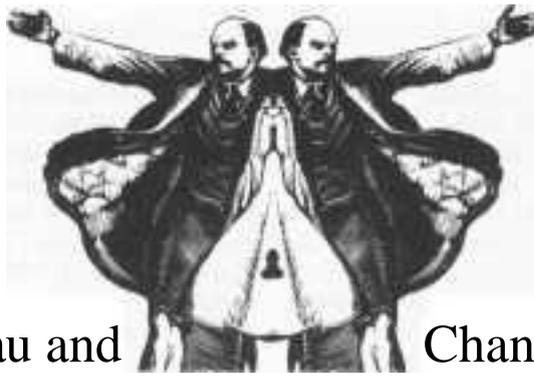


Socialist Strategy



Where Next?

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Socialist political struggle takes place today on a terrain which has been profoundly transformed by the emergence of new contradictions, with which the traditional discourse of Marxism, centered on the class struggle and the analysis of the economic contradictions of capitalism, has had great difficulties in coming to terms. To what extent has it become necessary to modify the notion of *class* struggle, in order to be able to deal with the new political subjects — women, national, racial and sexual minorities, anti-nuclear and anti-institutional movements etc — of a clearly anti-capitalist character, but whose identity is not constructed around specific 'class interests'? How can one continue to speak of a dichotomy between base and superstructure, when the reorganisation of capitalism in the age of the multinational corporations increasingly depends on forms of political articulation which affect the supposed 'laws of motion' of what is traditionally considered as the 'infrastructure'? How is it possible to go on defining as 'bourgeois' the framework of parliamentary struggle and individual freedoms, since it is becoming more and more evident that their maintenance and possible extension nowadays depends on the intervention of the working class movement and popular struggles? This is the type of problem now facing socialist militants in the advanced capitalist countries. The old certainties, the famous 'guarantees of history' are strongly questioned and the political uncertainty is accompanied by a growing theoretical perplexity. This is why one hears more and more of a 'crisis of Marxism'.

It should be pointed out, however, that this identity crisis of the socialist movement is not the result of a strengthening of bourgeois domination. On the contrary, capitalism is undergoing its deepest crisis of these last forty years, its forms of political representation and legitimation are undermined, and anxiety and doubt about the future is certainly as prevalent among the dominant classes as it is among the popular sectors. It is enough to compare the present-day situation with the arrogant confidence of the late 1950s in the 'end of ideology' and the unlimited capacity of neo-capitalism for integration, to realise at once the gravity of the present malaise.

Nevertheless, as we have said, this crisis of the dominant sectors has not been accompanied by a mass political movement presenting itself to the ensemble of the dominated sectors as a hegemonic alternative. It would seem, on the contrary, that it is the very same crisis of bourgeois domination which is at the root of the crisis of the socialist and popular movements. It is as though the forms of existence of the latter had been determined by their function of opposition within a certain capitalist order, and they could not survive the dissolution of that order. There is, then, a series of political, ideological and theoretical *obstacles* which the socialist forces must overcome if a solution is to be found to the present crisis, based on an extension of democracy and of popular control over politics and the economy, and not on a reinforcement of the authoritarian mechanisms of the state.

The objective

Our purpose in this article¹ is to contribute to this process of reflection, by analysing the main theoretical obstacle confronting

Marxism in the effort to surpass the present crisis: the one arising from the conception that there are 'laws of development' in history, operating in a predetermined direction and guaranteeing *a priori* the arrival of socialism. According to such a perspective, political struggle is seen not as being *constitutive* of the social order, but as being a mere 'superstructure' of an inexorable economic process. As against such a conception, however, there are other texts, going back as far as the early beginnings of Marxism, tending to emphasise the primacy of the political. With Marx himself, we find some texts which present class struggle, in its concrete historical specificity, as the motor of history and as an essentially active and creative element, whilst other texts present it as the passive manifestation of an underlying structural process — the development of the productive forces and the contradictions inherent in them. From then on, the whole history of Marxism was to be marked by the presence of these two contradictory discourses. The theses which we will put forward are as follows:

- 1 The Marxism of the Second International systematises a set of concepts: 'necessary laws of capitalist development', the base/superstructure distinction, the 'scientificity' of Marxism etc, which imply the subordinate character of politics and which have constituted fundamental obstacles accounting for the historical defeats of the working class and socialism in Europe.
- 2 The process initiated with Leninism opens a first breach in this tradition, a breach which leads to the affirmation of the primacy of the political. Still, the effects of this rupture will be limited because of the persistence of the old forms of economic discourse.
- 3 It is in the work of Gramsci, with the elaboration of the concept of hegemony, that the potential of the Leninist critique of economism begins to show the full extent of its deconstructive effects.
- 4 The emergence of new contradictions in advanced capitalism requires that socialist forces develop the concept of hegemony even further than its formulation in Gramsci, in order to bring out all its theoretical and political effects. This must lead us to bring about a 'Copernican revolution' in Marxist theory.

THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

The Second International constituted the first moment in which Marxism was systematised in Europe as a *party doctrine*. This means, above all, that the Marxist discourse was brought to face a series of problems which Marx and Engels had not dealt with, but around which parties engaging in parliamentary agitation, organising the trade union struggle and having to take a stand on every issue in national politics, were under an obligation to have a coherent doctrine. There is always a certain discontinuity between, on the one hand, the domains of discourse and of political action in which an emerging social force operates and, on the other hand, the broader domains which constitute the social life of a country. This hiatus is progressively resolved to the extent that the new force begins to articulate a variety of sectors, interests and contradictions, and consolidates a historic bloc which presents itself to the nation as a hegemonic alternative. It is through such a process of political construction that a social force becomes a state.

The Second International, however, responded to this requirement

in a different fashion. According to its conception, it was not necessary to constitute politically a complex subject which would articulate a multiplicity of antagonisms, since the endogenous logic of the process of capital accumulation would lead to the proletarianisation of the middle classes and the peasantry; thus, there was no need to articulate the interests of these sectors to those of the workers. Indeed, that would have been positively dangerous, since it would go against the necessary movement of history which condemned these sectors to disappear. In this way, there emerged a characteristic dialectic between the isolation of the working class and its centrality: by relying on itself and defending its own specific interests, it would end up by representing the whole of the exploited masses. Political and ideological struggles were thus reduced to subordinate moments through which was verified a necessary process, transcending them.



Gramsci

Political implications

Such a theoretical perspective is far from incompatible with a broad variety of circumstantial concessions to the class enemy. 'Tactical flexibility' was to be a constant exhortation on Kautsky's lips. Precisely because no 'fact' can represent a challenge to the inexorable course of history, we can afford to be negligent with facts. This attitude, paradoxically, creates two orders of reality. The first, that of the necessary laws of evolution, which is theorised in a rigorous fashion, represents the latent meaning of history. The second, the order of facts, in the absence of any perspective which would allow a theoretical analysis of the conjuncture, amounts to no more than a sum of empirical circumstances. The specificity of the peasantry can safely be ignored, since it is a sector *destined* to disappear in the course of capitalist development; some compromises with the established power are acceptable, since history is still *advancing towards* the decomposition of this power; and the precise strategic forms of the transition to socialism can be neglected, since Marxist science *provides us with the guarantee* of this transition. Knowing what will happen tomorrow allows us to be pragmatic in respect of what is happening today.

An ever-greater chasm is thus established between the expedients of day-to-day political practice and the aprioristic knowledge of the laws of history. The paralysing consequences of such a gap were clearly seen not only in the political collapse of 1914 but also, and more especially, in the inter-war social democratic governments: lacking any *national* policy towards the broad popular masses, reduced to no more than political pressure-groups of the trade union movement, the social democratic parties — pushed towards power by the postwar crisis — did not initiate any hegemonic project envisaging the transformation of the relation of forces in society, failed to consolidate

a new historic bloc and limited themselves to administrating passively the bourgeois order.

These, then, are the central characteristics of this first theoretico-political systematisation of Marxism. History possesses a necessary movement, which is independent of human will, and which operates like a natural process, revealing its secret to the inquisitive gaze of Marxist 'scientists'. The latter are the depositary of an absolute knowledge which enables them to grasp the 'objective meaning' of what goes on while the ideas of other people are mere superstructural manifestations of the underlying causality which engenders them. Political struggle is itself only a superstructural fact, since it does not constitute reality but is simply the expression of a process inscribed in history from its inception. Hence the stageism inherent in such a conception: every fundamental change depends on the development of the productive forces, and it is sheer voluntarism to attempt to anticipate its course.

THE LENINIST BREACH

Leninism represents a critical point in the disintegration of the economic model and in the move towards a new conception of Marxism centred on the primacy of the political. Lenin no longer conceives of the revolutionary rupture as a necessary and predetermined point in the unfolding of a single contradiction, but as a *specific critical conjuncture*, dominated by a displacement in the relation of forces between classes. The background to this conception is the perception of the world capitalist system as an imperialist chain, whose weakest links — those in which a revolutionary rupture is possible — do not necessarily coincide with those in which the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production has reached its highest point. But in this case, the universal and necessary character of the stages forecast by the economic conception is seriously called into question. The worldwide dimension of the imperialist chain implies, in effect, that the crises arising within it provoke shifts in the relation of forces between classes in those national economic and political structures which, from the stageist point of view, should not yet have been ripe for revolution. The logical connection between levels of economic development and the revolutionary resolution of crises is thus broken.

Some consequences

Several fundamental consequences can be drawn from this new analytical perspective:

1 If the relation of forces between classes is not the necessary outcome of the relation between productive forces and relations of production, and if, moreover, it is not the result of a single contradiction, but arises from an overdetermination of effects derived from the insertion of a country into the world capitalist system, it must then be concluded that there are no underlying principles which determine *a priori* that the contradiction shall be resolved in one way or another. Its outcome will depend essentially on political struggle. But this comes back to the affirmation that there does not exist an essence of the social order beyond a political relation of forces. This, then, amounts to establishing the primacy of the political in the analysis of every conjuncture. This is what differentiates drastically Lenin's analyses from those of the Mensheviks, who confined themselves to drawing out the *political* consequences of an *economistic* stageism conceived under the form of necessity.

2 If the revolutionary outcome of the conjuncture is not merely the superstructural consequence of an underlying economic process, then the political subject, the agent of this outcome, can no longer be conceived of as the simple product of an infrastructural logic. In this way a hiatus, a distance is created between 'vanguard' and 'class' which conceals the presence of two incompatible political logics. The

chain of necessity has been broken. It is not for nothing that Gramsci was to present the Russian revolution as a 'revolution against *Capital*'.

3 If the Second International could be tolerant and negligent with the facts, since it saw them as a contingency opposed to the inexorable laws of history, the reverse is true in the case of Leninism: since there is no necessary law which verifies itself behind the circumstances of the present moment, these circumstances are then the only thing we can count on to make history. The world of the concrete is thus invested with a new political dramaticity: 'the truth is always concrete', in Lenin's words.

4 If the effects of the crisis on the weakest link raise the possibility of a revolutionary solution to the crisis, the task of the vanguard will be to articulate a variety of popular forces around a unified leadership: in other words, it will have an essentially hegemonic role. The concept of hegemony thus made its appearance in Lenin, made possible by his rupture with the economic problematic.

5 Finally, Lenin clearly perceives the new social contradictions which are being provoked by the development of capitalism, and which can no longer be easily subsumed under the concept of 'class interests'. Capitalism is in the process of bringing about contradictions much broader than those defined at the level of the production process and which require a new form of politics. The epicentre of these transformations has doubtlessly been constituted by the world war, with the profound commotions that came in its wake — vast displacements of men to the battle fronts, famine, destruction, supply problems etc. But even before the war was declared, the multiplicity of conflict zones had obliged bourgeois politics to adopt a new form of mass politics which Lenin was to designate by the term 'Lloyd-Georgism'. And it is this new mass character of political struggle which obliges socialist politics in turn, also to adopt a popular and democratic character which was totally incompatible with the strict 'classism' of Kautsky or Plekhanov.

THE COMINTERN AND THE HERITAGE OF LENINISM

The Leninist conception is, however, penetrated by a fundamental ambiguity: on the one hand, it opens up a definitive breach in the political logic of classical economism; on the other, it is incapable of thinking through fully the deconstructive effects that the assertion of the primacy of the political must produce in the very structure of the theoretical and political discourse of Marxism. This explains why Leninism will not achieve a radical transformation of Marxism: it will be limited to a theory of revolution, not attaining the status of a theory of society. The origins of this limitation must be sought in the fact that Lenin's conception concerns the analysis of a *revolutionary conjuncture* — that is, a conjuncture characterised not only by the exacerbation of contradictions but also by the collapse of institutional channels and by the dislocation in the relation of forces. It deals, then, with the interruption of a 'normal' process, which enables the revolutionary vanguard to 'infiltrate' history. It is thus an eclectic conception, attempting to combine two contradictory logics. Let us analyse, from this perspective, some of the concepts of the Leninist tradition.

1 Unequal and combined development. With this expression, the essentialist logic of stages is called into question; but rather than conceiving of the elements attributed to these as being united by forms of political articulation, and thus divesting such elements of any stageist connotation, the Leninist view still thinks of the overall situation as a combination — albeit a paradoxical and heterodox one — of stages.

2 The vanguard party. The party is no longer the passive representation of a class, but is its vanguard. Thus we see the emergence of a certain political autonomy, as against economic determination. This autonomy, however, is conceived as the result of a structural hiatus between class-in-itself and class-for-itself: the party

is the agent of the *objective interests* of the class. This raises the possibility of a well-nigh infinite process of substitution, which will become one of the fundamental obstacles in the way of Marxism's grasping the true nature of political and ideological struggle.

3 Class alliances. This is the form under which Leninism conceives of hegemony. *Class* subjects with clearly defined *interests* will unite under the *political* leadership of the working class in order to face up to a common enemy. So what is to become of these 'masses', this vast field of democratic contradictions not determinable in class terms, insistently referred to in the Leninist discourse of the 1910s? They cannot be thought of in this theoretical schema.

A permanent dualism

The consequences of these limitations for the political line of the Comintern were to be far-reaching: they would install it in a permanent dualism between the political logic of Leninism and the economic logic of Kautskyism. The primacy of the political was to be reserved for critical conjunctures, whilst economism continued to dominate for periods of stability. The Comintern lived in expectation of the emergence of a new revolutionary conjuncture in Europe which would enable it to put its Leninist policy into practice. As for periods of 'relative stabilisation', though, it had no policy but that of preparing the best possible conditions for the onset of a new period of rupture.

The problem was to become more complicated with the arrival of fascism and the division of the European political space into two camps which did not coincide with the traditional class antagonism. The oscillating policy of the Comintern clearly shows that Leninism was ill-equipped to deal with such a situation. Prior to its Seventh Congress, where the political line of Popular Fronts was established, the Comintern moved from its first characterisation of fascism as an expression of the agrarian character of Italy, to the 'social fascism' line which presented social democracy and fascism as equivalent and interchangeable forms of bourgeois dictatorship. To understand this policy, one has to take account of the theoretical-discursive conceptions which made it possible: if the Leninist party's every effort had to be oriented towards seizing power in a revolutionary conjuncture, and if the main obstacle to this was the influence of social democracy on the working class, it was only natural to arrive at a conception of the Leninist vanguard's activity during an 'ebb' period as having to be centred on a settling of accounts with social democracy.

When Dimitrov's report to the Seventh Comintern Congress came to introduce the new Popular Fronts policy and to assert the role of the communist parties as the hegemonic articulatory element of a broad field of democratic struggles, it was in fact a question of advancing *politically* over a terrain not hitherto prepared by a process of theoretical reformulation. This is what accounts for the presence, in the subsequent history of the communist movement, of an increasingly acute contradiction between the theoretical framework of 'Marxist-Leninist' orthodoxy — with all its economic and reductionist baggage — and the democratic tasks postulated by the new strategy. The Comintern's dilemma, which it never managed to resolve, was this: either parliamentary regimes and so-called 'formal' liberties were no more than mere superstructures of bourgeois domination, and their defence by socialist forces could only be justified on tactical or conjunctural grounds; or else socialism was permanently committed to defending them, but in that case they were not simple *expressions* of a class domination. The vast mass mobilisations in the anti-fascist struggle and the establishment of Popular Fronts posed the same problem: either the participation of the communist forces constituted a tactical support for a more progressive sector of the bourgeoisie, or else it was accepted that

democracy, popular traditions of struggle and the symbols in which these were crystallised had no necessary class belonging, and that they constituted the terrain of a political struggle through which the communist parties could articulate them in a permanent way to socialist objectives.

But for this last possibility to be thinkable required a much more radical rupture with an economistic and reductionist conception of Marxism than that realised by Lenin. It demanded, in fact, the possibility of conceiving political subjects as being different from, and much broader than classes, and as being constituted through a multitude of democratic contradictions which the socialist forces had to take into account and be able to articulate. Thus it required a conception of hegemony which did not reduce it to an alliance of classes, into which each group enters with its identity and its specific interests *already* constituted, but which instead conceived of it as a process of the production of popular-democratic subjects.

GRAMSCI, TOGLIATTI AND EUROCOMMUNISM

It is Gramsci who elaborates this new conception of hegemony, drawing out all the potentialities present in Leninism. With Gramsci, in fact, hegemony is no longer conceived of as mere political leadership exercised over preconstituted subjects, but as 'political, intellectual and moral leadership' through which new political subjects are to be *created*. These subjects will express a national-popular collective will resulting from the articulation by the working class of a series of democratic popular demands corresponding to contradictions which are not strictly class ones. Such a conception brings in a new view of the unity of the social totality, breaking definitively with the problematic of economism according to which this unity was seen as the outcome of the 'necessary effects' of the infrastructure upon the political and ideological superstructures. For Gramsci, history and society are no longer the space in which an abstract logic reduces conjunctural and political specificity to a purely empirical and contingent moment, since society possesses no unity other than that furnished by the political articulations which, at various levels, result from the relation between antagonistic social forces. This radical refusal to reduce the concrete to a moment of an abstract logic and to transform history into a metaphysics of the mode of production, of practical reason or of the *homo oeconomicus*, is what Gramsci calls '*absolute historicism*'.

Gramsci, then, represents *at the same time* a continuity and a rupture with Leninism. A continuity, in that he extends Lenin's major intuition that history does not proceed according to a simple logic, and that every articulation and rupture depends on *apolitical* intervention by the revolutionary subject; but also a rupture, because he does not confine the primacy of the political to revolutionary conjunctures, but makes it the articulatory principle of every social situation, including periods of stability.

War of position

This new problematic, which begins to be elaborated in Gramsci's work, implies several highly important transformations for Marxist theory. The first is that it becomes impossible to maintain the distinction between base and superstructure. This is replaced by a new concept, that of 'historic bloc', presented by Gramsci as the fusion of these two elements into an organic unity. The organic character of this unity depends on the articulatory practices of a fundamental social force, which is itself constituted in a field cut through by antagonisms. The second consequence is that the terrain of politics is considerably enlarged. If politics encompasses the whole domain of social relations, the fundamental articulations of which depend on the existing relation of forces between antagonistic social subjects rather than being dictated by a necessary structural causality

prior to the actual struggles, then it has to be concluded that the field of politics covers society in its entirety. Such a conception is at the basis of the Gramscian notion of *integral state*, a concept which thus expresses the political articulation of the social whole.

This brings us to the notion of the *war of position*, a key concept in socialist strategy according to Gramsci and one which implies what one might term a *multidimensional conception of political radicalisation*. A conception of this kind goes against the traditional Marxist outlook — including Leninism — which was unidimensional insofar as it considered the political process and the revolutionary struggle as revolving around a single point: the seizure of power. Power was conceived of as a substance, having a source and a specific location within social relations — in the extreme case, as a building: the Winter Palace. The Gramscian concept of war of position implies a rupture with such a conception, a rupture which finds its theoretical source in the notion of integral state. For if the articulations of the social whole are political articulations, there is no level of society where power and forms of resistance are not exercised. Since these articulations do not come from a single and necessary source, there can be no absolute and essential location of power, but rather a multiplicity of dimensions and struggles, whose unity — or separation — are constantly being re-defined.

The achievement of socialism, therefore, does not arise from an absolute moment represented by a radical break consisting of *the* seizure of power. It must instead be the result of a series of partial ruptures through which the ensemble of relations of forces existing in a society will be transformed. What is traditionally known as the seizure of power, that is, control over the state apparatuses, is in fact only one — albeit one of the most important — of the many ruptures in this process of transformation. It is, therefore, an error to present the war of position strategy as implying a reformist or social democratic position, opposed to another which would be revolutionary. The defence of a democratic socialism, then, has nothing to do with a necessary 'peaceful road' or a slow accumulation of reforms. What it refers to is a novel conception of the radicalisation and the politicisation of social struggles, one which enlarges the field of confrontation and struggle to the whole of civil society.

Togliatti

This radically anti-economistic conception of society and of the transition to socialism, which has its foundations in the thought of Gramsci, is also present in Togliatti, who was to be the first to give it political expression in the strategy which was to inform the policy of the Italian Communist Party from the resistance onwards. The real significance of the Togliattian notions of 'progressive democracy', 'national tasks of the working class' and a 'new party' — conceived of as a mass party and no longer as a Leninist political vanguard — can only be grasped by reference to the Gramscian concepts of hegemony, historic bloc and war of position. It is therefore profoundly wrong to oppose Gramsci, as some do, to Togliatti. The latter's objective — to make the Italian working class the hegemonic force of a vast popular alliance, articulating through an ensemble of political struggles a whole series of democratic demands to those of the working class — was fundamentally Gramscian and fits perfectly into the theoretical problematic of absolute historicism elaborated by Gramsci. It is this same approach which also informs Berlinguer's 'historic compromise'. The successes, errors or limitations of this policy must therefore be evaluated in terms of its pertinence vis-a-vis the present stage of the war of position in Italy and in Europe, and not in terms of abstract options such as 'the peaceful road' versus the 'seizure of power.'

Recently, the use of the term 'Eurocommunism' to designate the policy of certain European communist parties may have led some to

the belief that these parties had effected, in the 1970s, a common rupture with respect to a single political line that previously prevailed. But this view conceals the profound continuity which existed in the line of the PCI, from Togliatti to the present day. Even if there were a series of convergences at a given moment between the policy of the PCI, the PCF and the PCE — mainly around the articulation between socialism and democracy — it would be wrong to present Eurocommunism as a novel strategy common to the three. That the PCF and the PCE should have discovered (and just as quickly forgotten, it seems, in the case of the PCF) the importance of democratic and popular struggle, ought not to make us forget that this has been at the heart of PCI strategy since the resistance period. Apart from this, the theoretical bases of the two policies (ie, those of the PCI and the PCF) are extremely different. While the Italian line, proceeding from Gramsci, is genuinely centred on the primacy of the political, and challenges an economic conception of society, that is certainly not the case for the PCF. Its strategy, based on the theory of state monopoly capitalism, rests on an instrumental conception which views the state as the instrument of the monopolies, and conceives the alliance with the 'intermediate strata' on the basis of a purely economic justification: as a result of transformations induced by the development of the capitalist mode of production, their economic interests now coincide with those of the workers.

TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPTION OF HEGEMONY

The term 'Eurocommunism' should rightfully be used to denote the recognition of the need for the communist parties in the advanced capitalist countries to develop a political strategy adapted to the far-reaching transformations that these societies have undergone since the 1930s, as a result of the growing intervention of the state consequent upon Keynesian economic policies. This recognition was reached at different points in time, and in terms of various theoretical perspectives. Togliatti was the first to draw its full political implications, and his concept of 'progressive democracy' was developed in response to the establishment of a new type of capitalist state and a new political and social model marked by the orientation of production to mass consumption and the growing social importance of the working class. The direct presence of the masses in the state brought political struggle into the state itself. The aim, therefore, could no longer be to attack the state from outside in order to destroy it, but rather to struggle within it so as to swing the balance of forces decisively in favour of the popular masses.

A strategy along these lines proved basically successful until the early 1960s, but from 1968 onwards new contradictions that had germinated within this new form of capitalist development came brusquely to light, clearly demonstrating the limitations of a concept of hegemony that was confined to expressing the demands of the traditional social subjects. In fact, the antagonisms that became prominent in the late 1960s, and were to expand and acquire a dynamic of their own in the following decade, exhibit new and specific characteristics. These new political subjects: women, students, young people, racial, sexual and regional minorities, as well as the various anti-institutional and ecological struggles, not only cannot be located at the level of relations of production (though this is not in itself absolutely new, Gramsci and Togliatti having already understood the importance of contradictions other than 'class' ones); on top of this, they define their objectives in a radically different way. Their enemy is defined not by its function of exploitation, but by wielding a certain power. And this power, too, does not derive from a place in the relations of production, but is the outcome of the form of social organisation characteristic of the present society. This society is indeed capitalist, but this is not its only characteristic; it is sexist and patriarchal as well, not to mention racist.

Technocratisation and bureaucracy

The capitalist mode of production, moreover, cannot be reduced to a determinate structure of production relations that lies at the root of the class contradiction. It also involves a certain mode of development of the productive forces: industrialism. This leads to a growing process of technocratisation and bureaucratisation, which produces pertinent effects at every level of society, and it is here that the origin of most of the new antagonisms should be sought. In comparison with the traditional struggle of the working class for the democratisation of the existing social system, the struggles and demands of these new subjects appear far more radical, since they put in question the very model of industrial development, the sum total of values that are bound up with this, and every system of power whatsoever. It is important to note that these new forms of struggle also find expression within the working class, and that a new type of worker have come



Togliatti

into being, the product of a fragmented and quite unskilled kind of work, and no longer definable in relation to this work, thus having nothing in common with the classical idea of the proletarian. The demands of these new workers, often expressed in unofficial strikes outside the trade union structure, transcend the customary negotiations over wages and hours of work and seek to attack the very organisation of work itself.

Faced with these new forms of struggle, the strategy of Gramsci and Togliatti proved unable to articulate them — hence the growing hostility between the PCI and the new movements. In Gramsci, however, we can find the theoretical elements needed to face up to this new situation and take full advantage of its possibilities. The multidimensional conception of political radicalisation involved in the notion of the integral state, which informs Gramsci's strategy of a war of position, enables us to grasp the specificity and importance of these new contradictions which are bound up with forms of domination different to that of economic exploitation. Without doing violence to the Gramscian conception of hegemony, this can be expanded to include the demands of the new social movements. But once the notion of hegemony is reformulated in these terms, a whole series of problems arise which undoubtedly do force us to go beyond certain of Gramsci's formulations.

Beyond Gramsci

The two contentious points concern the *necessary* hegemonic function of the working class, and the role of the party as the agent by which this centrality is actualised. For if it is certain that the working class is a decisive force without which there can be no socialism in Europe, its vanguard role cannot be considered an ontological privilege, guaranteed *a priori* by the economic structure. This role must rather depend on its ability to develop a political project that can be recognised by the other democratic subjects as fundamental for the

realisation of their own demands. The centrality of the working class in a project of hegemony can thus only be the result of its efforts to occupy this position; it is not a given that the other groups are forced to recognise and accept *a priori*. As far as the role of the party goes, the main danger is that of a reduction of the specificity of the social movements such as is inherent in any conception that sees the party as the vehicle of hegemony. If it is undoubtedly necessary to forge a unity between the whole spectrum of democratic and anti-capitalist demands, this unity can in no way proceed via the imposition from above of a unifying principle that seeks to obliterate the differences and homogenise the social field in authoritarian style. There is no question here of claiming that the 'party' form has become obsolete and that 'political' struggle of the traditional kind has been superseded, but rather of accepting that these only compose one terrain of political struggle in the broader sense that we have now defined. They must coexist and act in concert with a multitude of autonomous social movements, which are decisive for the constitution of a radically anti-capitalist and democratic collective will.

The autonomy of social movements

How can the various demands that express the new antagonisms be articulated without reducing their specificity and while maintaining their autonomy? This is undoubtedly the fundamental problem to resolve in developing the new conception of hegemony that socialist strategy today requires. The problem is a serious one, and its solution far from easy. It is this question that has dominated debate among socialist feminists in Britain since the publication of *Beyond the Fragments*. Many feminists are aware of the need to present a united front against the Conservative government, but are not disposed to see their specific demands disappear or be relegated to the back of the queue in an alliance with the socialist forces. They rightly insist that unity must be constructed, not assumed at the beginning, and that this process of construction implies a far-reaching transformation in the way that the forces of the left are organised and function, as in their very conception of socialism. It cannot be simply a question of adding women's demands to the existing list of those demands considered as socialist; the articulation between socialism and feminism must involve a radical transformation in the way socialism is customarily viewed, ie, simply as the socialisation of the means of production. And this in turn means a change in the order of priorities that are today seen as fundamental.

The primacy of politics in the economy

The same applies also to the articulation of the specific demands of other social movements. For if the traditional conception of socialism has nothing to offer women who are struggling against a sexist and patriarchal society, it is similarly devoid of attraction for those who are challenging the productivist and authoritarian model that also characterises the industrial societies in which we live. This model however is not generally challenged by the socialist forces, who in the main continue to conceive of socialism as the culmination of the development of the capitalist forces of production. Now it is not enough to criticise the idea that the development of the contradictions of capitalism leads necessarily to socialism, it is also necessary to abandon the conception according to which the development of the productive forces under capitalism creates the possible conditions for the establishment of a socialist society (through political struggle). It is ever more clear today that the development of the productive forces in terms of capitalist rationality leads rather to the destruction of natural resources and possibly even of civilisation itself. We must therefore topple the last bastion of economism and assert the primacy of politics within the economy itself. Far from forming a homogenous field ruled by the simple logic of profit maximisation, the economy is

in actual fact a complex relation of forces between various social agents, and the productive forces are themselves subject to the rationality imposed on them by the ruling class. This means that the economy, like all other spheres of society, is the terrain of a political struggle, and that its 'laws of motion' are not governed by a simple logic, but by the hegemonic articulation existing in a given society.

A new conception of democracy

The critique of the mode of industrial development under the aegis of capitalist rationality, which is common to the majority of the new movements, thus adds a very valuable element to the critique of the structure of capitalist relations of production that is the privileged field of working class struggle, and the anti-capitalist struggle can only be strengthened by the addition of these new fields of struggle. The unity to be constructed must be built from the bottom up, starting with the social movements themselves. It must consist of a vast system of alliances that are continuously redefined and renegotiated. But it cannot be truly consolidated without developing an ideological frame of reference, an 'organic ideology' to serve as cement for the new collective will.

We have already indicated how a new conception of socialism must be a fundamental element of this. But the cornerstone of this conception must undoubtedly be provided by a radically new conception of democracy. Our present definition, in fact, is completely inadequate to take into account the necessary scope of the struggle to suppress all relations of domination and to create a genuine equality and participation at all levels of society. Serious limitations are to be found in this respect even in the ideas of Pietro Ingrao, though his are among the most advanced conceptions of a process of social democratisation. It is not enough to go beyond the liberal conception of democracy tied to participation in parliament by simply adding the various forms of grassroots democracy through which citizens will participate in the management of public affairs and workers in the management of their workplace. Beyond these traditional subjects it is important to recognise the existence of other social subjects and their political character: women, and the various minority groups, also have the right to equality and self-determination. And the acceptance of pluralism, far from being limited to a pluralism of parties, must also include a *pluralism of subjects*. It is only when we come to understand democracy in this way, and the institutional channels through which this new pluralism can be guaranteed, that we shall have a conception of hegemony that will respect the autonomy and specific dynamic of each of its components. A conception of this kind will not eliminate conflicts, but it is high time to cast off the damaging and authoritarian conception of socialist society as a completely homogenous society in which all antagonisms will have disappeared, and to view socialism as a society in which antagonisms will be settled in a truly democratic fashion.

We have now arrived at the heart of the Copernican revolution which we mentioned earlier. This consists in leading through to its conclusion the break with economism that was initiated by Lenin and developed by Gramsci and Togliatti, and in breaking decisively with the essentialist metaphysics of the 'guarantees of history' and the forms of a scientificity that declares itself the 'absolute truth' of a historical process, claiming to be able to predict its necessary course. We have rather to conceive society as a complex field, crossed by a diversity of political struggles, in which the multiplicity of subjects must be recognised and accepted if we are one day to achieve a truly liberated and self-managed society.

¹ The ideas in this article are elaborated in our forthcoming book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* to be published by New Left Books.