Yet, for a variety of reasons, even this policy had failed to strengthen the position of the Italian proletariat. As Gramsci began to study the politics of advanced capitalism, Fascism was in power. The Italian workers' movement had been crushed. The Leninist remedy may have been tried too late but further explanations for the failure of the revolutionary forces had to be sought, not in the nature of the movement itself but in the character of the opposition facing it.

As a revolutionary socialist, Gramsci recognised that any class-state is an obstacle in the path of socialism. But, a class-state of sorts had existed in Tsarist Russia and it had not proved to be indestructible. The State in the West, on the other hand, had stood firm against the struggles of the workers in the post-war era and Gramsci began to ask how it had come about that "the revolution which the bourgeois class has brought into the conception of law, and hence into the function of the State, consists especially in the will to conform (hence ethicity of the law and of the State)"⁸⁰. Put simply, how had the bourgeois class-state in countries like Italy successfully won the consent

⁷⁹ Piccone, op. cit., p. 38.

⁸⁰ Gramsci, PN, p. 260.

of sufficient numbers of the population to stave off the revolutionary movement's challenge despite the apparent existence of objective conditions making socialism possible? In the second half of the twentieth century, the question is an obvious one for socialists to ask themselves and the answer may even seem plain to many. Yet, the answer given would more often than not manifest the influence of Gramsci's reflections on this problem. For a number of years, he was virtually the only Marxist to search for an answer to this question through an analysis of the political system of advanced societies. His researches have made a significant impact on the subsequent development of Marxist political theory. The irony is that his discoveries owe as much to non-Marxist, Italian sources as to the Marxist foundations of his thought.

Gramsci began his attempt to explain the resilience of the advanced capitalist State by fixing "two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the state'"⁸¹. These levels "correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the state and 'juridical' government"⁸². Reflecting the influence of the Italian "dual perspective", Gramsci distinguishes the concept of the State as "political society" ("in other words dictatorship, or an apparatus of coercion to control the masses of the people in accordance with the mode of production and the economic system prevailing at a given period") from the concept of the State "as an equilibrium between 'political society' and 'civil' society (ie the hegemony of a social group over the entire society of a nation, a hegemony exercised by means

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁸² Ibid.

of and through the organisations commonly called private, such as the Church, the Trade Unions, the schools, etc)"⁸³. That is to say, he distinguishes the Marxist view of the State as the coercive instrument of the dominant economic class⁸⁴ from that conception of political power, corresponding to the "dual perspective", which suggests that all politics is founded upon a combination of force and consent and that this is a permanent condition.

Three points must be made immediately. First, Gramsci's idea of the distinction between civil and political society does not correspond to the argument of either Hegel or Marx nor is his definition of the respective concepts identical to either of their usages.⁸⁵ The dualism of man which is suggested in the Gramscian conception is not the dualism between economic and political man but rather between social and political man - man in his private life and man as a citizen. This means that the resolution of human contradictions must be of a different order than indicated in Marxist political idealism. Second, Gramsci's use of the concept of the State is inconsistent. On occasions, he uses the narrower Marxist conception rather than that derived from the "dual perspective". His general theory of politics, however, owes more to what has been described as his "reformulation of the concept of the state in its relation with society" and his "expansion of the concept of the state"⁸⁶. It is this aspect of his thought which has been seized upon

⁸³ Gramsci, *Lettere del Carcere*, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I, p. 47. (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 7 September, 1931.)

⁸⁴ I am conscious of the fact that few late twentieth-century Marxists would hold this conception in its simplest form. That they do not do so, however, owes much to Gramsci's theories and to their own reformulations of central Gramscian ideas.

⁸⁵ This subject will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. I am concerned at present with indicating how Gramsci's theory of the state relates to his overall theory of politics rather than with examining its fundamental characteristics.

⁸⁶ Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., p. 13.

by later Marxists. Third, Gramsci uses the concept of hegemony in differing ways. Sometimes his definition coincides with earlier Marxist usage so that hegemony is taken to stand for the leadership given by one class to other classes during periods of revolutionary struggle.⁸⁷

Again, however, Gramsci's general theory of politics owes more to his innovatory use of the concept, defined as the cultural and moral authority of a ruling class within a particular political system.

Gramsci believed that in Tsarist Russia the State had approximated closely to the Marxist notion. It was essentially a coercive instrument. There did not exist a complex civil society which, in the West, mediates between the rulers and the ruled and helps to create the ethic of rule which is characteristic of the presence of a proper relationship between civil and political societies in advanced capitalist politics. "In Russia", writes Gramsci, "the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed"⁸⁸. This relationship between political and civil society is assigned a vital role in Gramsci's general theory of politics.

The "dual perspective", together with the tensions present in Marxist political thought, influenced his deliberations further, however, so that his prison writings contain many more "couples of opposed but dialectically united concepts which run through (his) work, and whose

⁸⁷ See Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", New Left Review, 100, Nov. 1976 - Jan. 1977, pp. 5-78. Fundamental to Anderson's argument is the claim that the concept of hegemony had a long history in Marxist thought prior to its adoption by Gramsci. This is not in doubt. But, this fact itself does not negate the claim that Gramsci employs the concept of hegemony in an original way in order to analyse political power in advanced capitalist societies.

⁸⁸ Gramsci, PN, p. 238.

shifting, and by no means always consistent combinations make it so hard to arrive at any definitive interpretation of his thought"⁸⁹. The tensions between idealism and materialism and between reformism and revolutionism stem from the Marxian foundations. The distinction used to explain political power, corresponding to force and consent, testifies to Gramsci's Italian inheritance. Gramsci's interest in Machiavelli's centaur analogy is no passing fancy⁹⁰ and it serves to imbue his analysis with a political realism absent from the work of Korsch and Lukács. A "dual perspective" underlies Gramsci's conception of politics and, it has been argued, is fundamental to his understanding of the communist party and its revolutionary tasks.⁹¹

Gramsci's explanation of the importance of the "dual perspective" is that the various levels in political action and national life on which it presents itself "can all theoretically be reduced to two fundamental levels, corresponding to the dual nature of Machiavelli's Centaur - half-animal and half-human"⁹². "They are the levels of force and consent, authority and hegemony, violence and civilisation, of the individual moment and of the universal moment ('Church' and 'State'), of agitation and of propaganda, of tactics and strategy, etc . . ."⁹³ Together with Croce and Gentile, Gramsci draws upon Machiavelli's teachings on the dualism of politics which is itself a reflection of and a necessary response to the dualism of man, neither wholly good nor wholly

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 45. Editors' introduction by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith.

⁹⁰ See Chapter 1, pp. 13-5. I think it is useful at this point to repeat some of the comments already made about Gramsci's attitude to this Machiavellian analogy.

⁹¹ See Showstack Sassoon, op. cit., p. 112.

⁹² Gramsci, PN, pp. 169-70.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 170.

bad. As Bates comments, "for all modern Machiavellians, the fundamental categories of power are force and consensus, and those are not mutually exclusive but independent realities. Croce, just as much as Gramsci, believed that there could be no consensus without force, no 'liberty' without 'authority'"⁹⁴. Political stability depends on the successful fusion of opposed elements. Revolutionaries in western Europe, in attempting to adapt Leninist strategy to their own circumstances, revealed an inability to see this point and to grasp its significance for their project. They had believed that until the time came when economic contradictions were brought to an end, all political power was based solely on the use of coercion by the economically dominant class. Some believed that the situation would change inevitably as economic contradictions became worse and undermined the foundations upon which the ruling class stood. The revolutionary opponents of this view, amongst them Gramsci, had sought to create, according to the example set by the Bolsheviks, organisations of the proletariat which would meet force with force when the objective circumstances were right and bring about the socialist society in which stability would derive from the consent of all people in a non-antagonistic condition.

In Tsarist Russia, where political power had rested far more on coercion than on consent, it had been appropriate to conduct a direct assault of this type on the State. The different situation in the West, where there was a more equal balance of force and consent as a basis of political power, had necessitated a different revolutionary strategy. This had not been fully understood even by Gramsci during his years as a political activist but it is fundamental to his interest in the Notebooks in developing an analysis of the particular problems facing the socialists in the West and in suggesting an alternative strategy, appropriate to the

⁹⁴ Bates, op. cit., p. 356.

particular conditions.

As Joll claims, "Gramsci saw, in a way few other Marxists have done, that the rule of one class over another does not depend on economic or physical power alone but rather on persuading the ruled to accept the system of beliefs of the ruling class and to share their social, cultural and moral values"⁹⁵. Thus, to examine the vicissitudes of the Italian nation-building process, Gramsci argued that "the methodological criterion on which our study must be based is the following: that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as intellectual and moral leadership"⁹⁶. Therefore, as Merrington suggests, Gramsci's concept of hegemony is linked to his aim "to redefine the nature of power in modern societies in more comprehensive terms, allowing for the articulations of the various levels or instances of a given social formation, political, cultural or ideological, in the determination of a specific power structure"⁹⁷. Gramsci employed this concept of hegemony to explain the way in which the bourgeoisie rules the working class in advanced societies. The notion may seem ridiculously simple but only to a post-Gramscian audience.

The concept of hegemony represents the first complete attempt by a Marxist to show that the bourgeoisie rules, to a large extent, on the basis of the consent which it has won from the vast majority of citizens of advanced capitalist societies. The bourgeois class has succeeded in persuading other class members to accept its moral, cultural and political values. The locus of this hegemony is to be found in the

⁹⁵ Joll, op. cit., p. 8.

⁹⁶ Gramsci, PN, p. 37.

⁹⁷ Merrington, op. cit., p. 20.

agencies of the expanded State, belonging for the most part to civil society in the Gramscian sense. Echoing Marx, however, Gramsci also acknowledged the importance of tradition and of past ideas, neither of which are operated directly by the ruling class but both of which play a part in the establishment of its hegemonic control.⁹⁸ He writes that "every real historical phase leaves traces of itself in succeeding phases, which then become in a sense the best document of its existence"⁹⁹. Gramsci's originality lies not in this observation but in the notion that there are institutions within the State, in its expanded sense, through which a ruling class may actually manipulate directly the consciousness of the ruled. In a world of mass communications and the widespread use of political propaganda, this finding may appear undramatic. But, the point had been missed by orthodox Marxists so confident that their socialist hopes would be realised that they ignored or underestimated the role played by superstructural phenomena such as religion and nationalism.

The continuing failure of Marxists to come to terms with the national question shows that not all of Gramsci's teachings have become commonplace. Like Machiavelli,¹⁰⁰ Gramsci realised that regional or national sentiment affect political stability. He did not confront the

⁹⁸ See, for example, Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, p. 10. Marx writes that "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world-history in this time - honoured disguise and this borrowed language".

⁹⁹ Gramsci, PN, p. 409.

¹⁰⁰ Machiavelli distinguishes between inherited principalities and principalities acquired by arms or with the help of fortune. He underlines the nature of the problems peculiar to those princes who seek to govern foreign peoples. This is a particularly prescient observation in an age before the modern doctrine of nationalism had evolved.

problem of nationalism directly but his reflections on the hegemonic rule of the Italian bourgeoisie led him to consider the nature of Italian national sentiment, its formation and limitations, in the post-unification period.¹⁰¹ He recognised, for example, that Croce's influence on the Italian intellectual scene was a national phenomenon as well as an example of the dominance of a particular philosophical conception over other world views which had international ramifications. Thus, Croce is regarded as a sort of "lay Pope".¹⁰² Together with Gramsci's general findings concerning hegemonic rule and the nature of the State in advanced societies, this recognition of the national framework of cultural activity influenced his thinking on the nature of future socialist strategy.¹⁰³ Initially, however, these various findings obliged him to consider the position of those who actually functioned to create bourgeois cultural hegemony - the intellectuals.

The Theory of the Intellectuals

As Buci-Glucksmann notes, Gramsci became interested in the intellectuals because their operations raise the political and

¹⁰¹ See Absalom, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰² See Jacobitti, op. cit., for a detailed account of the way in which Gramsci arrived at his concept of hegemony partly as a result of his observation of the intellectual and moral ascendancy wielded over Italian culture by Croce. It has been argued that in the late twentieth century it is Gramsci's own thought which similarly dominates Italian cultural life. See Romano Giachetti, "Antonio Gramsci: The Subjective Revolution", in Dick Howard and Karl E. Klare (eds.), The Unknown Dimension. European Marxism since Lenin, New York, 1972, pp. 147-68.

¹⁰³ It is worth remembering that Gramsci's early political tendencies were nationalist or regionalist. He was very conscious of the problems associated with the incomplete process of Italian unification. It is easy to appreciate why he came to regard the national dimension of socialist revolution as important having seen divisions in capitalist society which were not simply the products of economic contradictions. These divisions were almost forgotten during Gramsci's years as a political activist but their significance is acknowledged in the Prison Notebooks. See pp. 151-2 of this thesis.

sociological question which is "the little cog needed to come to grips with the double-headed Machiavellian centaur: force and consent, in other words the state"¹⁰⁴. Earlier Marxist political theories could uncover the source of coercion in modern societies but only a theory containing an examination of the role of the intellectuals could explain how a ruling class acquired consent. It can be argued that the intellectuals "succeed in creating hegemony to the extent that they extend the world view of the rulers to the ruled, and thereby secure the 'free' consent of the masses to the law and order of the land"¹⁰⁵. According to Bates, Gramsci's conception indicates that the ruling class is forced to have recourse to "the state's coercive apparatus which disciplines those who do not 'consent', and which is 'constructed for all society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command . . . when spontaneous consensus declines"¹⁰⁶. An almost identical point is made by Kilminster who writes that, in Gramsci's conception, "the apparatus of coercion exists . . . only in the anticipation of the failure of spontaneous consent to enforce discipline upon subaltern (subordinate) classes if necessary"¹⁰⁷. It has to be said that these comments create too one-sided an impression of Gramsci's arguments. At times, he suggests that the superstructures of civil society are like trenches guarding the bourgeois State.¹⁰⁸ On other occasions, he adopts the view that the State is itself an outer ditch behind which stands the real citadel of bourgeois political power - civil society.¹⁰⁹ The fact that these apparently

¹⁰⁴ Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁰⁵ Bates, op. cit., p. 353.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Kilminster, op. cit., p. 133.

¹⁰⁸ See Gramsci, PN, p. 235.

¹⁰⁹ See ibid., p. 238.

contradictory suggestions appear in his writings may suggest a certain uncertainty on Gramsci's part concerning the actual relationship between political and civil society.¹¹⁰ What they also indicate, however, is that, in Gramsci's opinion, these two spheres of political activity are always coexistent. Civil society, in however developed a form, and political society are present in every political system which lasts for any length of time. This means that coercion and consent are also present in every political system all the time. Gramsci's theory does not suggest that political power rests first on one and then on the other but rather that political power is based, at all times, on a fusion of both which may vary in its composition but not so much as to exclude one of the elements. Thus, Kilminster is more accurate when he comments that "Gramsci's message is: don't identify all power or all politics solely with state coercion"¹¹¹. However, it would be equally wrong to infer from Gramsci's general theory of politics the notion that he believed that, in some circumstances, all politics could be identified with consent originating from cultural hegemony. That consent had a vital part to play, however, leads to the need to examine the role of the intellectuals, especially in those societies in which the composition of the coercion/consent balance seemed to indicate that consent had a bigger role to play than coercion in the acquisition of political stability.¹¹²

Gramsci believed that the creation of consensus had become the normal mode of political rule in advanced societies. As Femia says, "disillusioned by the failure of revolutionary activity throughout

¹¹⁰ This will be considered in Chapter 4.

¹¹¹ Kilminster, op. cit., p. 133.

¹¹² Again, this is an aspect of Gramsci's thought which will be examined fully in the following chapter. The danger is that in saying that Gramsci's conception includes the possibility that one or other element of political power may dominate one may lose the complexity of his conception and assign to him a one-dimensional viewpoint.

Europe in the post-war period, Gramsci eventually came to view hegemony as the most important face of power, the 'normal' form of control in any post-feudal society and, in particular, the strength of bourgeois rule in advanced capitalist society"¹¹³. Hence, the vital role of the intellectuals had to be examined if socialists were to challenge this facet of bourgeois political power.

According to Gramsci, "the sphere in which intellectuals mostly operate is 'civil' society"¹¹⁴. Here men like Croce act in the interests of bourgeois hegemony even when they may be at odds with a particular government"¹¹⁵. Thus, it is suggested that "in the hegemony of Benedetto Croce over Italian intellectual life Gramsci glimpsed the method and the practice of hegemony"¹¹⁶.

However, in dealing with the question of the intellectuals, Gramsci does not allow himself to "be limited by the current notion which equates the term ('intellectual') with 'great intellectuals'"¹¹⁷. In keeping with his earlier argument that real culture is the discipline of one's inner self,¹¹⁸ he claims that "all men are intellectuals" although "not all men have in society the function of intellectuals"¹¹⁹. Gramsci's

113 Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 31.

114 Gramsci, Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I, p. 47. (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 7 September, 1931.)

115 See ibid.

116 Jacobitti, op. cit., p. 68.

117 Gramsci, Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I, p. 47. (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 7 September, 1931.)

118 See Gramsci, PW 1910-20, pp. 10-11. Gramsci writes that "we need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary, enabling their owner to respond to the various stimuli from the outside world".

119 Gramsci, PN, p. 9.

contention is based on his observation that "there is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: homo faber cannot be separated from homo sapiens"¹²⁰. According to Gramsci, "each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher', an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought"¹²¹. This broad definition of the intellectuals can be related to Gramsci's attempt to expound a materialist conception of history which allows for human action's role. Thinking man helps to create the objective conditions within which change takes place. The educator must be educated but it should not be forgotten that he also has the task of educating.

According to Hoare and Nowell Smith, Gramsci's theory of the intellectuals is an important innovation in Marxist thought. Its central argument, they write, is that "the notion of 'the intellectuals' as a distinct social category independent of class is a myth"¹²². Having arrived at that conclusion, Gramsci poses the question, "are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own particular specialised category of intellectuals"¹²³. To answer this, he divides the intellectual community into two categories -

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid. Although Gramsci believed that few people advance beyond a commonsense view of the world, he argued that the relation between common sense and the upper level of philosophy is assured by politics (PN, p. 331) and that, politically, the materialist conception is close to the people, to common sense (PN, p. 396). As Nemeth argues, Gramsci recognised truths in common sense despite the fact that he wanted it to be exposed by Marxism. Nemeth, op. cit., pp. 74-8.

122 Gramsci, PN, p. 3. Editors' introduction.

123 Ibid., p. 5.

"traditional" and "organic". His definition of the former has been said to be the category of intellectuals "who work in civil society to legitimise the prevailing social relations but, because of their adherence to old ideas conceive of themselves as above current social conflicts and as expressing the 'essential continuity' of history, eg the Catholic clergy"¹²⁴. Among the "traditional intellectuals", Gramsci also includes writers, artists and philosophers. He accepts that these appear to constitute an autonomous group and writes that "since these various categories of traditional intellectuals experience through an 'esprit de corps' their uninterrupted historical continuity and their special qualification, they thus put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant group"¹²⁵. The reality is very different. Gramsci argues that "one should note however that if the Pope and the leading hierarchy of the Church consider themselves more linked to Christ and to the apostles than they are to senators Agnelli and Benni, the same does not hold for Gentile and Croce, for example: Croce in particular feels himself closely linked to Aristotle and Plato, but he does not conceal, on the other hand, his links with senators Agnelli and Benni, and it is precisely here that one can discern the most significant character of Croce's philosophy"¹²⁶. So it may be argued that for Gramsci "the traditional intellectuals do not necessarily share the world-view of the ruling group" but "they eventually effect a compromise with it, in part because of institutional pressures and financial inducements"¹²⁷. In Gramsci's opinion, says Femia, "consciously or not

¹²⁴ Nigel Todd, "Ideological Superstructure in Gramsci and Mao Tse-tung", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXXV (1), Jan./Mar. 1974, p. 153.

¹²⁵ Gramsci, PN, p. 7.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

¹²⁷ Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 39.

they usually propagate ideas and ways of thinking that are essentially conservative in their implications"¹²⁸. An indirect link is forged between the "traditional intellectuals" and the ruling class to the obvious benefit of the latter in its quest for hegemonic control over society.

The so-called "organic intellectuals", on the other hand, are linked directly to social classes. Gramsci submits that "every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields"¹²⁹. Thus, the "organic intellectuals" of the bourgeois class consciously help to create bourgeois hegemony in advanced societies. According to Nigel Todd, this group consists of "those who work in political society and who are thrown up by the dominant class" (including factory managers and career politicians).¹³⁰ In fact, bourgeois "organic intellectuals" also operate in civil society and it can be argued that they are distinguished "less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong"¹³¹.

Therefore, the proletariat also creates organically an intellectual grouping and it becomes clear that Gramsci's theory of the intellectuals has "implications for the political struggle"¹³², as well as for his

128 Ibid.

129 Gramsci, PN, p. 5.

130 Todd, op. cit., p. 153.

131 Gramsci, PN, p. 3. Editors' introduction.

132 Ibid.

analysis of political power in advanced societies. True to historical materialism, however, Gramsci accepted that the "organic intellectuals" of the economically dominant group are more powerful than those of the proletariat. Indeed, he writes that "though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity"¹³³. Thus, "the intellectuals of the historically (and concretely) progressive class, in the given conditions, exercise such a power of attraction that, in the last analysis, they end up by subjugating the intellectuals of other social groups; they thereby create a system of solidarity between all intellectuals, with bonds of a psychological nature (vanity, etc) and often of a caste character (technico-juridical, corporate, etc)"¹³⁴.

It is important to note that Gramsci also recognises that the intellectuals who propagate bourgeois cultural hegemony attract other intellectuals and win support for the political system by posing as the representatives of a particular national spirit. Gramsci's concept of the "national-popular" derives from his interest in the links which bind intellectuals and the masses in specific countries. This interest prompted him to do research into "the formation of an Italian public spirit in the last century" and "the nature of Italian intellectuals,

¹³³ Ibid., p. 61. Those who regard Gramsci's political theory as idealist should note that he was conscious of the fact that economic factors influence the degree to which consent is given to a political system. In 1924, he raised the subject of the labour aristocracy (PW 1921-6, p. 199) and on a similar theme in the Prison Notebooks he argues that even peasants come to regard the life of the intellectual (eg the parish priest) as a social model. Far from reacting angrily against that social model, it is often the peasant's fondest wish that one of his sons can become an intellectual and thereby raise the social level of the entire family (PN, p. 14). Clearly such an attitude would contribute to the preservation of the status quo.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

their origins, their groupings according to the cultural currents of the time, their diverse modes of thought etc . . ."135. His interest is consistent with his awareness of the national dimension of hegemony and one infers that the patriotism of intellectuals working towards the creation of this hegemony is not the least important of their qualities.

Of course, one might say that since much of the potency of these intellectuals stems from the economic dominance of the bourgeois class, the ability to create hegemony will diminish along with a decline in the fortunes of capitalism. (One would recognise, naturally, that given Gramsci's understanding of historical materialism he would not expect this process to be simultaneous nor automatic.)¹³⁶ To prepare for such a development, according to Gramsci, it was necessary that the workers' movement create its own "organic intellectuals" able to offer an alternative Weltanschauung at a time of socio-economic crisis. In part, this recognition, in embryonic form, had inspired Gramsci's educational and journalistic activities. Even he, however, had underestimated the importance of the cultural dimension of revolutionary struggle in advanced societies. This became more apparent once the concept of hegemony was employed to explain how it is possible for ruling classes to retain control despite the onset of severe economic crises.

Yet, although hegemonic rule based on a balanced fusion of coercion and consent is more stable than government which is over-dependent on one or other element, Gramsci continued to believe that even in advanced societies in which the bourgeoisie rule through hegemony economic crises would necessitate political change ultimately. The proletariat has to be

¹³⁵ Gramsci, *Lettere del Carcere*, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I, p. 8. (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 19 March, 1927.)

¹³⁶ Hence, Gramsci's critique of economic determinism and of attempts to turn historical materialism into a science capable of predicting the future.

prepared to exploit the new situation and for that reason it is important that it has created intellectuals who can express counter-hegemonic ideas. According to Gramsci, "as soon as the dominant social group has exhausted its function, the ideological bloc tends to crumble away"¹³⁷. At this point, the proletariat must act to bring about socialism. However, not all economic crises provide this opportunity.

As Joll suggests, Gramsci "made a distinction between 'organic' movements - the long-term trends in society - and 'conjunctural' movements 'which appear as occasional, immediate, almost-accidental'"¹³⁸. Joll argues that his attempts "to describe the relationship between structural and conjunctural explanations led Gramsci to suggest an important, if obscure idea; that of the 'historical bloc'"¹³⁹. Gramsci used the concept to describe "the moment when both objective and subjective forces combine to produce a situation of revolutionary change, the moment when the structure of the old order is collapsing but when there were also people with the will, determination and historical insight to take advantage of this"¹⁴⁰. In addition to having implications for Gramsci's theory of revolution, this concept underlines his opposition to vulgar materialism and one-way determinism according to which political change, as a superstructural phenomenon, follows on inevitably from changes in the substructure. Through the concept of the "historical bloc", Gramsci re-asserts the claim that material changes create circumstances of which the vital forces in the superstructure may or may not take advantage. As he puts it, "if men acquire consciousness of their social position and of their functions on the plane of the

¹³⁷ Gramsci, PN, pp. 60-1.

¹³⁸ Joll, op. cit., pp. 85-6.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

superstructure, there exists a necessary and vital nexus"¹⁴¹. In Gramsci's opinion, only when there is a "historical bloc" can social forces become historically instrumental and "as change in the structure develops from the quantitative into the qualitative, transform society, resolve the cultural 'frattura' of the old order and create a new, unified and integrated way of life in which philosophy and practice fuse"¹⁴².

However, to suggest that Gramsci was confident about this is to attribute to him a political idealism which is less than characteristic of his general theory of politics. To some extent it is true that hegemony as perceived by Gramsci is less of a barrier to change than reification. The latter is intimately connected to the economic structure and it is difficult to see how its hold can be weakened until there have been changes in that structure. Hegemony, which is also regarded as defending the position of the bourgeoisie, is less directly related to the economic base of society. It is the creation of men - of the "traditional intellectuals" indirectly and of the "organic intellectuals" of the bourgeoisie directly. Men are vulnerable and so too are their creations. As Gramsci comments, "mechanical historical materialism does not allow for the possibility of error, but assumes that every political act is determined immediately, by the structure, and therefore as a real and permanent (in the sense of achieved) modification of the structure"¹⁴³. However, according to him, "a particular political act may have been an

¹⁴¹ Antonio Gramsci, Il Materialismo Storico e la Filosofia di Benedetto Croce, Turin, 1966, pp. 238-9.

¹⁴² Gwyn A. Williams, "The concept of 'Egemonia' in the thought of Antonio Gramsci - some notes on interpretation", Journal of the History of Ideas, XXI (4), Oct./Dec. 1960, p. 590. This should be taken to mean that Gramsci continued to envisage an eventual resolution of contradictions in human society. However, unlike the view held by politically idealistic Marxists, Gramsci's conception does not appear to indicate that this can result simply from the resolution of economic contradictions.

¹⁴³ Gramsci, PN, p. 408.

error of calculation on the part of the leaders of the dominant classes"¹⁴⁴.

In Gramsci's view, one such error on the part of the Italian leadership had been the failure to make their authority "national-popular". He observes that "in many languages 'national' and 'popular' are synonymous or almost"¹⁴⁵. In Italy, however, despite Croce's dominance of intellectual life, there was an absence of what Gramsci terms "national-popular" culture. According to Gramsci, the function of Italian intellectuals had always been "universalistic and a-national"¹⁴⁶. "The Italian intellectuals", he writes, "never had a popular-national character; their character was cosmopolitan, after the pattern of the church"¹⁴⁷. For example, "there is a distance between the public and the writers and the public seeks its 'own' literature from abroad, because it seems more its own than the so-called national one"¹⁴⁸. According to Gramsci, "there is a lack of an identity between the world-views of the 'writers' and of the 'people': that is to say, popular feelings are not lived as their own by the writers, nor do the writers have a 'national educative' function"¹⁴⁹. "In Italy, the term 'national' has a more ideologically restricted meaning and . . . does not coincide with 'popular', because in Italy the intellectuals are distant from the people, that is from the 'nation'; and, on the other hand, bound to a caste tradition, which has never been broken by a strong popular or

144 Ibid.

145 Antonio Gramsci, Letteratura e Vita Nazionale, Turin, 1954, p. 105. (Henceforth referred to as Gramsci, LVN.)

146 Gramsci, Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I, p. 45. (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 3 August, 1931.)

147 Ibid., p. 47.

148 Gramsci, LVN, p. 84.

149 Ibid., p. 103.

national political movement from below"¹⁵⁰. Clearly, their appearance as members of a separate, non-Italian caste placed limits on the ability of the Italian intellectuals in their hegemonic functions. One of the most illuminating aspects of Gramsci's concept of hegemony was its acknowledgement of the national or regional basis of political power. Hegemonic power which did not present itself as fully nationally could be threatened severely at times of crisis by an opposing world-view which was both popular and national. In observing a chink in the armour of the cultural hegemony of the Italian bourgeoisie, Gramsci arguably shows himself in a politically idealist light. Yet, he realises too that any prevailing hegemonic force has an advantage over counter-hegemonic forces at times of crisis, particularly mere conjunctural crisis.

First, there is the importance of tradition and widespread resistance to change. Second, the active operation of hegemonic control develops in such a way that "organic intellectuals" of the dominated classes may be drawn into the intellectual caste, thereafter identifying with that caste's world-view rather than elaborating an alternative view which would be necessary if these dominated classes are to be in a position to set up an alternative hegemonic regime, when some subjective and all objective forces make this possible. What would be lacking would be success in the cultural realm of the struggle. Gramsci emphasises that "it may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favourable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life"¹⁵¹. The failure of the proletariat's "organic intellectuals" to disseminate these counter-hegemonic modes of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁵¹ Gramsci, PN, p. 184.

thought clearly strengthens the chances of the retention of political power by the bourgeoisie after the crisis in the objective sphere is over. It can be said that Gramsci believed that "a crisis may last for decades . . . while an old order strives to pull itself together, and in the end the necessity of its supersession will only be demonstrated 'if the forces of opposition triumph'"¹⁵². Therefore, even when as in Italy the bourgeois intellectuals lack a "national-popular" appeal, the task of the intellectuals of the subordinate classes is difficult. It may be that it is impossible but this is not something which Gramsci wished to contemplate.

Even as his political realism increased, he retained in his general theory of politics the belief that a socialist society could be created and that this would bring about a unified way of life. If this was to happen, however, it was essential that the tasks confronting the "organic intellectuals" of the proletariat be carried out. Only in this way could the proletarian class present itself as capable of organising society. It had to exercise hegemonic control over large sections of the population before assuming governmental control. He writes that "a social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well"¹⁵³. The future, free from contradiction, depends on the ability of the universal, proletarian class to exercise this leadership. Only its triumph can usher in what Gramsci calls "the regulated society".

¹⁵² Kiernan, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁵³ Gramsci, PN, pp. 57-8.

This concept provides an interesting pointer to the essence of Gramsci's theory of politics. It suggests the withering away of the coercive element in political life. According to Gramsci, "it is possible to imagine the coercive element of the State withering away by degrees, as ever-more conspicuous elements of regulated society (or ethical State or civil society) make their appearance"¹⁵⁴. His dream is of a society in which stability is derived solely from consensus. In correct Marxist fashion, he argues that "as long as the class-State exists the regulated society cannot"¹⁵⁵. But, Gramsci does not content himself with the assumption that when the economic contradictions of the class-State are at an end so too will be the tension between coercion and consent in political life. He deems it necessary to spell out that, for him, the removal of that tension, even more than economic equality, is the essence of a socialist society and, thus, there is a subtle difference between Gramsci's conception of socialism and that of other Marxists - a difference in emphasis which reveals Gramsci's interest in politics per se and in the mechanisms of government. In the Italian political thought tradition, this interest tends towards political realism. As a Marxist, however, Gramsci seeks to keep his political idealism alive. It is this that explains the almost utopian character of his writings when he addresses himself to the subject of the future socialist society and, as a result of this utopianism, he is as unclear about what communism will be like as most other Marxists. What he is more certain about (and this adds to the realism of his general theory of politics) are the other developments which may result from the crisis of capitalism.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 263.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 257.

It has been suggested that "Gramsci uses the term passive revolution to indicate the constant reorganisation of State power and its relationship to society which preserves control by the few over the many, maintaining the traditional lack of real control by the mass of the population over the political and economic realms"¹⁵⁷. The concept is used in order to explain how classes seeking to establish their leadership can be foiled by the existing ruling class in spite of the existence of objective factors facilitating the triumph of a new order. In this respect, the concept of passive revolution is linked to the concept of hegemony but the former is more applicable to circumstances in which some change has taken place although insufficient to cause a fundamental break with the old political order. The old order accepts into its ranks members of the dominated but potentially progressive classes. Its cultural hegemony is extended to include elements of their world-view. Reformism (or transformism) occurs such that the present ruling class continues to rule although on slightly different terms.

Gramsci goes to Italian history for an example of a passive revolution. He describes the Risorgimento or unification process during the second half of the nineteenth century as a "'revolution' without a 'revolution'"¹⁵⁸. Mazzini and the Action Party failed to achieve a

¹⁵⁶ I shall discuss this concept only in the context of Gramsci's general theory of politics. It is examined in more detail in a paper presented by Anne Showstack Sassoon at the 1979 Political Studies Association Conference entitled, "Gramsci, the Passive Revolution and the Politics of Reform". John A. Davis (ed.), Gramsci and Italy's Passive Revolution, concentrates on the applicability of Gramsci's concept in Italian historical studies and on the way in which he came to the concept through his own analysis of Italian history.

¹⁵⁷ Showstack Sassoon, "Gramsci, the Passive Revolution and the Politics of Reform", op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Gramsci, PN, p. 59.

hegemonic position vis à vis the Italian people and can be contrasted in this with the Jacobins in France. Thus, Gramsci rejoins Machiavelli in seeking to discover how it is that political movements may win support on a broad basis in order to secure political power. Indeed, it has been suggested that Gramsci's interest in Jacobinism illustrates what he actually took to be his more original source, Machiavelli. According to Nemeth, "Machiavelli is selected not simply because he was Italian but also because he anticipated Jacobinism by hundreds of years"¹⁵⁹. In fact, Gramsci's interest in both Jacobinism and Machiavelli illustrates what is a major feature of his political theory - the concern with how political stability is established and how progressive classes can win political support.

According to Gramsci, throughout Italy's history there are examples of opposition forces failing to become hegemonic before attempting to win power and failing also to use new systems of organisation.¹⁶⁰ He writes that "one might say that the entire State life of Italy from 1848 onwards has been characterised by transformism - in other words by the formation of an ever more extensive ruling class, within the framework established by the Moderates after 1848 and the collapse of the neo-Guelph and federalist utopias"¹⁶¹. Gramsci argues that "the formation of this class involved the gradual but continuous absorption, achieved by methods which varied in their effectiveness, of the active elements produced by allied groups - and even of those which came from antagonistic groups and seemed irreconcilably hostile"¹⁶². The dialectical quality of his thought is seldom more in evidence for it is obvious that this theory of

¹⁵⁹ Nemeth, op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁶⁰ See Gramsci, PN, p. 60.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 58-9.

passive revolution is inextricably interwoven with the concept of hegemony and the theory of the intellectuals and that all are aspects of a general attempt to explain the apparent disjuncture between material conditions and superstructural developments which occurs when a new "historical bloc" has not been organised and which results in the defeat or failure of revolutionary opposition.

Gramsci's theory of passive revolution is another means by which he explains how ruling classes can suppress oppositional forces without recourse to coercion, and, thus, it explains certain events in his own lifetime and in the recent history of the workers' movement as well as in Italy's historical development. Indeed, it is claimed that "the specific points of reference for the development by Gramsci of this concept were the attempts made by a variety of regimes to reorganise capitalism in the 1920s and 1930s and the difficulties faced by the Soviet Union in building socialism with very narrow popular support"¹⁶³. According to Showstack Sassoon, the characteristics common to these were "the incorporation of various reforms and in varying degrees the expansion of an element of planning in the economy on the basis of a passive relationship between the mass of the population and the State. The relationship was passive in the sense that the traditional split between leaders and led was re-articulated in new forms at the same time as substantial changes were being instituted in social, economic and political life"¹⁶⁴. What was not being instituted was the radical transformation of society required to bring societal contradictions to an end. With his concept of passive revolution Gramsci explains this and implies once more, as Bates comments, that "the powers-that-be in the state have a great

¹⁶³ Showstack Sassoon, "Gramsci, the Passive Revolution and the Politics of Reform", op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

advantage in the struggle for hegemony, by virtue of their superior organisation, information, and means of communication"¹⁶⁵.

However, if the crisis which faces the ruling class is truly "organic" (involving the totality of the "historical bloc"), its problems may be such that they cannot be solved by a passive revolution. Bates argues that, according to Gramsci's conception, "an organic crisis is manifested in a crisis of hegemony, in which people cease to believe the words of the national leaders and begin to abandon the traditional parties"¹⁶⁶. The precipitating factor in such a crisis might be the failure of the ruling class to win the consent of the majority of the people to make sacrifices in the interests of a large undertaking such as war. As Gramsci comments, "in real life, one cannot ask for enthusiasm, spirit of sacrifice, etc without giving anything in return, even from the subjects of one's own country"¹⁶⁷. This is all the more true when the intellectuals representing the interests of the ruling class are distanced from the mass of the population, as appeared to Gramsci to be the case in Italy. It is implicit in his conception, as Bates suggests, that "in combatting the crisis, the intellectuals of the ruling class may resort to all sorts of mystification, blaming the failure of the state on an opposition party or ethnic and racial minorities, and conducting nationalist campaigns based on irrational appeals to patriotic sentiment"¹⁶⁸. An example of this was the attempt made by sections of the Italian middle class to condemn the workers' movement as an enemy of Italian national interest because of its refusal to agree to Italy's intervention in the Great War. That attempt failed to combat the

¹⁶⁵ Bates, op. cit., p. 363.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 364.

¹⁶⁷ Gramsci, PN, p. 89.

¹⁶⁸ Bates, op. cit., p. 364.

hegemonic crisis which threatened Italy in the immediate post-war period and this resulted in an even more dangerous situation - the sort of crisis in which the ruling class is obliged to turn for help to a "divine leader" in a last-ditch attempt to retain political control.¹⁶⁹ "Caesarism", as Gramsci calls it, is the final means by which a ruling élite may endeavour to transcend a major crisis once its hegemonic control is weakened and its efforts to bring about a passive revolution are unfulfilled.

This concept "expresses the particular solution in which a great personality is entrusted with the task of 'arbitration' over a historico-political situation characterised by an equilibrium of forces heading towards catastrophe"¹⁷⁰. At these moments, the coercive element starts to play a more active role in the achievement of political stability. The ruling class, having exhausted other channels whereby its rule might be maintained, is prompted to act as the beast rather than as the man, to use the Machiavellian notion. Strangely enough, Gramsci does not consider the implementation of this practice to be inherently negative. He writes that "there can be both progressive and reactionary forms of Caesarism; the exact significance of each form can, in the last analysis, be reconstructed only through concrete history, and not by means of any sociological rule of thumb"¹⁷¹. At worst, however, it can be said that Gramsci believes that "this 'Caesar' may give the old order a 'breathing spell' by exterminating the opposing elite and terrorizing its mass support"¹⁷². This could not be a permanent condition if the new political order was based solely on force for Gramsci's "dual

169 See ibid.

170 Gramsci, PN, p. 219.

171 Ibid.

172 Bates, op. cit., p. 364.

perspective" informed him that all politics was a combination, in whatever proportion, of force and consent (that is, until the creation of the regulated society, in which there would be no coercion or, put another way, no politics). One possible outcome of the "Caesarist" period would be that "the contending forces may destroy each other, leaving a foreign power to preside over the 'peace of the graveyard'"¹⁷³. Another possibility, and the one that is hoped for by the old ruling order, is a return to the status quo.

Gramsci was in no doubt that Italian Fascism was an example of "Caesarism" in its reactionary form. The fact that it could not establish its permanence was no reason to suppose that socialism would take over from it. Gramsci was unimpressed by the argument that the cause of socialism must benefit as a result of the deterioration in the quality of human life under the Fascist axe. As Bates points out, he "flatly repudiated the politics of tanto peggio tanto meglio ('the worse, the better') as flagrantly impossible"¹⁷⁴. Mussolini's "Caesarism" provided both capitalism and bourgeois rule with a breathing space. For that reason, the triumph of Fascism signalled yet another defeat for the workers' movement. The initial failure of the latter in the immediate post-war period had been attributed in part by Gramsci to the absence of a revolutionary, vanguard party. However, this final defeat of oppositional forces at the hands of Fascism was the direct result of the total inability to organise a new "historical bloc". The oppositional forces, notably the proletariat, had failed to present themselves as a viable alternative hegemonic force. The crisis had been sufficiently severe to make it impossible for the ruling class to maintain its position simply through its hegemonic power or even by way of a passive revolution. But,

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 364-5.

there had been insufficient broadly-based support for the socialist cause to prevent the success of the "Caesarist" tactic. Gramsci believed that things would have been very different had the workers' movement possessed a deep appreciation of the nature of the opposition, in the form of the expanded State of an advanced society, and of the nature of Fascism in relation to the crisis of that State but also as a political force in its own right. That Fascism was a political force in its own right and also the means by which a breathing space was being offered to the bourgeois State indicated to Gramsci that the Fascist epoch would not give way to the new socialist order and that there would be necessarily an intervening period of restored bourgeois parliamentary democracy in which coercion would remain an element but less conspicuously so than under Mussolini's government.

It is impossible to guess if Fascism would have triumphed had the Italian workers' movement possessed the sort of analysis suggested by Gramsci. It did not and Fascism did come to power. What Gramsci's writings do tell us, however, is that there are a great many ploys which the ruling class in advanced societies can use in order to retain power. Indeed, for socialists, it is a gloomy picture that he paints. At times, it appears virtually impossible that a revolution can succeed in an advanced, capitalist system. In this respect, Gramsci reveals himself to be much more of a political realist than his conception of a "regulated society" might lead one to suppose. As a Marxist, however, he desires to show that, despite the greater difficulties facing revolutionaries in the West than in feudal societies, the revolution can be made. Like Lukács, he is somewhat trapped by the apparently insurmountable problems which he suggests may beset oppositional forces in advanced capitalist societies and, like Lukács, he tries to escape from the dilemma in which he finds himself by returning once more to the concept of the party and

the study of the subjective conditions needed for that party, as the collective intellectual of the proletariat, to be able to act successfully. Despite the manifest realism of his pronouncements on hegemony, the passive revolution and "Caesarism" he continues to reveal his political idealism.

The "Cathartic" Moment and the Role of the Party

Gramsci uses the term "catharsis", according to Hoare and Nowell Smith, "to indicate (roughly speaking) the acquisition of revolutionary consciousness"¹⁷⁵. Gramsci claims that the concept "can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment, that is the superior elaboration of the structure into the superstructure in the minds of men"¹⁷⁶. As a result of this process, "structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives"¹⁷⁷. This is what is meant by the subjective conditions which permit the workers' movement to act. Consciousness coincides with objective conditions. A "historical bloc" is formed and a revolutionary situation can be said to exist. Gramsci acknowledges that this passage from "objective to subjective" and from "necessity to freedom" would not be made easily.¹⁷⁸ How it might be made at all was a burning question if his political idealism was to be anything more than empty utopianism. As Gramsci says, "to establish the 'cathartic' moment becomes . . . , it seems to me, the starting point for

¹⁷⁵ Gramsci, PN, p. 366. Editors' introduction.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 366.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 367.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 366-7.

all the philosophy of praxis, and the cathartic process coincides with the chain of syntheses which have resulted from the evolution of the dialectic"¹⁷⁹.

Gramsci describes the way in which men acquire the various moments in the development of collective political consciousness. First, they pass through the economic-corporate level at which "the members of the professional group are conscious of its unity and homogeneity, and of the need to organise it, but in the case of the wider social group this is not yet so"¹⁸⁰. This moment might be described as that of craft consciousness. The second moment comes when "consciousness is reached of the solidarity of interests among all members of a social class - but still in the purely economic field"¹⁸¹. It is perhaps this moment that approximates more closely to what Lenin described as "trade union consciousness". With the third moment, however, "one becomes aware that one's own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too"¹⁸². It is this moment, according to Gramsci, which "marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures"¹⁸³.

With Marx, Gramsci believed that, in the present historical epoch, the proletariat is the universal class which is alone able to make this transition to the third moment in the evolution of collective political consciousness but, along with other revolutionaries in the West, he was faced with the dilemma of the non-revolutionary proletariat. There was

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 367.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

little point arguing that the proletariat could acquire this collective consciousness if it continued to prove itself to be unable to do so. Confidence in spontaneity had certainly to be abandoned. Gramsci had already moved towards accepting this proposition when he argued the need for a revolutionary party and an acceptance of this argument is consistent with his materialist conception of history in which fatalism is condemned. According to Gramsci, "'pure' spontaneity does not exist in history: it would come to the same thing as 'pure' mechanicity"¹⁸⁴. He argues that "the fact that every 'spontaneous' movement contains rudimentary elements of conscious leadership, of discipline, is indirectly demonstrated by the fact that there exist tendencies and groups who extol spontaneity as a method"¹⁸⁵. The problem as Gramsci perceived it (in partial agreement with Lenin and Lukács and in opposition to Luxemburg) was to find a suitable vehicle to mediate between the objective conditions in which the proletariat has its existence and the superstructural realm wherein the class has its consciousness so that the "cathartic" moment might be attained.

"For Gramsci", writes Carl Boggs, "the central dilemma was how to move the oppressed beyond the immediacy of their everyday concerns without at the same time obliterating their spontaneous energies"¹⁸⁶. Faced with this selfsame problem, Lenin had conceived of the vanguard party as external mediator. Revolutionary Marxists in the West were obliged to take note of the success of this solution especially since the western proletariat had been unable to acquire revolutionary consciousness spontaneously. Lukács was forced to accept Leninist strategy although with initial qualification in that he believed, as

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 196.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁸⁶ Boggs, op. cit., p. 76.

Piccone observes, that "far from being an external mediator bringing class consciousness to the proletariat from outside, the party . . . is the objectified and organised form of class consciousness spontaneously attained by the most advanced sectors of the proletariat"¹⁸⁷. What is lacking in Lukács's conception is how the party, in this form, should be organised and, increasingly, he came to embrace the Leninist formula in toto. On the other hand, the desire to avoid élitism in revolutionary politics tends to lead to spontaneism with a contingent underestimation of the need for organisation. Gramsci's concept of the party grows from his attempt to avoid both extremes. It is an attempt which founders on the rocks of his own political realism and suggests that the course he tried to steer is in practice un navigable.

As Boggs outlines, Lenin's belief that "revolutionary change would depend upon the insertion of an 'external element' into the class struggle had influenced Gramsci, especially after the failure of the 'Ordine Nuovo' movement in 1921, when he began to look for a more explicitly political solution to the Marxist revolutionary project" and, in Boggs's view, "it is his increasing preoccupation with this 'external element' (the role of the intellectuals, the function of the party) that informs Gramsci's writing in the 'Prison Notebooks'"¹⁸⁸. According to Boggs, "Gramsci sought to refine and expand Lenin's approach to the problem of mass consciousness"¹⁸⁹. In this task, he was motivated, in Alberto Pozzolini's opinion, by the belief that "communist society will only be established by a colossal movement of the masses through the organs of struggle, above all through the party"¹⁹⁰. In his confrontations with

¹⁸⁷ Piccone, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁸⁸ Boggs, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁹⁰ Alberto Pozzolini, Antonio Gramsci. An Introduction to his Thought, London, 1970, p. 78.

Bordiga, Gramsci had attempted to argue the case for a dialectical, mutually educative relationship between the masses and the revolutionary party. In prison, he attempted to elaborate on this.

He accepted that the party was a sine qua non for revolutionary change. Comparing the modern communist party to Machiavelli's Prince, he writes that "the protagonist of the new Prince could not in the modern epoch be an individual hero, but only the political party"¹⁹¹. The communist party is the modern Prince. It can be argued that Gramsci had reached the conclusion that "the path to the emancipation and autonomy of the actual subordinate class can only be realised . . . through the party by means of the intellectuals and the State"¹⁹². According to Joll, "just as Machiavelli's aim was to educate the working class of his day and force them to face the realities of the political tasks facing Italy without being hampered by the dogmas of the Church, so the 'Modern Prince' would educate the proletariat and train it to become the ruling class of the future"¹⁹³. In this way, the party becomes the proletariat's collective intellectual. It is far superior as an instrument of change than the sum of the "organic intellectuals" of the working class left unorganised. However, this modern Prince must also offer leadership to other dominated classes in society for, according to Gramsci, "although every party is the expression of a social group, and of one social group only, nevertheless in certain given conditions certain parties represent a single social group precisely in so far as they exercise a balancing and arbitrating function between the interests of their group and those of other groups, and succeed in

¹⁹¹ Gramsci, PN, p. 147.

¹⁹² A.R. Buzzi, La Théorie politique d'Antonio Gramsci, Louvain, 1967, p. 215.

¹⁹³ Joll, op. cit., pp. 95-6.

securing the development of the group which they represent with the consent and assistance of the allied groups - if not out and out with that of groups which are definitely hostile"¹⁹⁴. This is particularly true of the party of the universal class.

In fact, these arguments do not take Gramsci beyond the Leninist position and they reveal precisely why he is often described as the Lenin of the West. According to Bates, "no Italian had greater faith in the Russians than Antonio Gramsci, who believed that Bolshevik principles were of universal validity"¹⁹⁵.

However, Gramsci had argued, in addition, that the struggle for socialism in the West must follow a different path to that taken by the Bolsheviks and his prison writings, in their moments of political realism, explain why this must be so. Leninism could not be imported to the West without modifications and one defect which could be eradicated was its overemphasis on élitism. Thus, Gramsci attempts, rather unsuccessfully, to outline the form that a democratic, vanguard party should take.

It has been claimed that "Gramsci's thought can be considered a theory of revolutionary process in which the seizure of power is only one aspect of importance and which extends long before and after that moment"¹⁹⁶. The major tasks of the party are the education of the proletariat so that it might show itself to be a new, leading class and the establishment of the hegemony of the proletariat, the universal class, in order that the regulated society free from coercion could be

¹⁹⁴ Gramsci, PN, p. 148.

¹⁹⁵ Thomas R. Bates, "Antonio Gramsci and the Bolshevization of the P.C.I.", Journal of Contemporary History, 11 (2/3), July, 1976, p. 116.

¹⁹⁶ Martinelli, op. cit., p. 8.

turned into reality. For Gramsci, these tasks demanded novel party organisation. As Jean-Marc Piotte submits, "if Lenin affirms that Marxism must be brought from outside to the proletariat, Gramsci, throughout his life as a militant, said that Marxism, as a conception of the world, is constructed in the dialectic between the knowledge of the intellectuals and the feelings of the working class"¹⁹⁷. The idea is similar to Lukács's argument but Gramsci spells out its implications for revolutionary practice in greater detail.

It is said that Gramsci's conception of the revolutionary party "was based on the premise that 'a party cannot exist by virtue of an internal necessity' but through an organic relationship with the class it represents, expressed by his formula of 'spontaneity and conscious direction'"¹⁹⁸. Because of this, he envisages a party with a different organisational structure from that conceived of and institutionalised by Lenin.

Gramsci writes that "for a party to exist, three fundamental elements (three groups of elements) have to converge"¹⁹⁹. The first is "a mass-element, composed of ordinary, average men, whose participation takes the form of discipline and loyalty, rather than any creative spirit or organizational ability"²⁰⁰. This is the rank-and-file party membership. Second, there must be "the principal cohesive element, which centralises nationally and renders effective and powerful a complex of forces which left to themselves would count for little or nothing"²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁷ Piotte, op. cit., p. 127.

¹⁹⁸ Merrington, op. cit., p. 167.

¹⁹⁹ Gramsci, PN, p. 152.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Here we have the party's national executive. Finally, according to Gramsci, the party must include "an intermediate element, which articulates the first element with the second and maintains contact between them, not only physically but also morally and intellectually"²⁰². By this third element, Gramsci can be taken to mean the local officers or branch officials of the party.

It is difficult to see how the organisation proposed by Gramsci differs radically from that operated by Lenin. The "reciprocal relationship" which he claimed to seek is incompatible with the view that the rank-and-file of the party is somehow lacking in creative ability. It is impossible to imagine that the branch officials are expected to do any other than take instructions from above to the ordinary, average party members. This is virtually admitted by Gramsci when he states that, though the party cannot exist without the mass-element, "it is also true that neither could it exist with these alone"²⁰³. In addition, he argues that it is also true that although the national leadership could not form a party on its own either, "it could do so more than could the first element"²⁰⁴. Fundamentally Leninist is Gramsci's contention that "one speaks of generals without an army but in reality it is easier to form an army than to form generals. So much is this true that an already existing army is destroyed if it loses its generals, while the existence of a united group of generals who agree among themselves and have common aims soon creates an army even where none exists"²⁰⁵. In fact, though Gramsci looks forward to the day when the workers' movement is in the hands of the "organic intellectuals" of the proletariat, he concedes, as Kiernan

²⁰² Ibid., p. 153.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 152.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 152-3.

comments, that intellectuals like himself who join from outside "will always, or for very long, be indispensable, because the formation of this 'new type' will be a very arduous undertaking"²⁰⁶.

It is disappointing that Gramsci, faced with the problem of what kind of political vehicle was required if the workers' movement was to surmount the many obstacles standing in its path in advanced capitalist societies, did little more than reiterate the Leninist conception of the party. His political realism, based on his own reflections and on Machiavelli's "dual perspective", allowed him to recognise that the struggle for socialism in the West must differ from that successfully engaged in by the Bolsheviks. But, his political idealism, stemming from his Marxist hopes for the future, obliged him to decide on what type of organisation was suited to this struggle. There is something ironic about his confidence that a party based less on a reciprocal relationship than on a leader-led arrangement was the key to a society in which there would be no longer leaders and led. Where his political realism re-emerges, however, is when he examines the nature of the struggle to be embarked upon by this party.

The struggle for the regulated society in the West must take the form of a war of position rather than a war of movement (manoeuvre) such as had been successful in Russia. Gramsci claims that this transition corresponds to a change in military strategy according to which "in wars among the more industrially and socially advanced States, the war of manoeuvre must be considered as reduced to more of a tactical than a strategic function; that it must be considered as occupying the same position as siege warfare used to occupy previously in relation to it"²⁰⁷. He

²⁰⁶ Kiernan, op. cit., p. 31.

²⁰⁷ Gramsci, PN, p. 235. It is worthy of note that Machiavelli also used military concepts for his explanations of politics.

writes that "the same relation must take place in the art and science of politics, at least in the case of the most advanced States, where 'civil society' has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions of the immediate economic element'"²⁰⁸. Gramsci believed that because of the need for a subordinate class to achieve a measure of hegemonic control prior to its seizure of political power, revolutionary transformation can no longer be regarded as being likely to result from a brief, direct assault which had been successful in Russia but which now becomes merely a possible final phase after a long war of position has been fought out on the cultural terrain as well as in the spheres of politics and economics. According to Gramsci, "every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas amongst the masses of men who are at first resistant, and think only of solving their own immediate (interests)"²⁰⁹. This is especially true of a revolution in a society in which the ruling class has at its disposal a wide variety of tactics to maintain its position even at times of crisis.

One example of the way in which Gramsci conceives of this war of position relates to his concern with the national dimension of hegemonic rule. It can be argued that although he was dedicated to fostering a world socialist transformation, he reveals, in his writings, an increasing perception of the problems posed by Italian history for the Italian proletariat and its parties.²¹⁰ From this perception grows the feeling that the working class has to "nationalise" itself in order to achieve some hegemonic control over other subordinate classes.²¹¹ Of course, this is

208 Ibid.

209 Ibid., p. 12.

210 See Absalom, op. cit., pp. 27-9.

211 Ibid.

consistent with Gramsci's conception of the non national-popularity of the Italian intellectuals. This represents one of the proletariat's few advantages in the coming struggle. Thus, it has been said that "the creation of an integral link between the 'national' and the 'popular' in Italy, the forging of a 'national-popular collective will' must be the strategic objective of the Modern Prince, not - for Gramsci - merely in order to create the subjective conditions for social revolution but as a condition of its historical permanence as the corollary of the raising of moral consciousness to the level at which revolutionary transformation became the explicit goal of the masses"²¹². According to Roger Absalom, "it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this implies a positive commitment to a strategy of forming a national consciousness as a prerequisite for the creation of a genuinely modern national State, and that for Gramsci the very formation of such a State in Italy would be a revolutionary act, involving a revolutionary transformation of all existing economic and moral relations"²¹³. There is an unMarxist ring to such suggestions about the nature of the revolutionary struggle and its outcome. Yet, they develop logically from Gramsci's thoughts on hegemony and the role of the intellectuals. If national identity can be utilised by the bourgeois ruling order as one way by which it retains power then the workers' movement must present itself as representative of the national interest, especially when the existing ruling class may have failed to make full use of this instrument of hegemony. The national dimension ascribed by Gramsci to the war of position follows on from his politically realistic observations on the nature of political power in advanced societies. Some would argue that these observations also led Gramsci to imbue this revolutionary strategy with a reformist dimension.

212 Ibid., p. 31.

213 Ibid.

It has been recognised that "the thesis of the 'war of position' has been interpreted as that which must lead by way of slow and gradual reforms, of a more or less structural character, to the progressive transformation of structures, all keeping the country under the rule of the bourgeoisie"²¹⁴. It has been denied rightly, however, that Gramsci's concept authorises "the interpretation of a 'seizure of power' by parliamentary means"²¹⁵. He is not guilty of renouncing his revolutionary faith and re-assessing his views on the reformism of Marxist orthodoxy. What must be remembered is that even in military science, according to Gramsci, the war of movement is only reduced in importance. It does not become irrelevant. Thus, one can infer from Gramsci's writings that he believes that, for revolutionary politics, the pre-eminence of the war of position in advanced societies simply reduces the significance of the war of movement. The former does not negate the latter. The frontal assault may still be necessary ultimately although for it to be a success the necessary preparatory work will have to have been carried out in the long war of position. Perhaps an acceptance of the reformist path to socialism by Gramsci would have been more compatible with his arguments concerning the nature of political power in advanced societies but one must not forget that despite the realism of these arguments he tries to remain a political idealist. The influence of his realism is more obviously present in his thoughts on the nature of revolutionary struggle than on the structure of the party and yet the unreconciled tension in his general theory of politics is still apparent.

This tension is present in all Marxist thought but became a particular problem during the second period of revolutionary criticism of Second International Marxist orthodoxy. The continued presence of a

²¹⁴ Macciocchi, op. cit., p. 101.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

non-revolutionary proletariat and the realisation that, for the time being at least, the revolution in the West was vanquished led to a necessary re-examination of Marxism. Korsch, Lukács and Gramsci each stressed the active aspects of Marx's conception but the neglect of these aspects by orthodox Marxism was insufficient to explain, in full, why the revolutionary project in advanced capitalist societies remained incomplete. All three, therefore, embraced the Leninist conception of the party. In due course, that conception and the authoritarian socialism to which it appeared to have led was rejected by Korsch. Lukács, on the other hand, became more idealistic rather than less, and accepted Leninism and Soviet Communism despite earlier misgivings. Of the major so-called Hegelian Marxists, only Gramsci endeavoured to steer the course between political idealism and political realism. In addition, he attempted to overcome the other tensions in Marxism: voluntarism and determinism, and revolutionism and reformism. As regards these other tensions, Gramsci was remarkably successful in his loyalty to Marx's conception. In his materialist conception of history and in his thoughts on revolutionary strategy, Gramsci is a good Marxist, albeit an unorthodox one in relation to the orthodox Marxism of the Second International. It is the tension between idealism and realism which really creates the difficulty of interpreting Gramsci's Marxism.

Gramsci's writings are politically idealist in their expectation that the regulated society in which there would be no longer a coercive dimension to political stability would come about. He was also a political idealist inasmuch as he believed that the proletariat is the universal class which together with its revolutionary party would bring this regulated society into being. The problem is that the most significant findings of his general theory of politics point to the fact that these claims are little more than utopian dreams.

Imbued with the "dual perspective", Gramsci's general theory of politics centres around the relationship between leaders and led. He assumes that all political power is based on a fusion of force and consent and fails to explain precisely why this should cease to be the case under socialism except by making politically idealist Marxist comments about the relationship between economic and political power which he does not develop. Instead, he explains in some detail what the precise difficulties are that face the revolutionary struggle in the West and does so in such devastating fashion that he is left hanging on to Lenin's vanguard party as his only real hope for the success of that struggle. True to the Italian tradition of political debate, Gramsci's work in prison is essentially that of a political realist concerned with problems like political stability and the nature of political power. This aspect of his thought, rather than his Marxist idealism, is what makes him such an interesting political thinker and nowhere is this aspect more manifest than in his theory of the state.

It is from the Italian tradition of political debate that Gramsci's political realism is derived. According to Gramsci, the first element of politics is "that there really do exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led"¹ and, like Machiavelli, Gramsci devoted considerable attention to the question of how rulers maintain their position vis à vis the ruled. Conventional wisdom might lead one to believe that Machiavelli's response to this question was to argue that rulers regard dishonesty and cruelty as politically expedient. In fact, because of his conception of human nature upon which he founded his political theory, Machiavelli had a rather more flexible view of the requirements for the maintenance of political power than conventional wisdom about his work would imply. Political power contains a consensual element. Mankind must be treated by the ways appropriate to man as well as by more bestial methods if political stability is to be maintained for as long as possible. Ultimately, it is true, Machiavelli believed that good arms are more important than good laws but he tempered this notion throughout his writings with the warning that a ruler should take care to avoid being hated by his subjects. Laws cannot be dispensed with entirely any more than can the use of force. This is the essential point of Machiavelli's political theory and it is a point which re-emerges in the writings of various contributors to the Italian tradition of political debate. As a political theorist in the Marxist tradition, Gramsci argues that the existence of rulers and ruled upon which the entire science and art of politics is based is not a permanent condition for it will be brought to an end in the regulated or classless society.² However, in those

¹ Gramsci, PN, p. 144.

² Ibid.

sections of his prison writings in which he addresses himself to the question of how political power is wielded in advanced capitalist societies, Gramsci evinces a political realism imbued with the "dual perspective" of the Italian tradition. This "dual perspective" corresponds to the balance of good and evil in human nature, progress and regression in historical development and consent and coercion in politics.

It is not only in the Italian tradition that one finds insights into this "dual perspective". For example, Hegel writes that "commonplace thinking often has the impression that force holds the state together, but in fact its only bond is the fundamental sense of order which everybody possesses"³. Marx himself, despite regarding the bourgeois State as the coercive instrument of the capitalist ruling class, accepted that traditional value systems play an important part in nullifying protests by those in society excluded from decision-making and prevented from deriving material well-being from the productive capacity of capitalism. Indeed, it has been suggested that "Marx realised that where consent exists force is not required"⁴. This indicates that in his political theory there is "at least an awareness of the cultural dimension of society"⁵. This recognition became increasingly significant in Marxist political thought when Lukács, and later the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, attempted to understand the failure of the western European and American proletariat to become revolutionary. However, as Richard Kilminster observes, "it was Gramsci who was the first Marxist systematically to formulate - through his concept of hegemony - that one reason for the solidity of Western societies against

³ Hegel, op. cit., p. 282.

⁴ Kilminster, op. cit., pp. 130-1.

⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

the inroads of socialism was the rule by consent of the ruling class achieved by its having historically attained ideological, cultural hegemony, throughout the society: its legitimacy to carry out the 'universal' goals of the society was assumed by the mass of the people"⁶. To do this Gramsci did not simply extend implications in the work of Hegel and Marx concerning the function of consent in the maintenance of political power. He modified the Marxist theory of the State because he drew upon the Italian tradition which dates back to Machiavelli and Guicciardini. In his attempt to come to grips with those same problems which faced Lukács and the Frankfurt School, Gramsci emphasises the realistic element of Marxist thought precisely because he bases many of his conclusions not on the Marxist foundations but on the Italian tradition in which political realism is the essence rather than merely a tentative suggestion.

Some would argue that with his concept of hegemony and his theory of the expanded State, which includes the private organisations of civil society as well as the normally accepted State organisations, Gramsci makes a vital contribution to the Marxist theory of politics. Alternatively, it is argued that Gramsci cannot be called a Marxist since his writings reveal the crucial influence on his thinking of Italian sources including the idealism of Croce. In fact, as regards his conception of historical materialism, Gramsci is a good Marxist, albeit one in opposition to what in his own time was considered to be orthodox Marxism. However, his general theory of politics is imbued with greater realism than most Marxist political thought and his theory of the State in particular shows clear evidence of the influence exerted on him by a non-Marxist tradition. A critical understanding of Gramsci's political thought demands that special attention be paid to his theory of the

⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

State with its distinction between political and civil society. The true origin of this distinction is to be found in the "dual perspective" of Italian political thought but to appreciate this it is necessary to consider how the distinction appears in the writings of Hegel and Marx which also influenced Gramsci's thinking.

Hegel and Marx on political and civil society

According to Norberto Bobbio, "modern political thought from Hobbes to Hegel is marked by a constant tendency - though with various solutions - to consider the state or political society, in relation to the state of nature (or natural society), as the supreme and definitive moment of the common and collective life of man considered as a rational being, as the most perfect or less imperfect result of that process of rationalisation of the instincts or passions or interests for which the rule of disorderly strength is transformed into one of controlled liberty"⁷. In this tradition, "the state is conceived as a product of reason, or as a rational society, the only one in which man can lead a life which conforms to reason, that is, which conforms to his nature"⁸. Originally the concept of civil society was used as a more general way of describing the condition opposed to natural society. It was not regarded, in the writings of Adam Ferguson for example, as an element of civilisation to be distinguished from political society or the State.

In the political thought of both Hegel and Marx, however, this distinction appears and is related to the separation in modern society of economic man from political man. Though the precise definitions given by Hegel and Marx to the concepts of civil society and political society differ, one may say that both regard civil society as the sphere of

⁷ Bobbio, op. cit., p. 21.

⁸ Ibid.

economic relations (with Hegel adding in his conception the regulation of relations in this sphere). Thus, it is argued that "for both Marx and Hegel, 'civil society' refers to social structure; more precisely, to what Marx termed the 'relations of production'"⁹.

The main difference between Hegel and Marx on the issue of the dualism in modern society is expressed not in their definitions of these concepts but in their interpretation of the relationship between them. According to Hegel, the modern State is the highest form of human association and as such it contains civil society but goes beyond it, transforming a merely formal universality into an organic reality. For Marx, however, the State reflects the particularism of civil society and cannot be expected to transcend that realm which gives it its form and for the continuation of which it functions. Civil society, the sphere of social conflict, powers human history. It cannot be manipulated by the political system. Under capitalism, the bourgeois State reflects the fact that in civil society it is the bourgeois class which is economically dominant. Furthermore, despite Marx's awareness of the consensual element of political power, he clearly believes that in the last resort this bourgeois State is maintained through coercion. Thus, Marx regards the relationship between civil society and political society in a totally different light to Hegel.

According to Bobbio, "as a consequence of the inversion of the relation between civil society and political society the conception of the historical process has been completely turned upside down; progress no longer moves from society to the State, but on the contrary from the State to society"¹⁰. As a result, "the line of thought beginning with

⁹ Bates, op. cit., pp. 356-7.

¹⁰ Bobbio, op. cit., p. 24.

the conception that the State abolishes the state of nature, ends with the appearance and consolidation of the theory that the state itself must in turn be abolished"¹¹. According to Bobbio, "Antonio Gramsci's theory of the state . . . belongs to this new history where the state is not an end in itself, but an apparatus, an instrument"¹².

Gramsci's theory of the State certainly has Marxist features. He regards the State as the means whereby an economically dominant class wields power over all of society. He looks forward to the day when the class State comes to an end. Unlike most Marxists before him, however, Gramsci goes on to study the State in detail and in so doing gives the concepts of civil and political society new, non-Marxist meanings. Civil society in his writings was taken, for the most part, to represent the private organisations which together with the institutions of political society form the State in its expanded sense. Civil society was not used by Gramsci to denote merely the sphere of economic activity. Because of this, Gramsci indicates a different dualism in human society from that which Hegel and Marx sought to eliminate for the distinction between civil and political society in his thought suggests the separation of social or private man from political man rather than of bourgeois from citizen. The hope that the dualism of the human condition can be overcome in a future society therefore depends on a different kind of transformation than is regarded as satisfactory in Marxist conceptions of the politically idealist type. The resolution of economic contradictions is an aspect of Gramsci's proposed solution to the dualism of modern society but the dualistic character of political power must be resolved in its own right. In an attempt to understand how it had come about in the first place, Gramsci concentrated much of his attention in

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

prison on the nature of political rule in advanced societies and, as a result, formulated his theory of the State. This theory provides clear evidence of the influence of the Italian tradition as opposed to the Marxist foundations of Gramsci's thought in that it is almost wholly concerned with relations in the superstructure rather than with relations between the superstructure and the base which are the concern of most Marxist theories.

Gramsci's concept of civil society

Hoare and Nowell Smith point out that "Gramsci did not succeed in finding a single, wholly satisfactory conception of 'civil society' or the State"¹³ and one is forced to accept their claim that there are "variations in his conception of civil society"¹⁴. In a passage where he comments on "the historical process which is transforming the whole of civil society"¹⁵, Gramsci appears to be using the term as Ferguson had done to indicate the antithesis of primitive or natural society. On other occasions, however, it can be seen that "civil society is in effect equated with the mode of economic behaviour"¹⁶. For example, Gramsci describes the State required for the process of Americanisation as "the liberal state, not in the sense of free-trade liberalism or of effective political liberty, but in the more fundamental sense of free initiative and of economic individualism which, with its own means, on the level of 'civil society', through historical development, itself arrives at a régime of individual concentration and monopoly"¹⁷.

¹³ Gramsci, PN, p. 207. Editors' introduction.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 208. Editors' introduction.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 209. Editors' introduction.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 293.

Here, it would seem that Gramsci is employing the concept in its Marxist sense.

It is unsurprising, given his political affiliations, that Gramsci uses the concept of civil society in the same sense as it was used by Marx. What is peculiar is that it has been asserted that "contrary to what is commonly believed, Gramsci derives his own concept of civil society not from Marx, but openly from Hegel, though with a rather slanted or at least unilateral interpretation of his thought"¹⁸. This is the suggestion of Norberto Bobbio who writes that "civil society in Gramsci does not belong to the structural moment, but to the super-structural one"¹⁹. In fact, this would not indicate that Gramsci employs the Hegelian definition since Hegel's conception includes economic as well as superstructural features. But, Bobbio persists, arguing that "Gramsci claims that his concept of civil society derives from Hegel's" and that "Hegel's concept of civil society as understood by Gramsci is a superstructural concept"²⁰. According to Bobbio, "a great difficulty arises from these two points: on the one side, Gramsci derives his thesis on civil society from Hegel and sees it as belonging to the super-structural moment and not the structural one; but on the other hand, Marx also refers to Hegel's civil society when he identifies civil society with the whole of economic relations, that is with the structural moment"²¹. Bobbio suggests that Gramsci's conception can be explained by the fact that, unlike Marx, he takes over the superstructural aspects of the Hegelian usage.²²

¹⁸ Bobbio, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 31-2.

²² See ibid., p. 32.

Bobbio's argument is unsatisfactory. Only on certain occasions does Gramsci imply that his conception of civil society includes the economic sphere. For Marx, civil society is the economic sphere and in Hegel's thought too economics have their existence in civil society. Bobbio admits that when Gramsci refers to Hegel the conception of civil society he has in mind "is not the one of the initial movement, that is of the explosion of contradictions which the state will have to dominate, but it is that of the final moment, when the organisation and regulation of the various interests (the corporations) provide the basis for the transition towards the state"²³. In this way, Bobbio attempts to justify his claim that Gramsci adopts one of the Hegelian uses of the concept of civil society. His claim is mistaken. Gramsci's conception is sufficiently different from that of both Marx and Hegel to show that it is not derived from their writings. He was influenced by them; particularly by their deliberations on the relations between base and superstructure. But, his concept of civil society is used, for the most part, to represent a wholly superstructural element. The real formative influence at work in his elaboration of the civil society - political society distinction is the Italian political debate tradition with its "dual perspective" corresponding to the use of consent and coercion in the world of politics. He takes over the Hegelian and Marxist terms but he uses them to explain a totally different contradiction than that with which Hegel and Marx were concerned. Justification of this claim requires fuller analysis of the Gramscian conception.

According to Gramsci, it is possible "to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political

²³ Ibid.

society' or 'the State'"²⁴. These two levels originate in the "dual perspective". Gramsci argues that they "correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government"²⁵. Underlining this point, Gramsci wrote in a letter to his sister-in-law that his projected study of the intellectuals would lead on "to certain definitions of the concept of the State, which is usually regarded as 'political' society (in other words dictatorship, or an apparatus of coercion to control the masses of the people in accordance with the mode of production and the economic system prevailing at a given period) and not as an equilibrium between 'political' society and 'civil' society"²⁶. It is the latter conception that is most often adopted in Gramsci's theory of politics. That is to say, he prefers a definition of the State imbued with the "dual perspective" to the basic Marxist definition. The political power of the State is regarded as being based on a combination of elements, not simply on the monopoly of legitimate coercion exercised by an economically dominant social class. To outline the other main aspect of political power, Gramsci uses the concept of civil society and gives it new meaning.

For Gramsci, civil society is that sphere "in which intellectuals mostly operate"²⁷. It is a realm of the superstructure and it is vital to the maintenance of political power for, according to Gramsci, "the hegemony of a social group over the entire society of a nation" is

²⁴ Gramsci, PN, p. 12. Gramsci is using the concept of the State here in its restricted sense and not in the expanded form which he generally adopts.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Gramsci, Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I, p. 47. (Gramsci to Tatiana Schucht, 7 September, 1931.)

²⁷ Ibid.

"exercised by means of and through the organisations commonly called private, such as the Church, the Trade Unions, the schools etc . . ."28. Thus, in Gramsci's thought, the concept of civil society can be said to represent, on the majority of occasions that it is used, "the marketplace of ideas", the place "where intellectuals enter as 'salesmen' of contending cultures"29. Civil society is "composed of all those 'private organisms' . . . which contribute in molecular fashion to the formation of social and political consciousness"30.

No further proof is needed that this is a different notion of civil society than that which appears in the writings of Hegel and Marx. In Gramsci's civil society, the "organic intellectuals" of the ruling class together with traditional intellectuals conspire to secure the consent of the majority of citizens to the existing political and socio-economic system. They pose as the upholders of the national interest. Indeed, civil society in this sense can be regarded as the basis of national identity as well as of consent to a particular class-State. There are many problems involved in trying to appreciate precisely what Gramsci includes in civil society but what is clearly excluded is the sphere of political, coercive agencies often taken to represent the State in its narrow sense. To understand the concept more fully one must examine its relationship in Gramsci's thought to that sphere of political society. What one can say at once, however, is that Gramsci's use of the concept of civil society shows that he believed that modern man finds himself in many important non-political associations other than simply the world of the economy and this must be kept in mind when one talks about the dissolution of all contradictions in human society.

28 Ibid.

29 Bates, op. cit., p. 353.

30 Ibid.

Gramsci's expanded concept of the State

The main significance of Gramsci's innovatory use of the concept of civil society lies in its function as part of Gramsci's re-evaluation of the Marxist theory of the State. In the past, Marxist political theory had been restricted to the extent that political power was held generally to be the result of the coercion exerted by the ruling class through the government, courts, police and military, ie through the State. By including civil society in his expanded concept of the State, Gramsci acknowledges the insights provided by the "dual perspective" and responds to the problems which had been faced by the revolutionary movement in advanced capitalist societies after the Great War; he concedes a consensual dimension to political power. The two floors of activity he fixes correspond to the fusion of coercion and consent. What is normally regarded as the State in Marxist political theory now becomes one of two elements in an expanded conception of the State and both elements are vital to the maintenance of power. Gramsci's expanded State concept is used "to explain the dialectical relation between coercion and consensus, dictatorship and hegemony which gives foundation and expression to the power of a class"³¹.

According to Boggs, Gramsci "assumed that no régime, regardless of how authoritarian it was, could sustain itself primarily through organised state power; in the long run, its scope of popular support or 'legitimacy' was always bound to contribute to stability, particularly during times of stress or crisis"³². This observation underlies Gramsci's theory of the intellectuals and notion of passive revolution as well as the concept of hegemony. One can infer that he believed that in Tsarist Russia political

³¹ Macciocchi, op. cit., p. 11.

³² Boggs, op. cit., p. 38.

power had rested almost exclusively on coercion; hence, his suggestion that "in Russia the State (political society) was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous"³³. In the West, however, a better balance between consent and coercion had been achieved. If anything the consensual element was dominant for "when the State (political society) trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed"³⁴. According to Gramsci, in advanced societies, "'civil society' has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic 'incursions' of the immediate economic elements (crises, depressions, etc)"³⁵. Thus, it can be stated that central to the Prison Notebooks is the necessary attempt of Gramsci the revolutionary "to grapple with the 'dense' civil society of much of contemporary Europe, to reveal how it embodies much of the defensive mechanisms of the ruling social groups, how this can be strategically assailed, and how it can be transformed"³⁶. This is not to argue that Gramsci believed that the power of the bourgeoisie rested solely on its acquisition of consent. The "dual perspective" does not allow one to think that political stability can be based on either consent or coercion on its own. As a Marxist however, Gramsci's originality lies in his suggestion that the consensual element is more important to the maintenance of political power in advanced capitalist societies than other Marxists before him had thought. Coercion remains as an ingredient of that power but the bare fact is that according to Gramsci's conception the majority of citizens in advanced capitalist countries consent to the rule of the bourgeoisie and are not coerced into an acceptance of their régimes.

³³ Gramsci, PN, p. 238.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 235.

³⁶ Ray Burnett, "Scotland and Antonio Gramsci", Scottish International, 9, November, 1972, p. 14.

This point can be better understood by a careful look at the difficult problem of how Gramsci sees the relationship of civil and political society.

The relationship between political society and civil society

(i) Gramsci's initial proposition is that political society and civil society are the separate floors of action from each of which a ruling class derives a certain amount of its power. These are to be the twin elements of his expanded conception of the State. On the one hand, there is civil society which creates hegemonic control and acquires the consent of the ruled to the political system as a whole; on the other hand, there is political society which can be equated with the State, in its narrower sense, as organised coercion. The simplest way of interpreting the relationship between civil and political society in his conception is that the two combine in varying proportion to form the State and, therefore, coercion and consent combine to forge political power. This interpretation makes a clear-cut distinction between the two spheres of action. Civil society corresponds to consent; political society to coercion. Because they have separate functions, they can be said to vary in importance from one political system to another. In the advanced West, civil society is relatively more important than political society. The problem with this interpretation of Gramsci's distinction between political and civil society, however, is that it leads to the assumption that Gramsci believes that in advanced societies the coercive element of political power disappears.

Perry Anderson argues that, in Gramsci's thought, "the preponderance of civil society over the State in the West can be equated with the predominance of 'hegemony' over 'coercion' as the fundamental mode of bourgeois power in advanced capitalism. Since hegemony pertains to civil

society and civil society prevails over the State, it is the cultural ascendancy of the ruling class that essentially ensures the stability of the capitalist order. For in Gramsci's usage here, hegemony means the ideological subordination of the working class by the bourgeoisie, which enables it to rule by consent."³⁷ According to Anderson, the preliminary aim of Gramsci's political society - civil society formula is "to establish one obvious and fundamental difference between Tsarist Russia and Western Europe - the existence of representative political democracy"³⁸. In an advanced capitalist society, the State is taken to represent only the "outer surface" of civil society.³⁹

This type of interpretation of the Gramscian distinction as an element of an expanded conception of the State tends towards the conclusion that Gramsci believes that a cultural and politically reformist struggle is the way by which socialism will be attained. Yet this is not what Gramsci argued. He indicated that the war of position must take over in advanced societies as the main strategy for revolutionary action but he did not rule out the possibility that there would also be a war of movement, a revolutionary assault on the State itself (political society) if socialism was to come about. This can be explained by reference to the distinction between political and civil society as an example of the operation of the "dual perspective". Though Gramsci believes that the consensual element is more important in advanced societies than it was in Tsarist Russia, he does not imply, as Anderson would have us think, that this consensual element is the essence or sole basis of political power in these societies. The danger of interpreting

³⁷ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 26.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

the Gramscian distinction in a simple manner, stating that the State is the combination of political and civil society, as distinct entities, is that one can come to the false conclusion that Gramsci thinks that one or other of these elements may be dropped and yet the State would still be secure. It is necessary to look for another interpretation of Gramsci's distinction if one is to retain his "dual perspective" and the idea that consent and coercion are always present in political power. However, one must be careful to avoid going to the opposite extreme for, on occasions, instead of suggesting that civil and political society can be easily distinguished as separate spheres of action, Gramsci appears to equate the two.

(ii) Gramsci argues that "the ideas of the Free Trade movement are based on a theoretical error whose practical origin is not hard to identify; they are based on a distinction between political society and civil society, which is made into and presented as an organic one, whereas in fact it is merely methodological"⁴⁰. It is asserted, Gramsci argues, that "economic activity belongs to civil society, and that the State must not interfere to regulate it"⁴¹. But, says Gramsci, "since in reality civil society and State are one and the same, it must be made clear that laissez-faire too is a form of State 'regulation', introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means"⁴².

Gramsci's equation of civil society and the State is seized upon by Perry Anderson who argues that this version of the relationship represents Gramsci's final attempt "to grasp his elusive object"⁴³. In

⁴⁰ Gramsci, PN, pp. 159-60.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 160.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 33.

it, says Anderson, "the State now includes 'political society' and 'civil society' alike" and "the concept of civil society as a distinct entity disappears"⁴⁴. Indeed, "the very distinction between State and civil society is itself cancelled" and this cancellation "has grave consequences, which undermine any scientific attempt to define the specificity of bourgeois democracy in the west"⁴⁵. According to Anderson, it is this interpretation of Gramsci's conception of the relationship between political and civil society that influences the political thought of Louis Althusser. He writes that "once he had rejected the notion of civil society, Althusser was thus later logically led to a drastic assimilation of Gramsci's final formula, which effectively abolishes the distinction between State and civil society. The result was the thesis that 'churches, parties, trade unions, families, schools, newspapers, cultural ventures' in fact all constitute 'Ideological State Apparatuses'"⁴⁶.

Anderson draws these conclusions from a false conception of Gramsci's writings. When Althusser abolishes Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction he is referring to these concepts as they are employed usually in Gramsci's writings. Yet, in suggesting that Gramsci gave a lead to Althusser in this respect by abolishing the distinction between civil society and the State himself, Anderson presents as evidence a section of Gramsci's work in which the concept of civil society is clearly being used in its Marxist sense. The distinction which Gramsci cancelled was between civil society as the sphere of economic activity and the State. He was not abolishing the distinction made elsewhere in his writings between civil society as the realm of hegemony and political society which corresponds to the moment of coercion. That distinction

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 33-4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

remains. However, this does not mean that we need to resort to the simple interpretation of Gramsci's theory of the State which has already been found to be deficient. Gramsci does not cancel the distinction between civil and political society but neither does he see them in a straightforward relationship from which either element can be taken in particular circumstances. There is another, more accurate way of explaining what Gramsci meant by the distinction between political and civil society.

(iii) It has been suggested that "the separate analysis of each of the two spheres of the superstructural moment does not evidently correspond to practical reality"⁴⁷. The point Gramsci makes is not that a political system is made up of two separate sets of institutions, but, rather, that political power itself is a combination of coercion and consent. Even Anderson admits that, in certain sections of Gramsci's Notebooks, "civil society is presented as in balance or equilibrium with the State (ie in its restricted sense) and hegemony is distributed between State - or "political society" - and civil society, while itself being redefined to combine coercion and consent"⁴⁸. Gramsci's main purpose in distinguishing political from civil society is to make this point about political power rather than to say something simply about political institutions.

As the balance between civil and political society, Gramsci's conception of the State assumes, in the words of John Merrington, "a wider and more organic sense"⁴⁹. Gramsci argues that the maintenance of political authority depends on "a proper relation between State and civil society"⁵⁰. He also submits that the historical unity of the ruling

⁴⁷ Portelli, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴⁸ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 31.

⁴⁹ Merrington, op. cit., p. 153.

⁵⁰ Gramsci, PN, p. 238.

classes "concretely results from the organic relations between State or political society and 'civil society'"⁵¹. The State becomes not political society + civil society but political society and civil society in permanent combination. The common purpose of the two apparently distinct spheres makes them parts of a dialectical totality - the organic State with its objective of the establishment and maintenance of political power. As Piotte claims, this State, in the Gramscian conception, is regarded as "the dialectical union of civil society and political society, of hegemony and coercion"⁵². Buzzi too accurately interprets Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction, writing that "the State as civil society and political society, is then conceived of as full of force, the armed intellectual"⁵³.

This interpretation of Gramsci's theory of the State emphasises the influence of the "dual perspective" in his thinking. The other two interpretations, on the other hand, fail to recognise that coercion and consent are seen as essential features of political power. It might be argued that this third interpretation is harder to grasp than the others but this is less true if one already appreciates the subtlety of the political realism expressed in the Italian tradition of political debate. It is as a part of that tradition that Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction should be understood. It is as a part of that tradition that, as Buci-Glucksmann argues, Gramsci's concept of the integral State "assumes that all means of a class's intellectual and moral leadership are taken into account"⁵⁴. The complexity of political power, with its dependence on both coercion and consent, is represented

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵² Piotte, op. cit., p. 223.

⁵³ Buzzi, op. cit., p. 286.

⁵⁴ Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., p. 93.

by Gramsci in his presentation of the "dual perspective".

Unfortunately Gramsci's theory of the State, understood in this way, is still open to misunderstanding. Anderson deduces from this interpretation that "Gramsci now grasps the co-presence of ideological controls within civil society and the State" and that he extends the concept of hegemony to include the coercive element.⁵⁵ Once more the subtlety of the Gramscian conception is lost.

One way of understanding what Gramsci is driving at and how he reveals the influence of the "dual perspective" is to avoid using the concept of the State in both its restricted and its expanded senses. Instead, we can adopt the equation, State (in the expanded sense) = political society (ie State in the restricted sense) + civil society, to indicate how Gramsci expresses the relationship between political and civil society. Even then, however, we must remember that the union of political and civil society which creates the State is not the simple adding together of two separate entities but a dialectical balance. The distinction cannot be cancelled and, yet, neither can it be taken to imply the potential autonomy of the two elements. The latter are separate but where there is political authority they are to be found together. Just as good is unimaginable without evil and just as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde are one and the same, so coercion and consent, in Gramsci's conception of the State, are linked together. When one does become separated from the other there can no longer be political authority (at least not until the institution of the regulated society in which, Gramsci the political idealist believes, coercion will disappear). This difficult point must be understood if one is to appreciate fully Gramsci's implementation of the "dual perspective". What remains to be seen is whether

⁵⁵ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 32.

Gramsci's conception explains concrete political events. Perhaps it is intelligible only on the philosophical level such is its intangibility. If one adopts the first interpretation of his concept (that civil society and political society are distinct entities) then one could look for expressions of the distinction Gramsci makes in everyday political life. The second interpretation (that there is no distinction between political and civil society) also offers the opportunity to examine how in advanced States political society incorporates all the would-be private organisations which create hegemony. The third, more accurate, interpretation of Gramsci's theory of the State, however, seems almost to be a metaphor for the presence of force and consent in politics rather than a precise outline of how a particular ruling class wields its power. To that extent it could be no more applicable to the study of advanced political systems than, for example, Machiavelli's own "dual perspective". For the purposes of political analysis, it would be little more than a commonplace. Yet, a number of writers have employed Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction to further their researches into specific political issues so it is worth considering a little more what practical functions Gramsci's conception can serve if one assumes that the most accurate interpretation of it is also the most abstract.

It is argued sometimes that the Gramscian distinction is merely methodological. Because his expanded conception of the State consists of a relationship between political society and civil society that is more complex than it might appear at first glance, the distinction which Gramsci draws between the two superstructural levels is regarded only as a metaphor for the combined use of force and persuasion in politics and not as an operative distinction representing a real separation between independent realms of political activity. According to Buci-Glucksmann, "as against Croce and liberal ideology, Gramsci rejects any organic

distinction between civil society and state, hegemony and dictatorship"⁵⁶. Jacques Texier too argues that Gramsci's "methodological distinction" should not be confused with an "organic distinction" but he writes that "the distinction between the moment of force (political society) and of consensus (civil society) is a practical canon of research, an instrument permitting a better analysis of an organic reality in which it is radically impossible to separate these two moments"⁵⁷. Some would argue that since these moments are not autonomous in real life Gramsci's theoretical distinction is not even useful as an instrument of research.

Furthermore, it has been shown by some commentators that complex though it is, if we accept the third interpretation considered above, Gramsci's distinction actually oversimplifies the nature of political rule because it implies that consent originates solely in civil society and coercion in political society whereas in reality both features of political power can be discovered in each of the superstructural levels supposing one can isolate these, in any case, in practice. According to Piotte, "the dialectic between civil society and political society is such that the functioning of each of them has effects which inscribe themselves on the heart of the other"⁵⁸. It is true that many of the so-called coercive institutions of political society not only depend for their proper functioning on hegemonic controls but also play a part in securing the consent of the population without using their coercive power. Conversely, most of the private institutions of civil society have recourse to coercion when the need arises. Thus, one cannot maintain that these realms are even distinctive in their approach to the problem of the retention of authority. That they overlap has obvious implications for

⁵⁶ Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., p. 93.

⁵⁷ Texier, op. cit., p. 51.

⁵⁸ Piotte, op. cit., p. 230.

anyone wishing to destroy a particular system and also for those who seek to use the Gramscian distinction as an instrument for analysing specific political systems.

Thus, a number of questions are raised concerning the analytical utility of Gramsci's distinction between political and civil society. First, there is the general problem of interpreting the distinction, always assuming that one has come to grips already with the fact that Gramsci is not entirely consistent in his use of the terms involved. The most accurate interpretation of his conception is also the most abstract for it indicates that political and civil society are not simply the separate ingredients of some political systems but rather the dialectically interwoven foundations of all political power. This leads to a second problem that these realms appear so interwoven that it becomes impossible to isolate them in practice. Even if it could be done, a third difficulty arises from the fact that neither realm is really tied to one type of function nor based on only one element of political power.

And, yet, Gramsci's conception has been made use of for the purposes of revolutionary strategy and political analysis. The distinction which he makes between political and civil society has been taken as something more than the commonplace it may appear in its general form though not so complex that it is totally intangible. Gramsci's distinction does correspond to a real dualism in modern society between political man and private or social man. It is in that form that it has been used to best effect in political analysis. As a basis for political strategy, however, it has resulted in a number of competing views which are dependent on the particular interpretation of the distinction being employed.

The final chapters of this thesis focus on one area in which Gramsci's conception has been put to analytical use by researchers whose findings highlight the Italian character of his theory of the State despite the fact that some of them would regard the theory purely in Marxist terms. Before considering this practical application of Gramsci's theory, however, it is worth reflecting on the theoretical difficulties facing any attempt to use his ideas in this way and also to examine the implications of Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction for revolutionary strategy. As far as the latter is concerned, we must see Gramsci only as a Marxist but a consideration of the rival strategic formulations claimed to be drawn from his work serves to underline the proposition that it is as a Marxist and an Italian political thinker that Gramsci makes his real theoretical contribution and not simply as a Marxist.

Force, consent, strategy. The political implications of the rival interpretations of Gramsci's distinction

Most socialist strategy prior to the outbreak of the Great War was based on the premise that the political power of the bourgeoisie rests on its control of the State and consequently its possession of all the legal coercive agencies. It has been argued that "Gramsci's great contribution was to take the analysis further, by demonstrating that in many western societies . . . capitalism is not based simply on force"⁵⁹. As Carl Boggs suggests, "the growing complexity of civil society in advanced capitalism (the development of a skilled labour force, the importance of knowledge and education in production, the role of the mass media, the availability of more sophisticated techniques of ideological control, the penetration of civil society by the State, etc)

⁵⁹ David G. Whitfield, "Antonio Gramsci. Signposts to Scottish Action", Scottish International, August, 1973, p. 7.

could only mean that authority and power would have to be viewed in a broader context than, for example, was the case under Russian conditions"⁶⁰. This is a valid point whichever interpretation of Gramsci's distinction between political society and civil society one favours because there can be no doubt that Gramsci recognised what Boggs describes as "the increasing significance of ideological struggle within civil society in the advanced capitalist systems"⁶¹. In pre-1917 Russia, politics had been almost wholly the coercive expression of economic domination. In the West, however, the maintenance of political power had become a much more complex business.

Nevertheless, it is wrong to assume that Gramsci regarded political power in advanced societies as based wholly on the consensual element originating in the realm of civil society as totally distinct from political society. It is correct to infer from Gramsci's writings the suggestion that, in advanced societies, "the powers-that-be in the state have a great advantage in the struggle for hegemony, by virtue of their superior organisation, information, and means of communication" and that they have at their disposal the "modern instrument of 'public opinion', the potential of which was foreseen by Gramsci as by few others"⁶². Gramsci writes that "the State when it wants to initiate an unpopular action, preventively creates the adequate public opinion; that is, it organises and concentrates certain elements of civil society"⁶³. However, there is a danger in drawing from such suggestions the conclusion that Gramsci thought that coercion plays no part in advanced capitalist systems. Such a conclusion would be quite wrong and, of course, would have

⁶⁰ Boggs, op. cit., p. 48.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 113.

⁶² Bates, op. cit., p. 355.

⁶³ Antonio Gramsci, Passato e Presente, Turin, 1966, p. 158.

serious repercussions for the construction of revolutionary strategy based upon it.

This conclusion is often drawn by those who wish to see Gramsci as a Crocean rather than a Marxist and a reformist as opposed to a revolutionary. It is suggested that he sees ideas as more important than material factors in the institution of political control in advanced societies. Corresponding to this interpretation is the claim that, because Gramsci believed that consent is the essence of political power in such systems, his war of position is clearly a reformist struggle through which power will be wrested from the hands of the bourgeoisie. Although the latter have coercive agencies under their control, these are seldom used and, long before they are, the proletariat will have progressed peacefully to the position of appearing as an alternative ruling class. Thus, it is inferred that Gramsci denies the importance of revolutionary struggle in advanced societies.

Such an inference is possible only if one makes a very simplistic interpretation of Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction and insists that he implied the total separation of these realms. On the basis of this interpretation, one proceeds to claim that consent may be the sole basis of political rule for a certain length of time and that when it is no longer viable coercion takes over to the complete exclusion of consent. In advanced societies, the former is the way in which political power is maintained and there is no recourse to the coercive option. Thus, it is unlikely that the struggle for socialism will be violent provided the battle on the cultural and ideological front has been won.

As Anderson suggests, this reading implies "the simple location of 'hegemony' within civil society, and the attribution of primacy to civil

society over the State"⁶⁴. It can be argued that such an interpretation of Gramsci's theory of the State "corresponds very exactly to what might be called a common-sense view of bourgeois democracy in the west, on the Left - a view widely diffused in militant social-democratic circles since the Second World War"⁶⁵. For those who hold this view, says Anderson, "it is the strategic nexus of civil society which is believed to maintain capitalist hegemony within a political democracy, whose State institutions do not directly debar or repress the masses"⁶⁶. It is easy to see how this view leads to the adoption on the Left of reformist political practice for it appears that "the main task of socialist militants is not combat with an armed State, but ideological conversion of the working class to free it from submission to capitalist mystifications"⁶⁷. As has been pointed out, the complexity and ambiguous nature of Gramsci's conception is partly responsible for this reformist interpretation of the strategic implications of his writings.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, though Gramsci's conception is open to a variety of readings, it can be stated that the reformist interpretation of the strategic message in the Notebooks is based on two fallacies: a belief that the "war of position" and the "war of movement" are regarded by Gramsci as mutually exclusive alternatives and the notion that support for immediate objectives and class alliances signals an acceptance of historical continuity to the exclusion of revolutionary rupture.⁶⁹ According to Femia, "nothing that Gramsci writes about the 'war of position' suggests that

⁶⁴ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 27.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁸ See Macciocchi, op. cit., p. 168.

⁶⁹ See Femia, "Gramsci, the Via Italiana, and the classical Marxist-Leninist Approach to Revolution", op. cit.

the proletarian capture of power will be peaceful or parliamentary"⁷⁰. It is the case that "the final destruction of the old order is viewed by Gramsci as but a single moment in the vast historical modification of cultural and social forms, a shift that occurs beneath the surface of formal political institutions"⁷¹. However, a "democratic" interpretation of Gramsci, though not without foundation, is incompatible with his expressed views.⁷²

Whether it has foundation or not, this interpretation of Gramsci is clearly unacceptable to revolutionary socialists seeking to draw strategic lessons from his writings. According to Macciocchi, one can combat the reformist interpretation and arrive at strategic conclusions more consistent with Gramsci's thoughts on the nature of political power in advanced societies by insisting forcefully that "for Gramsci, power is exercised not only by means of hegemony, that is to say by means of the diffusion of the ideas of the class that assumes it; there is a continued presence of coercive action (described by Gramsci as 'the necessity of constraint')"⁷³. The problem remains, however, that even in Macciocchi's interpretation there is the implicit suggestion that consensus and coercion are separate elements of political control originating in civil society and political society respectively. This fails to fully express the subtlety of Gramsci's conception and suggests, in spite of Macciocchi's intention, that these two elements have an autonomous existence indicating that it is conceivable that in some circumstances one or other can be dispensed with as an ingredient of political power. If that were so, one could argue legitimately that in some situations

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 95.

⁷³ Macciocchi, op. cit., p. 168.

political power is based solely on consent and that to take over the reins of government one must simply take away that consent. Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction does not point in this direction.

However, Gramsci does not suggest either that one can cancel the distinction between political and civil society for practical purposes. Yet, strategic conclusions opposed to reformism have been arrived at on the basis of this second, false reading of Gramsci's thought.

It has been claimed that this reading "has been utilized . . . by left currents within European communism"⁷⁴. It is an aspect of the reaction against the consensual view of political power in advanced societies which is characteristic of "Eurocommunist" thinking, in general, and P.C.I. policy, in particular, in the post-1945 period. It is an interpretation of Gramsci which has greatest appeal for those who deny the significance of consent in the maintenance of political power in the capitalist West and who oppose all reformist strategies to which a belief in its significance necessarily leads.

On the subject of the origin of bourgeois ideologies, Louis Althusser writes that "it is unimportant whether the institutions in which they are realised are 'public' or 'private' - for these all indifferently form sectors of a single controlling State which is 'the precondition for any distinction between public and private'"⁷⁵. Statements of this type represent the regression of Marxist political theory rather than theoretical advance based on Gramsci's conception. The implication is that the capitalist or bourgeois State is, as Marx and

⁷⁴ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 34.

⁷⁵ Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and other essays, London, 1971, p. 137-8.

and Engels had originally thought, simply a coercive machine whereas Gramsci's writings show that in advanced societies it becomes much more besides. As Anderson comments, "once the position is adopted that all ideological and political superstructures - including the family, reformist trade unions and parties, and private media - are by definition State apparatuses, in strict logic it becomes impossible and unnecessary to distinguish between bourgeois democracies and fascism"⁷⁶. Anderson criticises this view and rightly suggests that it derives from the scantiest of material in Gramsci's writings. Furthermore, he questions the strategic implications which are drawn from this erroneous reading of Gramsci. According to Anderson, "the boundaries of the State are not a matter of indifference to Marxist theory and practice. It is essential to be able to chart them accurately. To blur them is, in fact, to misunderstand the specific role and efficacy of the superstructures outside the State within bourgeois democracy"⁷⁷. There is still the other danger to be avoided however. An overemphasis of the role of these superstructures can lead to the adoption of a reformist strategy which is no more in keeping with Gramsci's thought than is this cancellation of the distinction between civil and political society. This mistake can be avoided only if one refuses to see the Gramscian distinction as absolute. Thus, we come back to the third interpretation of Gramsci's theory of the expanded State which indicates that civil society and political society form the State not as the result of a simple sum but because of their dialectical union. Neither element can become extinct, therefore, and neither can so dominate as to make one political strategy and one alone the key to success for opposition forces. This third interpretation of Gramsci's civil society - political society distinction alone reveals the

⁷⁶ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 36.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

influence of the Italian "dual perspective" on Gramsci's thinking. His political realism is expressed not in the recognition of the obvious fact that in some societies consent is more important than coercion and vice versa but in his awareness, shared with other theorists in the Italian tradition, that the essence of political power is the combination of consent and coercion. As Portelli suggests, for Gramsci "there does not exist a social system where consent serves as the sole basis of hegemony, nor a State where one group can itself continue to durably maintain its domination by coercion alone"⁷⁸. This is the message of Gramsci's conception of the State and it can be claimed that it is his distinction between political and civil society which "serves to explain the dialectical relation between coercion and consensus, dictatorship and hegemony which gives a base to the power of a class"⁷⁹. Other interpretations of Gramsci's conception prompt one-dimensional strategic assumptions. Either reformism is advocated because it is thought that consensus is regarded as predominant in advanced societies with coercion having virtually no role to play or ultra-leftist revolutionism is preached because consensus is seen as a sham with coercion being the true essence of bourgeois political control. Both strategic visions are claimed to be authorised by Gramsci but, in fact, both result from selective and confused readings of his political theory and do a disservice to the subtlety of Gramsci's thought.

His subtlety stems from his adoption of the "dual perspective". It would have been far easier for Gramsci to conclude that in certain situations one element of political power becomes all important and to argue that in the West this element is consensus. But, such a conclusion would be inaccurate and that is recognised by Gramsci because the realism

⁷⁸ Portelli, op. cit., p. 31.

⁷⁹ Macciocchi, op. cit., p. 164.

of the Italian political debate tradition helps him to see that in all political systems, even those of the most advanced capitalist societies, political power is based on the fusion of coercion and consent. It is upon this realistic conclusion that socialists must work if they are to produce political strategies which are authorised by Gramsci's political theory. The task is daunting, however, given the complexity of Gramsci's conception which, it is sometimes suggested, does not even have correspondence in reality. Furthermore, Gramsci himself was well aware of the many obstacles standing in the path of a successful transformation to socialism. Perhaps because of these problems, many activists would prefer to plan their strategies on one of the other readings of Gramsci's theory of the State. It is easier to plan a campaign on only one front. Gramsci's conception, however, points to the need to prepare for a war of position and a war of movement. The dual character of the struggle is necessitated by the dual character of political power which cannot function if dependent on only one element of control. The struggle against it can succeed only if it is directed against both of its aspects. The problem is how to engage in this complex struggle.

Gramsci's answer to the problem is provided in his theory of the revolutionary party or modern Prince. Naturally those activists who seek to base their strategy on this particular interpretation of Gramsci's thought also turn to the party as the instrument of the proletariat in the wars of position and movement. Unfortunately for them, Gramsci's own strategic vision may be regarded as inadequate for it fails to go beyond that of Lenin and is unclear about how the party actually engages in the revolutionary struggle. Thus, most activists who try to draw a strategic message from a proper interpretation of Gramsci's thought are obliged to adopt a Leninist strategy in the absence of any specifically Gramscian one. Gramsci's theory reveals the complexity of the struggle ahead but says little about how that complexity can be overcome.

Gramsci exhibits a politically idealist faith in the coming of socialism but even so he is realistic enough to point out the problems which can come about as a result of the period of "statolatry" at the conclusion of the struggle and prior to the advent of the regulated society in which coercion will be dispensed with. He writes that "for some social groups, which before their ascent to autonomous State life have not had a long independent period of cultural and moral development of their own . . . a period of statolatry is necessary and indeed opportune"⁸⁰. According to Gramsci, "this 'statolatry' is nothing other than the normal form of 'State life', or at least of initiation to autonomous State life and to the creation of a 'civil society' which it was not historically possible to create before the ascent to independent State life"⁸¹. It would seem that Gramsci is saying that "even in countries where there does not exist a real civil society, one of the first tasks of the new state must be to create this civil society"⁸². This is perfectly consistent with his thoughts on the nature of political power. What is more disturbing, however, is his suggestion that political power can be seized by the party after a struggle on only one front. He appears to be arguing that a new political order can be instituted before the consent of the mass of the population to that new order has been acquired. This may have been possible in Tsarist Russia where one might say there was an absence of real politics using Gramsci's definition but it seems inconceivable in view of his comments about political power in the West that Gramsci could suggest that this strategy leading to a necessary period of "statolatry" may be successfully adopted in advanced capitalist societies. What this would mean is that a proper

⁸⁰ Gramsci, PN, p. 268.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Portelli, op. cit., p. 41.

balance between force and consent would be replaced for a period by political power based almost exclusively on force until such time as a new civil society has been built up and is able to provide consent once more. The obvious danger is that this period of "statolatry" would be prolonged and that over-reliance on coercion would be continued. Gramsci fears this and writes that "statolatry" "must not be abandoned to itself, must not especially become theoretical fanaticism or be conceived of as 'perpetual'"⁸³. For him, says Portelli, "this primacy of the State apparatus is thus only transitory, and must not give way to the primacy of civil society, to the hegemony which is the normal mode of rule in the historic bloc"⁸⁴. Nevertheless, Gramsci's comments are fairly prophetic in view of the developments in Russia since the Revolution. The period of "statolatry" may be the logical practical outcome of a Leninist revolutionary strategy. Gramsci does not argue this but it is a possibility which is not ruled out in his own politically realist moments.

Yet, he was himself idealistic too. He did regard the State "as technically capable of withering away and of being subsumed into regulated society"⁸⁵. Indeed, the State and the law could be "rendered useless since they will have exhausted their function and will have been absorbed by civil society"⁸⁶. A situation could be reached in which it was possible at last to exclude the element of coercion from politics. Indeed, one might say that politics itself would come to an end together with the dualism between private and political man. How can this optimistic vision be squared with Gramsci's observations on statolatry

⁸³ Gramsci, PN, p. 268.

⁸⁴ Portelli, op. cit., p. 41.

⁸⁵ Gramsci, PN, p. 263.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 260.

and with the fact that he fails to advance a revolutionary strategy other than the Leninist one which would seem to lead to a bleak situation, very different from the regulated society he claims to envisage?

The fact is that the two conclusions cannot be reconciled. Gramsci's optimism is the product of his Marxist hopes for the future. His realistic assessment of the problems facing the revolutionary movement and his consequent inability to provide original clues as to how the revolution should be carried out result from his application of the "dual perspective" to contemporary capitalist societies. Having shown how complex their political power is, it is hard for him to suggest ways in which it can be overcome. Having implied that all political power must rest on a fusion of force and consent, it is difficult for him to sound anything other than utopian when he talks of a future society in which there will be no coercion. These difficulties arise from the inherent tension between realism and idealism in Gramsci's general theory of politics. This tension is evident in the thought of most Marxists, the majority of whom settle it in favour of political idealism when they come to develop their political strategies. In Gramsci's writings, however, the realism is too powerful to allow him to construct a politically idealist strategy of his own. His theory of the State informs revolutionary activists that there is no easy road to socialism in advanced societies, that the struggle is complex and that its outcome is uncertain. The soft options are for them to follow Gramsci in adopting the Leninist tactic even if it is inadequate to the tasks confronting it or to misinterpret Gramsci's thought and thereby decide that he authorises either reformism or ultra-leftism. As an aid to the elaboration of revolutionary strategies in the West, Gramsci's theory of the State is unhelpful. However, the very realism which makes it so enhances the relevance of his conception to the political analysis of advanced societies. Here the

influence of the Italian tradition can be seen as an advantage rather than a drawback. Indeed, this prompts one to ask if Gramsci's contribution to the discipline of political analysis may properly be described as Marxist.

The theoretical implications of Gramsci's distinction between political society and civil society

(i) for Marxism

Marx developed Hegel's conception of civil society in two ways. First, he dissected the extensive Hegelian concept and took over only that part of it which corresponded to the totality of economic relations. Second, he assigned to civil society in this form a more important, determining role in the process of historical development than it had been accorded in Hegel's scheme. Though Gramsci's concept of civil society differs radically from that of Marx, it too is granted a crucial role in the making of history. This observation implies that Gramsci substantially revised Marx's political theory and it has been argued that it is precisely at the level of the concept of civil society that he "introduces a radical innovation in relation to the Marxist tradition"⁸⁷.

First, Gramsci uses the term for the most part to describe a superstructural sphere although on less frequent occasions he employs the Marxist definition. Second, when he uses this concept in his own innovatory way he sees this superstructural sphere not as a mere reflection of the substructure of society but as an important educative influence in the historical process. As Bates comments, for Gramsci "civil society is a sphere of potent historical action, but it belongs

⁸⁷ Piotte, op. cit., p. 200.

not to the structure but to the superstructure"⁸⁸.

This point has been expanded upon most notably by Norberto Bobbio who begins his analysis with the observation that "civil society in Gramsci does not belong to the structural moment, but to the super-structural one"⁸⁹. According to Bobbio, "if Marx identifies civil society with the structure, then the transference operated by Gramsci of civil society from the field of structure to the one of superstructure, can only have a decisive influence on the gramscian conception of the relations between structure and superstructure"⁹⁰. Basing his further observations on this perceived difference between Marx and Gramsci, Bobbio can be said to go on "to draw some important conclusions which are, however, quite debatable"⁹¹. According to Chantal Mouffe and Anne Showstack Sassoon, it is Bobbio's belief that "for Marx the driving force of history is to be found in the economy, whereas for Gramsci it is to be found in ideology"⁹². According to Bobbio, "we should therefore find in Gramsci's work a double inversion with respect to the Marxist tradition"⁹³. Bobbio, in fact, claims that in Gramsci's civil society - political society distinction can be found indications that he believes that the superstructure is predominant over the structure and that, within the former, civil society is more important than political society. At this point, Bobbio may be accused of arriving at his conclusions on the basis of an oversimplified interpretation of Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction for he implies that Gramsci considered it possible for the elements of coercion and

⁸⁸ Bates, op. cit., p. 357.

⁸⁹ Bobbio, op. cit., p. 30.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 32-3.

⁹¹ Mouffe and Showstack Sassoon, op. cit., p. 43.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

consent to be completely isolated and for one or other to be depended upon solely at certain times for the maintenance of political power. This is one of three possible interpretations of Gramsci's theory of the expanded State and, thus, Bobbio's conclusions are partly excusable. In response to them, one would argue simply that he has not based his findings on the most accurate interpretation of the Gramscian conception. More contentious, however, is Bobbio's claim that Gramsci believes that the superstructure is predominant over the structure.

If this was Gramsci's belief, his right to be called a Marxist would certainly be in jeopardy. Yet, Bobbio himself states that he has no desire "to deny Gramsci's Marxism"⁹⁴. It has been pointed out by Mouffe and Showstack Sassoon that his argument that Gramsci is a Marxist rests on the idea that "any theory which in one way or another accepts the dichotomy between superstructure and structure is, in fact, a Marxist theory"⁹⁵. It is a flimsy argument from which it is easy to infer that Gramsci is not regarded as a particularly good Marxist. But, it has been shown in this thesis that, although Gramsci does depart significantly from the interpretation of Marxism proposed by Second International theorists, his materialist conception of history is authorised by Marx's writings. The fact that there can be more than one kind of Marxist is explained by the ambiguity of Marx's thought. The difference of opinion between Gramsci and economic determinist Marxists does not support the view that he is not a Marxist and they are or vice versa. Bobbio's weak defence of Gramsci's right to be called a Marxist, coming in the wake of his suggestion that Gramsci makes the unMarxist decision that the superstructure dominates the structure, meets with an inevitably hostile response.

⁹⁴ Bobbio, op. cit., p. 31.

⁹⁵ Mouffe and Showstack Sassoon, op. cit., p. 43.

Jacques Texier examines Bobbio's theoretical deductions and comes to the conclusion that "to oppose Gramsci and Marx in respect of the 'active' and 'positive' character of the superstructures is . . . pointless"⁹⁶. As Texier claims, Bobbio's thesis "implies a reading of the marxism of Marx which is nothing but a reduction of Marx to economism and mechanism"⁹⁷. An attempt has been made in this thesis to confirm Texier's view that such a reduction is unwarranted. Marx condemned all uncritical materialism and it is in the context of his critique that Gramsci's criticisms of the fatalism and determinism of orthodox Marxism can best be understood. Texier is justified therefore in his belief, paraphrased by Mouffe and Showstack Sassoon, that "the first mistake which Bobbio makes is that of presenting the relation between structure and superstructure as a dichotomy in which one of the two elements must of necessity dominate the other"⁹⁸. That is not the conclusion to which the dual critique of idealism and uncritical materialism made by Marx and Gramsci leads. For that reason, "Texier's contention is that both Marx and Gramsci conceive of the relation between structure and superstructure in a completely different way to that supposed by Bobbio, that is, as a process of dialectical unity in which each element can in turn assume the role of conditioner or conditioned"⁹⁹. They do not conceive of history in terms of one-way mechanical determinism.

This is recognised up to a point by Bobbio and yet he makes the claim that Gramsci doubly inverts Marx's thought by giving the superstructure primacy over the structure and civil society primacy over

⁹⁶ Jacques Texier, "Gramsci, theoretician of the superstructures. On the concept of civil society", in Mouffe (ed.), op. cit., p. 57.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹⁸ Mouffe and Showstack Sassoon, op. cit., p. 45.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

political society. His proposal is indefensible and his justification for continuing to regard Gramsci as a Marxist unnecessarily feeble. One must bear in mind that Gramsci's use of the term civil society is innovatory. When he makes the distinction between political and civil society he is not referring to relations between the superstructure and the structure as would be the case were he using the concepts as Marx had done. Gramsci is discussing relations within the superstructure and is not suggesting anything which might indicate that he denies the importance of the substructure accorded it by Marx. There is no evidence elsewhere in Gramsci's writings either to suggest that he downgraded the status of the economic base. To show that he opposed economic determinism is not the same as arguing that Gramsci was an idealist rather than a particular sort of Marxist who emphasises the active dimension of Marx's thought rather than its implicit fatalism. Whilst maintaining that Gramsci was a Marxist, though not very wholeheartedly, Bobbio argues that he became a theorist of the superstructures as if to suggest that this is a rather strange thing for a Marxist to do. However, as Showstack Sassoon observes, "while it is true that he developed this hitherto relatively neglected area of Marxist theory, it must not be forgotten that this was both implicitly and explicitly within a problematic which related the superstructure to an economic base or a dimension of reality expressed in terms of the conditions of production"¹⁰⁰.

Marx devoted much of his intellectual life to the study of the substructure of society. Gramsci, however, in response to the failure of the workers movement in western Europe after the Great War and as a contributor to the two eras of revolutionary criticism of reformist and determinist Marxist orthodoxy, concentrated the bulk of his attention on

¹⁰⁰ Showstack Sassoon, Gramsci's Politics, p. 114.

the superstructure. These facts should not be taken to imply a difference of opinion in the general matter of interpreting history. Texier sees no theoretical divergence between Marx's problematic and that of Gramsci. "The only difference consists in the fact that Marx primarily studied structural conditions whereas Gramsci devoted the greater part of his work to the study of the superstructure thus completing the project undertaken by Marx"¹⁰¹. Texier agrees that "Gramsci was the theoretician of the superstructures, in other words, of political science, of the relations between civil society and the state, of the struggle for hegemony and the seizure of power, of the moments of consensus and force, of the relations between ethico-political and economico-political history, and lastly, that he was the theoretician of the function of the 'intellectuals' and the political party"¹⁰². This does not indicate that he broke with historical materialism. In that respect, Gramsci remained a Marxist.

It is not the study of the superstructures which undermines Gramsci's Marxism but rather the findings which result from that study. Because Marxism lacked an adequate theory of politics, Gramsci was obliged to base much of his analysis on the Italian tradition of political discourse. Here he found ideas which run counter to the political idealism so apparent in the Marxist conception. He became influenced by a view of politics which regards contradictions in human society as permanent rather than the transitory reflections of economic contradictions. The dualism between economic and political man is replaced by a dualism between private man and public man. In both roles, however, man is subject to political control because essential to this Italian tradition is the "dual perspective" which corresponds to the inevitable presence in

¹⁰¹ Mouffe and Showstack Sassoon, op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁰² Texier, op. cit., pp. 48-9.

politics of coercion and consent and for Gramsci this is expressed in advanced political systems by the combined functions of civil society and political society which work through the spheres of man's private and public lives to secure his acceptance of a particular régime. As a Marxist, Gramsci believed that this dualism can be overcome and, furthermore, that a society will come about in which coercion is no longer necessary. However, he turns to the study of the superstructures and subsequently becomes influenced by the Italian political tradition precisely because this new society had not begun to evolve in post-war western Europe despite the existence of favourable objective conditions. His analyses, imbued with the "dual perspective", lead to the conclusion that the bourgeoisie possesses many advantages in its efforts to hold power and that the best that can be hoped for is that socialism will come about after a long struggle on the cultural as well as the political front. The overwhelming flavour of Gramsci's theory is pessimistic. He himself finds it difficult to explain what precise tactics can be utilised to bring socialism about and he offers few suggestions to those who seek to draw strategic ideas from his writings. However, Gramsci's unique fusion of a Marxist conception of history with the Italian tradition of political thought does allow him to construct an interesting and relevant analysis of political power in advanced capitalist countries.¹⁰³ The utility of Gramsci's theory of the State as an analytical tool is what makes his distinction between political society and civil society interesting and an examination of it also helps us to understand in what way Gramsci refutes Marxism increasingly as his political realism grows.

¹⁰³ A similar fusion is apparent in Labriola's work but it is not developed to form the basis of an analysis of political power in contemporary society. In this respect, Labriola, unlike Gramsci, fails to perform the service performed originally in the Italian tradition by Machiavelli.

(ii) for political analysis

The influence of the Italian tradition on Gramsci's thinking is nowhere more apparent than in the considerable attention paid by him to the problem of political power and the relations between leaders and led. In spite of his Marxist faith that there will come a time when no such relationship will exist, Gramsci is realistic enough to recognise that in the advanced West it is based on a proper balance of force and consent and will be destroyed only with great difficulty. It is the Italian "dual perspective" that informs his realistic appraisal of political power in advanced societies and prompts him to formulate a distinction between political society and civil society corresponding to the dialectical union of force and consent upon which this political power is based. The centrality of the "dual perspective" to Gramsci's thought must be kept in mind if one is to comprehend his theory of the State and its analytical utility. It is originally a Machiavellian concept but its presence in Gramsci's theory also indicates the influence of Croce.

It has been argued that "Croce's inspiration is apparent in Gramsci's concept of civil and political society"¹⁰⁴. Thomas Bates claims that Gramsci's concept of civil society can "be traced to Croce's idea of the 'church' defined in 'Etica e politica' as 'the formation of moral institutions and revolutionary sects, including the sentiments and customs and fantasies and myths of a practical tendency and content'"¹⁰⁵. "For Croce, as for Gramsci", says Bates, "the 'church', or civil society, is the sphere in which intellectuals (Croce's 'political geniuses') operate, whether in cooperation with the state or in opposition to it" and "for both men, whatever 'ethical' content a state may have is to be found in

¹⁰⁴ Bates, op. cit., p. 356.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

this sphere, not within the state proper"¹⁰⁶. Though this argument appears to contain a rather simplified interpretation of how Gramsci saw the relationship between political society and civil society, force and consent, the influence of Croce on Gramsci's formulation of his political theory cannot be denied. Indeed, it has even been suggested that Gramsci took "the idea of an indefinite expression of the state as a political structure . . . quite directly, from Benedetto Croce"¹⁰⁷. This opinion is based on the observation that "no less than four times in the 'Prison Notebooks', Gramsci cited Croce's view that the 'State' was a higher entity, not to be identified with mere empirical government that could at times find its real expression in what might seem institutions or arenas of civil society"¹⁰⁸. According to Anderson, "the misguided direction in which the Crocean fancy led is evident in all those passages of Gramsci's writings which assert or suggest a dissolution of the boundaries between state and civil society"¹⁰⁹. It has been shown, however, that the suggestion of a cancellation of the distinction between political society and civil society is made infrequently by Gramsci and only when he is using the concept of civil society in its Marxist sense. As Anderson admits, the dissolution of the boundaries between the State and civil society, given its Gramscian meaning, is made by Althusser and his followers rather than by Gramsci who stresses the dialectical relationship between the two spheres in advanced societies and not the subsumption of one by the other. This is not to deny Croce's influence on Gramsci however but merely to warn against adopting a polemical view of Gramsci's thought deriving from the obvious truth that he was influenced by Croce without appreciating

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 357.

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

the real nature of Crocean influence.

According to Bates, "Croce's development of ethicopolitical history was inspired by two political aims"¹¹⁰. The first was "the destruction of Marxism"; the second, successful opposition to "The 'Actualist' philosophy of Giovanni Gentile, whose concept of the 'Ethical State' provided the theoretical foundation of the Fascist dictatorship"¹¹¹. Bates indicates that Gramsci's attitude to the Croce-Gentile dispute "is extremely important for understanding his own view of the state and its relation to hegemony" and suggests that "it is interesting that Gramsci appears to take Croce's side in rejecting the Gentilian Ethical State, in which civil and political societies are fused, as well as his 'governmental concept of morality'"¹¹². Gramsci writes that "the concept of 'unity in the act' allows Gentile to recognise as 'history' what is anti-history for Croce" and "for Gentile history is entirely State history, while for Croce it is 'ethical-political'"¹¹³. In this way, "Croce seeks to maintain a distinction between civil society and political society, between hegemony and dictatorship"¹¹⁴. The fact that Gramsci too generally tried to maintain this distinction is partly explained by the influence exerted on him by Croce. This does not mean, however, that Gramsci's realistic modifications of the Marxist theory of politics can be simply regarded as Crocean idealist perversions.

More important than Croce's influence is the more general impact on Gramsci's theory of the State of the "dual perspective" which tempers an

110 Bates, op. cit., p. 357.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Gramsci, PN, p. 271.

114 Ibid.

entire tradition of Italian political thinking, including the theories of Croce and Gentile. The origins of this way of looking at politics can be traced back to Machiavelli and when Gramsci modifies the Marxist theory of politics he does so not as a Crocean idealist but as an Italian political thinker who has embraced the "dual perspective" of his predecessors.

As Merrington claims, "the significance of Machiavelli in Gramsci's research lay, not only in his political realism, but in the 'double nature' of his centaur, both beast and human, containing both 'degrees' of force and consent, of authority and hegemony"¹¹⁵. A similar point is made by Anderson who writes that Machiavelli was Gramsci's "celebrated ancestor and inspiration in prison" because he, "from whom Gramsci took so many themes, had also set out to analyse the dual forms of the Centaur - half-man, half-beast - symbol of the hybrid of compulsion and consent by which men were always governed"¹¹⁶. Indeed, says Anderson, "Gramsci adopted Machiavelli's myth of the Centaur as the emblematic motto of his research"¹¹⁷.

Some have argued that Gramsci did not really improve on the ideas of his celebrated Italian ancestor. For example, Henry Pachter comments that he is sorry to say that Gramsci "does not get far beyond Machiavelli: he is still in suspense between Fortuna and Virtù, between the conditions ripening in civil society (Hegel's bürgerliche Gesellschaft) and the possibility of action by the leading party; between that party's need to possess moral authority (for which the code word is 'hegemony') and the necessity alas, of using coercion"¹¹⁸. Noting in passing Pachter's

¹¹⁵ Merrington, op. cit., p. 153.

¹¹⁶ Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 49.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Pachter, op. cit., p. 450.

incorrect equation of Gramsci's concept of civil society with that of Hegel, one can proceed to argue that although Gramsci's theory of the State testifies to the debt owed by him to Machiavelli and to the entire tradition of political thought which provided him with the "dual perspective", its originality lies in the fact that it evolves as an analysis of the modern State in advanced capitalist societies. This means that the "dual perspective" is presented in a way that can be made use of by other analysts of political power in advanced capitalism. It is shown by Gramsci to correspond to a given reality. It is more than a clichéd suggestion that politics includes force and consent but is instead an indication that in modern society there is a dualism between the public and private spheres which forms the basis of political power and which can do so only if there is a proper balance between these spheres and the moments of force and consent. This realisation creates problems for Gramsci's Marxism but it is also what makes his theory of the State relevant to contemporary political analysis.

Having said that Gramsci's theory of the State and his distinction between political and civil society have analytical utility, however, one must tread carefully. If the relationship between these two superstructural elements is as complex as one would suppose from an accurate interpretation of Gramsci's writings, it may be that the Gramscian distinction should be used only to express the essence of political power in advanced capitalist societies and not its institutional foundations. Simpler readings of Gramsci make his thought much more accessible to those who seek to use his ideas either for developing a revolutionary strategy appropriate to advanced capitalist formations or simply for analysing political power in such formations. In this chapter, however, these simple readings have been rejected and one is left with an interpretation of Gramsci's civil society - political society which, whilst

doing justice to the subtlety of his conception, is abstract and consequently difficult to relate to political practice. This interpretation presents problems for those revolutionaries who attempt to find a strategic message in Gramsci's theory of the modern State. Does it also preclude political analysis influenced by his conception?

It is essential to Gramsci's theory of the State that there is a distinction between political and civil society together with a recognition that this distinction reflects the complex character of political power rather than the presence in the expanded State of two isolated and autonomous spheres of activity. This seems to suggest that, although we may speak of a distinction theoretically in order to explain how power is wielded in the modern State, we cannot claim that this distinction has a formal existence. We cannot say that here is civil society, the location of consent, and there is political society, the locus of coercion, and then proceed to examine the relative importance of these spheres in a particular political system.

Nevertheless, efforts have been made to use Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction for the purposes of political analysis. Do they do a disservice to the subtlety of Gramsci's conception? In some instances they may do so inasmuch as they are based on a simplistic reading of Gramsci's distinction. Yet, it can be argued that in certain conditions the distinction becomes concrete and it is then that Gramsci's theory can be particularly useful to political analysis without losing its essential complexity. An examination of one example of an area of study in which Gramsci's conception has been applied with some success may prove this point and moreover provide further information about the nature of Gramsci's political thought and his contribution to the history of political ideas. It can give us a clearer picture of the way in which Gramsci's Marxism is infused with the "dual

perspective" of the Italian tradition to the extent that the dominant tendency in his thought is political realism, a tendency which, though hinted at, remained weak in previous Marxist theories of politics. What can already be stated, however, is that Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction is a complex conception which is derived from the Italian tradition rather than from the writings of Hegel and Marx, thereby indicating that, in reflecting on the resilience of bourgeois political power, Gramsci was not satisfied that a critique of Marxist orthodoxy and a return to the Hegelian origins of Marxist thought could provide an answer to the continuing dualism of human existence.

Despite the fact that Gramsci's distinction between political and civil society only occasionally has correspondence in reality, Scottish political history has proved itself to be amenable to analysis inspired by his theory of the State. This is due to the particular form which Scotland's national development has taken, so that what follows is not an attempt to prove that Gramsci's distinction is universally applicable to concrete political situations but rather an outline of the way in which some political researchers claim to see in certain circumstances the concretisation of the Gramscian distinction. An evaluation of how they proceed to justify this claim can tell us to what extent Gramsci's conception has analytical utility and also provide further evidence to suggest that Gramsci's theory of the State is a politically realistic construct which is inspired far more by the "dual perspective" of Italian thought than by Marxist political philosophy. The irony is that this evidence is provided even in those works to be studied in this chapter which have an explicitly Marxist intent.

Since the publication in English of a substantial amount of Gramsci's writings, attempts have been made, in a variety of fields, to apply elements of his thought as analytical tools.¹ Scarcely anywhere has this phenomenon been more apparent than in political analysis of Scotland. Indeed, there has emerged a peculiar relationship between Gramsci and Scotland which can perhaps be explained as simply the result of the activities of a number of individual researchers. Tom Nairn who translated Giuseppe Fiori's biography of Gramsci is now based once more in

¹ See, for example, Eugene Genovese's use of Gramscian concepts in his work on American history; in particular, Roll, Jordan, roll: the world the slaves made, New York, 1972; and Patterson, op. cit., for an application of Gramsci's theory of organic intellectuals in an analysis of the development of country and western music in the U.S.A.

his native Scotland after several years of exile.² He works in Edinburgh. Martin Clark, the author of the definitive work in English on Gramsci's involvement in the Italian revolutionary movement during the "Red Years" of 1919-20, is a lecturer in the Department of Politics of Edinburgh University.³ V.G. Kiernan, who has also written extensively on Gramsci, was, for many years, Professor of History in that university⁴ where one may find too Hamish Henderson the translator of many of Gramsci's letters from prison.⁵ The coexistence in the one British city of four men so interested in Gramsci is pure coincidence. However, the origins of the peculiar relationship between Gramsci and Scotland cannot all be traced back to the personal taste of a few individuals, for references to Gramsci's thought appear in so many works on Scottish history and politics that one is led to the conclusion that there is something about Scotland's condition which prompts analysis based on Gramsci's "dual perspective". Support for that conclusion is provided by a critical analysis of a selection of the more extensive attempts to use Gramsci's distinction between political and civil society to increase awareness of the dual character of political power in Scotland which is the product of an atypical nation-building process.

According to T.C. Smout, "the concept of 'hegemony' has been increasingly used by historians outside Scotland to explain the mechanisms

² Fiori, op. cit.

³ Clark, op. cit. Clark's doctoral thesis was also on this specific period in Gramsci's career.

⁴ See "Gramsci and Marxism", op. cit., "The Socialism of Antonio Gramsci" in K. Coates (ed.), Essays on Socialist Humanism, London, 1972; and "Gramsci and the other continents", New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci III, 1975.

⁵ Gramsci, Lettere del Carcere, New Edinburgh Review, Gramsci I and II, 1975. The Review also published papers presented at a Gramsci conference held at Edinburgh University in June, 1974. See Gramsci III, 1975.

of social control but it has seldom been applied to Scottish history"⁶. In Smout's opinion, however, its importance has now been acknowledged in Scottish Capitalism - Class, State and Nation from before the Union to the Present.⁷ In fact, Smout is wrong to assert that the Gramscian concept has been less used in Scotland than elsewhere. Gramsci's ideas were seldom employed anywhere outside Italy until the 1960s when he began to be recognised as a significant political thinker but since then his concepts have appeared in a number of works on Scottish history and politics. Tony Dickson is correct to make the point, however, that Marxist ideas generally have been neglected in this area of research. According to Dickson, "even in what is probably the best social history of Scotland, Smout's A History of the Scottish People, class and class conflict appear as peripheral, rather than central phenomena"⁸. Dickson claims that dissatisfaction with existing literature in the field of Scottish history has been reflected in a minor upsurge in the number of works on Scotland written from a socialist or Marxist perspective,⁹ and that it was this same dissatisfaction which prompted him and his associates to write a history of Scotland using a Marxist approach. In their work, as Smout indicates, use is made of the concept of hegemony and other ideas derived from Gramsci's political thought. The result of their application of Gramscian concepts in Scottish Capitalism resembles

⁶ The Scotsman, 23 August, 1980.

⁷ Tony Dickson (ed.), Scottish Capitalism. Class, State and Nation from before the Union to the Present, London, 1980.

⁸ Ibid., p. 9. Dickson is referring to T.C. Smout, A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830, London, 1972.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 9-10. All but one of the works referred to by Dickson will be examined in the course of this chapter. They are Michael Hechter, Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966, London, 1975; Tom Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, London, 1977; and James D. Young, The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class, London, 1979. The fourth book which Dickson puts in this category is I. Carter, Farm Life in North-East Scotland, 1840-1914, Edinburgh, 1979.

the consequences of other attempts to make analytical use of Gramsci for the study of Scottish politics and society. The aspect of Gramsci's thought which really seems useful is his political realism inherited from the Italian political debate tradition rather than his idealist Marxist attempts to work out a socialist strategy appropriate to the circumstances which his realism tells him are not conducive to revolutionary action. Before showing how this is manifest in Scottish Capitalism, it is necessary to examine previous works in which Gramsci's thought is made use of.

Though some of the earlier attempts to use Gramsci's thought in Scotland had an explicit strategic purpose which, if our argument is correct, meant that they did not make the most of Gramsci's political theory, as early as 1968, Tom Nairn had shown just how relevant some of Gramsci's ideas might be to the study of Scottish history. In an article on Scottish nationalism, Nairn wrote of the Church of Scotland that "the very identity of Kirk and people - its 'national-popular' character in Gramsci's phrase - meant that it, more than anything else, has been preserved in Scotland's long and stagnant twilight, far less than a nation yet not a province like any other"¹⁰. In this brief comment, Nairn reveals an appreciation of the national dimension of political control which is contained in Gramsci's conception of hegemony and indicates that the application of a Gramscian concept can aid one's understanding of the nature of Scottish political development. That is to say, he suggests that Gramsci the political realist may be of assistance to political analysis. As on many other occasions, however, Gramsci is brought into the argument and then quickly set aside. Nairn does not attempt an extensive application of Gramsci's ideas. Despite his promptings and

¹⁰ Tom Nairn, "The Three Dreams of Scottish Nationalism", New Left Review, 49, May/June, 1968, p. 6.

the presence in Scotland of considerable academic interest in Gramsci's work, it was to be some time before extensive use was made of Gramsci's thought in the analysis of Scottish politics. Indeed, the first significant attempts to make fuller use of his theories were made from a polemical standpoint concentrating on the need for new socialist strategies in Scotland rather than from the standpoint of an academic analysis of political power in Scotland. For this reason, the resulting articles reflect the uncertainty of Gramsci the Marxist's own strategic conclusions. They do, however, indicate the possible utility of his conception for more objective analysis.

1 Gramsci and Scotland

According to Ray Burnett, "the importance of Gramsci is that more than any other he went much further into the complexities of modern western society in its civil and cultural sense"¹¹. Writing in 1972, Burnett says that he regrets the fact that "to date in Scotland, the 'straight' left has taken little interest in the 'other' left, politics and culture have not been seen to mix"¹². This "other" left to which he refers is willing to take into account the fact that Scotland differs from England so that it is not enough simply to argue that there is nothing different about the British state from all other bourgeois systems of government since all represent, in the last analysis, the dominance of capitalism. According to Ralph Miliband, Marxists apart from Gramsci "have made little notable attempt to confront the question of the state in the light of the concrete socio-economic and political and cultural reality of actual capitalist societies"¹³. Burnett's view would be that the concrete

¹¹ Burnett, op. cit., p. 14.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ralph Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society, London, 1973, p. 8.

reality of British society differs from that of other capitalist democracies and that it is necessary to take into account factors such as the existence within the British system of a separate Scottish identity - indeed, in Gramscian terms, a separate civil society.

It is, therefore, Gramsci's analysis of the relationship between political and civil society, between domination and leadership, force and consent, that lies at the heart of Burnett's adoption of his thought as a guide to political strategy in the Scottish situation within the overall British capitalist society and bourgeois system of political rule. From Gramsci's analysis, he extracts the idea of the war of position in advanced societies and argues that the relevance of this notion to socialists in Scotland springs from "one or two points that the organised left should note"¹⁴.

In the first place, says Burnett, "while we have a homogeneous British state it must be noted that the organisations and institutions in civil society which comprise its bulwarks and defences have an azoic complexity the most significant feature of which for all of us is that civil society in Scotland is fundamentally different from that in England"¹⁵. Second, "much of our shared 'British' ideology as it manifests itself in Scotland, draws its vigour and strength from a specifically Scottish heritage of myths, prejudices and illusion"¹⁶. These very points are made repeatedly in analyses of Scotland which employ Gramscian ideas. The agencies which generate consensus in Scotland (the church, education, the media, etc) are generally shown to be peculiar to Scotland despite the fact that the institutions of political society which operate in Scotland are

¹⁴ Burnett, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

specifically British as, nominally at least, is the overall State system in its expanded form.

It is Burnett's contention that "to expose and challenge we must examine the way the present ideological edifice has been built not on an abstract 'British' past but on a concrete Scottish one"¹⁷. Indeed, an emphasis on the particular is all the more necessary because, according to Burnett, "even political society, the State in its ethico-political sense, does not have the same external facade in Scotland as it does down south"¹⁸. Thus, he contends, "if the Left is even to begin a serious critique of our society then these differences must be taken account of"¹⁹.

We must do our own spadework and stake our own future in concert but not in silence.

We know we are part of that indissoluble economic framework - British capitalism - but what we want to know is how this affects us and our own "peculiar" society.²⁰

Burnett's arguments could easily be dismissed as the polemical advocacy simply of some leftist variant on nationalism. However, he does draw two fundamental points from Gramsci's work and in so doing he throws some light on the latter's contribution to a Marxist analysis of politics. First, he quotes Gramsci's assertion that the measure of the fecundity of a theoretical truth lies "in its becoming a stimulus to know better the concrete reality of a situation that is different from that in which it was discovered" and "in its capacity to incorporate itself in that same reality as if it were originally an expression of it"²¹. Clearly such a

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 15. Burnett is quoting from Gramsci, PN, p. 201.

view is a sine qua non for the attempted application of Gramsci's own ideas to situations other than the Italian one which spawned them. Second, going on from that point, Burnett inspires further application of Gramsci's ideas to Scotland with his proposition that within the British political system there can be said to exist more than one civil society, using Gramsci's conception of that term.

Burnett himself was confident that an extension of interest could develop into "a study of the fabric of Scottish society and the values of its culture and traditions"²². His suggestion was that "an improved sense of where to go forward to, of direction, would come if Scottish society was not simply documented but dissected" and that "an improved idea of how to go forward would come if better maps of the terrain could be produced"²³. It is not the concern of this thesis to examine possible strategies for the Scottish Left. What is of interest, however, is the dissection of Scottish society which, as Dickson indicates, has taken place on a more impressive scale in recent years than in the past. And, it can be said that at least part of Burnett's proposition has been heeded for he concluded his article with the view that "both writer and activist could learn much by examining the work of Gramsci, in particular the methodological criterion he applied and adopted in his own self-imposed task of 'actualising' Marxist theory in his own historical time and setting"²⁴. Future use was to be made of Gramsci's ideas in research into Scottish political history. However, the immediate response to Burnett's article was concerned with the problem posed by him of how to go forward and another work with strategic implications rather than a detailed dissection of Scottish society was the next contribution to the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

debate initiated by Burnett.

2 Gramsci's signposts to Scottish action

David Whitfield claimed that, in Burnett's article, "very little indication was given of the precise nature of Gramsci's insight, or of the specific use to which it might be put in improving an analysis of Scottish politics"²⁵. His own intention was "to outline one of the main features of Gramsci's political thought, and to suggest some of its implications for Left action in Scotland"²⁶. The strategic purpose behind Whitfield's argument is made quite explicit.

According to him, the general strategy of the revolutionary Left in Britain "is based upon the belief that capitalism is maintained by its control over the State machine"²⁷. It is argued, as a result, that "only the workers have the power successfully to confront the State, because only the workers have the weapons"²⁸. "Without their labour, and indeed without their co-operation, capitalist production is impossible and against their determined will not all of the forces of NATO intervention or of police brutality could prevail."²⁹ The central message, therefore, is that force must be met with force. Indeed, says Whitfield, the main strategy of the Left "has been to develop the organised labour movement as an instrument of force, able to bring capitalism to its knees by the application of workers' power"³⁰.

²⁵ Whitfield, op. cit., p. 6.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Whitfield accepts that "so far as it goes, none of the Left would wish to fault that strategy"³¹. He argues, however, that "Gramsci's great contribution was to take the analysis further, by demonstrating that in many western societies at least, capitalism is not based simply on force"³². Consequently, Whitfield stresses the significance of Gramsci's proposition that "there are two main structures that maintain capitalism - 'civil society' and 'political society'"³³. Furthermore, he claims that "the main theme of Gramsci's theoretical work in the Prison Notebooks is the development of the understanding of the process whereby 'consent' is given, the study of 'civil society' and the theory of hegemony"³⁴.

Fearing that Gramsci's theories will be subjected to a reformist reading, indicating a consensual view of society and a parliamentary road to socialism, Whitfield goes on to argue that "the hegemony operates not simply via ideas or tradition or culture, but much more specifically via the institutions and men who propogate these - the intellectuals"³⁵. It is not an accident. It is the creation of enemies of the proletariat. Thus, Whitfield seizes upon Gramsci's theory of the intellectuals and its implications for socialist strategy and proceeds to outline his personal interpretation of the lessons to be drawn from Gramsci's teachings.

He writes that "at least some intellectuals operate within an institutional framework which is not totally controlled by the bourgeois State"³⁶. For example, "educational institutions, above all, have a high

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

potential degree of independence arising from the local control which exists over schools" and "the ability of organised labour to determine policy within local government is, in principle, very great, especially in Scotland where the majority of the population are (sic) administered by Labour controlled councils"³⁷. Naturally, such a statement could not be made about normal political situations in which the political society - civil society distinction would be blurred such that education, as an element of the latter would be under the control of organs of the former. However, as shall become increasingly evident, Scotland does not conform to the normal pattern of political existence and Whitfield may be permitted, therefore, to argue that, in Scotland, "the labour movement is capable of insisting that the curriculum within the schools, and the criteria for promotion among teachers be related to the needs of working class rather than capitalist consciousness"³⁸. Thus, he believes that "an awareness on the part of working-class leaders of the class nature of education and of the class nature of intellectual skill is capable of producing a larger force of organic-intellectuals of the working class"³⁹.

These are without doubt stirring sentiments but one wonders if Whitfield is really using Gramscian theory in a significant way. True, Gramsci did assert that counter-hegemonic struggle in the schools, the media and so on was necessary if the workers' movement was to win and retain political power. His penetrative analysis, however, showed that such a struggle would be carried on in a hostile environment and that it would meet with many setbacks. Whitfield's apparent optimism is certainly not founded on Gramsci's analysis of political power in western societies nor does he provide proof for his claim that "Gramsci, and

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

through him Marx and Lenin, provide a strategy not only for the Left, but also for the growing number of people in Scotland who are nationalist"⁴⁰. Ultimately, his plea is for support to be given to the Communist Party of Great Britain's belief in the demand for Scottish nationhood as part of the process of building socialism. He says that "the needs of Scottish material and cultural welfare cry together for a socialist solution"⁴¹ and he argues that Gramsci showed that because "the forces which confront the Socialist cause are complex, . . . the weapons (not least the analytical weapons) required by the socialist arsenal must be ever more subtle"⁴². In the case of Scotland, these forces which confront the cause of socialism spring partly from within and partly from the wider British political system. Whitfield observes correctly that "Scottish legal traditions, religious traditions, educational traditions, recreational traditions, all differ from those of the rest of Britain" and, yet, "the Scottish hegemony is in large parts alien"⁴³. Because of this strange, dualistic type of hegemonic control in Scotland, Whitfield echoes Burnett and claims that "the struggle to undermine the Scottish hegemony must therefore take place within its peculiarly Scottish context, and requires a party of the Left aware of and dedicated to the needs of Scotland, allying the demands of nationalism to those of the organised working class"⁴⁴.

In spite, or because, of the flights of fancy in his article, Whitfield does not really improve on Burnett's initial application of certain Gramscian ideas to an analysis of Scottish politics. Both praise

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Gramsci's recognition of the fact that capitalist rule in advanced societies is not based solely upon coercion but rather on a subtle blend of force and consent. Both suggest, therefore, that the realm of civil society must be understood if the nature of political power in advanced societies is to be comprehended and if, from a socialist point of view, a successful strategy to combat that power is to be worked out. Both note that it is vital to recognise, therefore, that Scotland can be said to have a civil society which is distinctive and which is distinct from a specifically British one. Burnett, thus, suggests that socialists in Scotland should investigate this fact further but, rather than take up that call, Whitfield devotes much of his time to a eulogy on the British C.P.

He writes that Burnett drew attention to "the usefulness of the work of Antonio Gramsci in providing for the Scottish Left a new strategy, 'an improved idea of how to go forward'"⁴⁵. He neglects to repeat, however, Burnett's expressed desire for "an improved sense of where to go forward to, of direction" which he believed "would come if Scottish society was not simply documented but dissected"⁴⁶. A dissection of the type required is clearly missing from Whitfield's attempt to glean from Gramsci's writings signposts for socialist action in Scotland. He examines Gramsci's theory of the intellectuals but appears to forget, or dismiss as unimportant, the fact that Gramsci's theory emerged from his analysis of the formation of intellectual strata in his native Italy. Whitfield makes no attempt to consider the peculiarities of the development of Scotland's intelligentsia. Furthermore, although he mentions that certain Scottish traditions differ from those in the rest of Britain, he does not explain how they differ and with what implications. He describes

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Burnett, op. cit., p. 15.

Scottish nationalism as a "knife and fork" question but makes no serious attempt to analyse the reasons for its rapid growth as a form of political expression in the 1960s and 1970s, a period when the Communist Party virtually ceased to have a voice in Scottish political (as opposed to industrial) life.

Thus, of these two articles in which certain Gramscian ideas are applied to Scotland, Burnett's is by far the more significant, at least insofar as the main argument in this thesis is concerned. It deserves to be regarded as a pioneering piece. Despite its brevity and its occasionally polemical tone, it does represent a genuine effort at applying Gramsci's ideas to a subject which he himself had not examined. Thus, Burnett points the way towards further demonstrations of the relevance of Gramsci's thought to political analysis because he is willing to use that thought as "a stimulus to know better the concrete reality of a situation that is different from that in which it was discovered"⁴⁷.

In particular, Burnett indicates that Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction may have practical implications for studies of the nature of political power in Scotland. It was this revelation above all others in Burnett's article which was seized upon by Tom Nairn when he came to make the next major attempt to use Gramsci's thought to further the understanding of Scottish politics. Nairn's major contribution in this field will be examined shortly. First, however, it is worthwhile mentioning, if only briefly, two other writers who have brought Gramsci into work dealing with Scotland - Michael Hechter and Christopher Harvie.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Hechter, op. cit.
Christopher Harvie, Scotland and Nationalism. Scottish Society and Politics, 1707-1977, London, 1977.

In fact, Michael Hechter does little more than invoke Gramsci's name in his study of internal colonialism in the British context. He makes no real attempt to apply Gramsci's ideas systematically to Scotland or the rest of the so-called Celtic fringe but relies instead on the theory of internal colonialism to explain political, economic and cultural developments in the region. However, his work has not been without influence and it is an example of the use of certain Marxist, if not specifically Gramscian, concepts in the study of Scottish politics. Internal Colonialism, therefore, prompts conclusions, which have an affinity with those to which a Gramscian analysis of Scotland's political history might lead and it has been referred to by writers concerned more directly with using Gramsci's theory in this area of research.

Hechter himself only alludes to Gramsci on three occasions. In the least significant of these, he refers to the fact that "many writers have long called attention to the possible integrative function imperial expansion might serve in the creation of national solidarity". He suggests that "the Marxian notion of the 'aristocracy of labor', as discussed by Engels, Lenin and Gramsci, and the nationalistic theory of social-imperialism, as developed by Cunningham, Ashley and others in this sense share a common sociological perspective" and "the meager evidence which has been collected suggests that European socialist and labor parties displayed but slight resistance to the expansionist policies of their respective governments"⁴⁹. More significant is Hechter's reference

⁴⁹ Hechter, op. cit., p. 236. Kiernan, "Gramsci and Marxism", op. cit., p. 32, argues that Gramsci was less concerned with a labour aristocracy than with a Labour intelligentsia. This may be true as regards his strategic view but there is no doubt that Gramsci regarded as a major difference between the West and Tsarist Russia the presence in the former of sections of the working class who were bound closely to the capitalist system. See Gramsci, PW 1921-6, p. 199 where he actually writes of "the higher stratum, the labour aristocracy, with its appendages in the trade-union bureaucracy and the social-democratic groups".

to Gramsci where he writes that the "apparent preference of the working class in expansionist states for short-run, nationalist interests over long-run international interests was regarded with increasing gloom by such socialists as Lenin, Michels and Gramsci". According to Hechter, "Gramsci's description of the Southern Italian soldier acting as a strike-breaker in the North who justifies his participation by saying that Northern workers are - to his eyes - gentry, is illustrative"⁵⁰. This sort of problem is best explained, in Hechter's opinion, by a theory of internal colonialism which, he says, dates back to Lenin and which, he argues in his third reference to Gramsci, has similarities to the Gramscian analysis of the Italian south.⁵¹

Hechter rejects the diffusionist model of development according to which a sense of community results after a period of interaction between the metropolitan zone and a peripheral area during times of nation-building of the type which culminated in the creation of the United Kingdom. Hechter argues that "far from maintaining that increased core-periphery contact results in social structure convergence, the internal colonial model posits an altogether different relationship between these regions"⁵². The metropolitan area of the core can be seen to dominate the periphery and to exploit it materially. Thus, "the internal colonial model does not predict national development following industrialization, except under exceptional circumstances" because "the superordinate group, or core, seeks to stabilize and monopolize its advantages through policies aiming at the institutionalization of the existing stratification system"⁵³. According to Hechter, the latter can

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 239.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁵² Ibid., p. 9.

⁵³ Ibid.

be regarded as a cultural division of labour in which "actors come to categorize themselves and others according to the range of roles each may be expected to play". "They are aided in this categorization by the presence of visible signs, or cultural markers, which are seen to characterize both groups" and "at this stage, acculturation does not occur because it is not in the interests of institutions within the core"⁵⁴. This pattern is maintained, according to Hechter, by the nature of industrial development in the two areas, with the periphery becoming increasingly dependent on the core so that wealth in the former lags behind that of the latter.

Hechter proceeds to consider the possible outcome of this process and writes that "to the extent that social stratification in the periphery is based on observable cultural differences, there exists the probability that the disadvantaged group will, in time, reactively assert its own culture as equal or superior to that of the relatively advantaged core" and "this may help it conceive of itself as a separate 'nation' and seek independence"⁵⁵. Contrary to the diffusionist model, therefore, the theory of internal colonialism suggests that "acculturation and national development may be inhibited by the desires of the peripheral group for independence from a situation perceived to be exploitative"⁵⁶. In an attempt to test the viability of this theory, Hechter decides to employ it in an analysis of core-periphery relations in the British Isles.

Christopher Harvie is perhaps being unfair when he describes Hechter's work as a "magnificently wrong-headed analysis"⁵⁷. According to James Hunter, "Dr. Hechter's work is of obvious contemporary interest

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., p. 10.

56 Ibid.

57 Harvie, op. cit., p. 72.

in Scotland"⁵⁸.

For while modern Scottish nationalism can be partially explained - as Dr. Hechter himself argues - in terms of the discontent engendered by economic inequalities and regional imbalances, it is the survival of a Scottish national consciousness which has enabled such discontent to be channelled into effective political action through the medium of a nationalist party. The roots of this national consciousness and the reasons for its persistence are thus of considerable interest.⁵⁹

Of course, faults can be found with certain aspects of Hechter's study. His willingness to regard Scotland as part of the Celtic fringe, despite much evidence, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, runs against such a proposition, is a perfect example. Nonetheless, to quote Nairn, Hechter's work is an "imposing study"⁶⁰. "It represents a definitive academic anointment of the thesis (of 'cultural nationalism'), complete with PhD - worthy tables of figures, a weighty variety of references, and sometimes a corresponding style of argument."⁶¹ In Nairn's estimation, "a discussion founded upon Hechter's analysis would probably be more useful than any other in the future" given that "he himself conceded that 'the models employed here are painfully preliminary'"⁶².

The real drawback with Hechter's analysis, and one which Nairn recognises, is that the United Kingdom is not Latin America, to the study of which the theory of internal colonialism has been applied to most purpose, and Scotland (or lowland Scotland at any rate) cannot be equated with the Italian mezzogiorno. Hechter's theory is arguably too general

⁵⁸ James Hunter, Review Article in The Scottish Historical Review, LVI (1), No. 161, April, 1977, p. 104.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, p. 200.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 65n.

⁶² Ibid., p. 65n.

to take into account the special features of U.K. nation-building. Thus, Nairn writes that "his account is conducted essentially in terms of over-abstract models of development" and "although enlightening the application of the theory to Britain is insufficiently historical, and misses too many of the specifics"⁶³. "In spite of Hechter's massive attempt at legitimation", writes Nairn, "the theory remains too abstract, and too neat"⁶⁴. "The acid test of this and similar generalizations is the comparison between Wales and Scotland."⁶⁵ Nairn himself was to make that comparison in his work on the rise of political nationalism in the United Kingdom and he is correct to criticise Hechter's work for its lack of attention to the specific conditions prevailing in each of these countries.

Nonetheless, although Hechter does not take his model directly from Gramsci, he does exhibit the latter's awareness of the duality of political activity and of the fact that political power is partially located in the realm of culture and ideas. The theory of internal colonialism alerts us to the possibility that systems of political rule exist which differ from those of normal nation-states and also from those which prevail in overtly colonial situations. It can be argued that it is in these unusual systems that it is possible to observe the concretisation of Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction and the practical expression of the dual nature of political power. That, however, remains to be proved. What is implied in Hechter's work is that realisation, explicit in the writings of Burnett and Whitfield, that Scotland has a separate civil society, in the Gramscian sense, and that this must have implications for political activity in the country.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 202.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

A more concerted attempt to develop this realisation is made by Christopher Harvie in his work on Scottish nationalism in which the relevance of Gramsci's "dual perspective" is more explicitly acknowledged than in Hechter's study.⁶⁶

4 Scotland and Nationalism

Harvie's work has the great merit of being less polemical than most other studies of Scotland in which use is made of Gramscian concepts. Thus, it presents a more convincing case for the claim that Gramsci has made a significant contribution to political analysis in general than do those studies which belong to the contemporary Marxist tradition and in which Gramsci's thought is seized upon for a variety of reasons, one of the least important of which is the desire to test the contribution made by him to the academic study of politics.

It is Harvie's contention that there is much in Scottish historical development that underlines the perspicacity of Gramsci's insights. Furthermore, he claims that Gramsci was "one European political thinker whose influence on the reorientation of socialist thought has been considerable, not least in Scotland"⁶⁷. It is unfortunate that Harvie sees in Gramsci's writings a challenge to Marx's crude generalisations since it is more accurate to regard Gramsci's critique of vulgar materialism as being directed at Second International deformations of Marx's thought rather than at Marx himself. Nevertheless, Harvie is justified in claiming that Gramsci made a greater attempt than the majority of Marxists, Marx included, to understand the problem of nationalism.⁶⁸ Although he does not write extensively on the subject, his general comments on the

⁶⁶ Harvie, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁸ See ibid.

nature of political power throw light on it and this is testified to by Harvie's work in which Gramscian ideas are employed in the analysis of Scottish nationalism without repetition of the claim that Gramsci had a superior understanding of the national question than did Marx and, indeed, without reference to comments made directly by Gramsci on the subject. The fact that Gramsci's political thought contributes to our understanding of nationalism even if nationalism is not amongst its prime concerns is explained by Harvie in a fairly cunning manner. Gramsci "was preoccupied by the way in which the masses were persuaded to accept the 'civil society' (a phrase originated in eighteenth-century Scotland) which sustained the dominant political and economic groups, and he attributed this critical function to the intellectuals"⁶⁹. Thus, according to Harvie, intellectual history can be regarded as "the key to our understanding of why nationalist movements emerge"⁷⁰.

The two Gramscian concepts which Harvie employs thereafter are those of the State and of the intellectuals. It would be impossible to claim that Harvie makes a rigorous attempt to locate these concepts in a Scottish context. What may be suggested, however, is that his overall approach is imbued with the spirit of Gramsci's "dual perspective" and this is very evident when he writes that "the uniqueness of Scotland lies in the power of a 'civil society' divorced from political nationalism, and in an intelligentsia which, lacking a political centre, was divided between two loyalties: the red and the black"⁷¹. "The Union", according to Harvie, "allowed Scottish nationalism to survive, accompanied by a distinctive pattern of government and society, and the consequences of this relationship were sanctioned by an intelligentsia whose own character

⁶⁹ Harvie, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

was pervaded by a parallel dualism between the cosmopolitan and the native"⁷². Indeed, it is Harvie's central thesis that "no understanding of the forces making for a renegotiation of the Union is possible which omits the historical factors which have kept the Union in being, not as the absorption of one nation by another, but as a unique balance of assimilation and autonomy"⁷³. Once more we are confronted with that problem which forced Hechter to reject the diffusionist model of political and cultural development in favour of the theory of internal colonialism. Harvie's response is, however, more explicitly Gramscian.

It may be that he was not influenced consciously by the "dual perspective" of Machiavelli and Gramsci. It is already apparent that Scottish history and society lend themselves to dualistic interpretations and that, at times, Scottish development in a number of fields appears to be a process in which opposites join together. Thus, there is the split which Harvie observes in the country's intellectual history.

His "red" intellectuals are "cosmopolitan, self-avowedly enlightened, authoritarian, expanding into and exploiting bigger and more bountiful fields than their own country could provide"⁷⁴. The "black" intellectuals, on the other hand, are "demotic, parochial and reactionary" and it is they who keep "the ladder of social promotion open, resisting the encroachments of the English governing class"⁷⁵. Together, Harvie submits, these two intellectual groupings "controlled the rate of their own assimilation to the greater world, the balance which underlay the Union"⁷⁶. This situation described by Christopher Harvie is part of a

⁷² Ibid., p. 16.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

more general paradox in Scottish cultural evolution and part also of the dualism observable in Scottish political developments.⁷⁷

Harvie comes to a conclusion which can be inferred too from the internal colonialism theory - that there are, in fact, two Scotlands: one which is a vital part of the United Kingdom and the other, a distinct entity in its own right. According to Harvie, his book "is about both Scotlands - the achieving society, the defensive community - and the relationship between them"⁷⁸. In addition, he claims that it is about "the Scottish component of the Union which, despite its surface resemblance to the rest of Britain, is a very distinctive one indeed, like a house whose facade looks the same as other houses, but which, internally, is constructed in a quite different manner, for quite different purposes"⁷⁹. It is this component which corresponds to Gramscian civil society and it is unfortunate, therefore, that Harvie fails to explain Gramsci's definition of that concept, leaving those without any first-hand knowledge of Gramsci's thought to assume that he merely used it as Ferguson and Adam Smith had done.

Of course, we should bear in mind that it is not Harvie's main aim to test the analytical viability of Gramsci's thought through its application to the study of Scottish nationalism. He uses Gramsci's ideas when it seems to him that they may be illuminating but his main concern is with discovering why political nationalism "remained apparently in abeyance for two and a half centuries and why it has currently become relevant"⁸⁰. He argues that, since 1945, there have occurred a series of

⁷⁷ I shall deal at length with this subject in Chapter Six. See also David Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, London, 1964.

⁷⁸ Harvie, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

changes in the balance which underlay the Union and that "the reactions of politicians insensitive to its nature, have brought it to a state in which its stability has fluctuated from year to year, and sometimes from by-election to by-election"⁸¹. It is Harvie's belief that "the abstention of the intellectuals from 'classic' nationalism through a sort of 'transferred nationalism' showed signs of coming to an end, and the intellectuals were now giving the Scots a consciousness of their experience which they had hitherto lacked"⁸². "In British society", writes Harvie, "the State now took a leading role" and "the continuity of a Scottish society detached from party politics was no longer possible"⁸³. In many respects, this is a scenario similar to the one portrayed by Hechter. The failure of acculturation finally stimulates developments in the political sphere. Thus, according to Harvie, the rise of the Scottish National Party was not itself inevitable but the failure of the British democratic consensus "to come to terms with Scottish politics, as much as its failure to solve the country's economic problems, has provided the Nationalists with their opportunity"⁸⁴. The future, however, as Harvie predicted, was uncertain. "Whether this new political class is any better fitted to cope with the problems of the mass of Scottish people than the old civil society, or the young Whigs who entered on their millenium a century and a half earlier, remains to be seen."⁸⁵

What can be stated with some certainty, however, is that a nationalist response, and the form which it took, was influenced by the dual nature of Scottish political life which had been a feature of the

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸² Ibid., p. 163.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 164.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 165.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 271.

past two hundred and fifty years and more. Harvie emphasises this point when he submits that "one cannot understand the intricate mores of the current political transactions without casting a backward glance at the politics of two and a half centuries of unionism, and, behind that, at a national history which, although it exercised a profound effect on the idea of nationalism, singularly failed to conform to its orthodoxies"⁸⁶. What Harvie gives us is a stimulating account of the development of Scottish civil society, as understood in its Gramscian sense, and of the role of Scottish intellectuals since the Union. To that extent, he does some of the charting work called for by Burnett. Perhaps he could have made more use of Gramsci's thought and explained the latter more fully when he did decide to use certain Gramscian concepts. What is interesting though is that a Gramscian view of politics is detectable in Harvie's analysis of Scotland even when he himself does not remark on the fact. This tells us much about the nature of Scottish history and its amenability to observation through the "dual perspective".

Armed with Hechter's analytical framework and Harvie's analysis of the particular nature of Scottish civil society, we are in a reasonable position to increase our understanding of Scottish politics through a more comprehensive application of Gramsci's political theory, in particular his political society - civil society distinction. That such an application is viable is attested to in the work of Tom Nairn, James Young and Tony Dickson and his colleagues, all of whom are concerned with developing a socialist analysis of Scotland's place within the British State system and all of whom make use of Gramsci's thought in the process. It is in their work that the best evidence is to be found for the claim that Gramsci's theory contributes considerably to political analysis and that, in certain circumstances, it may even be shown that his political

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

society - civil society distinction is not simply methodological and his "dual perspective" not just a clever metaphor.

5 The Dawn or Dusk of Scottish Nationalism

Modern Scottish Nationalism has led a fluctuating, intermittent existence since 1853. Now, quite suddenly, it has become a more serious political reality. In the past it has gone through many renaissances, followed by even more impressive and longer-lasting collapses into inertia; but the present upsurge looks likely to last longer than others, at least, and to produce more of a mark on history.⁸⁷

So wrote Tom Nairn in his 1968 article in which Gramsci was referred to, probably for the first time in a work on Scottish politics. The Scottish national question became a live issue in the modern period during the 1950s and early 1960s but, as H.M. Drucker says, "until the 1966 General Election Scots voters had marched in step, almost in lock-step, with other British voters". Yet, as Drucker goes on, "in Parliamentary by-elections after the 1966 General Election, in local government elections and in opinion polls they began to step sharply out of line" and "the beneficiary was the Scottish National Party"⁸⁸.

Much has happened since these heady days for Scottish nationalism and again the S.N.P. has become an insignificant element in British political life. The political stage presents once more the acting out of the old conflict between Left and Right and even devolution proposals forced on the major British parties by the remarkable successes of the S.N.P. have been set to one side. Yet, the Scottish nationalist upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s is important not least because it reawakened interest in Scottish politics and, thereby, prompted serious study of the nature of political power in Scotland (hence, the arrival on the scene of

⁸⁷ Nairn, "The Three Dreams of Scottish Nationalism", op. cit., p. 3.

⁸⁸ H.M. Drucker, Breakaway: The Scottish Labour Party, Edinburgh, 1977, p. 7.

scholarly works by writers like Hechter and Harvie). In addition, with its confidence in the class basis of Scottish voting behaviour severely shaken, the Left in Scotland have been persuaded to take account of nationalism and attempt to understand the subject which has long baffled Marxists.

Tom Nairn was particularly eager to respond to the new challenge and also to Burnett's tentative remarks on the relevance of Gramsci's thought for Scottish socialists. Not surprisingly, his attention was drawn to what can be described as a Scottish civil society which operates alongside British political society within the overall British State. Nairn, indeed, refers to many aspects of Gramsci's thought in his writings, reflecting, in part, the general awakening of interest on the Left in Britain in the Italian communist's ideas. Above all, however, Nairn seems impressed by Gramsci's interpretation of historical materialism and by the degree of autonomous action which it grants to elements in the superstructure.⁸⁹ Furthermore, he agrees with Miliband's assessment of Gramsci as being unique among Marxists in having made an attempt "to confront the question of the state in the light of the concrete reality of actual capitalist societies"⁹⁰. Nairn, as we have seen, had used Gramsci's idea of the national-popular in his 1968 article revealing an early appreciation of the wide applicability of Gramsci's political thought. It is unfortunate that he turned to what is one of the more intangible elements in Gramsci's thought, but there is merit in his contention that the role of the Church of Scotland underlines the national dimension of hegemony. Later, Nairn revealed that he was aware of the

⁸⁹ He writes that "the term 'dialectic' should not be allowed to mislead us any more than the inebriants of romantic-nationalist ideology. It does not mean (as Gramsci once put it) that history is a boxing-match with rules where we can be secretly sure what kind of 'synthesis' is going to emerge". The Break-up of Britain, p. 344.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 15n.

relevance of other Gramscian concepts, appropriating, for example, Gramsci's "Fable of the Beaver". As Nairn comments, Gramsci used this story "to illustrate the acquiescence of the Italian bourgeoisie in fascism"⁹¹. Gramsci's version of the fable and his account of its implications are worth relating.

The beaver, pursued by trappers who want his testicles from which medicinal drugs can be extracted, to save his life tears off his own testicles. . . . Why was there no defence? Because the parties had little sense of human or political dignity? But such factors are not natural phenomena, deficiencies inherent in a people as permanent characteristics. They are "historical facts", whose explanation is to be found in past history and in social conditions of the present . . .⁹²

Adapting Gramsci's fable, Nairn suggests that one can argue that "in the 19th century the Scottish bourgeoisie could hardly help becoming conscious of its inherited cojones to some extent, its capacity for nationalism; but this consciousness conflicted with its real, economic interests in an unusual fashion, it was forced to - at least - repress or 'sublimate' the impulse itself"⁹³. According to Nairn, "the emasculation was not enforced by gendarmes and Regius Professors from London" but rather, "it was a kind of self-imposed, very successful Kulturkampf, one which naturally appears as 'neurosis' in relation to standard models of development"⁹⁴. Indeed, one might add that while such a process may appear to conform to the prognosis of the diffusionist model as outlined by Hechter, its traumatic effects and the potential for disaster created therein should not be ignored.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 153.

⁹² Gramsci, PN, pp. 223-4.

⁹³ Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, p. 153.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Repeatedly, Nairn takes a specific Gramscian concept and applies it in the Scottish context, revealing the universality of certain aspects of Gramsci's thought. This is perfectly in keeping with Gramsci's own approach to the study of history and politics.

Particularly significant is Nairn's adoption of the conception of civil society developed in the prison writings. The initial suggestion that this could usefully be done had been made by Burnett, of course, and Nairn begins the relevant section of his study by quoting from his predecessor's pioneering work in which it had been suggested that there exists a Scottish civil society which differs fundamentally from that of England and that political power in Scotland is based, in part, on specifically Scottish factors so that the Scottish Left must take into account the differences between Scotland and the remainder of the U.K. if a serious challenge to the prevailing system of political control is to be undertaken. According to Nairn, "the theoretical problem posed by these remarks of Ray Burnett's (sic) could be put as follows". "To understand any society as a whole, one must always distinguish between its 'State' or political and administrative structure, and its 'civil society'"⁹⁵. The latter, writes Nairn, using the term in its Gramscian sense, "comprises, for example, its most characteristic non-political organizations, its religious and other beliefs, its 'customs' or way of life, its typical jokes, and so on"⁹⁶. True, he goes on to say, "it is not easy to sum up all that is denoted by this Gramscian category and there are things which will not fit neatly under either heading"⁹⁷. Nonetheless, according to Nairn, "this is relatively unimportant" and

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 132.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

"what matters is that they are distinguishable, and that the singular identity of a modern society depends upon the relationship between them"⁹⁸.

It has been shown in this thesis that political society and civil society are not as easily delineated as Nairn claims. Indeed, it has been pointed out that there are those who would argue that Gramsci did not mean to imply that the distinction of which he writes is observable in practice. It is, they claim, a methodological distinction to be used to emphasise the fact that all political power is a complex fusion of force and consent. If one decides that these elements are separate in practice then inevitably one is drawn to a position which holds that one or other can dominate in specific situations. Our view of the political society - civil society distinction influences our entire thinking on the subject of how political power is wielded, especially in advanced political systems in which civil society is well-developed. It is, therefore, a matter of great importance, pace Nairn, that one should know what is denoted by the Gramscian categories and what type of relationship between political and civil society he envisaged if one is to make proper use of his theories for the purposes of political analysis. To regard these problems as unimportant is dangerous. Yet, in the context, Nairn's claim may be justified.

Generally, the dialectical relationship of force and consent is too complex for each element's place of origin to be examined separately. However, in peculiar or abnormal circumstances, what Gramsci calls civil society can have a separate (or relatively autonomous) existence whilst continuing to have a role in the wider State system. It is because Scotland may be regarded as unusual in this sense that Nairn's feeling that the intricacies of the Gramscian distinction need not be dwelt upon

98 Ibid.

is understandable.

What can be regarded as a serious defect in his work, however, is his use of the concept of civil society in different ways without indication as to whether the Gramscian usage is meant to be in operation or not. At times, he employs the concept apparently in the Gramscian sense but, on other occasions, his usage is closer to the definition of the concept given by Marx, or perhaps even the political economists or Hegel. He writes that Scotland "had too different a civil society, to become a mere province of the U.K."⁹⁹ and is clearly adopting the Gramscian conception. Yet, only a few lines further on, he refers to "the precocious progress of Scottish civil society in the later 18th and early 19th century"¹⁰⁰ and appears to be commenting on economic progress. In view of such failings, Nairn's statement that "amidst these abstractions, it is important to be as specific as possible"¹⁰¹ is not without a degree of unintended humour. On the other hand, it is possible, for the most part, to detect when he is using the concepts of State and civil society in their Gramscian forms and one would be unwise to dismiss his overall argument because of certain inherent ambiguities.

"What we are considering", says Nairn, "is the problem of understanding modern societies; and within that, the question of what it is that makes any one such society structurally distinct, 'peculiar' in relation to others resembling it in so many ways"¹⁰². "Needless to say", he continues, "the question can be answered quite empirically (and it usually is)"¹⁰³ so that "thousands of particular events always make any

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

one place different from others"¹⁰⁴. However, Nairn argues that "this is an evasion of the real problem, which derives from the fact that societies 'hang together' in some way, as some sort of whole"¹⁰⁵. Furthermore, "modern (19th and 20th century) societies hang together especially closely, and in a special way"¹⁰⁶. It is important, therefore, to understand the normal form of State-building before one proceeds to examine exceptions to the general rule and Nairn explains how within the last two centuries - roughly from the French Revolution to the present - there has arisen a relationship between State and society generally characteristic of modern social formations. He quotes Gramsci on this subject.

The revolution which the bourgeois class has brought into the conception of law, and hence into the function of the State, consists especially in the will to conform (hence ethicity of the law and of the State). The previous ruling classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own, i.e. enlarge their class sphere "technically" and ideologically: their conception was that of a closed caste. The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed; the State has become an "educator", etc . . .¹⁰⁷

It is in order to conceptualise this transformation that Gramsci develops his theories of hegemony and of passive revolution and devotes much of his attention to the subject of civil society. According to Nairn, this hegemonic type of control described springs from a new State-society relationship under advanced capitalism. He writes that "the main point about this modern State-society relationship - quite distinct from that

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., pp. 132-3.

106 Ibid., p. 133.

107 Gramsci, PN, p. 260.

of Antiquity or Feudalism - is that through it the whole people becomes part of society, really for the first time"¹⁰⁸.

Since Gramsci's "dual perspective" allows him to see that all relations of political power are based on the fusion of force and consent (except, he would claim, under socialism), Nairn might be accused of adopting the simplistic reading of the political society - civil society distinction to the extent that he infers from Gramsci's teachings that there is a recognition by Gramsci of the predominance of consent in bourgeois societies. Indeed, he stresses that whereas "previous State-systems and ruling castes had presided over society", it is argued by Gramsci that a State becomes ethical when "one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes"¹¹⁰. In fact, although Gramsci regarded the educative role of the State in advanced societies as significant he did not claim that education had become its sole function. The element of coercion does not disappear in Gramsci's view of the State despite what a superficial reading of his ideas may suggest. Nevertheless, it is true that ideological control becomes increasingly important and, hence, the need for socialists to study the sphere of action responsible for that control. The problem is, of course, that in practice that sphere is not easily distinguishable - that is, in examples of normal nation-building, when civil society and political society are fused.

¹⁰⁸ Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, p. 133. In abnormal situations, however, there may persist a separation of social man from political man more deep-seated even than that gulf which Hegel and Marx sought to heal.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Gramsci, PN, p. 258.

As Nairn suggests, "the State-society knot Gramsci is talking about was, so to speak, tied in remarkably different fashions" but "the normal historiographical and sociological model for it is naturally that of one society-cum-state"¹¹¹. In such cases, the distinction between civil society and political society is blurred and its relevance as a concept for political analysis remains, of necessity, methodological. However, "if the general problem is posed in this way, then how", Nairn asks, "does the particular problem of modern Scotland appear?"¹¹².

His answer is that Scotland "represents a historical oddity"¹¹³. Its peculiarity, he suggests, lies in the lateness with which its absorption into a British political system took place, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and in the character of this absorption. Of the Act of Union of 1707 Nairn writes, "there are many stateless nationalities in history, but only one Act of Union - a peculiarly patrician bargain between two ruling classes, which would have been unthinkable earlier, under absolute monarchy, and impossible later, when the age of democratic nationalism had arrived"¹¹⁴. Finally (and arguably most significantly), Nairn writes that Scotland's peculiarity lies in "the results of the bargain"¹¹⁵. In his words, these amount to "a nationality which resigned statehood but preserved an extraordinary amount of the institutional and psychological baggage normally associated with independence - a decapitated national state, as it were, rather than an ordinary 'assimilated' nationality"¹¹⁶. From the very start, therefore, acculturation of the

¹¹¹ Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, p. 134.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

type envisaged, according to Hechter, by a diffusionist model of the development of cultural relations in a core-periphery association, was an impossibility.

Yet, ironically, as Nairn points out, Scotland appears to be an even greater historical oddity in the years that followed the Union because it "posed no special or anguishing problem to its own ruling class or to its neighbours in Europe, simply because this freak nature was accompanied by prolonged political quiescence"¹¹⁷ Furthermore, "there was, almost until the present day, no urgent practical reason to decipher the enigma" since "romantic superstition did well enough" and, indeed, according to Nairn, "it became in the 19th century one of those 'bulwarks and defences' of civil society, a kind of surrogate nationalism"¹¹⁸.

Thus, Nairn uses certain Gramscian concepts to explain the way in which Scotland diverges from the normal path of national development in Europe. Normal development suggests "one political State and its society, or one distinguishable ethnic society and its own State - a world where the civil societies and the States mainly fitted each other, as it were, through the normal development struggles of last century and this"¹¹⁹. "By comparison", Nairn claims, "Scotland was a hippogriff: a manifest bastard, in the world of nationalist wedlock" because "incomprehensibly, this composite formation had failed to grow like the others"¹²⁰. In the age of nationalism, Scotland did not secure a political society to go along with that societal national identity which had been preserved by the terms of the Act of Union. "Although clearly an historic nation, and one which

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 134.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 134-5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 135.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

had preserved much of its inheritance after 1707 - thus escaping the Gleichschaltung to which so many other old ethnic groups were subjected, as they were 'absorbed' into provinces of greater European powers - Scotland failed to turn nationalist and create its own political State"¹²¹. For this reason, Nairn argues that Scotland "failed to do the normal thing, at the proper time"¹²².

Some would argue that even when the country did "turn nationalist" in the 1960s and 1970s, the venture was, to all intents and purposes, stillborn. The reasons for this lie also in those very conditions which made Scotland act abnormally in the first place. As Nairn himself acknowledges, "only in retrospect, from the point of view of the age of nationalism, did the loss of statehood seem to overshadow the country's history so completely, condemning it to eccentricity and oblivion"¹²³. But, during at least the first century after the Union, it could be seen that Scotland had not been subjected to total domination and the important fact is that, even today, what amounts to a Scottish civil society persists within the overall British political framework. Indeed, as Nairn comments, "Scottish society apart from the State, 'civil society', was guaranteed in its independent existence by the Union". "The church, the law, the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie of the Royal Burghs: all these institutions and the dominant social classes linked to them were confirmed in what they had demanded of separate ideality. So was the distinct social culture they represented"¹²⁴. Far from assisting attempts to create political nationalism in Scotland, this strange legacy of the Act of Union merely emphasised the peculiarity of Scotland's situation and helped to perpetuate

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

it. The result, says Nairn, was that "the Scots pattern so strikingly counterposed to the usual models is therefore that of a distinct civil society not married to 'its' state". "It is one of heterogeneity, not that relative homogeneity which became the standard of nationalist development"¹²⁵ and "this fate was", according to Nairn, "chosen by the indigenous ruling class"¹²⁶. The hegemonic control which emanated from this civil society was specifically Scottish, despite the fact that it strengthened the hold on Scotland of non-Scottish political rule. What is important is that the majority of those with access to political power in Scotland were satisfied with this arrangement. They had no desire to reverse the situation which had resulted from the Act of Union. Thus, whilst Scotland remained distinctive, its elites had no desire to turn that distinctiveness into a political issue through the adoption of nationalist doctrines. Thus, as Nairn complains, "the usual 'raw material' of nationalism remained, in Scotland, latent and unexploited"¹²⁷.

Nairn argues, furthermore, that "the relationship between civil society and State in Scotland precluded a fully national culture" and it led instead to "a strange sort of sub-national culture"¹²⁸.

An anomalous historical situation could not engender a "normal culture": Scotland could not simply be adapted to the new, basically nationalist, rules of cultural evolution. But since the country could not help being affected by this evolution, it produced something like a stunted, caricatural version.¹²⁹

The title Nairn gives to this phenomenon is "cultural sub-nationalism" and

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 136.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 142. This subject will be more fully examined in the following chapter.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 155-6.

he suggests that "it was cultural because of course it could not be political; on the other hand this culture could not be straightforwardly nationalist either - a direct substitute for political action . . ."130 .

Yet, political nationalism did emerge forcefully in Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s and Nairn's thoughts on that will be considered in Chapter 6. For the present, what should be said about his work is that it develops earlier efforts, particularly those of Burnett, to make use of Gramsci's political society - civil society distinction to aid the comprehension of certain aspects of Scottish history and politics. What is basic to his analysis is the point made by Burnett, Whitfield and Harvie (and implicit in the work of Hechter) that Scotland has a civil society which does not correspond directly to the British political system. Nairn advances beyond this observation to highlight some of the repercussions of this peculiar situation. In so doing, he provides further evidence for the case that Gramsci's distinction is applicable to certain concrete situations and that it can be employed, therefore, as a tool for political analysis. In the light of this, it is noteworthy that Gramsci's thought has been referred to in another two recent works on Scottish history.

6 The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class

James D. Young mentions Gramsci's ideas several times in his book about the Scottish working class.¹³¹ A couple of the references do little to further our appreciation of Gramsci's contribution to political analysis. In the first of these, Young comments on Gramsci's "conviction of the innate need for an industrialising society to impose the sort of moral restraint and discipline that resulted in the Scottish philosophes' intellectual

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 156.

¹³¹ Young, op. cit.

assault on the folk-memories, natural sexual attitudes and national language of the plebian Scots"¹³². According to Young, the use of this argument by some 'marxist' historians to support the notion that any expansion of the productive forces is the key to human emancipation from either nature or feudal oppression, ignores "the contradictions in Gramsci's thought which led him to advocate 'civilising' and emancipating the workers from 'vicious habits like alcoholism' at the same time as he sought to use populism, social banditry, mysticism and millenarianism as weapons in the struggle to overthrow capitalism"¹³³. There is no doubt that Gramsci's prison writings abound, as one might expect given the manner of their production, in contradictions, especially on such subjects as industrialisation, the sexual question and education.¹³⁴ However, Young's reference to this does not indicate a failure on his part to appreciate the merits of Gramsci's political thought. Although he makes a further relatively unimportant allusion to Gramsci's description of Bolshevik Marxism as "the revolution against Marx's Capital"¹³⁵, his other references to Gramsci reveal a genuine interest in the insights provided by the Prison Notebooks.

Thus, of mid-nineteenth-century Scotland, Young writes that "not only was there a much bigger and more determined radical working-class movement than Scottish historians have realised; but it had to operate in a context where both sides were struggling to impose what the Italian socialist thinker, Antonio Gramsci, described as 'cultural and ideological

¹³² Ibid., p. 47.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ An excellent analysis of Gramsci's apparently contradictory educational theory can be found in Harold Entwistle, Antonio Gramsci. Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics, London, 1979.

¹³⁵ Young, op. cit., p. 205.

hegemony"136. This situation, according to Young, was in contrast with the earlier period, 1789-1820, when "Tories and Whigs were divided about whether to use either brute force or ideology to keep the 'lower orders' in their place" because "they were now united in using both methods to preserve the status quo"137. One needs no knowledge of the actual period under discussion to realise that here is an example of Gramsci's "dual perspective" being used to understand how political power was maintained in a certain place at a certain time.

In addition, of a later period in Scotland's history, Young comments that "it is impossible to understand the process by which the Scottish labour movement was largely reintegrated into the existing social order between 1900 and 1914 without identifying the unique features of Scottish capitalism"138. According to him, "as the relationship between the unique features of a harsh, brutal and authoritarian society and what Gramsci called 'civil hegemony' constituted the mechanism by which the provincial elite was able to minimise social tensions, the application of the marxist concept of hegemony ought to illuminate some of the dark by-ways of the Scottish experience"139. Like Nairn, Young refers to Gramsci's view that the normal development of political systems in the West results in the tying of a political society - civil society knot so that there is a balance between force and consent within the framework of the State, in its expanded form.140 Young argues that Scotland did not follow this pattern and because it was "an internal colony without its own State apparatus, it was necessary for the possessing classes to depend

136 Ibid., p. 83.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid., p. 167.

139 Ibid., pp. 167-8.

140 Young quotes from Joll, op. cit., p. 99.

on ideological indoctrination and consensus to a much greater extent than occurred in most other modern, industrial societies"¹⁴¹. Young is in no doubt that these possessing classes enjoyed a fair measure of success in this venture writing that "in spite of outsider's (sic) growing awareness of the brutality, oppression and harshness of Scottish capitalism, the provincial elite who articulated the social attitudes and moral values of the British possessing classes managed to minimise class conflict by persuading the majority of Scottish working men and women to accept their values"¹⁴².

Clearly Young's use of Gramscian ideas leads him into the same area of discussion as is central to Nairn's analysis. What is important is that he develops the use of Gramsci's thought in the study of Scottish history to the extent that, arguably unlike Nairn, he uses certain concepts to explain particular aspects of Scotland's development rather than to merely emphasise the overall peculiarity of that process. A similar estimation can be made of the work of Tony Dickson and his colleagues, who are also concerned with the oddity of Scotland's economic and political history and with the relevance of the concept of hegemony to an analysis of Scottish capitalism.¹⁴³

7 Scottish Capitalism

Gramsci is quoted in a chapter of Scottish Capitalism for which Keith Burgess is largely responsible. Comparison is made between the economic and social transition which Scotland underwent between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that endured by Italy during the First and Second World Wars and Burgess quotes favourably Gramsci's

¹⁴¹ Young, op. cit., p. 168.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Dickson, op. cit.

description of the consequences of capitalist industrialisation.¹⁴⁴ This does not represent, however, a significant contribution by Gramsci in the field of political analysis. Of course, it could be argued that the work of Dickson and the rest is directed, above all, towards a study of economics and certainly this would explain the fact that the concept of civil society is employed, at times, in Scottish Capitalism, according to the original Marxian definition rather than the Gramscian one. Hence, Willie Thompson writes of the consequences of the Scottish nobility's greed, incapacity and divorce from any meaningful productive role in the pre-Union period and suggests that "their pursuit of income by straightforward rapacity, their internal armed conflicts over an economic surplus inadequate to satisfy their pretensions, the pressure they continually exerted against a feeble and imperilled central state - all rendered impossible the consolidation of any stable civil society in which accumulation within an accepted framework of law and authority could occur"¹⁴⁵.

However, mention has been made of Smout's review of Scottish Capitalism and of his reference to the fact that, in the central chapters (Five and Six, according to Smout), the concept of hegemony is one of the important organising ideas (the others being "client capitalism" and "the product cycle").¹⁴⁶ Smout does not believe that the other notions are particularly enlightening but he suggests that the concept of hegemony is another matter. He attributes it to Gramsci who, he writes, "suffered in Mussolini's prisons and had too much time to ponder the problem of how manifestly unjust and tyrannical elites could maintain themselves in power

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 231. Burgess is quoting Williams, "The Concept of 'Egemonia' in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", op. cit., p. 593.

¹⁴⁵ Dickson, op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁴⁶ The Scotsman, 23 August, 1980.

without using tanks in the street every day of the week". Having given a somewhat simplistic definition of the concept of hegemony¹⁴⁷, Smout goes on to write in a very illuminating way about the development of Scottish law and religion: law developed a tenderness to the rights of property in order to serve capitalism and the Church evolved an ideology of hard work and social obedience for the masses to the same end". Furthermore, "education worked along the same lines: the purpose of school was to produce obedient workers, not to liberate the spirit of man". According to Smout, "a great deal of this is manifestly true and the authors' discussion of Victorian institutions in this light should be read by everyone with a serious interest in Scottish history".

It is certainly the case that Burgess takes great care to explain how "uniquely Scottish forms of political decision-making, legal disciplines, and religious and educational control were allowed to flourish according to the terms of the Act of Union" and he comments that "these constituted what Gramsci would have called the structure of Scottish 'civil society', as distinct from the central apparatus of force and coercion controlled directly by the British state"¹⁴⁸. He argues that "it was the fact that these forms of social control were made by Scots

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Smout writes that the solution to the problem pondered by Gramsci lay in these elites' "control of the intelligentsia and the media - in historical terms, of university, school, Church, systems of law and the Press". This is certainly argued by Gramsci. However, it has been shown in this thesis that the most accurate interpretation of Gramsci's theory of the State indicates that he had a much more complex view of political power in advanced societies than more simplistic readings of his work might suggest. Smout bases his argument on a simplistic reading and, thus, argues that according to Gramsci's conception, "the majority are brainwashed by a minority to accept what is not in their true interest to tolerate for a moment". This does not do justice to the realism of Gramsci's position. He did not think in simple terms of one class being "brainwashed" by another. Hegemonic rule is a more complex phenomenon than such an argument would suggest. Furthermore, Gramsci did not believe that the coercive element could be done away with even in advanced societies. Indeed, like consent, it is essential to political power.

¹⁴⁸ Dickson, op. cit., p. 124. For the full description of this process, see pp. 102-124.

themselves, and were adapted so readily to the needs of a developing British capitalism, which made them so effective in reconciling the leaders of Scottish society to their client or dependent position in relation to England, and thus guaranteed the hegemony possessed by the preponderantly English interests in British society"¹⁴⁹.

Once again, Gramsci's thought is used to explain the absence in Scotland of political nationalism initiated by the upper echelons of society. The implications of this will be considered more fully in the following chapter. Suffice to say at this point that major aspects of Scottish Capitalism reflect an appreciation of the value of Gramsci's political theory. Smout has reservations about the virtue of this and comments that "pushed too far, even the concept of hegemony becomes a deus ex machina". According to Smout, "it seems to deny man the free will to choose to live under any system" and "the implication in Marxism-Leninism is that workers are always conned by capitalism when they are not directly coerced by it". "There is little room", says Smout, "for the alternative explanation that they voluntarily (and with all their wits about them) tolerate capitalism because it has gradually produced a stream of improving material welfare and extending civil rights".¹⁵⁰ This thesis is not concerned with deciding on the merits of these rival views. What is apparent, however, is a weakness in Marxism which is the result of its political idealism. Their faith in a future free from contradictions causes Marxists to deny that the proletariat can have any happiness in the capitalist system. Human misery is the result of economic inequality and will disappear only when economic inequality has been brought to an end under the socialist order. If the proletariat seems at present unaware of the contradictions in society it is because

149 Ibid.

150 The Scotsman, 23 August, 1980.

they have been prevented from seeing the truth and not because they are satisfied with the world around them. Smout is right to suggest that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is an attempt to explain the lack of proletarian revolutionary initiative and, indeed, it is its very success as an explanation that causes problems for Gramsci when he tries to construct a theory of revolutionary strategy and for those who want to take a strategic message from his work. On the other hand, Gramsci's conception does strengthen the political realist dimension of Marxism. The passivity of the workers is not explained away by a materialist construct such as Lukács's theory of reification or the deterministic assumption that objective conditions are not sufficiently mature for them to act decisively. Instead, Gramsci puts more emphasis on the power of the ruling class. The consent of the proletariat to their leadership is not simply the product of the false consciousness of the proletariat. It is to a large extent the creation of the ruling class whose political power is based on a fine balance between force and the acquisition of consent. Reformism and, more generally, passive revolution are weapons which can be made good use of by the bourgeois ruling class when crises occur in the structure of society. Smout is unfair to Gramsci in suggesting that he was as unrealistic as all other Marxists as regards understanding why the proletariat accepts the rule of the bourgeoisie and he is also wrong to imply that Gramsci was an economic determinist. His historical materialism has been shown to be of a very different order, consistent, nevertheless, with Marx's own teachings.

It is the overwhelming political realism of Gramsci's analysis of political power in advanced capitalist societies that brings his Marxism into question and creates problems for anyone searching in his work for signposts to action. Many of those who have used Gramscian concepts in their analyses of Scottish history and politics have failed

to recognise this. Confused and utopian projections of the future struggle and its outcome are the result. Even in the most polemical works employing Gramsci's ideas, however, there is an indication of his importance as a political analyst. It is because his analysis is so acute that he himself finds it difficult to construct a revolutionary strategy and maintain his political idealism. It is not surprising that even in works with an avowed strategic aim, reference to Gramsci underlines the respective strengths and weaknesses of his conception.

Each of the works considered in this Chapter are concerned with the relationship between leaders and led and each draws from Gramsci the important point that in advanced societies political power is maintained through the balanced use of force and consent. The main achievement of the various authors involved is not, however, an analysis of bourgeois political power in Scotland and subsequent suggestions as to how that power can be overthrown. What they do (in the case of the more polemical amongst them, completely unintentionally) is to reveal that political power is not simply based on class relations but, in fact, reflects a much more fundamental dualism between the private and public realms of society. They show that, in Scotland, Gramsci's distinction between civil and political society has real meaning. Power is maintained in Scotland through a civil sphere, which is Scottish, and a public sphere, which is British.

A realistic assessment of this dualism, which is the result of Scotland's unusual history as a "sub-nation" since 1707, is that though it is a precarious base for the wielding of political power, it will not simply be transcended as a result of changes in the economic structure of Britain. This realisation is the most significant outcome of the numerous attempts to employ Gramscian ideas in the study of Scottish history. It indicates that Gramsci's major contributions to political

analysis result from the "dual perspective" inherited from the Italian political debate tradition rather than from his Marxist conception of history.

It is the "dual perspective" which sees the importance of the force/consent relationship in politics, which indicates the nationalist dimension of political power and which points to the distinction between civil and political society which, in the case of Scotland, becomes a real distinction. Further analysis of some expressions of political opposition in Scotland bearing in mind the Gramscian distinction will reveal how deep-seated is the dualism of Scottish society. It will also provide the final evidence that it is as a political theorist, not as a Marxist, that Gramsci makes his major contribution to the study of political power in advanced societies and that this is due to the fact that his Marxism is infused with the "dual perspective" of Italian political realism.

It should come as no surprise to anyone interested in the literature, history or politics of Scotland that each subject is amenable to interpretation based on the "dual perspective". N.T. Phillipson claims that Sir Walter Scott "taught Scotsmen to see themselves as men whose reason is on one side of the Union and whose emotions are not, and in whose confusion lies their national character"¹. In this confusion too, lie the contradictions of Scottish culture in which, according to Edwin Muir, emotion and thought become separated with the consequence that emotion becomes irresponsible and thought arid.² The language of reason was English but, for many years after Scotland's Union with England in 1707, the old Scots dialect remained the language of the heart. As William Ferguson remarks, "well into the eighteenth century Scotsmen of considerable, and sometimes great, abilities quailed before the baffling intricacies of written English and wrote, as they spoke, with trepidation"³. As great a writer as David Hume is reported to have asked forgiveness for his "scotticisms" shortly before he died and it has been suggested that his "complex attitude toward his homeland is significant. It is typical of a psychology which rarely failed to combat prejudice with pride."⁴

In the literary field, the dualism of the Scot's mind or the divorce of the mind from the heart results in a phenomenon described by G. Gregory Smith as "the Caledonian Antisyzygy" - "a reflection of the

¹ N.T. Phillipson, "Nationalism and Ideology" in J.N. Wolfe (ed.), Government and Nationalism in Scotland, Edinburgh, 1969, p. 186.

² See Edwin Muir, Scott and Scotland, London, 1936, p. 29.

³ William Ferguson, Scotland 1689 to the Present, Edinburgh, 1968, p. 99.

⁴ John Clive, "The Social Background of the Scottish Renaissance", in N.T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison (eds.), Scotland in the Age of Improvement, Edinburgh, 1970, p. 239.

contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgement, which is the admission that two sides of the matter have been considered"⁵. Literally the concept means "the yoking together of opposites"⁶. Its applicability to Scotland is explained by Alan Bold who writes that Scots "are rich in examples of what Wyndham Lewis in 'The Apes of God', called the Split Man"⁷. "Again and again", says Bold, "we come across admissions of the split between reasonable behaviour and passionate displays of emotion."⁸ The literary results include James Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner and Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The latter contains what is arguably the clearest fictional depiction of the view of man which informs the "dual perspective" of Italian political realism. Stevenson shows how in one man can reside the potential for doing great good and great evil. He opposes the idea that some men are good, some bad. A similar interpretation of human nature forms the basis of the "dual perspective" of the Italian tradition beginning with Machiavelli. If man is neither wholly good nor wholly bad, the political authority required to maintain stability must cater for the evil in man together with the good. The "dual perspective", which is inherited by Gramsci and is a major influence on his theory of the State, corresponds to the necessary coexistence in political life of good

⁵ G. Gregory Smith, Scottish Literature. Character and Influence, London, 1919, p. 4.

⁶ For an interesting recent discussion of this concept, see Edwin Morgan, "The Future of the Antisyzygy", The Bulletin of Scottish Politics, 1, Autumn, 1980, pp. 7-20.

⁷ Alan Bold, "Split Brains and Twisted Men", Scotia Review, 17, Summer, 1977, p. 34.

⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

(consent) and evil (coercion). In this way, a realistic appraisal of human nature leads to a realistic analysis of politics. However, the dualism of Scottish political life is no mere reflection of the complexity of human nature.

Explicit in Smith's comments on "the Caledonian Antisyzygy" is the theory that literary representations of the "dual perspective" complement and, indeed, reflect a dualism which pervades Scottish society in general and Scottish politics in particular. The various attempts made to use elements of Gramsci's political thought for the study of Scottish politics and society point to the basic source of this dualism. After the Act of Union, Scotland failed to conform to the standard model of political organisation in advanced societies. In normal circumstances, political society and civil society correspond to each other as the interwoven parts of the nation-state, and for that reason, Gramsci's distinction between the two superstructural levels becomes impossible to observe in practice. In Scotland, however, as a result of the Union settlement terms, political power has rested since 1707 on the combination of British political society and Scottish civil society. Political power, in the northern region of the British political system, depends not only on the fusion of force and consent but also on a balance of Scottish and British elements. This results in the division between political man and social man, or public and private man, which is conceptualised by Gramsci in his political society - civil society distinction. The dualism of the Scot reflects the dualism of political power in his country. Because subsequent activity by oppositional forces in Scotland took place in an atmosphere of political dualism which itself engenders cultural dualism, it too exhibited a two-sided character, as did the efforts of the ruling class to maintain its position. Various opposition movements and the reaction they provoked will be examined in this chapter.

In considering the dualism of Scottish political activity, it shall be shown that a reading of Scottish history based on Gramsci's "dual perspective" and its political society - civil society distinction supports the contention that the latter is a politically realistic formulation which indicates that there are major non-economic contradictions present in human society which will not necessarily be transcended in a system in which economic inequality is eradicated. It is intended, in addition, to show that in certain conditions Gramsci's distinction becomes politically operative and that his conception is, therefore, of great significance for analysis of particular manifestations of political rule. The first step, therefore, must be to develop the argument that, as a consequence of the Act of Union of 1707, there exist side-by-side a civil society (in the Gramscian sense) which remains Scottish and a British political society.

According to James Kellas, "political man in Scotland stands on two legs, one Scottish and one British, and both are needed if he is to remain upright. His cousins in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are also two-legged in this sense, although they may prefer to walk on one leg, dragging the other behind them"⁹. Political power in Scotland, as elsewhere, is based on the dialectical fusion of force and consent. But, in Scotland, the spheres responsible for these two elements of political power do not overlap as they do in other countries. Consent to the political system is acquired through the workings of Scottish civil society though the coercion needed to maintain the Union emanates from the British political society. This results in the two-legged Scottish political man or, more accurately, in the divorce of public man and private man in Scotland.

⁹ James Kellas, The Scottish Political System, Cambridge, 1973, p. 18.

One might expect that their private Scottish existence would make Scotsmen politically nationalist. To some extent, this happens. Certainly, the presence of a separate Scottish civil society helps to create a Scottish national identity. Yet, at the same time, it works to acquire consent to the Union and to the existing political system. It provides a useful totem around which the dance of political nationalism sporadically takes place but its proper role is to ensure that this dance will not undermine the foundations of political power in Britain. This paradox is explained by the fact that the functionaries of Scottish civil society (traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie to use Gramsci's terminology) have been faithful to the British political system and content to strive in their various private organisations to win the consent of most Scots to that system. Thus, political nationalism has remained symbolic.

This peculiar type of political rule appears to work (or at least it seemed to be working until the 1960s and 1970s when large numbers of Scots gave electoral support to political nationalism) but clearly it is based on an uneasy balance, creating a tight-rope on which most Scots have appeared willing to walk. To explain this complex phenomenon, one must examine its origins. Until 1707, Scottish political men had stood steadfast on two legs - both Scottish - and there was no distinction between public and private life. The political dualism of Scotland began with the Act of Union.

1 The Act of Union

According to Agnes Mure Mackenzie, "the story of modern Scotland can be said to date from the first of May 1707, when the third of the three Scottish Revolutions reached its climax by accomplishing the transfer of the seat of Scottish government to London"¹⁰. J.D. Mackie

¹⁰ Agnes Mure Mackenzie, Scotland in Modern Times, London, 1941, p. 3.

describes the 1707 Act of Union as "a remarkable achievement"¹¹ and Janet Glover goes even further, suggesting that the fact "that Scotland and England became united in 1707 is one of the oddest facts in British history"¹². Indeed, Tom Nairn views this Union as peculiar by any standards, let alone those laid down by other events in Britain's history. As he puts it, "there are many stateless nationalities in history, but only one Act of Union - a peculiarly patrician bargain between two ruling classes, which would have been unthinkable earlier, under absolute monarchy, and impossible later, when the age of democratic nationalism had arrived"¹³. Certainly other countries have been and continue to be submerged politically but in all other cases the process has involved a certain amount of coercion. In the case of Scotland, whilst force had been exerted by the English at certain earlier periods in the history of the relationship which it had with its southern neighbour, its disappearance as a political entity was the direct result of parliamentary decision-making and the consent of those who wielded political power in the country itself. It was inevitable that the outcome would be different, and possibly more complex, than that which results in the more usual forms of colonial domination.

Scotland had enjoyed a long history as a recognisably independent nation-state prior to the Act of Union. Indeed, it is Mackenzie's contention that "Scotland, of all the European kingdoms, was the first to discover a true sense of nationhood, of the nation as something to be guarded and honoured, as a thing to which every man owed loyalty"¹⁴. How was it possible, if this was the case, for Scotland's parliamentarians

¹¹ J.D. Mackie, A History of Scotland, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1969, p. 262.

¹² Janet Glover, The Story of Scotland, London, 1960, p. 191.

¹³ Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, p. 129.

¹⁴ Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 260.

to renounce the nation's statehood and agree to a political alliance (some would say to domination) with another State which had long been regarded as an enemy? According to Nairn, "the standard European (and later world) pattern" of national development is that "of one political State and its society, or one distinguishable ethnic society and its own State"¹⁵. Conformity to this pattern leads to "a world where the civil societies and the States mainly fitted each other, as it were, through the normal developmental struggles of last century and this"¹⁶. Thus, using Gramscian terminology, it can be argued that the world is filled increasingly with States which have a correct relationship with their civil societies and with the balance of force and consent in political power which this relationship entails. Scotland, however, became, in Nairn's words, "a hippogriff: a manifest bastard, in the world of nationalist wedlock"¹⁷. The abnormality of the Union and of its consequences becomes plain to see.

There is, of course, a theory that the Union with England was from a Scottish point of view both inevitable and beneficial. Writing of the early years of the reign of James VI of Scotland, J.H. Burns comments that "it is easy for us to say after the event that Scotland, throughout this period, was moving towards the inevitable Union with England"¹⁸. Burns is wary of this view, however, and writes that "no statesman at the time dared assume that the union was, within any measurable time, inevitable; nor could it be known in advance under what conditions the

¹⁵ Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, p. 135.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ J.H. Burns, "The Political Background of the Reformation, 1513-1625" in David McRoberts (ed.), Essays on the Scottish Reformation 1513-1625, Glasgow, 1962, p. 29.

union would come if it came at all"¹⁹. The point is an important one but historians were to have the benefit of hindsight and those who favoured the Whig interpretation of history, and others besides, continued to stress the inevitability of the Union, despite its uniqueness.

As Mackenzie suggests, the process whereby Scotland became submerged within the United Kingdom is "a subtle and complex one, involving a score of elements small in themselves, but remorselessly cumulative in effect"²⁰. Gordon Donaldson explains how "something of a pattern in the relations between south and north Britain was established long before there were kingdoms of England and Scotland" and "any power in control of the larger and wealthier part of this island almost inevitably had ambitions to extend its sway over at least the whole east coast, where there was no definitive natural barrier"²¹. England's attempts to incorporate the Scottish nation were aided from the middle of the thirteenth century onwards, according to Mackenzie, by "a small pro-English party who were prepared to yield anything to England from which they might themselves win place or profit"²². These can be regarded as the ancestors of the present-day two-legged Scottish political man.

Although it was a dynastic accident which brought Scotland and England together in 1603 under the rule of one monarch, James VI and I, it is clear that a process which had begun much earlier gave the eventual parliamentary union of the two countries a credibility which it could not otherwise have enjoyed. As Donaldson comments, "the union of the two peoples had, though with many vicissitudes, been in the making in the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 262.

²¹ Gordon Donaldson, Scotland. The Shaping of a Nation, Newton Abbot, 1974, p. 26.

²² Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 264.

course of many centuries before the union of the crowns and the union of the parliaments"²³. Indeed, "the events of 1603 and 1707 were only two incidents in a long process, a process of which it is not easy to discern a beginning and a process of which we have not yet seen the end". The Union of the Crowns created a more tangible link than had existed before but the fact that both the protestant religion and the English language were shared by sizeable sections of the population of each country was equally significant. Thus, David Daiches writes that "as Protestant Scotland turned away from Catholic France to a Protestant England, English forms more and more invaded the speech of those Scotsmen who looked to England . . ." ²⁴. The framing of the Act of Union can appear to be the logical culmination of a long developmental process.

The danger, however, of adopting this interpretation is that one ignores the many crucial factors which militated against a Union and also the fact already mentioned that those Scots who were responsible for the Union acted abnormally in the context of European historical development. The covetous glances of England had led to more than mere increased contact between the two countries. They had also fuelled, according to Keith Webb, "a sense of Scottish nationhood based on distinctive cultural differences due in part to the different histories of the two nations"²⁵. Such a sense of national identity would not be easily reconciled to the idea of a political union.

P.W.J. Riley writes that "whatever else they had on their minds between the revolution of 1688 and the Union there was one problem of great concern to many Englishmen and to some Scotsmen: that of governing

²³ Donaldson, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁴ David Daiches, Scotland and the Union, London, 1977, p. 16.

²⁵ Keith Webb, The Growth of Nationalism in Scotland, Glasgow, 1977, p. 23.

Scotland within the framework of the union of the crowns"²⁶. The problem was scarcely an easy one to solve given the long history of conflict between the two countries and the enmity which that had aroused. The union of the crowns had not by itself established real unity nor even a normal, modern system of rule for within what could be regarded as a single kingdom there continued to exist two political societies and two civil societies or, put another way, as Donaldson suggests, "there was still two kingdoms, each with its own parliament, administration, church and legal system"²⁷. King James, according to Donaldson, "would gladly have integrated the two but, although he had the support of far-sighted men on both sides of the Border, his proposals were on the whole unwelcome"²⁸. Thus, Scotland and England found themselves, in the words of George Malcolm Thomson, "in the impossible position of being, at the same time, one state and two states"²⁹. Many felt, as George Pryde comments, that "there was no room in the one island for two parliaments, pursuing, under one king, conflicting aims in foreign and commercial relations"³⁰. Equally, there was little appetite for a return to the days when the separate kingdoms had enjoyed their independence only at the expense of a relationship between them characterised by mistrust, disagreement and even war. Despite the feelings of hatred which that former relationship had created, a closer union between the two countries was one obvious way out of the problem. Ultimately, the hand of politicians on either side of the border was forced (in Scotland by

²⁶ P.W.J. Riley, "The Structure of Scottish Politics and the Union of 1707", in T.I. Rae (ed.), The Union of 1707, Glasgow, 1974, p. 1.

²⁷ Donaldson, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ George Malcolm Thomson, A Short History of Scotland, London, 1930, p. 160.

³⁰ George S. Pryde, Scotland from 1603 to the Present Day, Edinburgh, 1962, p. 49.

commercial considerations and in England by the demands of security) and this solution became increasingly acceptable to many amongst them.

As Daiches suggests, "it was clear, at least to some, that while England and Scotland pursued conflicting trading policies, relations between the two countries would steadily worsen"³¹. Thus, he goes on, "there were those in both Scotland and England who more and more began to think that only a complete union between the two countries could solve this problem, by giving Scotsmen access on an equal footing with the English to English colonial markets and introducing complete free trade across the border"³².

Such a solution had a particular appeal for Scots involved in commerce. Their attempts to secure colonial markets for themselves had resulted in failure - most notably the disaster of the Darien scheme.³³ The Scottish economy faced serious difficulties. Indeed, according to Eric Linklater, "Scotland was now approaching calamity of a sort unknown in preceding centuries". "Defeat in battle had become familiar, internecine slaughter and the mourning consequent upon it were known in every quarter of the country. But until now - the last years of the seventeenth century, that is - Scotland had been spared the horrors of financial failure, because Scotland had never had finance enough to promote a major failure."³⁴ Darien had changed all that. The failure of the scheme prompted some Scots to take the view that access to England's colonial markets would be worth the price of surrendering Scotland's political independence. Yet, the commercial disaster had also

³¹ Daiches, Scotland and the Union, p. 51.

³² Ibid.

³³ For details of this episode in Scotland's history, see John Prebble, The Darien Disaster, London, 1968.

³⁴ Eric Linklater, The Survival of Scotland, London, 1968, p. 306.

exacerbated anti-English feeling in Scotland. According to Smout, the failure of the scheme "shook confidence in the king"³⁵. Promised English financial assistance had not been forthcoming when required and, as Daiches claims, "many Scotsmen felt angered with and humiliated by the English and were not in any mood to consider them as other than the traditional enemy"³⁶. Nonetheless, as Keith Webb says, "despite the dissimilarities between the two nations, and the mistrust between them - the result of centuries of mutual violence - union did occur in 1707 after several previous attempts"³⁷. Webb emphasises the paradoxical fact that union came about when it did, writing that "at a time when the dislike and distrust of the English had never been greater, the incorporating Treaty of Union was signed and put into effect"³⁸. The fact was that many of those men who had political power in Scotland had learned a different lesson from the failure of the country's commercial policy than had the majority of their compatriots and, in Scotland, according to Janet Glover, "sheer want drove men with business knowledge to a new political viewpoint about union"³⁹.

Although England could also gain economic advantage from a Union, that was not the main reason behind her parliamentarians' pursuit of a unionist policy. By 1707, as Smout remarks, "the very arrangement which they had so contemptuously avoided considering on many previous occasions, and as recently as 1690 and 1702, became now their first priority"⁴⁰. The simple cause of the transformation was the fact, pointed to by

³⁵ Smout, op. cit., p. 151.

³⁶ Daiches, Scotland and the Union, p. 51.

³⁷ Webb, op. cit., p. 17.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁹ Glover, op. cit., p. 192.

⁴⁰ T.C. Smout, "Union of the Parliaments" in Gordon Menzies (ed.), The Scottish Nation, London, 1972, p. 155.

Thomson, that "English statesmen could not contemplate with equanimity the prospect of sharing a sovereign with a kingdom which might remain neutral in England's wars, initiate wars and alliances on her own account, or even take the side of England's enemies"⁴¹. Their fears had been heightened by Queen Anne's death and the subsequent succession crisis and they viewed with little relish the possible prospect of a return to the days of two separate kingdoms with different rulers and different foreign policies, inspired by very different beliefs. The English statesmen feared a restoration in Scotland of the Stuart line and, for security reasons, they were prepared to take drastic steps to ensure that the Scots would accept the Hanoverian succession. Thus, as Daiches claims, the major object of English state policy was "to close the 'back door' to England by ensuring that Scotland had no alternative but to choose the same line of succession to the Scottish throne as had been settled for the throne of England"⁴². An incorporating union appeared to offer the best means by which this could be achieved.

It can be seen, therefore, that all the parliamentarians who consented to the union acted out of a sense of patriotism in the interests of their country as they perceived them. It may be that this argument is more convincing when used to describe the English than the Scots who are regarded just as frequently as traitors. Certainly their actions were not seen as the work of patriots by many of their fellow countrymen. The Union provoked riots and then, as now, there were those who claimed that Scottish parliamentarians had been bribed into accepting what amounted to the surrender of their nation's statehood. T.C. Smout agrees that bribery was one of the weapons used by the English politicians to gain Scottish acceptance of the union.⁴³ However, as Glover submits,

⁴¹ Thomson, op. cit., p. 201.

⁴² Daiches, Scotland and the Union, p. 52.

⁴³ Smout, "Union of the Parliaments", op. cit., p. 155.

while financial inducement may well have been involved, "by 18th century standards of public integrity there was no question of bribery and even by modern standards it would be hard to prove the charge"⁴⁴. Furthermore, as Smout argues, "this point, even if it were satisfactorily proved (it never has been), would not invalidate the common argument that in the circumstances which faced Scotland in the opening decade of the eighteenth century it was wiser for the country to unite with England than to cast off on her own"⁴⁵.

It is scarcely surprising that many Scots of the time failed to see the validity of this argument. In addition, as William Ferguson points out, there was "no sudden burst of prosperity after 1707"⁴⁶. Indeed, several acts passed by the new parliament were downright hostile to Scotland's economic interests.⁴⁷ Yet, seen in the long-term, the action of the Scottish parliamentarians who agreed to Union was economically justified even if it resulted in a situation which might be described as one of internal colonialism. The fact that the political consequences which Michael Hechter would expect to emerge from a situation of that kind did not occur is the result of the fact that England herself desired the Union and was willing to pay a price for it, thereby creating the Act's somewhat unusual terms and Scotland's abnormal political condition.

The terms of the Union which were favourable to Scotland were the product of a rather naïve English analysis of the situation north of the border at the time of the succession crisis. As J.D. Mackie suggests,

⁴⁴ Glover, op.cit., p. 198.

⁴⁵ Smout, A History of the Scottish People, p. 200.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, op. cit., p. 61.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Amongst these was the Malt Tax which provoked riots in Glasgow.

although the idea of a Union with England was unpopular with many Scots, "among those who disliked it there were many who realized that it was better than the only possible alternative"⁴⁸. That alternative was the restoration of the Stuarts - an option which had it been taken up could have led to war and, worse still for many Scots, a real threat to Protestantism. Thus, according to P. Hume Brown, "however much the Scots might grumble against the Union, the majority of them knew that it had made the Protestant religion secure, and that, if it were abolished, the heirs of James VII might be restored and Roman Catholicism along with them"⁴⁹. Emphasising the point, Sir Reginald Coupland writes that only by way of a Union of the Parliaments "could the Protestant succession to the throne be firmly secured"⁵⁰.

What the English statesmen failed to realise was that their fears for the security of their country were largely groundless in view of the Protestantism of the vast majority of Scots. Nonetheless, in their ignorance, these politicians were willing to grant Scotland a degree of independence unheard of in normal political arrangements whereby a wealthy and powerful State joins forces with its inferior.⁵¹

2 The Institutional Legacy of the Union

As Coupland argues, "in the temper of Scottish nationalism at the time a voluntary union - and of course it could not be imposed - might

⁴⁸ Mackie, op. cit., p. 263.

⁴⁹ P. Hume Brown, A Short History of Scotland, Enlarged edition, Edinburgh, 1951, p. 293.

⁵⁰ Sir Reginald Coupland, Welsh and Scottish Nationalism, London, 1954, p. 105.

⁵¹ Ireland offers the best comparison when one is examining the nature of Scotland's Union with England. For a study of Northern Ireland's present troubles inspired by Gramsci's political thought, see my own "Northern Ireland: An Essay on Political Pessimism", Moirae, 5, Trinity, 1980, pp. 159-172.

well have seemed impossible; and it would indeed have seemed impossible if England had wanted not union only but also the uniformity which the Stewart kings had aimed at"⁵². That the English politicians did not aim for such uniformity is attributed by Coupland to the good sense of their statesmanship. Thus, "they confined the changes they proposed to the necessary minimum" and "they made no attempt to tamper with two of the three institutional pillars of Scottish nationalism, the Kirk and the Law; and for the removal of the third they were willing to pay the necessary price"⁵³. Indeed, as Webb points out, "the Act of Union guaranteed the retention of three Scottish institutions: the mint, the legal system and the Church"⁵⁴.

One can also say that the whole character of the Union left the way open for the continuation and development of a wide variety of institutions and activities, all of which can be assigned to the Gramscian conception of civil society. Indeed, Charles Dand suggests that the result of the Union was to confer upon the Scots all the advantages of being English while they remained at the same time recognisably Scottish. They were absorbable but they had not been absorbed and, according to Dand, they owed this fact to some extent to "the tolerant indifference which the English have shown towards them at most times throughout the union, but primarily to the articles in the treaty which allowed them to keep their own systems of law and education and their own national church"⁵⁵. A similar point is made by Ian Ross who writes that "the Union of the Parliaments of Scotland and England in 1707 removed from

⁵² Coupland, op. cit., p. 105.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Webb, op. cit., p. 25.

⁵⁵ Charles Hendry Dand, The Mighty Affair, Edinburgh, 1972, p. 187.

Edinburgh the last vestiges of her importance as a seat of political power, since the vital decisions affecting policy and government were henceforth to be taken at Westminster". However, "the terms of the union settlement . . . preserved the autonomy of the National Church and established the quasi-autonomy of the Scottish legal system"⁵⁶. These implications of the Act of Union have had repercussions to the present day for, even now, as H.J.Hanham informs us, "the Scots have their own national church, their own national education system, their own national legal system, their own national banking system, their own national system of central and local government, their own national way of speaking English - even their own Scottish Trades Union Congress"⁵⁷.

Can it come as any surprise that Scottish political man has been said to walk on two legs - one Scottish and one British? Can we be surprised that a dualism exists in all Scottish political activity, forced as it is to take account of two different points of reference? Is it not easy to see why some commentators have turned to Gramsci, with his emphasis on the "dual perspective" and on the political society - civil society distinction, to aid their analysis of Scotland's political condition? It can be argued that what the Scots were left with after the Union were precisely these features which Gramsci describes as private and which make up civil society in the sense that he uses the concept. Henceforth, political society would be British but the State of which it was a part would also rely on a specifically Scottish civil society for the maintenance of political power.

⁵⁶ Ian Simpson Ross, Lord Kames and the Scotland of his day, Oxford, 1972, p. 8.

⁵⁷ H.J. Hanham, Scottish Nationalism, London, 1969, p. 15. Scotland retains a separate identity in numerous other spheres of activity. Some may be relatively unimportant but there can be no denying that the presence of a separate Scottish Football Association and a national side has made a sizeable contribution to the persistence of Scottish nationalist sentiment.

Thus, it is possible for Keith Burgess to claim that "in no sense were English forms of law and order imposed upon Scotland"⁵⁸. Similarly, Smout remarks that "the existing law of Scotland was . . . defended, which kept the professions of the lawyers intact"⁵⁹. According to Burgess, one of the results of this was that "the continuation of the country's own legal tradition was not only a significant factor contributing to the comparative quietude of Scottish social life in the eighteenth century but acted more positively to hasten the spread of capitalist social relations"⁶⁰. Here was a good example of law operating in a hegemonic rather than a coercive fashion. The important point to recognise, however, is that it is Scottish law acting in the interests of the wider British State system.

There can be no denying that the Scots legal system was different and has remained different from that which operates in the rest of the United Kingdom. Indeed, according to James Kellas, "the legal system of Scotland is one of the strongest clues to the existence of the Scottish political system"⁶¹. As Kellas says, "the people of Scotland are subject to many laws which are exclusive to Scotland" and "they have a system of law courts which are with one exception different from, and independent of, the law courts of the rest of Britain"⁶².

⁵⁸ In Dickson, op. cit., p. 108.

⁵⁹ Smout, "Union of the Parliaments", op. cit., p. 157.

⁶⁰ Dickson, op. cit., p. 108.

⁶¹ Kellas, op.cit., p. 3. His use of the term "political system" is confusing in the context of this thesis. Yet, it does underline the peculiarity of the situation in which a nation has some politically relevant institutions but not a State of its own. The use of Gramsci's terminology permits us to define these institutions as belonging to civil society with its private character and State functions.

⁶² Ibid. The exception to this rule is that in Scotland, as well as in the rest of the United Kingdom, the final court of appeal in civil cases is the House of Lords in its judicial capacity. For further information about the distinctiveness of the Scottish legal system, the general reader is directed to Andrew Dewar Gibb, A Preface to Scots Law, Edinburgh, 1964.

Like the legal system, the established nature of the presbyterian Church of Scotland was retained by the terms of the Act of Union. As Smout observes, "the Church was exempted by special legislation from any threat of amalgamation with the Church of England"⁶³. For many Scots, this was the sole point in the Union's favour. Thus, Burgess writes that "the survival of Scotland's distinctively national religion further enhanced the legitimacy of the Act of Union". "In fact", he continues, "serious Presbyterians were more concerned to preserve their national Kirk than the Scottish Parliament with its extremely narrow franchise, and they saw the Act of Union as a defence against a Jacobite restoration and the subsequent revival of Roman Catholicism or Episcopalianism"⁶⁴. Had the English statesmen realised this they might have been less generous in the terms offered by them in the Union. On the other hand, it is doubtful that the Union could have been implemented had its terms threatened the independence of the Scottish national church.

J.H.S. Burleigh describes the way in which the Kirk is "based on local congregational life" and is united as a whole by "graded church courts in which elders of the people share equally with ministers in all decisions as to policy and administration"⁶⁵. Donaldson also makes the point that "the whole concept in worship was of a kind of corporate priesthood, vested in the people"⁶⁶. Obviously, then, this church differed greatly from the established form of religion in England which was, as it is today, Protestant but Episcopalian. What is important too is the fact that this difference was recognised by many Scots. Burleigh,

⁶³ Smout, "Union of the Parliaments", op. cit., p. 158.

⁶⁴ Dickson, op. cit., p. 113.

⁶⁵ J.H.S. Burleigh, A Church History of Scotland, Oxford, 1960, p. 421.

⁶⁶ Donaldson, op. cit., p. 185.

therefore, assigns to the Kirk an important place in Scottish life.

"It has won and in large part retained the affection of the Scottish people, even when so many of them sit somewhat loosely to its ordinances."⁶⁷

It is true to say that the Scottish legal system is viewed in a similar way by most Scots, despite the fact that few would know what makes that system peculiar. Equally true is the observation that Scots have great, if at times unjustified, pride in their separate educational system which, like the law and the Kirk, forms a vital part of the country's civil society.

Scotland's separate educational system was not a direct result of the terms of the Union settlement. It should be mentioned at this point, however, because education is a part of civil society according to Gramsci and because Scotland's distinct system represents another aspect of her separate civil society. It has been argued that the system's uniqueness is the result of a number of influences such as pietism, poverty, Anglo-Scottish relations and, to some extent, the deliberations of the great educationalists.⁶⁸ It can be stated with some certainty that the distinctiveness of Scotland's religious traditions encouraged the uniqueness of the educational system for, as Burgess remarks, "Scotland's educational system was an especially powerful instrument of social control that the Kirk used to maintain its hold over the country's population"⁶⁹. The result, according to James Scotland, was an approach to education which consisted of a number of dominant features, including a devotion to the concept of education, a militant democracy, an academic bias,

⁶⁷ Burleigh, op. cit., p. 421.

⁶⁸ See James Scotland, The History of Scottish Education. Vol. 2. From 1872 to the present day, London, 1969, pp. 257-63.

⁶⁹ Dickson, op. cit., p. 121.

conservatism, authoritarianism, maintenance of a national system and, of course, links with the church.

James Kellas believes that the peculiarly Scottish approaches to education "have left their mark on the Scots and the structure of Scottish society, for good or ill"⁷⁰. A similar point is made by James Scotland.

In every generation it is easier to discern the shortcomings of a tradition than its virtues. It is rigidly idealistic, certainly inflexible, but it holds to a number of valid truths. At its best the Scottish tradition in education has served the people of Scotland well.⁷¹

According to Campbell Maclean, the preoccupation with learning, imbued in the Scottish educational system by a theological vision in which God is not a mystic but an intellectual, "gave rise to one of our few authentic folk figures, the poor man who does not want bread but education"⁷². One might add that there is also a commonly-held belief that his demand is more likely to be satisfied in Scotland than in other countries, particularly England. According to James Scotland, "the sentimental image of Scottish educational democracy, personified in the lad of parts who has become a colonial governor or a university principal or a law lord, may be idealised through an intellectual soft-focus lens"⁷³. On the other hand, adds Scotland, "there are many lads of parts, and they did attain eminence, and it was easier for a Scottish boy to reach a university than for his brothers in most countries of the Western world"⁷⁴.

⁷⁰ Kellas, op. cit., p. 7.

⁷¹ Scotland, op. cit., p. 275.

⁷² Campbell Maclean, "The Paradox of Knox", in Hugh Macdiarmid, Campbell Maclean and Anthony Ross, John Knox, Edinburgh, 1976, pp. 23-4.

⁷³ Scotland, op. cit., p. 275.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

An evaluation of the Scottish educational system, or indeed of the legal and religious codes, has no place in this thesis. What should be commented on, however, is that these are not only recognised as distinctive but are also highly esteemed by the majority of Scots. Obviously, many myths surround the various institutions. It is obvious too that any people will take some pride in their own national institutions. What is important though is that these Scottish institutions exist despite the disappearance of a political identity in the shape of a nation-state. Thus, they exist as reminders of a distinctive Scottish way of life and, in this, they are joined by a whole host of other spheres of human activity all of which belong to a recognisably Scottish civil society, using Gramsci's concept. The media, trade unions, entertainment, sport, political parties and, in general, the way in which people look at things and express themselves, all have a specifically Scottish orientation. Yet, there is no Scottish parliament, no Scottish state, no Scottish army. Is there, then, in any meaningful sense, a Scottish nation?

3 Scotland - a nation?

It might be argued that the continued presence of a Scottish civil society, with its various agencies, keeps Scotland's claim to nationhood alive. Jack Brand suggests that "the Church of Scotland has certainly been one institution if not the institution which has expressed the Scottishness of Scottish society"⁷⁵ and Daiches claims that Scottish lawyers "realised the national character of the Scottish legal system, and being an élite they regarded themselves as leaders not only of society but of national thought"⁷⁶. Yet, these claims might be countered

⁷⁵ Jack Brand, The Nationalist Movement in Scotland, London, 1978, p. 130.

⁷⁶ Daiches, The Paradox of Scottish Culture, p. 57.

with the argument that political nationalism would have made more inroads into Scottish political life had the nation really continued to exist.

As Daiches admits, even if the legal system provided a focus for Scottish culture, "it did not - indeed, it could not - succeed in providing a basis for national culture or for any culture that took into account all the relevant and available traditions of Scottish thought and feeling"⁷⁷. Similarly, he suggests that, distinctive as it was and still remains, the Church of Scotland has done little to positively nurture a sense of national identity. Indeed, he writes that "it was in Episcopalian households that the older traditions of music and poetry were more likely to be preserved, especially in the north-east"⁷⁸. Daiches, in fact, points out that for Sir Walter Scott, "always interested in the relation of the Scottish present with the Scottish past, the Scottish Episcopal Church maintained continuity with Scotland's past as the Church of Scotland, by the circumstances of its birth and early development could not"⁷⁹. It would be unreasonable to argue, therefore, that the presence of distinctively Scottish institutions and traditions is sufficient to substantiate the claim that there is a Scottish nation. Indeed, as Ferguson suggests, "whether there is a Scottish nation today depends largely on the definition of nation that is employed"⁸⁰.

If one uses objective criteria to define a nation, then one would find Scotland's claim deficient. The language of the majority of Scots is shared by the English and large numbers of other peoples besides.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 66.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁸⁰ Ferguson, op. cit., p. 414.

There is no racial grouping which could be said to correspond to the Scottish nation. There is no immense natural boundary that separates Scotland from England. Socially and, to a lesser degree, culturally too, it might be argued, there is nothing which fundamentally divides these two regions. Finally, as we have seen, despite the existence of a Scottish civil society, there is no Scottish State which is significant since at times it is the case that the State decrees the existence of a nation rather than vice versa. Therein lies an important point, however, because that would be particularly applicable to the United Kingdom if a British nationalism had been fashioned after the bringing together under the one rule of a number of different peoples. Whether this happened or not, and the role of Scottish civil society after the Union, are central themes in this chapter.

It can be argued that according to objective criteria there is not necessarily a British nation any more than a Scottish or Welsh one. As Webb suggests, "nationalism is not dependent upon statehood for its existence"⁸¹. Of course, Neil MacCormick is probably correct when he observes that to say "that a nation is a grouping or community of people not identical with a state is an essentially negative observation which fails in any event to distinguish nations from e.g churches, universities or, for that matter, private clubs"⁸². Thus, MacCormick argues that "the basic point to be made in a positive elucidation of nationhood is that nations are constituted by a form of popular consciousness, not by a mode of legal organization"⁸³. The point is expanded by D.D. Murison who describes nationalism as "the common consciousness of a group of

⁸¹ Webb, op. cit., p. 25.

⁸² Neil MacCormick, "Nation and Nationalism", in Colin Maclean (ed.), The Crown and the Thistle, Edinburgh, 1979, p. 100.

⁸³ Ibid.

people who have shared political experiences over a long period, have suffered common dangers and successes, have evolved a common way of life, which they feel to be distinct from others, created common traditions, devised institutions and a system of law and government to safeguard them, and who will rally against anything which seems to threaten them or to alter them in a manner not in accordance with the community's will"⁸⁴. Using that definition, one could say that Scots have reason to be both Scottish and British nationalists and that, of course, is precisely why Scottish political man is seen to walk on two legs. What is of special significance is the point made by Webb that assimilation to the English in areas such as commerce and trade "did not imply any lessening of the sense of a separate Scottish identity" and the disappearance of a separate Scottish State did not mean the disappearance of Scotland as a nation"⁸⁵. It did mean, however, that Scotland, thereafter, would be a rather strange sort of nation.

As Nairn observes, here was "a nationality which resigned statehood but preserved an extraordinary amount of the institutional and psychological baggage normally associated with independence - a decapitated national state, as it were, rather than an ordinary 'assimilated' nationality"⁸⁶. Alongside the Scottish civil society, there sat a whole set of gross caricatures of what it meant to be Scottish - lapses into what Nairn perfectly describes as "Balmorality".

However distorted it has been though, a sense of Scottish national identity was preserved as a result of the terms of the Union settlement and it has persisted to the present day. As Ferguson observes, "it

⁸⁴ D.D. Murison, "Nationalism as Expressed in Scottish Literature", in Wolfe, op. cit., p. 189.

⁸⁵ Webb, op. cit., p. 25.

⁸⁶ Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, p. 129.

is . . . surely a matter of some consequence that most Scots consider themselves as belonging to an ancient and historic nation, although the terms 'nation' and 'national' are loosely employed, sometimes to denote Scotland and sometimes the United Kingdom"⁸⁷. Such a situation could have had three consequences in the years following the Act of Union. First, the Scots could have built upon this sense of identity, kept intact thanks largely to the Union's terms, and created a political nationalism aimed at restoring the Scottish nation-state. Second, they could have become increasingly assimilated, thereby acquiring a British identity and giving support to the diffusionist model of cultural development condemned by Hechter in Internal Colonialism.⁸⁸ Third, an uneasy balance could have been maintained with the Scots walking on two legs and being told by their hearts that they are Scottish and by their heads that they are British.

It is clear that the third of these scenarios most closely corresponds to what actually happened. However, one should add that this situation did not come about as a result of a deliberate choice by Scots that it should. Using the "dual perspective" as expressed by Gramsci in his distinction between political and civil society, it is possible to explain how this uneasy balance was secured and maintained as a consequence of the dual nature of Scottish political activity since 1707. It has had, at all times, both a unionist and a nationalist dimension.

Gramsci was conscious of the nationalist element of hegemonic rule. In Scotland, one might say, political power has been based on a

⁸⁷ Ferguson, op. cit., p. 414. It has often been shown that the majority of Scots consider themselves to be Scottish first rather than British. For details of surveys on this attitude, see H.M. Drucker and Gordon Brown, The Politics of Nationalism and Devolution, London, 1980, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁸ Hechter, op. cit., pp. 22-30.

considerable amount of consensus resulting from the fact that those institutions most involved in the creation of consent are themselves Scottish. As Nairn suggests of the Church of Scotland, the institutions of Scottish civil society have a "national-popular" aspect. One might anticipate that this situation would be favourable to the elaboration of a counter-hegemonic political nationalism which would achieve cultural hegemony over the Scottish people, leaving only the coercive agencies of British political society to resist forces of opposition. It is important to note, however, that though the institutions of Scottish civil society themselves are a powerful influence on the retention of a Scottish national identity, their functionaries, Gramsci's traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie, have used their powers of moral leadership consistently to win consent to the British political system and to ensure that nationalism would fail to be expressed in a fully political manner, remaining merely an amorphous sentiment. The existence of a separate Scottish civil society keeps this sentiment alive but the activity within that sphere is directed towards the maintenance of the Union. Gramsci indicated that the "non-national popularity" of the Italian intelligentsia was a drawback in its efforts to maintain moral and cultural ascendancy over subordinate classes but he was conscious of the fact that despite its handicap it was capable of countering attempts to establish an alternative hegemony. This suggests that whilst national sentiment is a powerful force it is less influential than hegemonic rule originating in civil society. The irony of the Scottish case is that it has been to the advantage of the functionaries of civil society that their efforts to acquire consent to the Union have been made in recognisably Scottish institutions. Their hegemonic role is both unionist and, in a sense, nationalist. In this, they resemble those Scottish parliamentarians who surrendered their nation's political identity for patriotic reasons. It is this paradox

which explains how successfully political power has been maintained in Scotland despite frequent attempts to transform nationalist sentiment into a fully-fledged political movement. As Gramsci suggested, a successful opposition movement must be seen as the upholder of national interest. It has been difficult for any Scottish opposition movement to do this since Scotland's very existence as a nation depends to a great extent on the continued presence of a civil society which has been operated in favour of the Union but which has been regarded as truly national, an example of Scottish relative independence, for all that. The difficulties which were to beset all subsequent attempts to change Scottish politics were already present when the only military struggle against the Union was defeated. The failure of the Jacobites like the failures of many movements since was related directly to the dualistic character of political power within Scotland as well as to the force/consent dualism which existed in the wider British political system.

4 The Jacobite Challenge

The Act of Union came about in the face of fierce opposition from the majority of Scottish people and, to that extent, nationalist opposition to the Union is as old as the Union itself. Seldom, however, has it taken, or been allowed to take, an expressly political form. However, as Coupland claims, "scarcely had the great act of statesmanship been achieved when Scottish nationalism began to react against it; and before the eighteenth century was half-way through three attempts were made to break up the Union settlement by force of arms and either to subject all Britain to the rule of a Scottish king or to make Scotland again a separate sovereign state"⁸⁹.

⁸⁹ Coupland, op. cit., pp. 137-8.

The efforts of the Jacobites to restore the Stuarts to the throne can be regarded as examples of the first option open to Scots after the Union. In fact, Jacobitism presented the sole military threat to the Union of Scotland and England in its entire history. In its early stages, of course, it could hardly have been described as merely a variation of Scottish nationalist discontent with the Union for the aims of the movement went far beyond the repeal of that particular piece of legislation and its support base extended far beyond Scotland too. However, as Sir Charles Petrie points out, the character of Jacobitism was to change so that the rebellion of 1745 can be regarded as a predominantly Scottish affair unlike the earlier rebellion of 1715 for example.⁹⁰ Indeed, says Petrie, "England made no move in 1745, while thirty years before she was actually preparing to rise of her own accord"⁹¹. Why did Jacobitism persist longer in Scotland (and, for that matter, in Ireland) than in England? According to Petrie, "Jacobitism in Ireland and Scotland did not derive its strength primarily, or even principally, from a widespread affection for the exiled dynasty, but rather from the existence of certain grievances which weighed upon the nation or a section of it, and which were believed by those concerned to be a consequence of the Revolution"⁹². Thus, the Jacobites, according to Hume Brown, were "one class in Scotland who were delighted to see the people so discontented with the Union"⁹³.

The Union was unpopular. It came at a time when anti-English feelings were running high and there had been few occasions in the years

⁹⁰ Sir Charles Petrie, The Jacobite Movement, London, 1932, p. 130.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 131.

⁹² Ibid., p. 95. The reference is to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the "overthrow" of the House of Stuart.

⁹³ Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 291.

before that this had not been the case. "In these desperate straits", claims George Pratt Insh, "our Scottish forefathers, with traditional and indomitable pertinacity, sought inspiration by viewing the present discomfiture of the ancient monarchy they had sought to restore, against the background of the long centuries of our national history"⁹⁴. There is, he goes on, a "deep-rooted tendency of the Scottish mind to turn instinctively, when profoundly stirred, to the far-stretching background of our early history"⁹⁵. From that history and from a mythical and garbled account of it all Scotland's nationalist movements have drawn succour and, according to Pratt Insh, "in this consciousness of the significance of those remote centuries and of the great traditions handed down unbroken from them, we have one of the strongest and most influential of those varied and complex emotions that formed the persistent and effective background of the Scottish Jacobite Movement"⁹⁶.

The Stuarts were a Scottish dynasty. Their overthrow, it could be argued, was the work of foreign (ie English) interference - an idea which, as Petrie says, was much propagated at the time of the Darien disaster and the Act of Union.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the Union itself had failed to bring the economic advantages which the Scottish parliamentarians had anticipated would be the reward for their surrender of national sovereignty. "The Houses of Orange and Hanover", Petrie writes, "were disliked, not only as usurpers, but because they attempted to govern as Cromwell had done"⁹⁸. According to Petrie, "these various factors

⁹⁴ George Pratt Insh, The Scottish Jacobite Movement, Edinburgh, 1952, p. 7.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Petrie, op. cit., p. 290.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

contributed greatly to the hold which Jacobitism had in Scotland until long after the failure of the Forty-Five, and they were already in existence at the time of the (Stuart) Restoration"⁹⁹.

Webb is correct in his assessment that in the period of unrest, from 1707-1750, "the prime factors were not nationalistic but dynastic, religious and cultural"¹⁰⁰. However, it can be asserted that the persistence of Jacobitism in Scotland owed much to its role as a surrogate nationalist movement. That certainly explains the persistence of the Jacobite cause in the collective memory of the Scots, with the songs of the day still remembered and Bonnie Prince Charlie's face appearing on sweet tins and biscuit boxes throughout the country. "In Scotland", as Daiches claims, "Jacobitism survived as a species of Scottish nationalism with inevitable anti-Union and often anti-English implications"¹⁰¹.

Yet, it could be only a species of nationalism. It could not be transformed into a proper political nationalist movement. For many Scots (indeed, the vast majority), the idea of a Stuart Restoration was viewed with mistrust, fear and even loathing. As has been indicated earlier, the reason for this lies in the religious division in Scotland - a division which was also, in part, geographical. For obvious reasons, Jacobitism appealed more to Catholics and Episcopalians than to Presbyterians in Scotland and, thus, support for the cause was actually restricted to the north of the country.¹⁰² "South of the Tay", says Ferguson, "the Jacobite cause was unpopular; there the prince's famous charm made no impression on

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Webb, op. cit. p. 27.

¹⁰¹ Daiches, Scotland and the Union, p. 168.

¹⁰² See Pratt Insh, op. cit., p. 90.

the predominantly presbyterian countryside"¹⁰³. Seldom has the division between the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland been so apparent as during the Jacobite period. There can be no disputing the fact that lowland Scots fought ferociously alongside the English army against their fellow countrymen and one might claim that they did so to support the British State. But they were not coerced into this action. Indeed, it could be suggested that they were influenced by elements of Scottish civil society protected by the Union's terms and providing material evidence of the continued existence of the Scottish nation. The Church of Scotland, the Scottish legal system and the whole lowland Scottish way of life were put in peril by the threat of Jacobitism and Scots, imbued with a sense of what was best for their nation, fought against a movement which can be regarded as Scottish nationalist in certain senses. Some may have been forced to do so by the British State but most consented to this course of action because of the persuasive power deriving from post-union Scottish civil society. To them, therefore, there was nothing contradictory in their response to Jacobitism although we may regard it now as exhibiting schizophrenic features.

"By mid-century", according to William Ferguson, "the Union had become accepted in Scotland as one of the facts of life" and "the last stronghold of anti-Union feeling, the Jacobite movement, had been destroyed"¹⁰⁴. Perhaps Jacobitism had been found guilty of wishing to put the clock back, as Thomson suggests.

The Jacobite rebellion of 1745 must be regarded not only as a mere episode in Scottish history but also as an anachronism and an anomaly. Strangely unrelated to the life of an age over which it passed like a dream vividly but momentarily recollected in waking hours.

¹⁰³ Ferguson, op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

It was as if Scotland had walked in her sleep and done deeds wildly at variance with the actions of her consciousness.¹⁰⁵

This may be so. Much had changed since the Stuarts had last ruled Scotland. The Union had become increasingly acceptable especially when finally material benefits began to be seen to flow from it. Nonetheless, Jacobitism did not disappear completely from Scottish national consciousness.

The real paradox is that the Jacobite cause became enshrined in the mythology of the whole country and not just in that area from which support for it had come. Lowland Scots came to regard the most crushing of all the setbacks suffered by the Jacobites, the Battle of Culloden, as a personal defeat. At the less serious end of the scale there is the Prince's omnipresence in the Scottish tourist trade's campaigns. The kilt, or at least a perversion of it, became a national costume for all Scots to be proud of in the years that lay ahead despite the fact that its wearing had been outlawed with the agreement of those Scots who, for perfectly sound patriotic reasons, had sought to crush Jacobitism and the entire Highland way of life. As Mackie remarks, while Jacobitism failed as a political issue, "in Scottish sentiment it survived"¹⁰⁶. In similar vein, Coupland argues that although by 1745 Scotland had begun to settle down to the Union, the Pretender had won a place in the romance of Scottish nationalism.¹⁰⁷ Ironically, this added another element to Scottish civil society and to national self-identity and, more perversely still, helped to bring the Highlands and Lowlands rather closer together than one might have expected in view of what had happened during the period of

¹⁰⁵ Thomson, op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁰⁶ Mackie, op. cit., p. 277.

¹⁰⁷ Coupland, op. cit., p. 139.

the Jacobite rebellions. Nowhere was the Jacobite cause more vital, thereafter, than in literary attempts to create a nationalist feeling when other, more direct forms of nationalist expression were in abeyance.

5 The Literary Response

Duncan Glen writes that "it is debatable whether the Union of the Scottish and English parliaments in 1707 has been economically a blessing or a curse for Scotland but, surely, there can be no doubt that the day the Act of Union received the Queen's assent was a black day for the independent Scottish tradition in literature and for the cultural life of the nation . . ." ¹⁰⁸ Yet, this fact is not obvious if one considers Scottish literary activity in the eighteenth century when the Union appeared to be a negative incentive.

It has been suggested that three developments were possible as a result of the conditions created by the Act of Union. Scots could have sought to re-establish their nation-state. They could have allowed their country to become increasingly dominated, politically, culturally and economically, by England. In the absence of a real drive to do either of these things, they could satisfy themselves with the existence of their dual condition resulting from the balance between Scottish civil society and British political society. Of course, not all Scots were happy with this situation. The Jacobites had attempted to secure the first option. Their opponents, including representatives from the main institutions of civil society in Scotland, sought to defeat them and facilitate the second option. So the uneasy balance continued and it can be argued that it was also to dominate Scottish literary life, where similar contending forces sought more drastic solutions and created much cultural vitality in the

¹⁰⁸ Duncan Glen, Hugh Macdiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance, Edinburgh, 1964, p. 9.

process.

According to Daiches, there are two cultural ways in which a nation, in a situation like the one in which Scotland was placed after 1707, can seek to nurse its injured pride. "It can attempt to rediscover its own national traditions", he writes, "and by reviving and developing them find a satisfaction that will compensate for its political impotence"¹⁰⁹. On the other hand, by "accepting the dominance of the culture of the country which has achieved political ascendancy over it, it can endeavour to beat that country at its own game and achieve distinction by any standard the dominant culture may evolve"¹¹⁰. "Eighteenth-century Scotsmen", according to Daiches, "chose both ways"¹¹¹. Given what has been indicated already, one would be surprised had they done any other.

The dualism of the Scottish condition resulted in what Daiches calls "two different yet related reactions to the Union on the cultural side"¹¹², described by Hanham as the results of a clash between "two different patriotic points of view"¹¹³. "The first", says Daiches, "was what might be called a patriotic nostalgia, and the second was a determination that now that Scotland was North Britain its writers and thinkers should show the world that it could represent Britain proudly in the eyes of Europe and indeed beat the English at their own game by producing works of international importance written in a pure and elegant English style"¹¹⁴. That literary developments corresponded to the more general dualism in

¹⁰⁹ David Daiches, Robert Burns, London, 1952, p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹¹² Daiches, Scotland and the Union, p. 182.

¹¹³ Hanham, op. cit., p. 38.

¹¹⁴ Daiches, Scotland and the Union, p. 182.

Scotland's condition is immediately apparent. Hume's plea to be forgiven for his "scotticisms" represented more than a manifestation of personal inadequacy.

The first type of reaction described by Daiches was realised in the revival of vernacular Scots as a literary language - a revival which gave expression to Jacobite sentiment and to nationalist feeling without ever giving rise to a political nationalist movement. The second reaction - the desire to beat the English at their own game - was expressed in the Scottish Enlightenment which corresponded in political terms to the unionism of those patriots who believed that union with England was in Scotland's best interests.

Of the vernacular revival, L.M. Angus-Butterworth writes that "denied the means of political expression after the Act of Union of March, 1707, there was a powerful instinctive urge for national feeling to find an outlet in other ways"¹¹⁵. This outlet was provided initially by James Watson, an Edinburgh printer with Jacobite sympathies. The project which he set in motion was carried on by Allan Ramsay and the work of both men resulted in the increased availability to the Scottish public of old Scots literature. In addition, Ramsay attempted to write poetry in the vernacular and his somewhat uneven efforts signal the beginnings of a literary movement which was to receive its fullest and most talented expression in the writings of Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns, both of whom directly introduced nationalist ideas into their work as well as declaring their nationalist sympathies by their choice of the vernacular as their mode of expression.

¹¹⁵ L.M. Angus-Butterworth, Robert Burns and the 18th Century Revival in Scottish vernacular poetry, Aberdeen, 1967, p. 16.

There was always a danger that this vernacular revival might degenerate into a sentimental type of antiquarianism which would be an unhealthy influence on Scotland's future development. As Gregory Smith suggests, "a small country, made guardian of its own destinies, runs the risk, by sheer energy and success of its self-reliance, of finding an ever-growing satisfaction in the things that lie at hand and are familiar"¹¹⁶. It is conceivable, therefore, that, when a country is deprived of its right to be "guardian of its own destinies", it might become almost morbid in the extent of its fascination with these familiar, but increasingly antiquated, things and, as a result, fail to face up to the concerns of the present in a realistic way. This is the sphere of Harvie's "black intellectuals". Amongst the "red intellectuals" were the literati who forged the Scottish Enlightenment determined that Scotland should not become insular. They would have denied vigorously the charge that they were less patriotic than the protagonists of the vernacular revival but they were led by their realism away from Scotland's past and towards a position, akin politically to unionism.

Their realism was founded upon observations on Scotland's progress since the Union. There was increased material prosperity. The Union had come to stay. As A.J. Youngson claims, after Culloden, "Scotsmen awoke to find that the future of all of them, for as long as anyone could foresee, was in a united Britain and under the House of Hanover" and "they realized that they were living in a new intellectual age as well"¹¹⁷. On the basis of these realizations, "Scotsmen set out, deliberately as befits rational men, to reconstruct their country". Indeed, "the corporation of Edinburgh, and all the enlightened citizens of Edinburgh and many other

¹¹⁶ Gregory Smith, op. cit., p. 45.

¹¹⁷ In Douglas Young et al., Edinburgh in the Age of Reason, Edinburgh, 1967, p. 16.

men and women from all over Scotland began by rebuilding, or at least by building an extension of, their ancient capital"¹¹⁸.

It is true that a division still separated the North and South of the country. In fact, Anand Chitnis makes the point that "despite the ascription 'Scottish', the Enlightenment was not apparent all over Scotland; nor did it flower with equal vigour in those parts of the country where it appeared"¹¹⁹. "Its location", writes Chitnis, "was essentially that limited geographical area of the central, lowland belt bounded by Glasgow in the west and Edinburgh in the east but also taking in the city and universities of Aberdeen"¹²⁰. Politically too the country remained somewhat divided and there were those who still advocated the restoration of a separate Scottish kingdom. Yet, as Lord Cameron claims, "it was upon such a country with such continuing divisions but with such promise and presage of material improvement that the impact of the Enlightenment fell and sparked off such a chain reaction of brilliance as Scotland never knew before - or, indeed since"¹²¹.

Thus, says Daiches, "the aim of the literati - to assert their country's claim to greatness by operating in the van of European progress in order to show that Scotland, small and poor though she might be and chequered though her history might have been, could proudly represent Britain before the world - was realized not only in philosophy, history and literary criticism in the works of Hume himself, William Robertson, Hugh Blair, Lord Kames and others". Equally, it was expressed in such

118 Ibid.

119 Anand Chitnis, The Scottish Enlightenment, London, 1976, pp. 4-5.

120 Ibid., p. 5.

121 Young et al., op. cit., p. 49.

fields as sociology, political economy, architecture, portrait-painting, medicine, geology and even road-building.¹²²

Perhaps unconsciously the Enlightenment challenged the ethos of the vernacular revival. The scene was set for a showdown. However, if, as Daiches suggests, the attitude of the literati towards the Scots language was "symbolic of an uneasiness, a cultural ambiguity"¹²³, the persistence of this ambiguity to the present day suggests that neither cultural reaction to Scotland's condition scored an outright victory. Instead, what happened was that the vernacular revival was subsumed by the Enlightenment. It was taken over where useful for the purposes of the latter in a process similar to that by which Jacobitism was incorporated into the consciousness of all Scotland, including those areas where most had preferred the Union with England to the cause of the Jacobites.

In the cultural field, the key figure in this absorption process was Sir Walter Scott who set out to bridge the gulf between the two alternative responses to the union. As Daiches observes, "Scott, with his antiquarian passion, his interest in history and in the ways in which the past modulated into the present, and his simultaneous belief in progress and improvement, combined both reactions and out of the resulting tensions within his own mind and imagination was able to invent the historical novel"¹²⁴. However, he did much more besides. He legitimised the continuation of that uneasy balance between what amounted to literary nationalism and literary unionism. The struggle between the two continues into the present century - revived most energetically from the nationalist side by the endeavours of Hugh Macdiarmid. It is no nearer to solution,

¹²² Daiches, Scotland and the Union, p. 189.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 195.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

however, and perhaps it affords no solution in the present institutional framework of Scotland's political condition.

The major impetus to develop a literary nationalism comes from the existence of a national identity and heritage which are aspects of Scotland's separate civil society. Literary nationalism, like Jacobitism, however, faces much opposition which can also be traced back to that civil society which creates the prevailing hegemony. Scott was merely a figurehead in the movement to defuse literary nationalism and exorcise its political component. As Chitnis shows, "the roots of the Scottish Enlightenment lay deep in the nation's history, since the expression of the movement depended on the Church, the law, the lawyers and the universities"¹²⁵. Indeed, Chitnis argues that "among the central agencies of improvement were three institutions that had traditionally played conspicuous parts in Scottish life and history, the Kirk, and the legal and educational systems"¹²⁶. These are, of course, elements of Gramscian civil society. Once the leading functionaries of these realms had decided that English should be the language of the Scots and the vernacular relegated to the rank of an antiquarian curiosity, their political role was such that they were in a position to win the consent of the majority of Scots for this decision. To the present day, vernacular or even dialect Scots, is shunned in the churches, law courts, schools and universities of Scotland except when it is used to pursue a "couthy" point or to make the speaker seem closer to "the people". Even the latter, however, know full well that the correct way to speak is in the Queen's English.

¹²⁵ Chitnis, op. cit., p. 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

The English government had no need to ban the speaking of lowland Scots or even Gaelic. The intellectuals who operated the main institutions of the country's civil society ensured that the majority of Scottish people would accept the growing irrelevance of these languages in an improving society. In addition, it was not just on the question of language that Scottish civil society played this significant role. In politics, generally, this source of Scottish national identity functioned towards creating general acceptance in Scotland for the Union. There were those, however, who were willing to challenge the status quo as socialists rather than political nationalists and it is interesting to examine the attitudes which they held concerning Scotland's right to nationhood.

6 Nationalism and socialism

According to James Young, "from 1820 onwards the provincial elite in Edinburgh co-operated with the metropolitan elite in London in the common task of imposing their ideas and ideology of the Scottish community"¹²⁷. In adopting radical ideas, the Scottish working class met with the opposition of both elites as one would expect. More significant for our purposes, however, is the fact that radicals and socialists in Scotland failed to use successfully the nationalist card because of the attitudes instilled by the leaders of Scottish civil society, the permanent institutional reminder of Scottish nationhood, who were as opposed to attacks on the Union as to attacks on the prevailing economic system.

Attempts were made to fuse nationalism and radicalism (and later socialism) and such attempts continue to be made. The United Scotsmen, Thomas Muir's "Society of the Friends of the People" and the Chartist movement in Scotland all included a separatist element in their radical

¹²⁷ James D. Young, op. cit., p. 74.

ideologies although it may be, as Webb suggests, that "for the long term development of nationalism the separatist views and aims of the radical movements were probably less important than the fact that they saw themselves as acting in a Scottish context"¹²⁸. Indeed, it was not until the twentieth century that a thoroughgoing attempt was made to theoretically fuse the twin causes of radicalism (in this instance, Marxism) and nationalism in Scotland.

The attempt was largely the work of one man, John Maclean who, according to Ferguson, "for the unsophisticated masses of the socialist movement in Glasgow . . . became a legend, a symbol of integrity and incorruptibility"¹²⁹. However, in trying to develop a Marxist political nationalism in Scotland, Maclean was entering troubled waters.

Marx himself wrote that "the working men have no country"¹³⁰ but the remark cannot be taken at its face value in view of the fact that he, and subsequent Marxists, supported certain nationalist movements if they seemed to be progressive. As Kenneth Minogue suggests, "since nationalism has often competed with communism for popular support, it must be attacked; yet since on many occasions nationalist movements (especially in colonies) can serve communist purposes, the door of equivocation must be left open"¹³¹. Such is the ambivalence of the Marxist position on nationalism, attributable in no small measure to the problematic quality of the Marxian legacy and, in particular, the ambiguity of the materialist conception of history. Theoretical problems create tactical difficulties for socialists who attempt to come to terms with nationalism and Maclean's

¹²⁸ Webb, op. cit., p. 34.

¹²⁹ Ferguson, op. cit., p. 360.

¹³⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, Moscow, 1973, p. 71.

¹³¹ K.R. Minogue, Nationalism, London, 1967, p. 141.

difficulties were compounded by the fact that if Scotland's condition was colonial, it was a strange type of colonialism indeed.

According to Walter Kendall, "Maclean's strategical view formed a unified whole" and "Scotland dominated by the industrial heartland of the Clyde valley was nearer to socialism than England"¹³². Maclean also argued that "Scotland was by culture, history and tradition a separate nation"¹³³. The advance towards socialism would be facilitated by the re-establishment of an independent Scotland but the latter was morally justified in its own right. Thus, he demanded "the formation of a specifically Scottish Communist Party which would initiate the Scots Revolution and set off the powder train in the rest of Britain"¹³⁴. According to Kendall, "Maclean's insistence on the national character of the Scottish Revolution did in fact reflect a deep seated Scottish sentiment, a fact to which the resurgence of Scottish nationalism today bears witness"¹³⁵. It is worthy of mention that Gramsci was active in the workers' movement at the same time as Maclean and that he too emphasised the national dimension of the revolutionary struggle. His prison writings reveal the importance which he attached to studying the precise national context within which the revolution is to take place. He did not embrace nationalism per se as Maclean did. But, the circumstances in which he found himself did not oblige him to consider doing so. The dualism in Italian political life was that of force and consent originating in the complex fusion of political and civil society. In Scotland, however, dualism was expressed in that form and also in the fact that civil and political society were actually distinct and that

¹³² Walter Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-21, London, 1969, p. 286.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 290.

hegemonic rule had nationalist as well as unionist facets. Thus, nationalism was, of necessity, more fundamental to oppositional struggle in Scotland than it was in Italy where Gramsci thought in terms of completing the unification process rather than of separatism.

Maclean himself fought with ever-growing determination to create a separate Scottish Communist Party, which would correspond to the existence of a separate Scottish civil society. According to his daughter, in this project, he enjoyed "the backing of most of the Scottish communists"¹³⁶. Soon, however, most leading communists in the country began to favour the arguments of William Gallacher who, on his return from Russia in September, 1920, submitted that the Communist Party of Great Britain should be given the support of all revolutionaries in the United Kingdom. As Nan Milton admits, "the situation changed completely"¹³⁷. Maclean refused to accept the fact and, in 1923, he formed the Scottish Workers' Republican Party which "hardly survived his death in the same year"¹³⁸.

Scotland's revolutionary era was also drawing to a close. In part, the revolutionaries had been defeated by the political power of the State. That is to say, they had been repulsed by the agencies of political society which can be described as British. It can be argued too that the situation in which they had found themselves had not been truly revolutionary. There had not been the necessary correspondence between objective conditions and subjective factors defined by Gramsci as the "historic bloc". Either the working classes had been insufficiently conscious of their strength to carry out the tasks which befell them or,

¹³⁶ Nan Milton, John Maclean, London, 1973, p. 244.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 254.

¹³⁸ Allan Armstrong, "Nationalism or Socialism", Socialist Worker, London, nd, p. 4.

as the Italian revolutionaries were to decide after reflecting on their failed revolution, what had been lacking was proper revolutionary leadership provided by a vanguard party. An additional factor is indicated by the relative isolation of Glasgow during this "revolutionary" epoch. Indeed, Glasgow in 1920 invites interesting comparison with Turin in the same year - two cities whose working class had drawn strength during the war years from their newly-revealed importance to the nation. Their contribution to the heavy engineering sectors of their respective economies was vital to the war effort despite the initial lack of enthusiasm shown by many of their members for the war itself. It was their new-found strength which caused the proletariat of Glasgow and Turin to adopt more advanced revolutionary views than were held by working class people elsewhere in Scotland and Italy. In some measure, the defeats of the workers' movement in the two countries can be attributed to the same causes.

The failure of Maclean's fusion of nationalism and socialism, however, can be explained only in specifically Scottish terms. Those private agencies of Scottish civil society, which had helped to defeat Jacobitism and ensure that literary nationalism would have no political counterpart, put obstacles in the path of the attempted combination of political radicalism and nationalism. Conventional trade unions, the Labour Party and the Communist Party, all of which may be assigned to Gramsci's civil society, had their own Scottish identity when operating in Scotland but remained tied, for the most part, to the idea of the Union and the struggle on behalf of the interests of the British working class. Other institutions of Scottish civil society ensured that insufficient numbers of Scots would rally round the radical banner. These newer agencies, belonging partially to British political society as well as to Scottish civil society, persuaded most radical Scots, who had not been persuaded to accept the prevailing system, to regard their

cause as British rather than Scottish nationalist. Political nationalism failed once more to make a successful entry into political life in Scotland. The very institutions whose existence signifies Scottish separateness had again operated so as to protect the Union rather than to undermine it. The remaining question concerns the apparent failure of these institutions of Scottish civil society to prevent the emergence in the 1960s and 1970s of a flourishing political nationalist movement.

7 The Growth of the Scottish National Party

It has been claimed that as the State began to take a leading role in British society after 1945, "the continuity of a Scottish society detached from party politics was no longer possible"¹³⁹. According to Harvie, "the critical factor has not been capitalism, but government"¹⁴⁰. "The problem was that it was attempting to fill a role which had, before the Second World War, not been performed by government at all, but by the most powerful of the traditional Scottish institutions, the business community"¹⁴¹. Elsewhere it is noted that "Scottish nationalism in the past has been muted partly because of the caution and reserve of the Scottish civil establishment which expressed it and partly because there was no political channel for the expression of overt nationalist demands such as self-government"¹⁴². One reason for the reserve and caution within the agencies of Scottish civil society is the fact that its functionaries exercised considerable power in Scotland and also enjoyed the

¹³⁹ Harvie, op. cit., p. 164.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁴² D.N. MacIver, "Civil Society and the Union: interpretations of Scottish Nationalism", (Paper presented at the Political Studies Association Workgroup on U.K. Politics held at U.W.I.S.T., Cardiff, in September, 1980). This is an interesting paper in which the term "civil society" is used in the Gramscian way although Gramsci is not himself referred to.

benefits bestowed by membership of the larger and economically successful British political system. The expanded role of the State in post-war Britain posed a threat to the control exercised for so long in Scotland by Scottish civil society as well as to the actual identity of Scotland.¹⁴³ The existence of a separate Scottish civil society had kept that identity alive. If its institutions became less important, there was a likelihood that Scottish national identity would begin to diminish. A realisation of this fact was secondary to the growing awareness on the part of the agents of Scottish civil society that they might lose their position as moral and cultural leaders of Scotland. Both factors, however, combined with economic dissatisfaction to make the functionaries of Scottish civil society less willing than in the past to perform the job of winning the consent of the Scottish people for the Union. Previously they had helped to prevent the emergence of political nationalism because despite the fact that the sphere in which they worked kept Scotland's identity alive they themselves felt no threat from the Union to their influence at home and they had reaped the rewards of membership of a great imperial power. A changed attitude on the part of the traditional intellectuals and bourgeois organic intellectuals, the functionaries of Gramsci's civil society, would have important repercussions for Scottish political nationalism. For the first time, indeed, in the 1960s and 1970s, the nationalist cause in Scotland received support from large numbers of those people whose operations exert great influence on the opinions of most Scots. Teachers, lawyers, journalists, artists and officials of the trade union movement, the main political parties in Scotland and the Church of Scotland began to lend their weight to the growing demand for a measure of devolved government for Scotland if not full independence.

¹⁴³ See Harvie, op. cit., p. 193.

Thus, it can be argued that the upsurge of political nationalism in Scotland must be explained with reference to "the historical character of the British state itself"¹⁴⁴. Its priority had prevented it from becoming truly modern and its requirements for its perpetuation hindered attempts to reform it. In the 1970s, Nairn, like many others, believed that the best hope that it could be reformed sprang from the re-awakening of nationalist feeling in the component parts of the United Kingdom. According to him, "a Scottish middle class, by nature somewhat less attached to the great English pieties, has begun to see the system as more and more a frustrating burden"¹⁴⁵. "England", he wrote, "will not be able to suppress or assimilate the Scottish revolt: although small and remote in world terms, Scotland is also a relatively developed, bourgeois society with many inner strengths and a long history of separate traditions and culture"¹⁴⁶.

It is significant that a socialist like Nairn should emphasise the importance of the middle class in this process. The findings of this chapter suggest that for political nationalism to be a viable form of political expression in Scotland it would have to be taken up by those functionaries of Scottish civil society, not all middle class of course, who at least until the 1960s had held a pro-Union hegemonic control over the majority of Scots. Was that necessary transformation coming about? Was it conceivable that Scottish civil society, unhappy with its peculiar marriage to British political society, might exercise its persuasive powers as the instigator of a move towards the re-establishment of a Scottish political society which would correspond to itself in a proper relationship forming the substance of a Scottish State, in the expanded

¹⁴⁴ Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 190-1.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 191.

Gramscian sense?

Writing in the early 1980s, one is forced to conclude that the answer is that no such change took place in the previous decades. Scottish devolution did not come into being, far less complete independence, despite the substantial electoral support received by the Scottish National Party. Yet, it is true that more middle-class Scots, functionaries of civil society included, did favour a degree of devolved power if not full-scale independence. The Church of Scotland has voted consistently for a number of years now for something along those lines. Lawyers have been prominent in the nationalist movement as have teachers and lecturers. The Labour Party in Scotland and large sectors of the trade union movement supported devolution proposals. Even the media swung away from a solidly pro-Union stance and became increasingly sympathetic to the devolutionary ideal. Thus, many functionaries of Scottish civil society, and many other Scots besides, gave the appearance in the 1960s and 1970s of supporting political nationalism. Yet, nothing substantial was achieved.

That this was the case is attributable to the fact that what these Scots were favouring was not true political nationalism. Writing of Scots in the two preceding centuries, N.T. Phillipson argues that "the basic ideological problem which confronted Scotsmen was to define and secure some sort of national identity for Scotland, while at the same time accepting the fact that the Union would grow closer and threaten the very identity they sought to preserve"¹⁴⁷. They had no real wish to break the union and, therefore, they required "a passive ideology; one that would combine a stoical acceptance of the passing of an old Scottish way of life with a legitimate means of protesting against it without in

¹⁴⁷ Phillipson, "Nationalism and Ideology", op. cit., p. 185.

any way harming the essential economic and political structure of the Union"¹⁴⁸. By virtue of the unusual status of Scottish civil society, they were given an ideal opportunity to develop just this kind of ideology. The apparently mutually exclusive alternatives may have been nationalism and unionism but as they did with the Jacobite experience, the literary response and even radicalism, many Scots were able to do as Walter Scott had done and bridge the gap, combining a zeal for their native land with a realistic acceptance of the Union, even when, as in the case of the radicals, the ultimate aim was to change the entire system over which the British State presided. As Phillipson puts it, "by validating the making of a fuss about nothing, Scott gave to middle class Scotsmen and to Scottish nationalism an ideology - an ideology of noisy inaction"¹⁴⁹.

It is perhaps premature to dismiss the Scottish nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s as the mere continuation of this ambiguous ideological stance. As has been noted, middle-class functionaries of Scottish civil society did show a greater enthusiasm for devolution than at other times in Scotland's history and this can be attributed in no small way to what Harvie sees as the diminution of the influence of non-state apparatuses in the face of the advances of an increasingly interventionist British state. Maybe the challenge of the S.N.P. symbolised rather more than noisy inaction.

However, what can be stated with some certainty is that the nationalists who belonged to agencies in Scottish civil society failed to break the hegemonic hold which their own institutions had developed over a long period - a hold which had won the consent of most Scots, and

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 185-6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 186.

certainly the vast majority of those who ran civil society, to the Union. The fact that some of those civil society functionaries and many others in addition made a more serious attempt than ever before to challenge that hegemonic hold may indicate that political nationalism has a future in Scotland. However, if we learn anything from Gramsci's thoughts on the role of civil society and the power of cultural hegemony, we would be forced to admit that it will take a war of position - a long cultural struggle which would require more than romantic caricatures of Scottish history - for it to succeed.

In the meantime, still using Gramscian concepts and terminology, it can be argued that in many colonial situations the element of force tends to be more apparent than the consensual element. The civil society of the colonised country is destroyed and a period of statolatry sets in whilst efforts, often unsuccessful, are made by the colonisers to create consensus built around a new civil society. Scotland, however, is a "colonised" country which has been allowed to retain its own civil society. Colonisation was limited. The continued existence of this society has helped to stimulate a sort of nationalism by keeping alive a sense of Scotland's separateness. The British ruling class, however, has not deemed it necessary to destroy Scottish civil society in order to maintain the Union for the very reason that the main agencies of civil society in Scotland - the Kirk, the legal system and education - have been operated on behalf of the prevailing political system. No period of British statolatry has been required and seldom has British State force been needed to defeat nationalist aspirations in Scotland. Seldom, indeed, until recent years when the functionaries of Scottish civil society began to re-examine their traditional function, have these aspirations evolved into a political movement capable of creating substantial anti-unionist feeling in Scotland.

The dualism between public and private life in Scotland has not had to be resolved with the use of force. This would have happened only if the agents of civil society had refused to use their hegemonic powers to win consent for the Union. Their compliance with the British political system meant that the dualism of Scotland was partially resolved without any takeover of private Scottish life by the British public realm. The solution was partial, however, because in institutional terms, at least, a distinction has persisted between civil society and political society in Scotland. Increased State intervention since the end of the Second World War manifests itself in Scotland as an attempt to dissolve this distinction once and for all by reducing the importance of Scottish civil society and hence the basis upon which the distinctiveness of Scottish private life is based. The result has been to make the functionaries of Scottish civil society less willing to use their power to protect the Union. That is to say, there are signs that the dualism, blurred for so long, is being exaggerated rather than diminished. There can be only two ways whereby the situation may be resolved. First, a recognition of how fundamental the dualism of Scottish political life is could lead to the creation of what would approximate to a Scottish political society (independent State, devolved power, federal status). The demands of political nationalists would be met and Scotland's dualistic political condition would be resolved within a Scottish context. Second, the more frightening scenario is of an attempt by the British political society (the State in its limited form) to maintain the Union by coercion in answer to what might become increasingly militant gestures on the part of the political nationalists in Scotland. A period of British "statolatry" would ensue while efforts were made to destroy or alter fundamentally the institutions of Scottish civil society. All that is certain is that the dualistic character of Scottish political life cannot be overcome simply by the removal of economic contradictions which politically idealist

Marxists would consider to be at the root of all contradictions in human society. This is the main conclusion to which a Gramscian interpretation of the dualism of Scottish politics leads. Many might think it strange that an analysis based on the theory of the State developed by a Marxist thinker should arrive at a conclusion which runs counter to the vision of historical progress held by all Marxists in some form or another. In this, they would reveal a misunderstanding of Gramsci's contribution to political theory. He succeeded in negotiating the tensions in Marxist thought between reformism and revolutionism and determinism and voluntarism. But, the tension between political idealism and political realism which is also an aspect of the Marxist foundations is reflected in the uneven quality and the contradictions of Gramsci's thought. In a politically idealist mood, he espouses utopian hopes for the future and puts his trust in a Leninist party to get the proletariat there. As a political realist, however, he analyses the nature of political power in advanced societies and shows how many obstacles stand in the path of the creation of a regulated society free from coercion. His awareness of these problems is expressed in the concepts of hegemony, passive revolution, Caesarism and, of course, the theory of an expanded State based on the fusion of force and consent and, in institutional terms, the distinction between political and civil society. That distinction is particularly helpful to an analysis of Scottish politics which operate in conditions where political and civil society are formally separated. The application of Gramsci's realistic conception results in the conclusion that there are divisions in certain societies which are more fundamental than that which exists between political man and economic man. In Scotland, the division between Scottish private man and British public man has existed for almost three hundred years and the application of Gramsci's "dual perspective" suggests that it will continue to be of vital importance to Scottish political activity for many years to come. There can be no

doubting the analytical utility of Gramsci's theory of the State in this context. All that remains to be considered is what this theory signifies as regards the general orientation of Gramsci's political thought.

CONCLUSION

According to Gramsci, in a study of a particular thinker's conception of the world, the "search for the Leitmotiv, for the rhythm of the thought as it develops, should be more important than that for single causal affirmations and isolated aphorisms"¹. My aim in this thesis has been to discover the Leitmotiv or essential character of Gramsci's own political thought. To do this I have concentrated on the development and theoretical significance of his thoughts on the nature of political power. It is usual to assess Gramsci's work primarily as that of a Marxist thinker and there is no denying that the manner of his life and of his death testify to his commitment to revolutionary socialism. Nevertheless, the preceding examination of the origins and evolution of his theory of the State and the consideration given to the analytical applicability of his distinction between political and civil society to the study of Scottish politics reveal in Gramsci's work a much greater degree of political realism than is evident in most Marxist political thought. Even were this not so, to state that the guiding principle of Gramsci's political theory is Marxist would require some qualification in view of the notorious difficulty in establishing what is the orthodox Marxist approach to the study of politics.

It is true that, on occasions, Gramsci, obliged to reflect on the failures of the Italian workers' movement, made comments which were consistent with what had become known as Marxist orthodoxy. He asks, for example, "can there be cultural reform, and can the position of the depressed strata of society be improved culturally, without a previous economic reform and a change in their position in the social and economic fields?" and answers that "intellectual and moral reform has to

¹ Gramsci, PN, pp. 383-4.

be linked with a programme of economic reform - indeed the programme of economic reform is precisely the concrete form in which every intellectual and moral reform presents itself"². According to Gramsci, "the idea that complete and perfect political equality cannot exist without economic equality . . . remains correct"³. Thus, he makes the undeniably Marxist connection between politics and economics with political power understood to be the reflection of the economic dominance of a particular social class. The communist society cannot be established so long as economic inequality prevails. "As long as the class-State exists the regulated society cannot exist."⁴ In proper Marxist fashion, Gramsci's hopes for the future rest with the universal, proletarian class because "in reality, only the social group that poses the end of the State and its own end as the target to be achieved can create an ethical State - i.e. one which tends to put an end to the internal divisions of the ruled, etc., and to create a technically and morally unitary social organism"⁵. Gramsci's optimism is in keeping with the general tone of Second International Marxist orthodoxy. Yet, doubts are expressed as to the orthodoxy of his Marxism and from time to time his very right to be called a Marxist has been questioned. To understand why this should be it is necessary to appreciate, firstly, the extent to which Marxism itself defies uniform definition and, secondly, the degree to which Gramsci was influenced, in any case, by non-Marxist ideas.

Although in the so-called orthodox Marxism of the Second International great emphasis was put on the relationship between politics and economics, Gramsci comments that "one may speak separately of

² Ibid., p. 133.

³ Ibid., p. 258.

⁴ Ibid., p. 257.

⁵ Ibid., p. 259.

economics and politics"⁶. At no time did he share with the orthodoxy the belief that there is a rigid connection between the two and, for that reason, he was unhappy with claims that Marxism could predict the political future. He argues that "to believe that one particular conception of the world, and of life generally, in itself possesses a superior predictive capacity is a crudely fatuous and superficial error"⁷. "Indeed", says Gramsci, "in politics the assumption of the law of statistics as an essential law operating of necessity is not only a scientific error, but becomes a practical error in action"⁸. There is no doubt that Gramsci was opposed to the crude materialism of some writers and activists who claimed to be Marxists. Attention should be paid, however, to his assertion that "the claim, presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works"⁹. The implication is that those who have made this idea an essential postulate of historical materialism are guilty of distorting Marx's original expression of the materialist conception of history. Gramsci's argument is not with Marx but with those who have interpreted the Marxian foundations in such ways as to obliterate the true essence or Leitmotiv of Marx's teachings.

First, Gramsci challenges "the so-called orthodox tendency, represented by Plekhanov . . . who, in reality, despite his assertions

⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

⁷ Ibid., p. 171.

⁸ Ibid., p. 429.

⁹ Ibid., p. 407.

to the contrary, relapses into vulgar materialism"¹⁰. What is more, "the orthodox tendency has determined the growth of its opposite: the tendency to connect the philosophy of praxis to Kantianism and to other non-positivist and non-materialist philosophical tendencies"¹¹. Thus, "the philosophy of praxis has undergone in reality a double revision, that is to say it has been subsumed into a double philosophical combination".

On the one hand, certain of its elements, explicitly or implicitly, have been absorbed and incorporated by a number of idealist currents (one need mention only Croce, Gentile, Sorel, Bergson even, pragmatism). On the other hand, the so-called orthodoxy, concerned to find a philosophy which, according to their extremely limited viewpoint, was more comprehensive than just a "simple" interpretation of history, have believed themselves orthodox in identifying this philosophy fundamentally with traditional materialism.¹²

Gramsci's understanding of Marx's teaching is at variance with each of these interpretations. He praises his predecessor Labriola precisely because the latter "distinguishes himself from both currents by his affirmation (not always, admittedly, unequivocal) that the philosophy of praxis is an independent and original philosophy which contains in itself the elements of a further development, so as to become, from an interpretation of history, a general philosophy"¹³. Far from preferring the idealist reading of Marxism to the orthodox position or vice versa, Gramsci argues that the philosophy of praxis "goes beyond both traditional idealism and traditional materialism, philosophies which are expressions of past societies, while retaining their vital elements"¹⁴.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 387.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 389.

¹³ Ibid., p. 390.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 435.

This fact is not always recognised and, as Gramsci observes, "it often happens that people combat historical economism in the belief that they are attacking historical materialism"¹⁵. In Gramsci's opinion, however, Marx's writings reveal a strong revulsion to crude materialism and vulgar economism. Amongst "the real precautions introduced by Marx into his concrete researches"¹⁶, for example, is the contention that "politics in fact is at any given time the reflection of the tendencies of development in the structure, but it is not necessarily the case that these tendencies must be realised"¹⁷. There is no fatalism, no scientific prediction and no vulgar materialism in Marx's conception of history. Neither is there a tendency towards idealism for he transcends speculative idealism together with uncritical materialism. Why, then, asks Gramsci, "has the philosophy of praxis had this fate of having served to form combinations between its principal elements and either idealism or philosophical materialism?"¹⁸

The deliberations contained in the opening chapters of this thesis suggest that the answer to Gramsci's question lies in the ambiguity of Marx's own political legacy. Gramsci correctly interprets the Marxian conception of history as the product of a dual critique of earlier forms of materialism and of philosophical idealism. The subtlety of this vision is not easily incorporated into a practical political strategy and, for that reason, those followers of Marx who sought to translate his legacy into political action found the temptation to emphasise one or other element of his historical materialism rather than both hard to resist. The materialist element was favoured by those who developed

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 407.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 408.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 390.

what was to become known as Marxist orthodoxy. As Gramsci shows, this provoked the emergence of an opposing tendency which aimed at recovering the idealist dimension of Marx's thought to the neglect of his critical materialism. Despite his disagreement with Marxist orthodoxy, Gramsci may be described as a good Marxist inasmuch as he understands the complexity of Marx's conception of history. He does not seek to overcome the tension between materialism and idealism which is present in Marx's thought but, rather, regards that tension as essential to Marxism which must be kept apart from uncritical materialism and philosophical idealism. This tension in Marxism must be maintained and stressed if one is to underline the contribution made by Marx to the history of political ideas. This is why Gramsci regards the overemphasis of one element in Marx's conception as a distortion of the Marxian vision. I have tried to show that Gramsci's view is indeed consistent with that of Marx. At the same time, however, one recognises the possibility that the tension inherent in Gramsci's thought and in the Marxian foundations can be maintained only on the theoretical level and the virtual inevitability that the dialectical relationship between materialism and idealism which characterises Marxian philosophy becomes obscured during the search for a Marxist political strategy which cannot take place only on the level of theory. Furthermore, other tensions in Marxist thought, far from being essential to it, are the unwanted results of the ambiguity and uncertainty of Marx's specific comments on the subject of political practice. In certain respects, these are extensions of the tension between materialism and idealism but they play too an independent part in the creation of divisions in Marxist strategy after Marx's death.

The tension between reformism and revolutionism is overcome by Gramsci in an interesting and subtle way. He argues that, in advanced societies, socialism cannot result simply from a sudden, direct assault

on the State but must develop out of a long war of position fought on the cultural as well as the political and economic fronts. It has been argued here that this should not be taken to imply Gramsci's advocacy of reformist strategy. The war of position is itself a revolutionary war and, furthermore, the possibility of an eventual war of movement, a frontal attack, is not ruled out by Gramsci. Again in keeping with Marx's attempts to maintain a balance between apparent opposites, Gramsci endeavours to forge a synthesis between reformism and revolutionism. It should be noted, however, that whereas the tension between materialism and idealism may be reconciled satisfactorily in theory though not in practice, the tension between reformism and revolutionism has only practical significance so that Gramsci's theoretical reconciliation, fascinating as it is, may be judged solely in terms of its relevance to Marxist political strategy.

In practice, the problem is to translate the subtle balance of Gramsci's conception into the concrete form of a political organisation suited to the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat. Gramsci envisages a movement which is reformist and revolutionary. But, it is far simpler to create a party whose objectives are either reformist or revolutionary and this was reflected in the development of Marxist political theory and practice. Gramsci's theoretical reconciliation of reformism and revolutionism is arguably irreconcilable in practice. Indeed, his recognition of this fact is testified to by his acceptance of the Leninist conception of the revolutionary party albeit with certain misgivings emanating from his desire to implement a more balanced approach.

Though Lenin was a determinist, he did not subscribe to the view held by the S.P.D. orthodoxy and, in some respects, by Rosa Luxemburg, that determinism necessitated waiting for things to happen. His emphasis on the importance of the revolutionary will particularly appealed to

Gramsci. It was the voluntaristic rather than the deterministic side of Leninism which was greeted with enthusiasm by Gramsci in 1917 and which remained a vital element in the subsequent development of his revolutionary theory. Instead of contenting himself with a synthesis of this particular tension in Marxism, Gramsci tended to stress the role of human intervention in the making of history and he argued that the Bolsheviks had acted in defiance of the central tenets of what had come to be accepted as orthodox Marxism.¹⁹ His problem was to establish how such human intervention comes about. That this is a problem for all Marxists apart from the most deterministic is yet another result of Marx's ambiguous legacy.

The devout determinist would argue that people act when material conditions necessitate that they do so. A variation on this argument was advanced by Luxemburg who suggested that, although the proletariat would acquire revolutionary consciousness spontaneously and would act thereafter in accordance with their new-found understanding, they must be involved for the time being in revolutionary activities. Luxemburg emphasised nevertheless the relationship between material forces and human consciousness. Lenin, on the other hand, denied that there is a direct relationship between the two. He doubted that the proletariat can acquire a fully revolutionary consciousness spontaneously in response to changed material circumstances. Transformations in the structure of society may facilitate the revolutionary movement but the necessary intervention of the universal class must be precipitated by an injection of consciousness from outside. Lenin conceived of the party, therefore, as a band of vanguard revolutionaries who prompt the workers to realise their true consciousness and to act in a truly revolutionary manner. After the failures of the workers' movement in western Europe, many revolutionary

¹⁹ See Gramsci, PW 1910-20, pp. 34-37.

socialists in the West, Gramsci included, felt obliged to accept Lenin's analysis and to adopt the tactic which had resulted in the successful Bolshevik revolution and seemed a reasonable solution to the dilemma of the non-revolutionary proletariat.

Gramsci's misgivings were twofold. First, he was wary of the inherently anti-democratic tone of Leninism and attempted to outline a conception of the party based on the organic unity of its component parts. He saw no value in "'vanguards' without armies to back them up"²⁰. He does argue, however, that generals are more indispensable than armies and, in so doing, shows how far he had felt obliged to accept the Leninist formula. In an effort to escape what might appear to be a logical stranglehold, Gramsci argues that the important leaders of the workers' movement of the future will be organic intellectuals of the proletariat so that the distance between leaders and led need not be as great as one might imagine. But, he recognises that "creating a group of independent intellectuals is not an easy thing; it requires a long process, with actions and reactions, coming together and drifting apart and the growth of very numerous and complex new formations"²¹. In this suggestion may be found a hint of the political realism which comes to play such an important part in Gramsci's thought and his second reservation concerning Leninism also points in the direction of realism.

Before his imprisonment, Gramsci already recognised that Leninism could not simply be transplanted into western Europe and be expected to flourish as it had done in Tsarist Russia.²² Political power was maintained in the West in a different way than in pre-revolutionary Russia

²⁰ Gramsci, PN, p. 204.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 395-6.

²² See Gramsci, PW 1921-6, pp. 196-203.

and this fact alone necessitated a different revolutionary strategy. It was for this reason that Gramsci insisted on the need for a war of position. He also thought it necessary to study in detail the nature of political power in the West and it is in his deliberations on this subject that his political realism becomes increasingly apparent.

A tension between political realism and political idealism is of course another feature of Marxist thought. In the work of most major Marxists, including Marx, the tension is resolved in favour of political idealism. Confidence is expressed, in varying degrees, about the coming of socialism and it is generally assumed that if and when socialism comes about it will bring an end to all contradictions in human society. What must be remembered is that the major contradiction to which most Marxists refer is between the economic and the political. My examination of Gramsci's thought and of its application to the analysis of the Scottish political condition suggests that he has in mind a different contradiction - between public and private - which may not be reconciled simply by a revolution in the economic base of society. Furthermore, his fears that the revolution will not be carried out with ease in the West reveal that he did not share in the buoyant optimism of some Second International socialists.

Nonetheless, Gramsci was inspired by the maxim, "the pessimism of the intellect, the optimism of the will"²³. This might have strengthened his faith in the advent of socialism and his hopes that by abolishing economic inequality and the class-State it would result in political equality, the regulated society and the dissolution of all contradiction

²³ Gramsci, PN, p. 175. According to Hoare and Nowell Smith, "Romain Rolland's maxim 'Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will' was made by Gramsci into something of a programmatic slogan as early as 1919, in the pages of Ordine Nuovo".

in human society. In addition to Marxism, however, Gramsci had inherited elements of the Italian tradition of political thought which supported his realistic conclusions rather than his political idealism. These non-Marxist influences deeply affected the tone of Gramsci's political thought and they must be taken into account if one is to fully understand why Gramsci may be regarded as a political realist despite the fact that as a Marxist he might have been expected to settle the idealism/realism tension in favour of political idealism.

Above all, one must appreciate the influence on Gramsci's thinking of Machiavelli. Gramsci acknowledges that there is a danger in "considering Machiavelli too much as the man of politics in general, as the 'scientist of politics', relevant in every period"²⁴. Instead, "Machiavelli should be considered more as a necessary expression of his time, and as closely tied to the conditions and exigencies of his time" for he is "a man wholly of his period; his political science represents the philosophy of the time, which tended to the organisation of absolute national monarchies - the political form which permitted and facilitated a further development of bourgeois productive forces"²⁵. On the other hand, Gramsci also makes great claims for the significance of Machiavelli in the history of political ideas.

"Before Machiavelli", according to Gramsci, "political science had taken the form either of the Utopia or of the scholarly treatise"²⁶. Machiavelli successfully combined the two forms. "The basic thing about The Prince is that it is not a systematic treatment, but a 'live' work, in which political ideology and political science are fused in the

²⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 125.

dramatic form of a 'myth'"²⁷. Gramsci rightly submits that "Machiavelli's ideas were not, in his own day, purely 'bookish', the monopoly of isolated thinkers, a secret memorandum circulating among the initiated"²⁸. They included a realistic awareness of the nature of political power which is one aspect of Machiavelli's "dual perspective". As Gramsci observes, "Machiavelli is 'pessimistic' (or better realistic) when he regards men, and the motives of their actions"²⁹. In addition to a realistic general theory of politics, however, Machiavelli's thought contains a programme or guide to action. As Gramsci puts it, "Machiavelli is not merely a scientist"³⁰. "Machiavelli's style is not that of a systematic compiler of treatises, such as abounded during the Middle Ages and Humanism, quite the contrary; it is the style of a man of action, of a man urging action, the style of a party manifesto"³¹.

Machiavelli does not content himself with expounding a realistic analysis of the nature of political power in his own day. According to Gramsci, "he is a partisan, a man of powerful passions, an active politician, who wishes to create a new balance of forces and therefore cannot help concerning himself with what 'ought to be'"³². Although Gramsci did not deny that utopia can have "a philosophical value"³³, his claim that Machiavelli was concerned with what "ought to be" does not imply that he saw Machiavelli as a utopian thinker detached from reality. Gramsci asserts the necessity of seeing "whether what 'ought to be' is

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 134.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 173.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

³¹ Ibid., p. 134.

³² Ibid., p. 172.

³³ Ibid., p. 405.

arbitrary or necessary; whether it is concrete will on the one hand or idle fancy, yearning, daydream on the other"³⁴. "The active politician is a creator, an initiator; but he neither creates from nothing nor does he move in the turbid void of his own desires and dreams. He bases himself on effective reality"³⁵. It is Gramsci's belief that "if one applies one's will to the creation of a new equilibrium among the forces which really exist and are operative - basing oneself on the particular force which one believes to be progressive and strengthening it to help it to victory - one still moves on the terrain of effective reality, but does so in order to dominate and transcend it (or to contribute to this)"³⁶. According to Gramsci, "what 'ought to be' is therefore concrete; indeed it is the only realistic and historicist interpretation of reality, it alone is history in the making and philosophy in the making, it alone is politics"³⁷.

Machiavelli's hopes for the future were not those of a utopian dreamer. Gramsci recognised that they sprang from his concrete analysis of the present. Unlike Guicciardini, Machiavelli refused to allow his realistic analysis to make him a sceptic. He was inspired by his optimism of the will and, like Gramsci, he stressed the historic role of the human will and its freedom to manoeuvre.³⁸ It is the active, revolutionary dimension of Machiavelli's thought which found favour with Gramsci the Marxist. One must not forget, however, that Gramsci was aware that Machiavelli had fused political idealism with realistic analysis. It is political realism that is the key ingredient of his

³⁴ Ibid., p. 172.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See ibid., p. 175.

"dual perspective" and becomes a major feature of subsequent Italian political thinking to which Gramsci fell heir.

The political idealism of Machiavelli combined with that of Marxism to inspire Gramsci in the belief that the regulated society, what "ought to be", could be brought about. Gramsci postulated the end of politics inasmuch as this new order would be devoid of coercion which until then was a basic element in political life. Yet, Machiavelli did not envisage a future free from politics. His vision of the immediate future, like that of other major thinkers in the Italian tradition, was that of the impermanence of political stability which is maintained only as long as the ruler makes proper use of both force and persuasion, of arms, deceit and good legislation. As Gramsci notes, "what Machiavelli does do is to bring everything back to politics - ie to the art of governing men, of securing their permanent consent, and hence of founding 'great states'"³⁹. Machiavelli's concern with what "ought to be" does not permit him to imagine a world without politics. Thus, his teachings are directed not at those who will bring about the end of politics but at those who, although at present ruled by others, may become rulers themselves in time.

Gramsci writes that "anyone born into the traditional governing stratum acquires almost automatically the characteristics of the political realist, as a result of the entire educational complex which he absorbs from his family milieu, in which dynastic or patrimonial interests predominate"⁴⁰. Machiavelli strives to tell the people who are not "in the know" how political power is acquired and retained. "It seems clear", says Gramsci, "that Machiavelli wished to persuade these forces of the necessity of having a leader who knew what he wanted and how to obtain it,

³⁹ Ibid., p. 249.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 135.

and of accepting him with enthusiasm even if his actions might conflict or appear to conflict with the generalised ideology of the time - religion"⁴¹. Gramsci too sought to inform those not fully cognizant with the business of governing and he turned to the Leninist revolutionary party as the modern equivalent of Machiavelli's Prince. His Marxist vision, however, is that of the triumph of the universal class culminating in the advent of a society in which there would be no longer rulers and ruled. This would suggest that Gramsci was obliged by his Marxist political idealism to break with Machiavelli on this fundamental issue.

However, although he appears to do so on occasions, Gramsci does not generally abandon the realism which he inherited from Machiavelli and the Italian tradition and his theory of politics reveals that he was well aware of the many obstacles standing in the path of the struggle for a non-political society and even that he may have had serious doubts as to whether such a society could ever be attained. Whilst Gramsci does not bring everything back to politics as, by his reckoning, Machiavelli does, he is certainly much more concerned with specifically political questions than are the great majority of Marxist thinkers. It is in his conception of the fundamental elements of politics that one begins to see that political realism which characterises his thought and which bears witness to the influence on his work of his Italian forebears.

According to Gramsci, "it really must be stressed that it is precisely the first elements, the most elementary things, which are the first to be forgotten. However, if they are repeated innumerable times, they become the pillar of politics and of any collective action whatsoever"⁴². For him, the most elementary point about politics "is that there really do exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led"⁴³. Traces of political

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 136.

⁴² Ibid., p. 144.

⁴³ Ibid.

idealism are apparent in his claim that "the entire science and art of politics are based on this primordial, and (given certain general conditions) irreducible fact"⁴⁴ for one infers from his qualification that this does not hold true for the regulated society of the future. But, what he makes quite clear is that this condition has persisted for a very long time. "The origins of this fact", he writes, "are a problem apart, which will have to be studied separately (at least one could and should study how to minimise the fact and eliminate it, by altering certain conditions which can be identified as operating in this sense), but the fact remains that there do exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led"⁴⁵. According to Gramsci, a recognition of this fact has important implications for political practice.

Given this fact, it will have to be considered how one can lead most effectively (given certain ends); hence how the leaders may best be prepared (and it is more precisely in this that the first stage of the art and science of politics consists); and how, on the other hand, one can know the lines of least resistance, or the most rational lines along which to proceed if one wishes to secure the obedience of the led or ruled.⁴⁶

One might expect that for a Marxist this would be only a temporary objective, a necessary evil in a process which ends with the establishment of a society in which there are no rulers and no ruled. Gramsci asks, "is it the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or is it the objective to create the conditions in which this division is no longer necessary? In other words, is the initial premiss the perpetual division of the human race, or the belief that this division is only an historical fact, corresponding to certain conditions?"⁴⁷ The answer which

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 144.

is provided by Marxist political idealism is that economic equality will create conditions in which the division of mankind into rulers and ruled will cease. In his overtly Marxist guise, Gramsci himself accepts this answer. On the subject of the elements of politics, however, he writes that "it must be clearly understood that the division between rulers and ruled - though in the last analysis it has its origin in a division between social groups - is in fact, things being as they are, also to be found within the group itself, even where it is a socially homogeneous one"⁴⁸. He admits that "in a certain sense it may be said that this division is created by the division of labour, is merely a technical fact"⁴⁹ but, nevertheless, "since the division between rulers and ruled exists even within the same group, certain principles have to be fixed upon and strictly observed"⁵⁰. Like the division between public and private man which in cases such as the Scottish one would outlive, according to an analytical application of Gramsci's theory of the State, radical transformation in the economic realm, the contradiction in human society between rulers and ruled is no mere reflection of economic inequality.

The "dual perspective", represented in political life in the division between rulers and ruled, force and consent, political and civil society, imbues Gramsci's political thought with an unMarxist tone of realism. Like Machiavelli, he is inspired by the optimism of his will to hope for a perfect society but Gramsci concentrates his attention on ideas which appear to owe more to the pessimism of his intellect. Divisions in human society may one day disappear but for the time being they must be analysed and even utilised by revolutionaries. Nowhere does Gramsci rule out completely the possibility that contradictions in human society

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 145.

can be abolished. Indeed, he points out that if the perfect society comes into existence Marxism itself will become obsolete. "If, therefore, it is demonstrated that contradictions will disappear", he writes, "it is also demonstrated implicitly that the philosophy of praxis too will disappear, or be superseded. In the reign of 'freedom' thought and ideas can no longer be born in the terrain of contradictions and the necessity of struggle"⁵¹. The problem is that "at the present time the philosopher - the philosopher of praxis - can only make this generic affirmation and can go no further; he cannot escape from the present field of contradictions, he cannot affirm, other than generically, a world without contradictions, without immediately creating a utopia"⁵². Thus, Gramsci's training in the realism of Italian political thought continues to prevent him from lapsing into the sort of utopianism that is featured in some Marxist political theory. He does not foresee in the near future the era in which Marx's "conception of the world will be superseded, when the conception of necessity is superseded by the conception of freedom"⁵³. He writes that "Marx initiates intellectually an historical epoch which will last in all probability for centuries, that is, until the disappearance of political society and the coming of a regulated society"⁵⁴ and he implies that for some time to come the elements of politics will remain unchanged and the contradictions in human society will persist.

Gramsci regards as a revolutionary duty the examination of the precise representation of the fundamental elements of politics in advanced capitalist societies. The intention is that his studies should be combined with his politically idealist zeal, just as Machiavelli's had been,

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 405.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 382.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

but the impression created is that Gramsci is far more certain of the findings of his concrete studies than of his projections of the future. Indeed, one may conclude that the tension between political idealism and political realism in Marxist thought is without doubt settled by Gramsci in favour of the latter and in reaching this conclusion one becomes increasingly aware of the similarity between the guiding principle of Gramsci's thought and that which flavours the theory not only of other members of the Italian tradition but of other political realists besides.

Evidence of this is provided by a brief glance at Christian political thought in which, as in Marxism, there is a tension between realism and idealism. As R.N. Berki suggests, "from the beginning to the present day Christianity, in all its ramifications, has embodied a direct self-contradiction between the spirit of realistic accommodation and idealism of a radical, even revolutionary kind; if anything, this has added to its dynamism and appeal"⁵⁵.

Like Marxists, Christians are inspired by a vision of the future but they must also come to terms with the realities of present-day living. This can create a dualism in Christian political thought just as in certain Marxist approaches to politics. Along with some orthodox Marxists, one group of Christians will claim that the present is of little concern since the future is already mapped out but those Christians like St Augustine, who seek to elaborate a Christian view of politics must analyse the present in order to understand its relationship to the future. Berki argues that "turning from the individual to society, Augustine takes into account both man's basic worldly condition as a being tainted with sin, inescapably suffering from its consequences, and God's redeeming 'grace' which yet enables man to improve his life and prepare his soul for its

⁵⁵ Berki, The History of Political Thought, p. 83.

ultimate reception in God's kingdom"⁵⁶. In this way, Augustine regards the earthly city as both good and bad and, according to Berki, if the dual meaning in his thought regarding the city of man is grasped, "we go a long way towards understanding the meaning of 'Christian realism' of which Augustine is the most eloquent exponent"⁵⁷.

Again like the Marxist, however, the Christian political thinker cannot be satisfied with present conditions nor should he believe that his faith is subordinate to the real world of politics. It may be argued, however, that Christianity has failed to restrict politics to its assigned role as the worldly appendage of religion. Berki writes that "what did go down with the Middle Ages, possibly never to return, is the religious vision as the dominant determinant of political argument and speculation"⁵⁸. Christianity was successful in intellectual and social terms in that it was able to infuse, impregnate and transform the political thought tradition but, says Berki, "the only way in which it was not successful was in its own, religious terms: it did not manage to keep politics in a permanently subordinate position, as a worldly appendage to religion"⁵⁹. This has forced Christian political thinkers to be even more realistic in their assessment of politics. In the modern period, for example, Reinhold Niebuhr has written about politics in a manner closely resembling the approach to the subject of political power taken by the Italian tradition.

Niebuhr writes that "while no State can maintain its unity purely by coercion, neither can it preserve itself without coercion"⁶⁰. In some systems, however, it is difficult to recognise the extent of coercion.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

⁶⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society. A Study in Ethics and Politics, New York, 1960. First published 1932. p. 3.

According to Niebuhr, "the coercive factors, in distinction to the more purely moral and rational factors, in political relations can never be sharply differentiated and defined"⁶¹. As a result, "since political conflict, at least in times when controversies have not reached the point of conflict, is carried on by the threat, rather than the actual use, of force, it is always easy for the casual or superficial observer to overestimate the moral and rational factors, and to remain oblivious to the covert types of coercion and force which are used in the conflict"⁶². In Niebuhr's view, "politics will, to the end of history, be an era where conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive factors of human life will interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises" and "the democratic method of resolving social conflict, which some romantics hail as a triumph of the ethical over the coercive factor, is really much more coercive than at first seems apparent"⁶³.

Niebuhr and Gramsci turn their attention to similar matters not because they have renounced their respective faiths. As realists, however, they come to accept that there must be accommodation with the present based on an awareness of how political power is wielded and how stability is achieved. It is for this reason that Gramsci devotes much of his writings to problems which are for the more politically idealist Marxists transient and, hence, unimportant concerns for Marxist theory. Gramsci becomes a theorist of the superstructures precisely because of the predominance of realism in his political thought.

Indeed, it is his realistic assessment of political power in advanced societies - an assessment infused with the Machiavellian "dual perspective" - which forms the basis of his contribution to political

⁶¹ Ibid., p. xxiii.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

thought. For all that he desires the end of the bourgeois State it is when he shows how successfully it blends the dual components of political power, coercion and consent, that Gramsci is at his most stimulating. By showing the pitfalls on the road to socialism rather than by developing an orthodox Marxist strategy, Gramsci makes his mark on the history of political ideas.

His concept of hegemony is the product of his reflections on the failed revolutions in post-First World War Europe and his efforts at explaining how the bourgeoisie maintains control even during periods of severe crisis. His theory of passive revolution is employed as a means of showing the way in which even when forced to make changes the ruling class can do so without fundamentally weakening its grip on the reins of power. Gramsci is also sufficiently realistic to see that as a last resort it is possible for the ruling class to be extricated from a particularly serious crisis of authority by Caesarism or a period of authoritarian rule. Indeed, he admits that it may be necessary even for oppositional forces to make use of a period of statolatry. Gramsci has few illusions about the transition to socialism. The reason is to be found in his realistic awareness that all political power is based upon a fusion of force and consent. In general, his realism allows him to take account of problems usually ignored in Marxist thought.

In dealing with problems of political legitimacy, Gramsci even makes some attempt to grapple with the national question which has proved notoriously difficult for Marxists to handle. Again, his thoughts are influenced by Machiavelli for the latter is regarded by Gramsci as the forerunner of the French Jacobins who, unlike the Action Party during the Risorgimento, succeeded in forging a national-popular support base. According to Gramsci, "the modern Prince must be and cannot but be the proclaimer and organiser of an intellectual and moral reform, which also

means creating the terrain for a subsequent development of the national-popular collective will towards the realisation of a superior, total form of modern civilisation"⁶⁴. Even the universal proletarian class, if it wishes to come to power, must present itself as a guardian of the national interest. "A class that is international in character has - in as much as it guides strata which are narrowly national (intellectuals), and indeed frequently even less than national: particularistic, and municipalistic (the peasants) - to 'nationalise' itself in a certain sense"⁶⁵. Gramsci is not simply saying that it is sometimes of tactical worth for revolutionary socialists to take part in a nationalist struggle. The implication of his comments on this matter is that political stability depends, in part, on the relationship between rulers and ruled as members of a national entity. Gramsci writes that "one cannot make politics - history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood (so-called organic centralism)"⁶⁶. According to Gramsci, "if the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation"⁶⁷.

Gramsci's awareness of the importance of national sentiment together with a number of other propositions central to his political thought reveal not only the influence exerted on him by the Italian tradition of

⁶⁴ Gramsci, PN, pp. 132-3.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 241.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 418.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

political thought but also the extent to which he can be described as a political realist. Nowhere, however, is the Italian influence and the realism of Gramsci's thought more evident than in his own presentation of the "dual perspective" as the distinction between political and civil society which combine dialectically to form the modern State.

Hegel and Marx also distinguish political society from civil society. However, they do not define these concepts in the same way as Gramsci and regard the distinction as the manifestation of the separation in modern times of man as citizen and economic man. Gramsci takes each of these spheres of activity to be essentially superstructural and, therefore, posits a distinction between public and private man. Furthermore, Gramsci uses this distinction to denote the two components of political power (although one should take care to avoid the inference that Gramsci believes these components to be always separate in practice). Gramsci then shows that the political stability and resilience of advanced capitalist systems derive from a proper balance between these two spheres of action.

His general theory of politics offers insights into the nature of political rule in advanced societies but, interestingly, his expanded conception of the State, a particularly significant product of his realistic "dual perspective", can be shown to be of greater relevance to the study of politics in certain "colonial" relationships. In normal circumstances, the distinction which he postulates is not formalised. The separation of political and civil society, of force and consent and of public and private is blurred. The acuteness of his conception is underlined, however, when it is applied to situations in which there is a real distinction between the two superstructural realms. For that reason, two chapters of this thesis concentrate on the applicability of

Gramsci's theory of the State to Scottish politics.⁶⁸ A distinction can be made between Scottish private man and British public man or citizen. This is not a contradiction in human society which may be reduced to economic factors. It is a relatively independent contradiction which affects all Scottish political life including the activities of oppositional forces seeking to alter the Scottish condition. In addition to examining these matters through a Gramscian "dual perspective", attention has been given to a number of commentaries on Scottish politics which make use of Gramsci's theory of the State. The point to notice is that in a number of these Gramsci's conception is taken to be essentially Marxist. The findings of this thesis, on the other hand, point towards the conclusion that the Leitmotiv of this conception is the political realism of the Italian "dual perspective".

I have no wish to deny Gramsci's Marxism. But, there can be little doubt that the originality of his theory of the State owes more to his political realism, a minor aspect of Marxist thought, than to his adoption of politically idealist Marxist-Leninism. There is a danger for a revolutionary in becoming too realistic. As Gramsci himself observes, "'too much' (therefore superficial and mechanical) political realism often leads to the assertion that a statesman should only work within the limits of 'effective reality'; that he should not interest himself in what 'ought to be' but only in what 'is'."⁶⁹ There is a case for saying that the realism of the Italian tradition tends towards moral despair.⁷⁰ That is not the intention of Machiavelli nor of Gramsci in

⁶⁸ I have no wish to suggest that the Scottish situation is unique. The Gramscian distinction could be applied to a number of quasi-colonial systems. The reason why I chose to concentrate on Scotland (personal interest apart) is that already there has been a considerable amount of work done to develop a Gramscian analysis of its political condition.

⁶⁹ Gramsci, PN, p. 171.

⁷⁰ See Ferenc Feher, "Toward a Post-Machiavellian Politics, Telos, 42, Winter, 1979/80, pp. 56-64, passim.

adopting the "dual perspective" but as Alvin Gouldner suggests, "every theoretical system has another system inside it struggling to get out. And every system has a nightmare that the caged system will break out."⁷¹ The caged system of the Italian tradition appears to be pessimism which threatens to engulf the blend of idealism and realism which both Machiavelli and Gramsci sought to maintain. It has been argued that Marxism for its part has two nightmares.⁷² First, there is the impression that it is an old utopian project masquerading as a science. Second, there is the possibility that the bourgeoisie were right all along and Marx was wrong. Gramsci cannot accept the latter but in order to conquer it and also to show that Marxism is neither utopian nor scientific, in the way that orthodox Marxists thought it to be, he imbues his own brand of Marxism with elements of that tradition in which the nightmare is the tendency towards pessimism and despair.

Gramsci fights against the tendency. He believed, as Nemeth comments, that "all needs could be satisfied and that such satisfaction would result in universal agreement on all issues"⁷³. He is sustained by the notion that the contradictions of human society can be brought to an end. But, it should be stressed that he did not see the advent of socialism as representing a sudden break in the course of human development. For Gramsci, writes Nemeth, "communism does not offer some messianic hope for a transformation of the very nature of human happiness"⁷⁴. Gramsci believed that there is happiness in society prior to the advent of the regulated society but what communism does offer is "liberation from forces constraining

⁷¹ Gouldner, op. cit., p. 380.

⁷² See ibid., pp. 380-1.

⁷³ Nemeth, op. cit., p. 195.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

the even greater happiness that is possible"⁷⁵. The impression he gives, however, is that even in the communist system complete human happiness will remain a goal to be aimed for rather than a reality. Marxism "seeks an enormous quantitative increase in the concrete, or mundane, if you will, happiness of people, a feeling of happiness which we all know even if it seems so elusive in our own lives"⁷⁶.

Central to the Italian tradition is the belief that man cannot be permanently satisfied. In fact, dissatisfaction is the very thing that creates human motivation and, consequently, progress. As a Marxist, Gramsci is impelled to advance some sort of soteriological conception. Yet, set alongside his otherwise realistic political theories, such a conception would seem utopian. This problem is avoided as a result of the relatively underdeveloped nature of the soteriological aspects of his world view, such as his thoughts on the regulated society. Instead, he expands the realistic side of his theory so that it becomes the basis of his fascinating and original discussion on the subject of political power. It is as though Gramsci uses the realistic Italian tradition to develop the embryonic political realism of Marxism and, in so doing, plays down the utopian tendencies in the philosophy of praxis. This process is quite apparent in the development of his theory of the State which owes so much more to the "dual perspective" of Machiavelli than to the Marxian foundations and which, as the study of its application to Scotland shows, points out contradictions in political life which one cannot expect to disappear in the foreseeable future.

Should we continue to call Gramsci a Marxist if, as is suggested in this thesis, his original political formulations are heavily

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

influenced by non-Marxist ideas? The first point to be made is that Gramsci did not set out to construct a pessimistic theory. Like Machiavelli, he was intent on informing those who are not "in the know" about how political power is manipulated in advanced capitalist societies rather than showing why socialism cannot be attained, at least for a number of years to come. Secondly, although his theory of the State indicates a contradiction in human society which does not correspond to the division between the economic and the political and, thus, cannot be resolved solely by the dissolution of economic inequality, Gramsci does not deny that economic factors cause other conflicts in human society and that these can and must be resolved by way of an economic transformation. Thirdly, despite the frequent attempts to present Gramsci as a philosophical idealist, it has been argued in this thesis that his is a legitimate interpretation of Marx's historical materialism. Indeed, it can be argued that his conception of the relationship between the base and superstructure is closer to Marx's than are those of most Marxists. In these important respects, Gramsci's claims to be a Marxist can be upheld.

It might be useful, however, to see Gramsci as belonging to a new era in the history of Marxist thought. It has been argued that theoretical developments in eastern Europe suggest that there is, in certain Marxist circles, a move away from political idealism and a growing emphasis on the more realistic aspects of Marxist thought. In some respects, Gramsci prefigured this retreat from political idealism.⁷⁷ One may speculate on the material reasons for this. It is conceivable that his own experiences of the new socialist society in Russia and his awareness of the doctrinal disputes within the socialist camp of which

⁷⁷ See Berki, "The Retreat from Idealism: Reflections on some aspects of contemporary east European Marxist thought", op. cit.

he disapproved caused Gramsci to take an increasingly realistic view of what is humanly possible. But this is no more than speculation. The theoretical impulse, however, was provided quite definitely by the Italian political thought tradition with its "dual perspective" and its emphasis on the permanence of impermanence.

According to Svetozar Stojanović, "mature communism is distinguished by its realistic and multilateral evaluation of the possibilities of human nature"⁷⁸. One might say that Marx himself, therefore, was the first mature communist, a fact reflected in the various tensions within his thought. Bobbio writes that "Marx is the only realist writer who takes the realistic conception of the state to its extreme consequences, with an awareness that makes him the follower and, in a certain sense, the one who completes Machiavelli"⁷⁹. By fusing the political realism of the "dual perspective" inherited from the Italian tradition of political thought with Marxism, Gramsci undoubtedly takes this a stage further. His theory of the State provides ample evidence of his "mature communism". And, it is on this basis that Antonio Gramsci makes his singular contribution to the study of politics and to the history of political ideas.

⁷⁸ Svetozar Stojanović, Between Ideals and Reality. A Critique of Socialism and its Future, New York, 1973, p. 209.

⁷⁹ Norberto Bobbio, "Is there a Marxist theory of the State?", Telos, 35, Spring, 1978, p. 16.

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The selection of commentaries on Gramsci's writings is not intended to be exhaustive. Books and articles appear because they have been of assistance in the composition of this thesis or because they deal at least with the aspects of Gramsci's thought which are the central concerns of this thesis.

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