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Marx, the joker in the pack (or the included middle)***The following notes are a record of the second and third parts of a paper which I presented on the 18 May 1981. In order to reduce it to more reasonable dimensions, I have preferred, rather than attempting to summarise it in its entirety, as if dealing with a totality separable into distinct conclusions, purely and simply to leave out the first part, which discusses, in cavalier fashion, the history of the concept of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' from Marx to Stalin, Gramsci and Mao.²⁰This was discussed, in relation to these successive figures, in terms of an ever-widening re-inscription of an identical circle, whose circumference encompasses historical mass movements, increasingly numerous and heterogenous forms of political practice: a theoretical circle in which the theorisations of Stalin and those of Gramsci end up face to face in a surprising formal symmetry. In both cases the party is seen as the organising centre, in the sense of a developing organism. But in the one case, this is in relation to the State, and in the other in relation to civil society. This is why, in one case, the process of organisation is called the 'socialisation' of the State (in Stalin = dictatorship of the proletariat exceeding the State), and in the other it is called the 'becoming State' of society (in Gramsci = the exceeding of corporatism). In this antithetical reconstruction of the pair State/Society, the possibility of a third term, or of a third area of definition for 'proletarian politics', which had been perceived along the way, and had even been crystallised in the form of 'the government of producers' (Marx) or the 'society of transition' (Lenin), was once again lost, as if it had failed not only to achieve stability, but also properly to apply its theory to its practice. Thus, through a series of extensions, the problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat, originally relative to a localised, if not marginal theoretical concept (that of a particular revolutionary 'strategy'), ultimately enters into communication with all the important problems of Marxism, offering a perfect example of the alternative to any contractual problematic.²¹Consequently, as the 'crisis' of this concept impinges on factuality, as is the case at present, it coincides with an actual 'crisis of Marxism', disproportionate to anything so described in the past, unless as a recapitulation and concentration at the most sensitive point.

Étienne Balibar

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Basil Blackwell

Marx, the joker in the pack (or the included middle)*

Étienne Balibar

Argument

This *middle* which can no longer be excluded (even as a ghost . . . only exorcised!) is, of course, 'proletarian politics'. Our task is to question once again whether Marx formulated it as a concept, and if so, in what way. Taking up a hypothetical position in the interspace between 'Society' and 'the State' (or in other words, between 'self-management' and 'the autonomy of politics') he does not actually move beyond it. Rather, he disrupts this classic opposition, revealing it to be no more than the mirror image of the same illusion of totalisation and normalisation of social relationships. He therefore evokes, as a problem rather than as a theory, a reality which no political philosophy has been able to encompass successfully — whether one calls it class position, irreconcilable antagonism or dictatorship of the proletariat — and which probably poses an obstacle to the constitution, after Marx, of any political philosophy, of whatever persuasion (to say nothing of a 'political science').

Having posed the question of what is specific about the relationship of Marx to politics, my aim is not, of course, to provide a falsely complete answer, but simply to propose one course among others, of (re-) readings and historical analyses intersecting as much as possible the problems which I think would face anyone attempting to think and act politically *within* Marxism; that is, within its 'limits'.

By Marxism I mean a practico-theoretical ideological formation whose history and present state are such that, for the time being at least, it has not yet given rise to a discourse possessing the relative harmlessness of a discourse on Kant or on Hegel: not only is it subject to interpretation, it is also open to partisan standpoints, and thus to transformation. For all that, it is, nevertheless, to be hoped that this does not entail the obligation to choose between an academic digestion and an intellectual terrorism of the argument by its consequences!

I also maintain that the history and the actual state of this discourse — even if one can do no more than allude to it — can help us to elucidate the nature of the objective constraints on knowledge represented by the principal *concepts* of 'political theory' in Marx and some of his successors: the pre-eminence of class struggle, the idea that the real 'politics' of the bourgeoisie as dominant class is its 'economy', the perfecting of the State apparatus, the historical necessity of revolutionary transition, etc. Seeing that these analytical or pragmatic concepts have failed either to acquire an

unequivocal definition, or to form a system *a fortiori*, which in no way means that they lack rigour, one can propose to consider this constraint not as one of anticipation, but rather of contradiction: Marxism will continue as such as long as it is a factor of crisis in the relationship of theory and practice. But this inevitably implies a rebound effect of its own internal crisis. It is precisely centred upon the relationship of three 'topographical' (*topiques*) concepts (in the terms revived by Althusser): *the masses*, the *party*, and *ideology*. To consider, or rather to analyse the history of mass parties and the political effects of their ideology (or better, of their position in ideological relationships) is to offer release to the 'crisis of Marxism'. In all probability it involves an exit from Marxism.

Unless Marx, the joker in the pack still manages to slip out of our hands.¹

State or politics = the 'Machiavelli of the proletariat'?

I do not wish here to indulge in another general examination of the relationship between Hegel and Marx, which is more a matter of detail than of overall form, whether or not it can be understood in terms of 'reversal' or 'break' etc., since Marx effectively continues to think in the words of Hegel, and yet away from his problematic. On the other hand, this classic confrontation is inevitable, since we are examining the articulation of three terms which encroach on each other, *politics*, *State* and *history* (or philosophy of history), and whose relationship between each other as worked out by Hegel is at the root of Marx's work. This means that Marx's work can be seen, in part, as taking a different, contradictory course from Hegel, not by posing an immediate, exterior alternative, but by way of subverting and diverting the meaning of his statements. I will completely bypass the question of determining whether, in doing this, Marx does not in fact end up coming back across a course which even in Hegel was subversive of his own system. Or, to put it in other words which would refer to recent work which seems to me fundamental (G. Lebrun, J. Derrida, L. Althusser) whether 'Hegel' is not in fact *simultaneously* the author of a philosophy of history which might stand as the most complete dogmatic construction, *and* the organiser of a critical subversion of all philosophies of history, in as much as they are based on 'finalistic' *representations* of progress (and more fundamentally on mechanistic-finalistic representations of time). In this sense, the Hegel I refer to here is always the 'dogmatic' (not to say 'metaphysical') Hegel.

It appears that it was Croce (in *Historical materialism and the economics of Karl Marx*) who first had the idea of presenting Marx as the 'Machiavelli of the proletariat' (perhaps as a counter to those who, evoking certain formulations of Engels, presented

him rather as the 'Darwin of the proletariat' or 'of socialism'). This idea is picked up by Sorel, and elsewhere by Gramsci. More recently it has been given abundant treatment by Althusser, sometimes explicitly, sometimes through a whole network of allusions and transposition of Marx's and Lenin's theses using the very words of Machiavelli. I do not think that this emphasis is fortuitous, but it does also seem to be based on a genuine reversal of positions. To start with, this comparison serves to confirm the similarity of Marx and Hegel in their methods of articulating politics and history. In the end, particularly in Althusser, it serves to set them totally apart. We will see how, in the case of Gramsci, it produces a highly characteristic oscillation in this respect.²

One can dispute the fidelity of Croce's readings of Hegel. What appears evident to me is that the expression 'Machiavelli of the proletariat' refers implicitly to the role represented by 'Machiavelli' in the Hegelian exposition on the formation of the modern State. Croce emphasizes three points: (1) that Marx, like Machiavelli, is above all a *political* theoretician, whose reflections operate on power relationships and how to get inside these through action, and not an economist or a sociologist attempting to constitute, in positivist fashion, an 'abstract' science of social relationships for its own sake, from which concrete applications might be deduced 'post facto'. (2) that consequently theory in Marx is from the word go, subordinated to the *primacy of politics*, in the sense here of the determination of a concrete 'will', the search for means of realising a certain (revolutionary) end amidst the contradictions of reality. (3) that the place occupied by the problem of the formation of a national Italian State in Machiavelli is occupied in Marx by the problem of socialism: in both cases we are dealing with a *movement in reality*, or a historical necessity, with which practice must coincide. Except that Machiavelli is ironised as the definitive 'prophet unarmed', whilst Marx is seen to have found the revolutionary weapon he required in the organised workers' movement of his time. This is why Croce, and after him Sorel³, explain that the realism of Marx is, partially at least, consonant with his concept, whilst that of Machiavelli is paradoxically inoperative.

Gramsci took this interpretation a step further by, in parallel, defining *the Prince* of Machiavelli as a 'revolutionary utopian manifesto' and the Marxist, or rather Leninist proletarian party as a 'modern prince', that is, in short, as a *new* 'new prince' which, unlike the first, is supposed to have found in its conditions of modern capitalism the 'matter' necessary for the realisation of its form. . . . But the remarkable thing here is to find Gramsci

in the middle of a critique of the *economism* of the second and third Internationals, aimed at re-establishing what for him is the essence of Marxism (the philosophy of praxis, 'politics as autonomous science') in fact displacing and plagiarising the dichotomy of 'utopian socialism' and 'scientific socialism', forged by Engels, turning it into the dichotomy of utopian politics and scientific (or realist) politics. The main criterion proposed by Engels as explanation of this transformation of Utopia into science involved precisely a demonstration of how the traditional objectives of socialism (e.g. = to move from the 'government of men to the administration of things', or the abolition of the political State) which for the utopians were a pious wish without means of realisation, became in Marx the necessary consequences of scientifically proved 'laws of evolution'. Besides, it is clear from a reading of Engels' text that the very notion of *utopianism* which he employs is so completely determined by the Hegelian concept of the revolutionary role of the 'great men', who *unconsciously anticipate* historical necessity in their actions. In short: on the one hand, the identification of Marx with Machiavelli, or of the Leninist party with Machiavelli having 'finally discovered' the material for its concept is, quite simply, in contradiction with Engels' definition of historical materialism. On the other hand, however, they both refer back to a Hegelian 'model' which I will characterise schematically by saying that the relationship of theory to practice (or of the will to its conditions) is represented by the image of *temporal delay*: the distinction of the two is simultaneously an anticipation, the action of great men preceding the concept, and the delay of consciousness (which is opposed in certain famous texts of Marx to the 'acceleration' of history by the activity of the mass revolutionary party. But as Althusser demonstrated more recently, this reversal obeys the same logic). Their unity or fusion lies in a simultaneity within a single *Zeitgeist*, and in the return of the individual to the heart of a people from which he had temporarily disengaged himself (the *Zeitgeist* is a *Volksgeist*⁴).

Things begin to get interesting when we note that Engels' argumentation is not simply a way of considering the necessary conjunction between Marxist theory and the contemporary workers' movement, but also a way of *substituting* socialism, or rather communism for the law-based state (*l'état de droit*) in its function and aim, of the realisation of a historical tendency, or as he says elsewhere with Marx, of movement 'from the prehistory of history' and 'from the rule of necessity to the rule of liberty'; an essentially equivocal operation, since it can mean, depending on context and usage, either a *critique* of the definition of the State

as the 'end of history' (realisation of liberty) and even, more interestingly, a critique of the very grounds of an end of history, as the nucleus of an essentially 'State' ideology, or, on the contrary, the transformation of the State into an 'administration of things', that is, a rational instance of planning and collective normalisation of social relationships. This removes the 'political' features seen as forms of archaic domination, in order to liberate what Marx happened to call (in *The civil war in France*) the 'legitimate functions' which are at the same time 'general social functions'⁵. 'Negation of the State', which is its accomplishment, or, as Derrida puts it, its sublation. To sublimate, by definition, is not to destroy. Let us not forget that the substitution of 'the administration of things for the government of men' originates in Saint-Simon, and that it removes any definition of 'politics' as a militaro-theological archaic (and ultimately feudal) structure. It thus implies an idea of socialism which would, quite simply, be the completion of the process whereby bourgeois society (citizenship) frees itself from its own feudal residues. Let us also not forget either that whereas Engels, in the *Anti-Dühring*, defines communism in explicitly Hegelian terms as the non-State, Marx at the same time in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* poses the problem as follows: 'what transformation will the State undergo in a communist Society? In other words, which social functions will continue analogous to the present functions of the State? Only science can answer this question. . . .'

Given these conditions, the critical displacement effected by Gramsci through the equation 'Marx = Machiavelli' (of the proletariat) seems doomed to entrapment in similar ambiguities. By substituting politics for economics as the instance of reality, which measures the relationship of theory to practice, is it suggested that the sole relevant appropriation of Marxism is that which takes place in the *actuality of class struggle*, in its different forms, but with a general exterior one might call the 'politics' of each era, just as Marx wrote in the *Manifesto*: 'All class struggle is political'? Or does it mean that, having removed all point of contact with anarchist interpretations of communism as abolition of the State, it is also necessary to reject the technocratism and shameful corporatism of the 'administration of things' and to confer on the State of the future (communist State? proletarian State?) the full political dimension of an 'ethical' State, that is, a law-based state (*un état de droit*) even if it be made clear that the law here is of a new type — one which is detached from its dependence on the economic forms of commerce and salary, in short, of capitalism?

A cursory examination of the function performed by the

Machiavellian moment in Hegel's argument might be illuminating at this point. 'Machiavelli', for Hegel, is the moment of *transition*. There are two important texts from two quite different periods in Hegel's writing: one in the *German Constitution* (1801), unpublished, the other in *Lectures on the philosophy of history* (1830?), posthumous. The first somehow 'neutralises' the difference between absolute monarchy and the republic in the single concept of the constituted-constitutional *modern State*, because his principal object is national unity ('Germany is no longer a State etc.'). Machiavelli and Richelieu, a duality which reproduces, across the Alps, the gap of theory/practice, are the representatives of a political attitude which *confronts political anarchy* turning its own weapons against it, thereby transforming the people into a State. In the *Lectures* the concept of transition acquires a different sense: no longer the transition of non-State into the national State in general, but the movement of one State into another State, from the feudal regime to absolute monarchy, the penultimate stage of a detailed periodisation aimed at making the law-based state (*l'état de droit*) the culmination of universal history (and, incidentally, re-inscribing the French revolution with its mass egalitarianism, within the limits of a reformed and reformist ethic, in line with the main Hegel password: for Revolution, but through Reform). National unity then is no longer the essential end, but merely a moment and a means in this process. In both cases, however, Hegel proposes a common idea which might be schematised as follows: firstly, he refutes the arguments of anti-Machiavellian moralism, which is founded on a misrecognition of politics and of historical conjuncture: 'one does not cure gangrened limbs with lavender water'. Then he inscribes Machiavellism in the system of means of realisation of a superior ethical norm, State duty, which in return alone permits a bypassing of the characteristic oscillation of abstract morality between the two 'natures' of man, goodwill and natural wickedness.⁶

Why is this thematic of interest to our enquiry? Because it enables us to fix a certain conception of the relationship between *State* and *politics*, whose contradiction has been necessarily and tendentiously re-opened by Marxism. What is striking in Hegel's argument is the fact that, in order to confer on his 'Machiavelli' an ethical dignity from the point of view of the modern State, he is obliged to read him in a highly selective and tendentious manner. Hegel aims to show that *force* (or constraint) and even *violence* are *retroactively justified* by the constitution of the judicial order in which they culminate: 'For a State, the introduction of anarchy is the greatest, indeed the only crime,

for all crimes of which the State must know, lead to this extreme etc.' (*German Constitution*). Thus politics, in its specificity which distinguishes it from morality, is identified with violence, because it leads to a result whereby the State has the monopoly on legitimate violence and the absolute right to repress crime in the general interest. On closer consideration this is a very surprising argument: at the same time he completely 'judicifies' the question of politics, and does it in a *retroactive* fashion, which, from a judicial point of view, is quite scabrous. Or, if you like, it produces in Hegel a necessity to *make the law precede itself*, in the form of deeds, in order to assign a purely judicial base to the State, and thereby inscribe all politics within the horizon of *Recht*. But in this retroactive justification/judicification an essential aspect of Machiavellian politics is totally eliminated. In Machiavelli, politics is by no means the sole preserve of violence, of constraint. As we know, the 'prince' is simultaneously lion and fox. Alongside violence, there is ruse and dissimulation. This second aspect is essential, indeed more so than the first, which it governs, since it alone makes possible the *forgetting of the origins* of the State without which stability of power is impossible. Ruse is the ideal means of constituting the system of semblances of power, of outward show, which gains the love (or at least forestalls the hate) of the people, and frees the State from the indefinite cycle of private vendetta. By comparing Machiavelli with Hegel's reading of him one can therefore say, either that the duality violence and ruse is what permits Machiavelli to dispense with any judicial consideration in his analysis of politics as the conquest and conservation of power, or that the ethical reconciliation of violence and law inevitably leads Hegel to eliminate purely and simply all forms of dissimulation, hence of the imaginary, not to mention of ideology. This is all the more striking since Hegel is otherwise an obstinate theoretician of the reality of appearances (it is even, according to Lenin, one of the two principal definitions of the dialectic). But one can well see why they cannot be admitted here. It is because of the fact that, if it is possible or even indispensable to find a codified exercise of violence in the law-based state and thereby to justify retroactively its employment in the formation of the State, it is quite impossible to do likewise with ruse. In the law-based state, which is the result of political action before becoming its absolute base and structure, ruse, dissimulation, bad faith can have no place. Furthermore, if they were admitted, the judicial order would be ruined at a single stroke, in so far as it remains essentially a system of mutual recognition on the part of private persons under the guarantee

of public power. Thus, if politics is always directed in advance to an end which is the constitution of a law-based state, it can work in the domain of violence, but never in the domain of dissimulation.

We can, therefore, take this a step further. Firstly we can form the hypothesis that there is an *incompatibility* between the Machiavellian idea of a *world of appearance* in which politics unfolds (a world of appearance which refers to no essential subjacent *truth*, at least to no truth manifesting itself in history — since it is itself ‘the effective truth of things’) and the Hegelian idea of *the unconscious* which characterises the political activity of great men as anticipation of the State, even though Hegel relies on the image of Machiavelli in order to consider this process of anticipation (or of transition). Next we recall that, in Hegel, *the banishment of ruse from the sphere of the means of political action has as a counterpart the definition of the process of formation of the State as a ‘ruse of reason’*⁷. The ruse of reason is in opposition to the ruse of individuals (which is at best no more than a psychological accident). The ruse of reason lies in the fact that, in following their particular passions and private interests, individuals unconsciously make themselves the means of a universal end. Paradoxically, Hegel includes in this process *both* the particular will of the innumerable private proprietors whose egotism unfolds in civil society, in the sphere of demand and of commerce, *and* the particular will of the ‘great man’, who wants power for his own interests, and is thereby led to legislate for all (according to the dialectic immanent in the ‘object’ he believes he is appropriating, and which in reality makes him its instrument and property). If the State succeeds in constituting itself, it is due to a convergence and union of these two processes (which is ultimately a scholarly way of saying that in order to make States, the unity of a ‘free’ market circulation and a power desired for its own sake is required). In Machiavelli, man’s natural ‘wickedness’, which explains why politics can be no more than a combination of violence and ruse, has nothing to do with any economic *egotism*, with the search for a utility conceived of as the satisfaction of the interests of private proprietors. All in all, it is as if Hegel had at the end of the day systematically confused two historically distinct concepts of this ‘wickedness’. Following the theoreticians of ‘possessive individualism’, like Hobbes or Mandeville, he sees the ‘evil’ from which emerges, through passions and antagonistic interests, the good of the people, that is the State, as the ‘ruse of reason’ in this double aspect: on the one hand as the ‘invisible hand’ at work in civil society, and on the other as the political

activity of 'great men' who anticipate the law through violence.⁸ This allows him, in his retroactive exploitation of Machiavellism, to compensate for the elimination of ruse and 'appearance' by introducing the egotistic interest (thereby shifting ruse from the individual to the objective spirit) and conjuncture (which Machiavelli calls 'fortune', and which excludes any representation of history as the unfolding of truth) by the mechanical *balance* of interests as the founding moment in the realisation of the State.⁹

To summarise. What is at stake in this discussion is to determine how the concepts of politics and the State became associated, even identified in the theoretical horizon within which Marxism inscribes itself. We have seen that if 'Machiavelli' becomes in Hegel's eyes the very image of politics, the moment where modern politics emerges in personal form, it is by an anticipatory self-inscription in the constitution of the State. We have also seen that this implicitly introduces two alien categories into Machiavelli: that of the law, and that of economics considered as the automatic balancing of the world of demand and private property, and thus a reinscription of the 'wickedness' or the 'perversity' of men in their egotism. We have seen that this whole operation implies inevitably both a displacement and a reduction of what constitutes politics in Machiavelli. In Hegel's totalisation, in particular his totalisation of civil society and the State, a part of politics is left to fall by the wayside, simply 'forgotten' or rather denied.

It is therefore tempting to reverse the perspective and to consider whether this 'forgetting' or this setting apart does not reveal, albeit indirectly, the *limitation*, the narrowness of Hegel's political viewpoint. There may be an aspect of real politics — which perhaps Machiavelli grasped in his own words: but have we ourselves any better? — which is *irreducible* to the constitution of the State and which, in this sense, cannot be considered as its objective or subjective anticipation. Hegel's limitation is in measuring the entire field of politics in terms of an end, or a State order, on the pretext that the State cannot exist without controlling, organising or normalising this field. This means, according to how one chooses to apply this term 'politics', either that politics, *having existed*, is *no more* from the point when the law-based state comes into existence (politics as such belonging merely to the transition, the preparation of the State); or else that *politics only achieves adequate form in the (rational) State*, in keeping with the ethico-judicial concept. Previously it remained unconscious, presenting itself in the form of its opposite, that of singular individuality rather than the individuality of the people. The law-based state, as a real community, no longer has need

either of great men or of heroes. Brecht expresses this idea: 'Woe to the people who need heroes' (*Life of Galileo*).

But it is even more tempting to pose the following question: if Marx can justly be called the 'Machiavelli of the proletariat', if Gramsci attempts to portray the Leninist party as the 'modern prince', is this a continuation of the Hegelian interpretation? Does it not lie rather in the extent to which Marx effects a sort of return to Machiavelli, or rather an encounter with that which Hegel completely ignored in Machiavelli?

I will be more precise, hopefully without making arbitrary identifications. If there is an original concept of 'proletarian politics' in Marx, the point of departure for his formulation is the double hypothesis of the *Manifesto*: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles (. . .) But all class struggle is political struggle.' I am not forgetting that, from this point on, Marxist discourse, in Marx himself and his successors, became engaged in that characteristic movement of oscillation which I talked about above: on the one hand, the idea that class struggle leads beyond the State and politics to a society without State or politics; on the other hand, the idea that, as Lenin puts it, 'politics is a concentrated expression of economics (. . .) Politics must take precedence over economics.' ('Once again on the trade unions, the current situation and the mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin,' 1921, *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 83.) I am not interested here in choosing between these two lines, but in formulating a hypothesis which crosses both of them at an oblique angle. Is there not in Marx (and Lenin) a concept of class struggle whose function would be precisely to displace once again the 'location' of politics, to demonstrate that if politics, under given historical conditions, can *never disregard the State*, if it organises itself in step with its existence, for or against it, tending to its conquest, its preservation, or its destruction, it cannot however be *reduced* to it? In short, Marx's effort might move above all to a new definition of politics co-extensive over the whole field of class struggle, over the polarised, though not unified, and even less ordered or normalised system of its practices, and thus to a rupture of the equation between politics and the State, which is no more than domination and exploitation under another name.

A critique of the judicial conception of the State, the idea that State power cannot ultimately be explained in terms of its judicial or constitutional form, would form a necessary aspect of this displacement. But the most essential point would be the idea that class struggle is 'broader' or 'more complete' than the State itself.¹⁰ I say displacement rather than reversal, since it is

obviously not possible to see the existence of the State as a moment in the constitution of class struggle in the same way that one might be tempted to see (as Marx, Engels etc. repeatedly did) the class struggle as a moment in the constitution of the State. In reality, class struggle is not a fixed term, it is not an organic whole: one cannot thus define any process as *leading* to its completion in the class struggle, since the class struggle itself is its own indefinite process, one can only say that in the field of class struggle there is always already a State organisation, its control or transformation being one of the things at stake. It is in this sense that I propose to recognise a 'Machiavellian' and non-Hegelian aspect of the concept of politics in Marx. This supposes that, provisionally, at least, we agree to place ourselves in the *actuality* of politics as he described it, or rather as he strove to gain a foothold in it through a certain organised unity of theory and practice (which he called the revolutionary party), but only *without* anticipating its end, or rather without believing that this actuality could be defined as the anticipation of its end. Corresponding to that aspect of political practice in Machiavelli which appears irreducible to an organic concept of the State, as the *whole* in which social differences become ordered, would be Marx's idea that the *State only appears as a 'whole'*, in so far as it is no more than a contradictory element immersed in the non-totalisable process of class struggle. In this sense, though framed in quite different terms, politics is again that which exceeds the State, that which constitutes it as a temporary balance or relative relationship of forces; a process of differentiation rather than integration; or, to return to a classic formulation, an attempt to see contradiction, or a series of contradictions, as a tendency which leads to no guaranteed resolution or reconciliation.

Obviously a number of objections can be raised here. Firstly, one could argue that this analogy is a purely formal one. If Machiavellian politics does not coincide with the development of a Hegelian style State, is it not because it remains at a level of abstraction, an analysis of certain means and certain effects of *power* in general, failing to take historical 'matter', whether economic or judicial, into consideration¹¹? Unlike this abstract 'power', the State as seen by Hegel would be both anchored in a network of exchange, in the sphere of labour, and itself constituted as an administrative 'apparatus' (since Hegel was one of the first to analyse civil servants, State bureaucracy under the name of *universal 'Stand'*); thus twice over more concrete. Conversely, if 'class struggle' exceeds the State in Marx, is it not because it is

presented as *the anatomy of civil society*, and because Marx seeks to reverse the relationship of civil society and the State? In this sense the Marxist primacy of politics, meaning the primacy of class struggle, would have nothing to do with a reconstitution of the Machiavellian dialectic of the relationship of force and power; it would only be a translation (or as Lenin puts it, a 'concentrate') of the reversal which includes the State in the historical movement of civil society, instead of including the economic and judicial movement of civil society in the constitution of the State. It would be, in every sense of the word, a *socialism* (necessarily including a *sociologism*), that is, a primacy of the 'politics of society' or social policy, which aims to be non-political, over the 'politics of the State', the only 'political politics', though described as 'politician politics'. To qualify this politics as 'proletarian' would simply be another form of the tendential identification of the proletariat with the *social totality*, universalising its function on the basis of two equations: 'proletariat = productive class', and 'society = production', while the State, conversely, would be doubly relativised and particularised, not to mention marginalised, as the organisation of the dominant class, or of the non-productive exploiters, and as the particular and temporary product of the social division of labour. As against the Hegelian totalisation, Marx would not mark a return to the 'autonomy of politics' under the name of class struggle, but an attempt within the history of nineteenth century socialist ideologies to examine the development of society against the State, in the perspective of society 'without the State' (or, if you like, of social 'self-management', which he calls the 'free association of producers').

It is not therefore surprising that the attempt to reread Marx in Machiavelli, on the pretext of standing aloof from economism, should result, as in Gramsci, in (at least verbal) aporia — When Gramsci tries to take the analogy of the 'new prince' to its conclusion he must specify that the 'new *Prince*' could not have a personal hero as its protagonist, 'but a political party which relates both to a determined class base and to a mass organisation under a "conception of the world",' or a no less determined ideological hegemony.

In other words this 'Prince' differs from the original in as much as it is no longer individualised as the subject of a will or decision. The questioning of the abstract formalism of Machiavellian 'power' has, as a correlative, a questioning of the *subject* of that power, who ideally concentrates in his head and hands its means and its objectives. But at the same time it potentially makes class, or the proletarian masses organised as a political party, into another

subject, a collective or historical subject, and one which is perhaps even more metaphysical. Or even, as Gramsci puts it, it is a 'writing of the general history of a country' as it is reflected 'in the history of a determined party', from the point of view of that party. It is obvious that in Gramsci this is only possible if the party is the name given to the inevitable tendency of the masses to organise themselves in a centralised fashion, according to different conditions, around their 'organic' leaders and intellectuals. But, above all this *organisation is in turn an anticipation of the State*. It is what Gramsci, gathering his forces to bursting point in trying to understand the defeat of the proletariat by fascism, calls a 'national-popular collective will'. It is what he describes in proposing that the proletarian political party is the germ of a process of 'becoming State', that it constitutes itself around a 'State spirit' to be realised historically through social antagonisms. Thus reworking the theme of anticipation. This is why when Gramsci, in order to 'translate' it into his problematic, resumes the *duality* of Machiavellian politics, which, as we have seen, eluded Hegel = violence and ruse, or force and dissimulation, by demonstrating that all political domination is a combination of 'force and consent' or of 'dictatorship and hegemony', it is not long before he had in turn reinscribed this duality in an ethical perspective. He tones down the dual aspect of Machiavellian 'wickedness' or the 'beast' in a distinction between the *beast* and *man*. He thus hierarchises them and sets them down in a temporal sequence: in the end the first aspect alone corresponds to the class struggle, and the second to the ethical State which supersedes it. The class struggle, and its temporary condition, the economic opposition of 'corporate' interests, figure on the side of dictatorship and force, whilst on the other side consent prefigures the ideal of a State without class struggle: the same superposition of the *present* and *finality* as in Hegel. Sometimes Gramsci demonstrates that only the proletarian State (workers' State, or communism) can be fully ethical, that is, *popular*. At other times he recognises that, in this sense, all States in history have been ethical in one way or another, and from this point of view the proletarian State offers nothing new. But then proletarian politics and its political party, the 'germ of collective will' also offer nothing new, except in that they are the historical substitute for preceding ruling classes. Hence perhaps Gramsci's inability to get (himself) out of a perpetual oscillation between the two terms 'civil society' and 'State', which he is obliged both to distinguish and identify. Hence perhaps the brutal contradiction I evoked in another connection: a hostage twice over, of fascism and of Stalinism,

without ever being able to resign himself to this symmetry, Gramsci is by far a greater liberator of critical analyses and collectively revolutionary practices than any other contemporary Marxist, and yet he provided no effective means of breaking loose from Stalinism, whose circle he co-habits. True, these oscillating formulations of Gramsci are also part of a work which moves towards a breaking of this circle, which is there for us to carry on. Gramsci is no more unified than Hegel or Marx, 'such as to himself eternity's changed him etc.' (*Poems of Mallarmé*, R. Fry (trans.), London, Chatto & Windus, 1938, p. 207 (translator's note).) Gramsci's 'equations'¹² in their perpetual displacement, are haunted by the same insistent question: how can one find a *third 'location'* or articulation for revolutionary theory and practice, which would be *neither civil society nor State*, that is, which is not a prisoner of this distinction and of the effects of teleological anticipation that it implies? In ceaselessly exploring all its configurations, Gramsci should have seen better (or less badly) than any other the very tomb of 'proletarian politics' and of the autonomous class position it claims to represent.

Economics and politics

In conclusion, I would like, very schematically, to develop the following hypothesis: Marx's clearest contribution to the solution of his own problem, that of a specifically 'proletarian politics', is paradoxically his *critique of political economy*. I therefore intend to take up an opposing point of view to that held by most current commentators, whether Marxist or non-Marxist. We are told that what is 'missing' in Marx is a critical theory of the State or of politics. Such a theory is thus attempted following Marx's plans, elaborated at different periods of his work, but having in common the inscription of the economy as point of departure of a deductive, or 'dialectic' process leading ultimately to the State, revolution, international politics etc., in short, to the political. The critique of political economy is therefore *used*, not as a discourse producing *its own* political effects (in practice as well), but in order to *move beyond it*, in the direction of what is seen as 'real' politics, exceeding economism. And if it is not possible to extract the means of this movement beyond from the critique of political economy (i.e. principally from arguments put forward in *Capital*), one can try to compensate by seeking elements of analysis of *power, the State, the form-party, bureaucracy* etc. in other Marxists who are more 'political' than Marx, and in this sense more Machiavellian or Hegelian, or why not even in the 'political scientists' or such sociologists, so

as to complete or rectify the critique of political economy. Consequently, in order to re-establish a systematic unity, it is proposed to reconsider all this in terms of a *return to Marx*, and even a *return within Marx* to what would be the common 'anthropological basis' of the critique of political economy and the critique of politics, for example, an anthropology of labour, a philosophy of history as fate of the division of labour, etc.

It seems to me that in following this line of thought one is simultaneously searching in the pitch dark and in broad daylight for something which is in fact *already given*, already present, doubtless in partial and conjectural form, but which there is no need to 'move beyond'. Besides, one becomes a victim of the same process of recognition/misrecognition in which Marx found himself involved in his own work: a totally classic process (with sufficient daring I would say that we all experience it) which consists of the belief that one will arrive at one's originally projected aim, whereas actual practice, even if it is a 'theoretical practice', leads elsewhere. Let me explain:

What is sought is already given because the form *par excellence* of Marx's political thought is precisely his critique of political economy, his analysis of the class struggle in production; it is the very means whereby he evokes antagonism at the point where the discourse of the economists had apparently exorcised it. It may be that this political thought is *partial*, that is, that it does not possess a uniquely consistent principle for understanding the class struggle (which Marx perhaps believed it did). But it is impossible to maintain the idea that this critique is politically incomplete, or pre-political, somehow preliminary to politics, or, if you like, an analysis of the *preliminary conditions* of politics, which itself would subsequently emerge on the 'base' of these conditions. In other words it is certain that Marx, in criticising *political* economy, notably in *Capital*, does not reduce the strength of the adjective 'political' but on the contrary reinforces it. Already this offers a typical indication of his difference from the economists. The tendency of economists throughout history, from the 'classics' to the 'neo-classics' and their successive critical attempts to confirm the *scientific* status of their discipline (and as J-P. Osier observes, this confirmation constantly demands new forms of criticism when it becomes apparent that previous economics *lacks* the required universality, objectivity and impartiality), this whole tendency aims to rid itself of the adjective 'political' and to constitute an economic science, a pure economics. The only economists to go against the grain are those who both reintroduce the effects of social contradiction into the economic game, and who show how

economic science has had the singular fate of providing State practices with a language and a self-awareness which has continually contradicted its dogmas: for example Keynes, in chapter 23 of *General theory* on 'mercantilism'. But if Marx tends to reinforce the meaning of the adjective, and ultimately to show that *economics is really politics*, in spite of and by means of this denegation, it is clearly at the cost of a *displacement*, and thus in a quite different sense from that common to the mercantilists and Adam Smith. Economics is not political because it analyses the condition of the wealth of nations, such as a State is able ideally to realise or guarantee them¹³. It is political because it discovers phenomena of domination in the equilibrium between competitors, the logic of exploitation and even over-exploitation in the accumulation of capital, the necessity of surplus labour (*surtravail*) in value etc. Thus it is political if we change the meaning of the word.

But I said above that this obstacle in our recognition of Marx's politics in his most immediately given analyses is also a misrecognition on the part of Marx himself. If you like, it is the difficulty that he, like ourselves, has in changing the meaning of the word. It would be easy to put this down to an effect on his discourse of the 'dominant ideology'; but we must be more precise, for in reality, it is the very nature of this dominant ideology which is in question here.

The source of difficulty for Marx is the fecundity of the conceptual pair *Society-State* (or 'civil society' and 'political State') which we have evoked on numerous occasions. I am not alone in my belief that Marx never managed to rid himself of this pair, or this 'topography', even when his actual analyses became increasingly incompatible with it. But I do not believe that his reasons were all bad.¹⁴

Chief among Marx's 'good reasons' is that the pair *Society-State*, such as he inherited it through Hegel, intersects the opposition of the *private* and *public*. Here the whole analysis of capitalist exploitation shows that the judicial form of *private appropriation*, and as a correlative that of the *wage contract*, are the necessary middle term for the extraction of surplus labour, and for its conversion into 'surplus value', and its capitalisation. But above all, the historical development of capitalist relationships (up to the 'multinational' forms of present-day imperialism) increasingly showed that bourgeois domination is itself, in its way, a 'double-headed eagle'. That is, that it has no one single centre, whether in capital or the apparatus of the State, but *two*, and that there may be a concerted interplay

between these two centres, or heads, as we observe any day of the week, which allows the left hand to be ignorant of what the right hand is doing, and to be able to swing the workers to and fro from one adversary (or 'contractual' interlocutor) to another; but it can also entail disagreement, contradiction and crisis, especially when it involves facing a mass upsurge of 'those down below'. Marx was deeply troubled by this duality, which became increasingly manifest after the revolution of 1848, and he tried all manner of means to *reduce it*, either by presenting it as a transitory phenomenon, an unstable 'balance' in a counter-revolutionary phase, or an 'exceeding' (*dépassement*) of capitalism within the very conditions of capitalism (which merely transposes the Hegelian definition of the monarchy¹⁵...), or else by demonstrating that each of these two terms can be *derived* from the other, to be made its 'expression' or 'instrument'. But at the same time he was somehow forced to *recognise* it. This is very evident in his analyses of bonapartism and bismarckism. It was to be even more evident in Lenin's analyses of imperialism. I think this is the 'good reason' that Marx had for sticking to the pair civil Society-State. In this sense it is quite pertinent in relation to the bourgeoisie, to the domination of the bourgeois class, even if the latter cannot be reduced to it. It is not simply a form of language, but also a form of organisation (and even a 'form of life'), a structural political form, provided that we admit that society is capital, or the reproduction of capital, and nothing else. But in a sense the workers themselves, their families, etc. form part of the conditions for the reproduction of capital.

But this does not avoid the fact that the pair Society-State is completely inadequate for an understanding of the political meaning of the critique of political economy. I will return to exploitation in a moment. What the preceding analyses of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the 'machievellianism' of Marx have indicated is that the pair civil Society-State is also the tomb, or the 'damper' of 'proletarian politics'. One sets off from the idea that this politics is *already present* in some way in the process of labour, or rather in the explosive contradiction of the living and working conditions of the industrial wage-earning class, and consequently proposes to see how this contradiction develops, how it places restraint in certain conjunctures on all other contradictions, or even the simplest differences present in the social formation that are there to fall into line with it. It is therefore shown that there is a double constraint at work in the political field: on the one side the constraint of the process of the accumulation of capital, to which even the workers are

forced to submit; and on the other the constraint of the workers' struggles which even the capitalists are forced to take into account. But as soon as one defines and locates the basic contradiction as a contradiction *within* 'civil society' or *of* civil society, one is caught in a vicious circle. To 'develop' the contradiction then is to pass it on to the superior element of the State, or conversely to draw and re-absorb the State into the element of civil society. But the State and civil society are merely mirrors of each other. As a result one ends up going round in circles, and, in particular, instead of finding a way of considering proletarian politics as *another* practice of politics, which creates a change in the meaning of the word 'politics', one can only treat it as the *anticipation of a reconstituted unity* between Society and State, to the detriment of one or the other. One is completely caught in the trap that lies in wait for socialist ideology: in trying to set up 'society', its productive forces, its autonomy, etc. *in place of* the State as the instance of direction, regulation and totalisation, to substitute, in fact, one 'statism' for another, a statism of production and planning for a statism of free exchange, contract and the 'government of men'.

Therefore I would like to say this: if there is an element of 'proletarian politics' in Marx which is a genuine *third term*, it is necessary to seek it at first (as later in Lenin or Gramsci) in the direction of everything which resists and dislocates the civil Society-State dichotomy. If it is to be found above all in the critique of political economy, this is because *this dichotomy*, as it is handed down to Marx (and to us after him) *is above all an effect of economic ideology*. Hegel would not have been able to construct his representation of the whole as the hierarchical and concentric relationship of civil society and the State if he had not inherited the distinction of the economists, beginning with the very meaning of the words 'civil society', which, prior to Smith and Ferguson, means political society. In working back from Hegel to the economists, Marx works back to the source of this ideological representation.

I spoke of recognition and misrecognition at the same time. It is a dangerous formulation, since it could be held to imply a subjective appreciation. In fact I do not wish to prove it, but merely to make it acceptable as a working hypothesis. I will say that Marx, *like* the socialists of his time, and in this sense he can be counted among them, lies completely *within* economic ideology. For example, Marx, at one point in his analyses, perpetuates the economic ideology of automatism, or the spontaneous regulation of economic phenomena in quantitative terms. If he praises to the skies Quesnay's *tableau économique*,

and tries to plagiarise it in book II of *Capital*, it is because the *tableau* allows him both to criticise the idea of a regulation of the market (competition) *and* to replace it with the idea of a regulation of social production and reproduction. Even more significantly, Marx, as we know, criticises the *naturalism* of the economists, the way in which they represent commercial production as a state of nature; but this critique leads him to 'historicise' capitalism in a very particular form: by inscribing the trends of commercial production in a *general law of evolution*, which Engels was to compare to that of Darwin. And it was not long before these laws of evolution occupied the exact same space as the *states of nature* in the dominant ideology, that of providing a metaphysical guarantee of progress within stability¹⁶

On the other hand, however, Marx, unlike all the other socialists of his time, and in this sense he cannot be counted among them (which incidentally is one of the reasons for his insistence on the word *communism*) is paradoxically *outside* of economic ideology: his process involves a systematic demolition of its mode of analysis. It would be necessary to reread all of book I of *Capital* to demonstrate this in a convincing fashion. I spoke of laws of historical evolution. . . . But aside from this concept, which rather has the appearance of a philosophical generalisation *a posteriori*, there is another concept of a quite different nature, which is more directly enlisted in the analysis; ie. the concept of a *law of tendency*. A law of tendency is the combination of a tendency and a counter-tendency. This does not mean that the tendency is held back, or that the history of capitalism follows a middle course between tendency and counter-tendencies . . . it means that the tendency never arrives at its originally projected aim. This is why we have a history of capitalism rather than simply a logic of accumulation. Above all this means that capitalism cannot 'administer' its own tendencies without combining into them quite heterogenous strategies of exploitation of the workforce, which are just so many ways of responding to the class struggle, or of anticipating it, this time in the sense of a good sportsman anticipating his opponent . . . with the difference that this game has no rules, and there are no holds barred. This is why *Capital*, to the amazement of most of its readers, is not purely an economic argument. If it takes value as its starting point, it is in order to get back to labour, and subsequently to surplus labour. From this point on we are no longer in economics, but in certain chapters of the class struggle where we find workers' coalitions, reports of factory inspectors, labour legislation, and even the bloody expropriation of peasant populations linked

with a 'primitive accumulation' which is primitive in name only, interfering with problems of productivity and profit. In short, we are in the history of strategies of exploitation, and no longer at all in the distinction of civil society and State. We are therefore fully within the conditions of proletarian politics, at least in some of its more immediate aspects. This perhaps helps us to understand why many readers of Marx put down everything in *Capital* which is not translatable in terms of exchange value and quantitative relationships between exchange values or prices, as founded in 'metaphysics'....

I fully acknowledge that these considerations in no way settle the practical problems of proletarian politics which I posed at the beginning (concerning the successive images of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'). But in a way it is better left there, in order not to fall back into one form or another of the primacy of theory over practice.... It does not settle the question of the form-party (but it might illuminate that of the union, which is inseparable from it). It does not settle the question of a materialist, and hence critical analysis of Marxism as mass ideology, that is, both revolutionary and State ideology. It does not settle the question of establishing whether, as the *Manifesto* claims, 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles', that is, whether we can treat the analyses of *Capital* and the critique of political economy as an analytical *sequence*, instead of taking them as the germ of a totalisation, and as such as a sort of fundamental social ontology....

But it does enable us to formulate one last hypothesis concerning the equally ambiguous reasons for the endurance, or the adaptability of Marxism. This hypothesis is that *economics – as such – is the perfect State ideology, or the principal State ideology of the bourgeoisie as dominant class*, from the end of the eighteenth century to this day, including of course the State ideology of socialist States, which are more or less destabilised or re-established bourgeois States. Curiously enough, Marx, in one sense, never says anything else but this, and never stops repeating it, by describing economists as the 'ideologues of the bourgeoisie', its 'ideological representatives', and by opposing the 'political economics of labour' to that of 'capital'. But on the other hand, when they explicitly formulate the question of a *dominant form of dominant ideology*, Marx, and especially Engels say that this form is the judicial ideology, that is, the ideology of the rights of man, of the social contract and of the parliamentary regime. It is true that this formulation harks back indirectly to economics, since the judicial ideology, often confused with the law itself, is analysed as the reflection of the

universal extension of private property and of commercial exchange. But in this way, instead of describing economics as a deeper or broader stratum *of* the dominant ideology, one tends to make it *the reality* which explains the production of ideology as such, and thus to sanction it rather than criticise it. In fact, Marx's difficulty lies in his saying *both* that there is a scientific political economics, or that there is a 'scientific aspect' of political economics, *and* that political economics is State ideology number 1 of the bourgeoisie. It is not his actual analysis of economic discourse (at least, that of the 'classics') which stands in his way. On the contrary: as proof, the conclusion he draws from his reading of Adam Smith: 'the bourgeoisie has excellent reasons for attributing this supernatural power of the creation of value to human labour,' or else his recognition of the fact that Ricardo expresses, 'without mincing words', 'without illusions' the logic of the accumulation of capital at the expense of the landed proprietors. Above all, what stands in his way is his use of a solely theoretical definition of ideology as *speculation*, thus of a one-to-one opposition between science and ideology, which his critique of economics precisely brought into question, and which renders proletarian ideology (or 'class consciousness') literally unthinkable, and its kinship with the pair civil Society-State again easily demonstrable. Or again it is the belief, which goes hand in hand with this definition, that the ideological is at the height of its 'mystificatory' efficiency when in the social topography it is at the greatest distance from determinant social relationships and the recognition of class struggle, whereas the critique of economics would suggest — think of the extraordinary chapters on wage form — that the maximal efficiency of the ideological is found *at the closest point* to social contradiction, when the ideological discourse is directly intertwined with the conflictual relationships it aims to control. Marx's only rigorous attempt to follow up this line of thought is that fascinating text on the 'commodity fetishism'. But as Marx was forced to come to terms with his identification of ideology with speculation, everything is trapped in a surprisingly post-Kantian construction of the dialectic of social appearances, and most importantly the concept of dominant ideology is completely detached from any reference to the State¹⁷.

This is tantamount to saying that another root cause of Marx's difficulties in setting forth in full what he continually demonstrates in practice is his difficulty in distinguishing what I crudely termed *State ideology number 1* of the bourgeois class (indispensable not only to domination, but also to the constitution and even the reconstitution of a bourgeois class) from the *particular ideology*

which internally 'cements' the bourgeois State apparatus, the behaviour of its officials, the activities of its intellectuals, the rights and duties of citizens in relation to the State apparatus etc., and which is in fact the judicial ideology, or if you like, the 'judicial conception of the world' (as opposed to a religious conception). Engels masks this distinction when he writes that 'the State is the premier ideological force'¹⁸, making dominant ideology the *product* of the State apparatus, whereas the first question is to determine which ideological form must become dominant in order that the bourgeoisie might control, transform and utilise the State apparatus.

No doubt there are all sorts of historical reasons which might help us to understand why Marx found this distinction so difficult. For example, the influence of the model of the French Revolution which had led Marx to believe that 'France is the classic country of bourgeois politics', whilst the Britain of liberalism and the industrial revolution alone was seen as the classic country of his economics. From this point on there was a lack of connection between the two halves of 'typical' bourgeois society, which meant that, in the middle of the nineteenth century, Marx was still representing Britain as a country *without a developed bourgeois State* (and he had just spent several years living in the heart of London!). On the other hand, the more the domination of the bourgeois class became consolidated in France, in the forms of bonapartism, and later of the Third Republic, with that remarkable development of a bureaucratic and centralised State apparatus (which good form now tells us to call 'jacobin', without fear of historical ridicule), the more Marx and Engels were disturbed by these new political forms. That led them to the view that the rule of the bourgeois class is not to exercise political domination 'in person', but to delegate it to others than its own dominant groups. . . .

Today we can take a step back from these historical conditions, and, even without entering into all the details, we can perceive the relevance of this tireless work of arming 'proletarian politics', not by means of a critique of judicial ideology – whatever the consequences of this omission might have been – but principally by means of a critique of economic ideology.

The recent book by Louis Dumont, *Homo aequalis* (Gallimard, 1977) has no doubt helped to re-awaken discussion in this country about the political effects of economic ideology (in this we are lagging behind other countries). But as the discursive sequences he analyses are immersed in a vast 'anthropological' confrontation between so-called 'holistic' and 'individualistic' societies (an avatar, among others, of the old 'paradigm' of 'status' and

'contract', of 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gesellschaft', of 'natural' and 'monetary', of 'cold' and 'warm societies', etc.) I persist in my belief that the more limited analyses of J-P. Osier concerning Smith and Hodgskin are more instructive (in his short work *Thomas Hodgskin, une critique prolétarienne de l'économie politique*, Maspero, 1976). The fundamental point is that from Adam Smith onwards, 'economic' discourse, by presenting itself as *science* and radically divorcing itself from 'politics', represented as a remnant of pre-capitalism, and thus instituting the distinction of civil society and the State, provides the different factions of the bourgeoisie with the means of considering, and thus of organising the unity of their interests as just so many conditions of the accumulation of capital. Everything opposing their mutual interests is called 'politics', and everything which leads back to the logic of accumulation, that is, to the command of capital (or money) over labour, is called 'economics'. At last this provides the means, albeit theoretical, of preventing the interests of labour, or rather of workers, from entering into the conflict of interests between different bourgeois factions, so as to disturb its 'arbitrations' (as we say nowadays) and to undermine the mass bases of the State. Furthermore it offers a solution ('finally discovered' as Marx would say) to the problem that classical political philosophy had never been able to solve satisfactorily with its 'natural State' and its 'social contract'.

It was necessary in fact to formulate a theory which first of all proposed a *conflict of interests*, the inevitability of 'civil war', in order to demonstrate subsequently in the very terms of this conflict, the *necessity of its solution*, that is, the constitution of a whole, a harmonious order, a general will. Instead of seeking this solution in the field of right, morality, 'natural law', economic ideology *radically displaces it*. It claims that this order is not 'political', that it is not imposed by the State, that it is quite simply *economic logic itself*, the play of opposing interests tending to the same general balance, the 'invisible hand' of the market. And at the same time it achieves a solution incomparably superior to any previously formulated. There is no more need of the complex artifices of the social contract and its limitations or guarantees. There is no more need of the fictive supposition of a reconstitution of the State from zero, of an imaginary 'natural State' which also always involves the danger of what Spinoza called, in reference to the monarchy, 'a return to the mass', what Hegel later described with dread as the 'fanaticism' of people who have read too much Rousseau. . . . It is sufficient to *perpetuate the State*, and to reform it by assigning it the task of reproducing the conditions of the 'free play' of the market,

including the labour market, and of course, including the 'planned' market.¹⁹

My belief, couched fully within the form of a hypothesis, is that we now still occupy the ideological space opened up by this remarkable solution. This is the reason why I said in my introductory argument that Marxism remains somehow unsurpassable — in the middle of its own crisis — as long as it is a factor of crisis in the relationship of political theory and practice: because they are organised in the field of this ideology; thus not so much because of Marxist theorisations of the party and of socialist transition, but because the class struggle is permanently re-opened by the critique of economics. At the same time this seems to me to cast some glimmer of light on the way in which, the more Marxism tends to transform itself into a State ideology (through a party ideology), the more it becomes an economist itself.

Translated by David Watson

Notes

* The following notes are a record of the second and third parts of a paper which I presented on the 18 May 1981. In order to reduce it to more reasonable dimensions, I have preferred, rather than attempting to summarise it in its entirety, as if dealing with a totality separable into distinct conclusions, purely and simply to leave out the first part, which discusses, in cavalier fashion, the history of the concept of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' from Marx to Stalin, Gramsci and Mao.²⁰ This was discussed, in relation to these successive figures, in terms of an ever-widening re-inscription of an identical circle, whose circumference encompasses historical mass movements, increasingly numerous and heterogenous forms of political practice: a theoretical circle in which the theorisations of Stalin and those of Gramsci end up face to face in a surprising formal symmetry. In both cases *the party* is seen as the organising centre, in the sense of a developing organism. But in the one case, this is in relation to the *State*, and in the other in relation to *civil society*. This is why, in one case, the process of organisation is called the 'socialisation' of the State (in Stalin = dictatorship of the proletariat exceeding the State), and in the other it is called the 'becoming State' of society (in Gramsci = the exceeding of corporatism). In this antithetical reconstruction of the pair *State/Society*, the possibility of a third term, or of a third area of definition for 'proletarian politics', which had been perceived along the way, and had even been crystallised in the form of 'the government of producers' (Marx) or the 'society of transition' (Lenin), was once again lost, as if it had failed not only to achieve stability, but also properly to apply its theory to its practice. Thus, through a series of extensions, the problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat, originally relative to a localised, if not marginal theoretical concept (that of a particular revolutionary 'strategy'), ultimately enters into communication with all the important problems of Marxism, offering a perfect example of the alternative to any *contractual* problematic.²¹ Consequently, as the 'crisis' of this concept impinges on factuality, as is the case at present, it coincides with an actual 'crisis of Marxism', disproportionate

to anything so described in the past, unless as a recapitulation and concentration at the most sensitive point.

The same problem, seen from a different angle, forms the object of the two developments I am reproducing here in the incomplete form proper to work done for a seminar.

(This paper was first published in L. Ferry, J-L. Nancy, J-F. Lyotard, E. Balibar, and P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Rejouer le Politique*, Galilée, 1981, 135–169.)

1. I call Marx a 'joker' because, if there is almost not a single one among his 'political' concepts which was not drawn from preceding games of philosophers, it must be admitted that having shuffled and redealt the cards he produced a deal that has made philosophy elude itself and given him (Marx) a hold over it. I don't think I am contradicting here the critical distinction proposed by F. Gadet and M. Pecheux between the *Joke* and the *Witz* (*La langue introuvable*, Maspero, 1981, p. 211 following). In fact Marx, the inexorable polemicist, anxious to the point of obsession, has never had the sense of the *Witz* (in spite of his 'origins'...).
2. The following suggestions owe an inestimable debt to the lectures on Machiavelli given by Althusser at the E.N.S., particularly in 1972.
3. cf. *Société française de philosophie*, session of 20th March, 1962 (thanks to Thierry Paquot for this reference).
4. cf. L. Althusser: *Reading Capital*: 'The errors of classical economics: an outline for a concept of political time'.
5. The common ideological element being what one would call, in Anglo-Saxon terms, the 'rational central rule' (cf. Herman van Gunsteren, *The Quest for Control*, a critique of the rational central rule approach in public affairs, London, J. Wiley, 1976).
6. cf. also *The Philosophy of Right*, sections 15–18.
7. On this point in particular I differ from the fascinating analyses of Cl. Lefort, in *Le travail de l'oeuvre: Machiavel* (Gallimard, 1972) (cf. particularly p. 109 following, p. 237 following, p. 383). In overneglecting, in my view, the distortion of the Machiavelli–Hegel relationship, Lefort exposes himself to a *play on words* in the 'economy of desire', and ultimately re-integrates Machiavelli in the series of organisers of the State-civil society relationship ('better than Marx', as he puts it) (cf. Machiavelli: 'la dimension économique du politique' in *Les formes de l'histoire*, Gallimard, 1978, pp. 127–140).
8. In *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Basic Books, 1974) pp. 18–19, Robert Nozick contrasts 'invisible hand explanations' and 'hidden hand explanations', in other words, the production of order by fluctuations, and order as the result of a 'conspirative' intention. It is clear that the Hegelian critique of Providence, and of the Leibnitzian theodicy is a critique of 'hidden hand explanations'. But the point is to decide whether, by constituting a dialectic through the addition of the invisible hand and of the great man, Hegel does not end up rediscovering providence.
9. As we know, the Hegelian State, no matter how total it defines itself, is under no circumstances 'interventionist' in economics. In this respect Hegel belongs entirely to the *liberal* tradition.
10. On this possibility, initiated by Marx, of considering the historical field as *exceeding the 'whole'* cf. Althusser 'Elements of self-criticism' in *Essays in Self-Criticism* (Graham Lock trans.) London, New Left Books, 1976, and also E. Balibar 'A nouveau sur la contradiction', in *CERM: Sur la dialectique*, Éditions Sociales, 1977 on the interference with the dialectic of Spinoza of P. Macherey *Hegel ou Spinoza* Maspero, 1979, especially pp. 180–90.

11. This is the privileged object of discussion in Gramsci's *Quaderni del Carcere* (Edizione critica dell'Istituto Gramsci, A cura di V. Gerratana Einaudi, 1975): against Machiavelli's reductions to a purely 'technical' consideration, which is nevertheless critical of the abstraction which historical conditions impose.
12. It is somewhat pathetic to reread in this light the little equations of the Gramsci of prison (State = coercion + hegemony; = dictatorship + hegemony; = force + consensus etc.) which express not so much a theory of the State as, in categories borrowed from 'political science' as much as from Lenin, the search for a political line of conquest of State power by the working class. (L. Althusser, 'Enfin la crise du marxisme' in *le Manifesto, pouvoir et opposition dans les sociétés post-révolutionnaires*, Seuil, 1978). But in demonstrating the instability of the 'little equations' — from which he draws his argument against Gramsci — Perry Anderson ('The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci' — *New Left Review*, 1976) has perhaps provided a means of removing an obstacle blocking our reading of Gramsci, not as a 'work', all the more pathetic for being incomplete (in Gramsci Marxism has found its Pascal!), but as a work in progress — one of the few in this context to be self-critical. Perhaps one of the first steps one might take to move beyond this statement is to discover the nature of Gramsci's difficulty, in spite of his views on 'liberalism' and 'americanism', in advancing from a critique of *economism* (in the workers' movement) to one of the *economy* (as ideology of the bourgeois State).
13. Which is essentially the argument of Lionel Robbins in *The Theory of Economic Policy in English Classical Political Economy*, 2nd ed, Macmillan, 1978. Though not averse to making abridgements, he nevertheless shows well that it is a mistake to attribute to the classics, especially Smith, but also Bentham, a negative conception of the State as 'night watchman', as a counterpart to their promotion of economics to a state of independence. Once again the relationship of public and private instances arises rather from the 'division of labour'. cf. also Göran Therborn, *Science, Class and Society*, New Left Books, 1976, p. 77 following.
14. Althusser is quite justified, in my opinion, in looking for elements of a 'second topography' of Marx in the Marxist analysis of the 'conditions of reproduction' of the relationship of exploitation. cf. especially 'Ideology and Ideological State apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, (Ben Brewster trans.), London, New Left Books, 1977 (first published in French in 1968). As for the difficulties arising from the co-existence of the two pairs 'civil society-State' and 'base-superstructure', Luporini's essay 'Le politique et l'étatique = un ou deux critiques?' in E. Balibar, C. Luporini, A. Tosel, *Marx et sa critique de la politique* (Maspero, 1979) offers some interesting reflections.
15. Stanley Moore, in 'Three tactics', Monthly Review Press, New York, 1963, pp. 78ff, offers a noteworthy presentation of the 'strategic model' based on this concept of the 'internal superceding' of capitalism starting from the concentration of capital, which he makes the source, in Marx himself, of 'reformism'. Note that in *Capital*, Vol. III, chapters 24 and 27, Marx presents this 'exceeding' as an ambivalent process, whose inner contradictions would be equally prone to a 'good' or a 'bad' solution.
16. Of course Darwin himself never defined his 'hypothesis', later 'theory', as a *law* of development, in the sense of contemporary evolutionists.
17. cf. Jacques Rancière: 'The concept of critique' and 'The critique of political economy', in *Theoretical Practice*, no. 1, 1971, pp. 35–52; and E.

Balibar, *Cinq Études du matérialisme historique*, Maspero, 1974, p. 206 following.

18. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the outcome of classical German philosophy*, chapter 4.

19. One can see that these hypotheses, even if they intersect the thesis maintained by P. Rosanvallon in his book *Le capitalisme utopique* (Seuil, 1979) (which is particularly indebted to L. Dumont), ultimately head in the opposite direction. Indeed it is fair to affirm, after Helévy, MacPherson and a few others, that classical political economics 'aims to resolve a political problem' and should 'be grasped as a response to problems left unresolved by political theoreticians of the social contract' (op. cit. p. 6.). But I do not believe either that 'it does not aim principally to constitute theoretical knowledge' or that it constitutes, according to the notion employed by Sorel, a 'liberal utopia'. Once again, it is these alternatives, it is this conception we have of *ideology* in general which is at stake. *A fortiori* I do not believe at all that, in proposing *the autonomy of the economic*, the classical economists 'repressed the question of politics'. On the contrary, they deal with it explicitly, not indeed in terms of the *individual* (that is, in the metaphorical area of some anthropology), but directly, in terms of social *classes*, and therein lies their force: whether it is to do with the critique of mercantilism, the distinction between 'productive' and 'non-productive' labour, the population problem, the 'poor laws' and the coalitions, or the way in which Ricardo thinks he is able to define, once and for all, the limits in which the antagonism of wages and profit might be contained (provided that the rent of landed proprietors is minimised). In this respect I do not think it is excessive to suggest that Marx, in many of his passages (notably in his whole critique of the myth of 'private accumulation', which aims to ensure a 'forgetting' of the historical origins of 'directed labour') very clearly described this 'Machiavellian' aspect of the liberal economists.

20. The essential points of this presentation can be found in the article 'Dictature du prolétariat' which I drafted for *Vocabulaire critique du marxisme*, appearing 1982, published by PUF under the direction of Georges Labrica.

21. To my knowledge there is no satisfactory critical history of this swapping over in democratic (later socialist) thought between this pair of theoretical objects: the 'social contract' and 'revolutionary dictatorship', and their various permutations.