

POLITICAL POWER AND MARXIST THEORY

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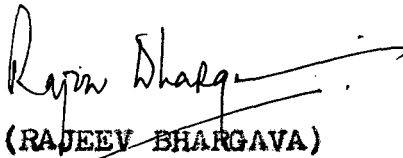
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We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before
the examiners for evaluation .


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C O N T E N T S

	Pages
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
INTRODUCTION	1 - 18
CHAPTER I : THE MACROPOLITICS OF POWER : A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	19 - 64
CHAPTER II : THE QUESTION OF POWER IN MARXIST THEORY	65 - 107
CHAPTER III : PRAXIS, POWER AND STRUCTURE	108 - 155
CONCLUSION	156 - 170
BIBLIOGRAPHY	171 - 176

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of power and its theoretical status in Marxist theory, in the light of recent historical experience.

This experience of the countries of 'actually existing socialism' presents the best opportunity, as it were, to locate the disjunction between the domain of power and the domain of production. It brings into sharp relief the question of an 'autonomous problematic of power', to borrow a phrase from Paul Ricouer.

For here, for the first time, we see political power being exercised in a society where there is no private ownership of the means of production, and therefore, non-exploitative relations of production.^{*} Yet relations of domination and a high degree of absolutization of power are evident - against which the rest of society stands powerless. How can this phenomenon be explained in Marxist terms. One way of 'explaining' it would be to assert, as many influential scholars have done, that this 'so-called'

* To be sure, many Oriental societies did have an absence of private property in production but these again were societies where the state, according to Marx, was the landlord. Production relations in that sense were also relations of domination. But in a sense, these Oriental societies too, illustrate, if not a disjunction, an inversion of the relationship between the two domains. The political relations of domination are here, the basis of exploitative relations of production rather than the other way round.

socialist state was not based on non-exploitative relations of production. Such an argument holds that here the state represented some sort of 'state capitalism', 'bureaucratic capitalism' or was simply a 'transitional stage' where relations of exploitation continued to exist. Such argument, far from explaining anything, prevents even a proper enunciation of the problem.

Another way of looking at it would be to maintain that the extant relations of production in these societies were in fact, non-exploitative. In that case the disjunction becomes crystal clear.

Paul Ricouer made much the same point, way back in 1965, following the publication of the Khrushchev report on the crimes of Stalin, when he said,

"The fundamental fact would seem to be that the criticism of Stalin has meaning only if the alienation of politics is an absolute alienation, irreducible to that of economic society. If it were not, then how is it possible to censure Stalin while continuing to sanction the socialist form of economy and the Soviet regime.... But since Marxism does not allow for an autonomous problematic of power, it falls back upon fable and moralizing criticism".¹

1 Paul Ricouer, "The Political Paradox" in William Conolly (ed), Legitimacy and the State. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984, p.261.

The question of an autonomous problematic of power is however, a difficult one from the standpoint of Marxist theory. For, to grant that there can be an autonomy of power is to immediately raise questions of a philosophic nature. If power, as generally understood in political theory, is grounded in an idealist notion of a "will" or "intention" that is somehow innate in an "abstract human nature", then the autonomy of power has overtly idealistic implications.

The problem that we then seek to address is the following : Is it possible, within a materialist account of history, to have a non-reductionist theory of power? Or, what is another way of saying the same thing : Is it possible to have a materialist theory of power that is at the same time, not an economic reductionist one?

II

Addressing the above problem is a complicated task. More so, because we shall primarily be depending on the classical texts of Marx and Engels; and to some extent, of Lenin, in order to answer it. Power, we may note, is present in these texts only in what can be called its absence. However, we agree with Althusser that "a science only progresses i.e. lives, by the extreme attention it pays to the points where it is theoretically fragile. By these

standards, it depends less for life on what it knows than on what it does not know".²

Power figures in Marxist discourse in much the same way in which labour-power does in the discourse of classical political economy.

A brief digression may help to illustrate this point. Althusser, in his discussion of Marx's reading of classical political economy, quotes from Capital, Vol. I, where he discusses the question of the current price and value of labour.

"In this way, classical political economy believed it had ascended from the accidental prices of labour to the real value of labour. It then determined this value by the value of subsistence goods necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of the labourer. It thus unwittingly changed the terrain by substituting for the value of labour, up to this point, the apparent object of its investigations, the value of labour-power, a power which only exists in the personality of the labourer....

2 Louis Althusser and E. Balibar, Reading Capital. Verso London, 1979, p.30.

"Classical economy never arrived at an awareness of
this substitution...".³

This is so because, says Althusser, though classical political economy gave the correct answer, "it is the correct answer to a question that has just one failing : it was never posed".⁴ Because its eyes are still fixed on the old question".⁵

As with classical political economy, so with Marx and Marxist theory in general, in fact with any theory for that matter, often certain objects and problems remain absent in discourse, while being present in thought.

"They are invisible because they are rejected in principle, expressed from the field of the visible : and that is why their fleeting presence in the field when it does occur (in very peculiar and symptomatic circumstances) goes unperceived...".⁶

We may add to Althusser's point, that it is only when history poses problems anew, are the texts re-read to locate

3 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp.20-21 [emphasis Althusser's].

4 *Ibid.*, p.22.

5 *Ibid.*, p.24.

6 *Ibid.*, p.26 [emphasis added].

the silences and absences in discourse. Marx is no exception to this and as we hope to show, though power is absent from Marx's discourse, it is not from his thought. It has in fact been argued by many Marxists that the entire corpus of Marx's work is an account of the disposition of power in capitalist society and even in the whole of human history.⁷ Richard Miller, for instance, even goes to make the valid point that, "the theory of surplus value would be simply a grand book keeping device if it were not an argument that the dynamics of capitalism are shaped by class struggle, often collective and organized, together with technological change".⁸ Such is also the argument of others like Poulantzas and Balibar and, Laclau in his Marxist phase.

The very fact that increasingly, Marxist scholars have been finding it necessary to grapple with the 'autonomous problematic of power', should be taken to mean that this 'object', hitherto forbidden, "repressed from the field of the visible" seeks to appear, to be present. For the blanks in the theoretical field of Marxism present a serious obstacle to enquiry.

7 For example see, Jeffrey Isaac, Power and Marxist Theory, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1987 and Richard Miller, Analyzing Marx : Morality, Power and History, Princeton University Press, 1984.

8 R.Miller (1984), p.11.

However, to quote Althusser once again,

"To see this invisible, to see these 'oversights', to identify the lacunae in the fullness of this discourse, the blanks in the crowded text, we need something quite different from an acute or attentive gaze; we need an informed gaze, a new gaze, itself produced by a reflection⁹ of the 'change of terrain' on the exercise of vision...".

In Marxist theory, the 'oversights' and absences are already brought into the field of the visible by the pioneering work done by diverse theorists such as Gramsci, Althusser, Poulantzas, Balibar and others. Only the status of this 'new presence' of power is not very clear. The new, informed gaze, made possible by the change of terrain, therefore is already provided by theorists such as those mentioned above.

However, the 'change of terrain' here does not conform to the Althusserian notion of an 'epistemological break' - a radical discontinuity from the preceding problematic. There is a profound continuity even in this discontinuity.

A problem here relates to the fact that the change of terrain is not really complete. Althusser's own 'determination in the last instance' acts in some sense as

⁹ Ibid., p.27.

an obstacle to a fuller change of terrain. But the precondition of doing away with the notion of a 'determination in the last instance' is to present an account of power that conforms to a materialist interpretation of history. That alone can change the terrain.

III

Methodologically speaking, it is imperative in our view to turn to a dialogue with other theoretical and intellectual traditions where power is actually present as a central concept of the problematic. That can help in acquiring a fuller 'informed gaze' which makes it possible to see the invisible in Marxist texts.

The existing literature on power can be broadly divided into two categories. First, those in the behaviouralist and rational-choice framework, which are mainly concerned with the exercise of power in specific micro-situations and how individuals are involved in them. The second category concerns broader questions relating to power-systems and the dynamics of power.¹⁰ Our concern has been primarily with the latter category literature since it is its macropolitics that we wish to investigate.

10 See chapter I for the distinction between micro and macropolitics.

Further, most of the literature in the first category is based on an ontological and methodological individualism that is fundamentally incompatible with what has been called the relational ontology and methodology of Marxism.

The Hobbesian definition of power as a causal relation between individuals (the 'agent' and the 'patient') forms the basis of most of the studies in this genre of power-studies.

This conceptualization, as Terence Ball has correctly noted, "entails a reconceptualization of human agency. Human beings are reconceptualized as material entities who by their very nature are disconnected social atoms driven by desire and self-interest".¹¹

Marxists, and realists generally, with their emphasis on underlying structures, and their insistence on going beyond phenomena to uncover the essences, naturally reject the empiricist basis of above positions.

We however, take a brief look at one of the debates - the 'three faces' or what has also been called the 'three dimensions' of power debate. The reason for so doing is that the debate takes us precisely to the threshold from where

11 Terence Ball, "The Changing Face of Power" in Transforming Political Discourse, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, p.83.

we can clearly see, through Lukes' intervention, the limits of empiricism. Lukes' intervention enables us to clearly see that without a 'change of terrain' as it were, without reference to structural arrangements, institutional practices and the location of individuals therein, it is simply not possible to understand power.

In a sense therefore, Lukes leads us to our three major theorists, Talcott Parsons, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault whom we then turn to. A clarification is in order here. We have not studied the above theorists in toto, as that is not our purpose. We only discuss them in relation to what they have to say about the macropolitics of power, under certain broadly identified themes. In the final chapter, we also draw heavily upon the work of Anthony Giddens. Our reasons for primarily selecting Parsons, Arendt and Foucault are :

(i) that they are ontologically and methodologically not incompatible with Marxism in so far as they are not individualists but relationalists.

(ii) The three of them, representing three divergent and disparate paradigms reflect certain common features - certain affinities, in their understanding of power.

The affinities mentioned above are not all that evident, it is true. But then they are there and have been

noted by many others like Anthony Giddens, Terence Ball, Dennis Wrong etc.

Needless to say, there are many other extremely fascinating aspects to the theorizations of power by the above theorists, particularly Arendt and Foucault. These not being directly relevant to our immediate concern, have not been dealt with. One such aspect, for instance, is the notion common to both, that power is generated discursively (Foucault) and in communication (Arendt) between speaking and acting subjects. We have dealt with the writings of the above theorists only to the extent that they are helpful to our immediate project - to read Marx and Marxism with a new and informed gaze, with regard to a materialist theory of power.

Our reading of Marxist classical texts is then supplemented with some of Gramsci's highly original and interesting innovations. These Gramscian innovations are based on an innate political realism of a revolutionary leader which often turn up in his texts intuitively. But they still provide us with a clue - a thread that, along with Parsons, Arendt and Foucault help us to re-read Marx and Engels.

It is therefore necessary to assert, and clarify, at the outset, in the manner of Althusser and Balibar, that

ours is not an innocent reading. We therefore read Marx and Engels as a political scientist would, asking the question : what is the status of power and politics in Marxism?

It hardly needs to be stated that from within the same texts, a different reading can construct a different picture - in fact, even a diametrically opposite one. We do not make the claim that ours is the only possible or only possible correct reading of these texts. All that we claim is that they can also be read in this way - a way in which an autonomous problematic of power does not appear at all, incompatible with the general propositions of Marxist theory.

Finally, it should be stated that while reading Marx and attempting to discern the 'blanks' or 'absences' we have made use of the methodological imperative of distinguishing between the 'logical order' that governs the movement of categories in thought and the 'historical order' - the actual sequence of development of real events and phenomena. This distinction is Marx's own that he has elaborated in the 1857 Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, later incorporated in the Grundrisse. Categories of thought or conceptual knowledge to Marx is not in this sense, a simple reflection or 'mirroring' of reality. This distinction between the logical development and real historical development is extremely crucial for an

understanding of Marx's method. In our analysis of the argument in German Ideology, for instance, this distinction becomes clear, and necessary.

For, as Jindrich Zeleny in his The Logic of Marx notes,

"The Marxian conception of the 'concept' expresses a logical form ... which is essential for the Marxian dialectical-materialist conception of the reproduction of reality in ideas.... The 'concept' according to Marx, is the intellectual reproduction of the inner arrangement, the inner structure of an object, and indeed of that inner structure in its development, its origin, existence and decline. In the 'concept' Marx works out the logical form which unites the structural and the genetic point of view internally...".¹²

To take a simple and straightforward example, it matters little to Marx whether society or the individual came into existence first, in the historical order. In the method of exposition and analysis that Marx espouses, it is society that is logically prior to the individual and is irreducible to the latter. Whatever the real course and sequence of historical development, it is impossible to make

12 Jindrich Zeleny, The Logic of Marx, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, p.38.

sense of the course of the real historical process itself, according to him, by starting from the individual. This is not to say that real historical development has no meaning for him. On the contrary, it is crucially important for him that the movement of thought keeps returning to the real process and be firmly grounded in it.

As Zeleny rightly notes, "It is one of the characteristics of Marxian analysis that theoretical work constantly touches on the facts of historical reality.... The continuous oscillation between abstract dialectical development and concrete historical reality pervades the whole of Marx's Capital. At the same time it must be emphasized that the Marxian analysis detaches itself continually from the sequence and superficialities of historical reality and expresses in ideas the necessary relations of that reality. Only thus could Marx grasp the historical actuality...".¹³

This is of utmost importance. In our case for example, it is not really important, and may in fact, even be impossible to ascertain, as to which is historically prior, the unequal division of labour (and power relations) or the unequal ownership of property (exploitative production relations). In the real history of societies, evidence in

13 Ibid., p.36.

any form, which can establish the real order of appearance of the two phenomena, seems to be almost impossible to acquire. So the question : Which came first? becomes much like the proverbial chicken and egg question.

However, once we have established the logical and ontological priority of praxis, as the basis of both, power and production relations, it ceases to matter which appeared first and was therefore the cause of the other. (Of course, this is not to say that whatever comes first becomes the cause of what follows). Rather the point is, it can be said, echoing Marx, to grasp the 'inner necessary connection' between these phenomena.

IV

The main contention of the present dissertation is that it is possible to have a non-reductionist Marxist theory of power and politics. Further, that such a theory of power must depend crucially on a reading of Marxism that accords ontological primacy to praxis, human agency and action, from which power is necessarily generated. It follows from the above contention then that power is ontologically embedded in human existence and is therefore, a necessary feature of the human condition.

The argument presented in this dissertation is based however, on a reconceptualization of power. It is argued

that power is not simply a phenomenon of coercion and repression, the anti-thesis of freedom. It is rather, a creative and liberating force as much as it is associated with repression/coercion. We have further suggested that power is in fact, that necessary mediation through which human action realizes its purpose.

Finally, we also suggest that if power is in reality a phenomenon that necessarily involves conflict and coercion too, then the Marxist vision of the future 'good life' needs to be understood afresh, in a radically different way - as a continuous struggle of humanity.

Chapter I reconceptualizes power primarily on the basis of the writings of Talcott Parsons, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, as a two-dimensional phenomenon, one involving both creation and liberation and coercion/repression. In this reconstruction of the concept of power, this chapter argues that it is generated in and through collective human action, at every level of social interaction, and that therefore, power is much more than State power. It is that capacity through which determinate collectivities achieve their objectives and purpose. Finally, this chapter argues that power has its own dynamic - its internal logic - that involves the dialectic of centralization and equalization. Power systems display this two-fold tendency - to accumulate at the top and to equalize, and it is this

paradox that prevents on the one hand, a total concentration of power, and on the other, a full equalization.

Chapter II, on the basis of the insights gained from the works of Parsons, Arendt and Foucault, attempts to re-read Marxist texts in order to discern the blanks and absences. It is the argument of this chapter that in fact, Marxist texts actually display a considerable amount of conceptual resources for a reconstruction of a materialist theory of power wherein power is generated in human social praxis, and does not exist simply as a derivative of production and production relations. Further, it examines some of Gramsci's novel insights on the irreducibility of power and politics, and on its internal logic.

Finally chapter III raises questions of structure and structural power and argues that though power is generated in human praxis, it is not possible to understand the existence and reproduction of power on an enduring basis, without understanding structures. It argues that power is generated through structures that may be more or less stable, and embodies itself in those structures. Individuals hold power or wield power to the extent that they occupy certain positions in those structures. For the argument in this chapter, we depend on some significant contributions of Anthony Giddens.

We finally conclude by suggesting that power, once embodied in structures, accrues to individuals occupying definite positions in them and becomes an end-in-itself. It is suggested that there is thus a certain fetishism of power. It is further suggested that it is also possible to see the reproduction of power as an expanded accumulation, with power augmenting itself with all manner of resources. These suggestions are, of course, of a tentative nature subject to further research and investigation.

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CHAPTER - 1

THE MACROPOLITICS OF POWER : A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

There are various ways in which power and power relations can be discussed and not all of them are mutually exclusive. Much of it eventually depends upon what exactly about power we want to discuss. If our intention is to study how, in localized power situations different actors party to the 'game' behave, how the exercise of power affects these actors, and therefore what actually constitutes an exercise of power, our terms of debate must unavoidably involve an exercise of the sort undertaken in the "three faces of power debate". This is true even though on substantive issues differences may remain, and one may call into question many of the empiricist presuppositions of most of these positions. This we may refer to as the microplitics of power. If, on the other hand, our intention is to delve into systemic and structural questions, how power and power blocs come into existence, how they maintain themselves, what is the internal dynamic of power, and in what relation all these stand to the question of social transformation, which in the final analysis is nothing but the reconstitution of power relations, then we are dealing with an altogether different set of problems which could be called the macropolitics of power.

In this chapter, we intend to look at some existing conceptualizations of power at the macropolitical level in order to arrive at least, at a skeleton of an understanding of what power is. We seek to understand its essential nature, where it emanates from, and what its dynamics are.

Before we go into these questions, however, we take a brief look at what is known as the "Three faces of power" debate. Though the concerns of this debate are not directly relevant for our purposes, there are certain underlying assumptions of the different positions that are relevant for us.

II

The "Three Faces of Power Debate"

The first mentioned debate is briefly recapitulated here, highlighting the major positions involved.

The central assumption of the protagonists of the debate is that conflict is an essential attribute of any power situation and that A could be said to have exercised power over B if A gets B to act in a way that B would not otherwise do. This debate for the major part therefore deals with the micropolitics of power, concerned as it is with the behaviour of individual actors. A brief overview of this debate is important for our purposes because it serves

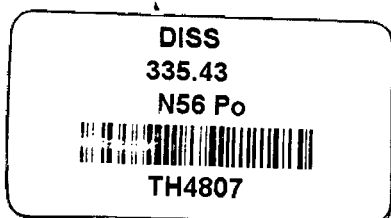
to highlight a certain fundamental difference in the conception of power, in relation to the other theorists considered. However, we may still note that even according to the theorists of the pluralist tradition, their micropolitical studies are based on assumptions of a macropolitical nature. Nelson Polsby, for instance, claims that :

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"The first and most basic presupposition of the pluralist approach is that nothing categorical can be assumed about power in any community. It rejects the stratification thesis that some group, necessarily dominates.

"Another presumption of the pluralist approach runs directly counter to stratification theory's presumption that power distributions are a more or less permanent aspect of social structure."¹

With these, rather arbitrary assumptions, the pluralists therefore address themselves to the question : when can we say A exercises power over B ? The whole debate revolves around this question.

1 Nelson Polsby, "How to Study Community Power : A Pluralist Alternative" in Roderick Bell, David Edwards, R.Wagner, ed, Political Power : A Reader in Theory and Research, The Free Press, New York Collier-Macmillan Ltd, 1969, pp.32-33.



The one-dimensional or what we would call the "first face of power" position, held notably by Dahl and Polsby, argues that if, in any observable conflict expressed in decision-making, A gets B to do something that B would not otherwise do, it could be said that A has exercised power over B. The "second face" position advocated by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz argues, however, that decision-making constitutes only one, the more apparent face of power. The second, more insidious face of the exercise of power is seen in "non-decisions" i.e., the very arrangement of political agenda whereby certain issues are kept out of the decision-making process. In their words: "Non-decision making is a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced or kept covert or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or failing all these things, maimed or destroyed in the decision-implementing stage of the policy process"². However, as Lukes, the third party to the debate and exponent of the "third face" argues, despite a very crucial difference, the analysis of Bachrach and Baratz has one significant feature in common with theirs (the pluralist's-AN) : namely they stress on actual

2 Quoted in Steven Lukes, Power - A Radical View, Macmillan Press, 1974, p. 19.

observable conflict, overt or covert.³

Within the three-faces debate, therefore, Lukes provides the most radical view of power, distinguishing it from the first two, on two counts, namely, (i) power as a structural rather than an individual attribute and (ii) power as something more than simply associated with observable conflict. To put it in Lukes' own words: "... the power to control the agenda of politics and exclude potential issues cannot be adequately analyzed unless it is seen as a function of collective forces and social arrangements"⁴. On the second count, Lukes contends that A may exercise power on B also by "influencing, shaping or determining his very wants"⁵.

It is certainly true that fundamental conflicts and struggles in any power situation centre around decision making and non-decision making and that the study of these situations constitutes a necessary condition for the study of power in any serious empirical research. But is it a sufficient condition ? Despite the problems of "operationalization", this needs to be seriously looked

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 22.

5 Ibid., p. 23.

into. For, if there is more to power than observable conflict, and if "influencing" and "shaping" the wants of those subjected to it, then we are brought face to face with aspects that defy 'operationalization'. We are likely to be left with an 'operational concept' that only remotely resembles the object of our inquiry. It can only be suggested at this juncture that such "scientific" studies, therefore, need to be considered with extreme caution, without overstating their importance. Parenthetically, we may note yet another problem with this process.

Dahl for example, comprehensively lists the resources available to 'political man', in his Who Governs : Democracy and Power in an American City, as comprising :

"An individual's own time; access to money, credit and wealth; control over information; esteem in social standing; the possession of charisma, popularity, legitimacy, legality ... the rights pertaining to public office; solidarity... the right to vote, intelligence, education and perhaps even one's energy level"⁶. In this connection Wrong observes that in Dahl's otherwise comprehensive list coercive resources do not find mention. This despite the fact that

6 Quoted in Dennis H. Wrong, Power - Its Forms, Bases and Uses, Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 125.

in 1968, New Haven, the field of Dahl's research saw prolonged riots by blacks and the murder of a member of Black Panther Party and again in 1970, it saw a massive rally of Yale University students against the indictment of one Bobby Seale for the above-mentioned murder and also the US invasion of Cambodia". "In other works where he has not been specifically concerned with New Haven or American local government", says Wrong", Dahl has routinely included⁷ coercive resources on his list of political resources. This single fact probably gives some insight into the way power relations operate and the difficulties involved in studying them, "scientifically".

However, be that as it may, Dahl's list notwithstanding, the debate does not provide much insight into the bases of power, its dynamics and mechanisms and its nature. Lukes' intervention, no doubt represents an enormous step forward in that it brings into discussion of power the question of social arrangements and institutional practices, for one thing. For another, it introduces, instead of subjective conflicts, the notion of real or objective interests of the power-subject being affected by the power-holder in some way. To a certain extent then, Lukes transcends the Weberian notion which understands power

7 Ibid., ch. 6, fn. 5, p. 279.

as the "probability that one actor in a social relationship will carry out his own will despite resistance from others" which makes the notion of overt conflict the only factor in exercise of power. But even in Lukes this happens only to an extent, in that the idea of "A shaping B's wants and desires" presupposes conflicting interests. We shall return to this point later.

III

The Macropolitics of Power

Having discussed the "three faces of power" debate briefly, we now move on to a discussion of its macropolitics, as discussed and propounded by some leading theorists. In our discussion we concentrate on the writings of Talcott Parsons, Hannah Arendt, and Michel Foucault representing three diverse paradigms. We also refer wherever necessary, to the writings of such theorists as Anthony Giddens and Robert Michels. At the outset, it needs to be clarified that while the burden of Foucault's works is to stress what he calls the "micro-structures" of power, his concerns are essentially macropolitical, as we shall see later.

We identify three broad themes under which we study the works of these theorists and consider their positions regarding these. These are -

- i) Power as such,
- ii) The Genesis or Bases of Power, and
- iii) The Internal Logic of Power.

Though normally speaking, any discussion of any phenomenon/object/institution should have begun with the genesis itself, as the starting point of an investigation, that is not always possible. More so in the case of a complex phenomenon like power, where it is necessary in the first place, to identify what it is. If we agree with Steven Lukes (1974), that it is an "essentially contestable concept", then it is all the more the case.

(i) Power as Such

We begin by posing the question left unanswered by the "three faces" debate in identifying this elusive phenomenon. This unresolved question is the one posed by Lukes as opposed to both Dahl and Polsby (first-face) and Bachrach and Baratz (second-face), namely, is power to be identified by the sole criterion of observable conflict - decisions and non-decisions? Or, as Lukes argues, may it involve the shaping and moulding of the power-subjects desires, wants and even thought processes? The argument can in fact be taken further and it can be asked whether an exercise of power must always involve only conflict of interests? For, despite what Lukes actually does in making this tremendous

advance, he leaves a fundamental assumption untouched. From the arena of observable conflict, he takes his conceptualization further into the arena of unobservable conflict of objective interests. By positing the dichotomy between real and perceived interests, he introduces the whole new range of issues related to how power legitimizes itself, secures the willing consent of its subjects. But in a sense the entire "three faces" debate still constitutes only one dimension of power i.e., power as repression or coercion.

The theorists we are now going to consider represent what can be called the two-dimensional view of power, though there are very fundamental differences among them, conceptually.

Parsons defines power as "the generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective organization when the obligations are legitimized with reference to their bearing on collective goals and where in the case of recalcitrance, there is presumption of enforcement by negative situational sanctions.⁸ In thus defining power, Parsons seeks to

8 Talcott Parsons, Politics and Social Structure, The Free Press, New York & Collier-Macmillan, London, 1969, p. 361.

reconcile the conflictual and consensual aspects of power. In his own words "... there is the problem of the relation between the coercive and consensual aspects.... A major tendency is to hold that somehow in the last analysis, power comes down to one or the other, i.e., to rest on command of collective sanctions, or on consensus and the will to voluntary cooperation".⁹ Parsons maintains that "by my definition, securing compliance with a wish, whether it be defined as an obligation of the object or not, simply by threat of superior force, is not an exercise of power".¹⁰ To him therefore, the very definition of power must imply two things:

(a) it is legitimate, and

(b) it is generalized, that is to say, a robber's or a bandit's securing compliance of the subject in one single act of robbery cannot be called an exercise of power. The second aspect of both (a) and (b) taken together is that the employment of sanctions must, therefore, be symbolic because in any enduring relationship, particularly if the condition of legitimacy must hold, repeated and continuing use of force cannot be effective. This, precisely is his complaint with the Hobbesian tradition of treating "power as simply

9 Ibid., p. 353.

10 Ibid., pp.361-62.

the generalized capacity to attain ends or goals in social relations, independently of the media employed or of the status of authorization to make decisions or impose obligations¹¹ which in his view makes it "logically impossible to treat power as a specific mechanism, operating to bring about changes in the action of other units, individual or collective in the processes of social interaction".¹² He derives his theory of power as strictly parallel to the theory of money, in economics, in its logical structure treating power as a circulating medium of exchange. The functionalist approach whereby, society is seen as a homeostatic metasystem comprising many sub-systems, leads Parsons to discuss the phenomenon with a heavy accent on consensus. The very definition of power as the generalized capacity to impose "binding obligations" on units, rules out any notion of "misuse of power" etc. For whenever power is exercised, it is done so in order to see that deviant individuals/units perform consensually arrived at obligations normally. It is therefore always legitimate. "Illegitimate power" is a contradiction in terms. This however, does not mean that force is never used. On the

11 Ibid., p. 353.

12 Ibid.

issue of force, his analogy with the gold standard, sums up his position appropriately :

"The special place of gold as monetary base, rests on such properties as its durability, high value in small bulk etc., and high probability of acceptability in exchange i.e., as a means of inducement in a wide variety of conditions which are not dependent on an institutionalized order.... Force, therefore, is important ... the ultimate deterrent. It is a means that, independent of any institutionalized system of order, can be assumed to be intrinsically the most effective in the context of deterrence, when means of effectiveness which are dependent on institutionalized order are insecure or fail".¹³ So, force in the Parsonian concept is essentially a standby, the limiting case of the use of power.

Hannah Arendt goes further and asserts that, in fact, force, command etc., all belong to the realm of the power of government, which is but only one side of power. To quote:

".. it is particularly tempting to think of power in terms of command and obedience, and hence to equate power with violence, in a discussion of what is actually, only one of power's special cases, namely, the power of

13 Ibid., p. 366 [emphasis added].

14
government". She thus takes power outside the realm of governmental activities.

Though heavily influenced by classical Greek thought, her interpretation of the politics of ancient Greek city-states or polies has an air of novelty about it. Arendt says:

"In Greek self-understanding, to force people by violence to command rather than persuade were prepolitical ways to deal with people", for to live in a polis meant that "everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence".¹⁵ Arendt here is trying to disentangle the concept from the practice, when she uses the word "people" in its pre-modern, classical sense. 'People' here, refers to those who have citizenship rights - not to slaves, against whom the very same Greek self-understanding sanctioned the use of force.

Arendt, therefore, continues: "What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to the polis life, took for granted is that freedom is exclusively located in the

14 Hannah Arendt, On Violence, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1970, p.47.

15 Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970, p. 26.

political realm, that necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon, characteristic of the private household organization, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity - for instance by ruling over slaves and to become free".¹⁶

Following Arendt, let us for the time being forget the private realm. The public realm where freedom resides, the archetype of which is the ancient democracy of the polis, "is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together"¹⁷. In her view, power as distinguished from strength is never the property of an individual and can never be stored and kept like the means of violence can. It exists only in actualization and always accrues to collectivities. It is worth noting that Hannah Arendt introduces into her conception of power something more than just collective i.e., common will. In her conception, the realm of freedom, and therefore of power, arises out of "acting and speaking together" - power exists only in actualization. This conception immediately ties power to human action i.e., collective human action.

16 Ibid., p. 31.

17 Ibid., p. 198.

Foucault, on the other hand, almost completely breaks with the tendency that seeks to study power still in the paradigm of sovereignty and right and therefore, as a negative repressive force. In fact, his is an impassioned plea to do in political theory what has long been done in practice: chop the King's head. This metaphor aptly summarizes one of his key concerns. To Foucault, power is not just repression, not merely negative but positive and productive. To quote:

"In defining the effects of power as repression one adopts a purely juridical conception of power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all, as carrying the force of prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative narrow, skeletal conception of power. If power were never, anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you think one would really be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourses. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance

whose function is repression.

Posing the question in terms of the state according to him means posing it in terms of the sovereign and therefore as essentially repressive. It is not something he says, "of which there are haves and have-nots and it cannot be analyzed in terms of those who exercise it and those who submit to it "but rather as something which circulates. It is never ... in anybody's hand, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth".¹⁹ He goes on to say that "individuals circulate between its threads and that they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power".²⁰ Human individuals and human agency figure in his entire analysis merely as bearers of power relations.

We can make sense of the above statement, provided we bear in mind that the distinction that we have been using so far between the power-holder and the power-subject, is a wholly static one, meant only for analytical convenience. Though we agree with Foucault that power is a relation,

18 Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge : Selected Interviews and other Writings, ed. Colin Gordon, Pantheon Books, New York, 1980, pp. 118-119.

19 Ibid., p. 98.

20 Ibid.

that it cannot be possessed, purely for purposes of simplifying the analysis, we often prefer to speak of it "as if" there were power-holders and power-subjects, since domination arising from asymmetries in power relations are crucial aspects of the exercise of power. In this sense we often use the simplified relations of "A exercising power over B" which is referred to as being static precisely because here we are not immediately concerned with the multiplicity of ever-changing relationships that A or B may be involved in with others, C, D, E, separately and among themselves. The moment we move on to the domain of such real-life power situations, we find individuals involved in "a web of relationships", wielding power in one and subject to it in another, and in each relationship enjoying a certain 'space of manoeuvre'.

We have thus far only vaguely referred to the "productive aspect of power" posing the problem in very general terms. In fact we have treated Foucault's notion of the productivity of power almost in the same sense as Parson's consensualism and Arendt's collective will and action.

The problem now needs further explication and elaboration. What exactly is meant by all these terms? What can we possibly mean by such expressions? For a clarification of such aspects, we may very briefly refer to

the definitions of power as available in other conceptualizations. According to Hobbes, "Power is man's present means to a future apparent good". Russell defines it as the "production of intended effects". Even Max Weber, who defines power in purely individual terms defines it as "the probability that an individual in a social relationship may carry out his will despite resistance".

What we see in all these definitions, the common denominator, as it were, is that power is that which makes the achievement of ends/outcomes possible. Ends of course, may vary from situation to situation, but what actually remains valid in all cases is the fact that no social ends can be achieved without power. That is what is meant then, by the creative side of power. Ends, we may note, can be with reference to society as a whole, or with reference to any part thereof. These "intended effects", "apparent future good" or "end" can refer to actual economic and developmental ends or may refer to any social group's aspiration to achieve its emancipation from oppression/exploitation or simply improve its lot. Power is implicated as the ennobling force in all such activities. In this sense power is then not merely productive it is creative and liberating too.

Supplementing Foucault's point we may take note of what Anthony Giddens calls the dialectic of control by which he

means that, even within the static relation of domination, "power relations are always two-way, even if the power of one actor or party in a social relation is minimal compared to another".²¹

This notion of Giddens thus only emphasizes Foucault's point that there are no haves and have-nots of power in the sense in which there are haves and have-nots of property. Elsewhere, Giddens makes the point that power relations are expressed even in the most casual of social encounters²² that they are enmeshed in social relations.

Summing up our above discussion of power we can say provisionally that :

- (a) power is two-dimensional, involving both conflict and consensus i.e. common will.
- (b) it has a creative aspect, too,
- (c) it is a relation, and
- d) state power is only a special case of power.

21 Anthony Giddens, Central Problems of Social Theory, Macmillan, London & Basingstoke, 1979, p. 93. In Giddens' own terminology though, the static/dynamic dichotomy is claimed to have been done away with. Here we use this term in the very specific sense mentioned above.

22 Giddens, op.cit., p. 88.

Genesis of Power

In the light of the above discussion, we can ask the following questions :

If power is vested not only in the state, as understood traditionally, wherefrom does it arise? If power is not just violence and force, it cannot merely be a function of the means of violence. Whence precisely, does the productive aspect of power originate? Again as we have just seen, if we tentatively understand by it the capacity to achieve social ends a conception implicit in Parsons, Arendt and Foucault,^{*} as well as in Giddens' notion of power as transformative capacity, then it must mean it has some social sanction or legitimacy logically tied to it. This may

* Foucault presents in this regard a fairly complex position which is open, in our view, to interpretations of a diverse nature. The very language that we have used would seem to run counter to Foucault's whole enterprise. To a large extent many answers to such questions, that he provides are open ended and often highly confusing. The language of 'wills' and 'agency' being totally alien to his enterprise, one can only deduce, and that too, at the risk of being highly controversial. Let us for example, see the following: "In general terms, I believe that power is not built up out of wills (individual or collective) nor is it derivable from interests". This is clear. But this continuous "Power is constructed and functions on the basis of particular power, myriad issues, myriad effects of power". (Foucault, p. 188) and we have a perfectly circular argument. A fuller discussion of Foucault is not possible here. All we can say is one of the ways of understanding the "productive aspect of power" ('it produces things') is the one adopted above.

be the power of the state to undertake productive activity or the power of any collectivity outside the state to do so. Productive activity being defined strictly as activity directed toward achieving social ends, which would then necessarily include the activity of any group/class etc., to fight against oppression and exploitation. In this context, when we speak of some form of social sanction or legitimacy being tied to the notion of power, we must differentiate it from legitimacy as it is generally used. In its general usage legitimacy implies the consent of the ruled, to be ruled by some rulers. It relates to society as a whole and is largely juridical. As against this, sanction or legitimacy here refers to even those instances where a particular social group accepts a set of leaders, delegates to them the responsibility of acting on their behalf to achieve the said social ends. And such legitimacy may often go without any juridical trappings. it is the forging of common will rather than 'consent' as generally used, that legitimacy in this case refers to.

Whereas to Parsons this question of the genesis of power never posed itself since it was immanent in the very existence of the system, we can still disentangle the following conclusion. If power is the generalized capacity to ensure the compliance of obligations regarding consensually arrived at goals, then it follows that its

ability to undertake any social responsibilities and in the event of default impose sanctions cannot but emanate from the original act of consensus itself.

Arendt, on the other hand is much more explicit in this regard: "power springs up between men when they act together²³ and vanishes the moment they disperse". "The only indispensable material factor in the generation of power is the living together of people. Only when men live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them".²⁴ It derives its legitimacy, in her view, "from the initial getting together rather than from any action that may follow".²⁵ Or to put it differently, she asserts, "when we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name".²⁶ Not only does she see power as being generated from collective action, but goes on to make a crucial point (to be taken up later in the discussion) that "what keeps people together, after the fleeting moment of action has passed (what we

23 Arendt (1970), p. 200.

24 Ibid., p. 201.

25 Arendt, On Violence, p. 52.

26 Ibid., p. 44.

today call 'organization') and what, at the same time they keep alive through remaining together is power".²⁷

However, one problem with her conceptualization remains, and that is the fact that she never answers or even poses the question as to why living together in unrestrained communication should lead to collective action. The problem becomes apparent when for instance she discusses the labour movement. While accepting the fact that "From the revolutions of 1848 to the Hungarian revolution of 1956, the European working class by virtue of its being the only organized and hence the leading section of the people, has written one of the most glorious chapters of recent history".²⁸ She claims that labour cannot act collectively and generate power because the "togetherness" that large-scale production brings is not based on plurality but rather premised on "the actual loss of all awareness of individuality and identity".²⁹ Arendt is keen to avoid any talk of interests, common interests that people inevitably develop when they share a common fate be it living together or working together. But her Aristotelian theory of action which sees labouring together as animal Liberiens, _____ which is

27 Arendt (1970), p. 291.

28 Ibid., p. 215.

29 Ibid., p. 213.

incapable of acting and speaking together, naturally rules out such a possibility.

Foucault raises the question only in a cursory fashion since his main concern is with the mechanisms of power. He does still pose the question of its genesis by asking whether it must always be "deduced in one way or another from the economy?"³⁰ This introduces a new aspect in our discussion so far, informed as much of Foucault's work is by Marxist theoretical tradition. He rejects decisively what he calls economism in the theory of power. He stresses over and over again that power relations do not operate merely as a function of production relations, have their independent/autonomous position even "when we allow that it effectively remains the case that the relations of power do indeed remain profoundly enmeshed in and with economic relations³¹ and participate with them in a common circuit".

Beyond this however, he does not venture into this territory and takes it as given. He seems to assume power that exists as something that is inherent in human society and does not stand in need of being explained. This inherence of power in society seems to be closely tied

30 Foucault (1980), p. 88.

31 Ibid., p. 89 [emphasis added].

to his understanding of power as productive network, and even as a disciplinary force - the specific form that according to him is the great invention of bourgeois society, a power that "has been a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism".³² He however, sounds a note of caution, in that he urges that this correlation should not be understood as instrumentally wielded from the top, rather disciplinary mechanisms evolved independently, only to be appropriated and put to use by the bourgeois state.

In a subsequent article, The Subject and Power (1982), Foucault seems to have broken fresh ground. Discussing the subject in relation to power for the first time he "places power squarely in the context of action theory or a theory of political 'praxis'".³³ Fred Dallmayr comments that "The 'exercise of power', the essay states, is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others... power is said to exist only when it is put into action...."³⁴

Foucault introduces, very significantly, in this essay, the terms 'power-action' and 'action-power' to emphasize this

32 Ibid., p. 105.

33 Fred R. Dallmayr, Polis and Praxis : Exercises in Contemporary Political Theory, MIT Press, Cambridge. Massachusetts etc., 1984, p. 92.

34 Ibid.

aspect of power's relation to action and the way in which it acts on others' actions. He therefore claims that "mechanisms of subjection (individual) cannot be studied outside their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation (class) and domination (ethnic, social and religious etc.).... They entertain complex and circular relations with other forms".³⁵ He goes on to add "But what makes the domination of a group, a caste or a class, together with resistance and works which that domination comes up against, a central phenomenon in the history of societies, is that they manifest in a massive universalizing form, at the level of the whole social body, the locking together of power relations with relations of strategy and³⁶ the results proceeding from their interaction". That is to say, power relations are introduced with the ongoing processes of action and interaction between individuals, groups, collectivities. The link, that Foucault establishes between power and what Dallmayr has called 'political praxis' seems quite evident here.

35 Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics" Essay by Foucault in The Subject and Power. The Harvester Press, Sussex, 1982, p. 213.

36 Ibid., p. 226.

In the opinion of Giddens, the very concept of action is "logically tied to that of power..."³⁷ for action involves intervention in events in the world - with intended action being one category of an agent's doing or his refraining. Power, as transformative capacity can be taken to refer to agent's capabilities. We may now recall that Hannah Arendt, too, makes a similar point that "logically ties" the notion of action to the concept of power. We have however pointed out that Arendt's discussion of collective action avoids any mention of interests. Giddens too holds that "the concept of interest..." like that of conflict, has nothing logically to do with that of power".³⁸ In so asserting he states: "The exercise of power is not a type of act; rather power is instantiated in action as a regular and routine phenomenon".³⁹ We would argue instead that though conflicts and interests are not all that there is to power, they are nevertheless central to its exercise. To define power in such a way that makes conflicts and interests appear contingent to its exercise is to make it almost synonymous with any action.

Apart from these conceptions we have the influential position of the Marxist tradition that sees power as being

37 Giddens (1979), p. 88.

38 Ibid., p. 90.

39 Ibid., p. 91.

essentially derived from control over the means of production. Many other, even hostile traditions have accepted the potency of this contention including the Weberian and behaviouralist schools, though after substantial modifications.

We conclude this part of the discussion with the observation that power springs up on the basis of people's collective efforts to achieve social ends. And since material production remains humanity's most fundamental activity for survival, economy and the control over means of material production seems to be an important basis of power.

Despite the somewhat problematic definition of power and action noted earlier, the important point that Giddens however does make is that the concept of power is tied to that of action. We have also noted earlier that to Hannah Arendt too collective action is the basis on which power arises. This formulation in our opinion makes the distinction between the two concepts clear. To say that power arises from collective action is also to say that the two are not the same though closely related. It can be understood then, to mean the capacity to achieve ends/outcomes, that action gives rise to.

What still remains unexplained in both Giddens and Arendt is why people act and for what purpose? For Giddens

it requires no explanation since it is "the transformative capacity of human action (is) itself the origin of all that is liberating and productive in social life as well as all that is repressive and destructive"⁴⁰ that is the most fundamental fact of social life. In Arendt's conception however, action is not really all that fundamental, since as we have seen above, there are categories of people (e.g. the working class) who in her theoretical framework, are incapable of action.

Giddens' account of human action, as the most fundamental fact of human life, is more plausible. This, however, does not make the above question irrelevant. Why people undertake any activity at all must have some explanation other than the fact that they have energy which they must spend. For, that will not explain why a particular type of action is preferred to another type. Somewhere then, we are confronted with the idea of interests which both avoid taking into account.

"Interests" may give the impression of a highly instrumental conception of human action, but that is no reason why it should not be considered. We may in the first instance talk of a collective human interest to survive - the

40 Giddens, A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, Macmillan Press, London and Basingstoke, 1981, p. 51.

urge to live, for which humanity must devise ways to ensure that the minimum material prerequisites are available to it. Production to fulfil those material prerequisites for survival then becomes the most fundamental human activity. But interests can be those pertaining to much smaller groups of social classes/social groups/communities and so on. People act, it seems reasonable to believe therefore, to achieve their ends-interests, the aspirations for a 'good life', for instance.

Once we bring the concept of 'interest' into discussions of power relations we can then not only understand why people act, but why they must, in particular ways. We can then also understand, by recasting Arendt's conception, why people who "live together (and even work together AN) in unrestrained communication act, and in so doing generate power. "Communication" of course, accordingly changes its definition and so does "action". Even action, 'independent of one's will', can be considered action. If this be the case, then we shall argue, power is not simply rooted in human will, but in all human action.

The Internal Logic of Power

Our discussion thus far reveals certain patterns in the operations of power-systems. We have deliberately kept the discussion of state power out of the discussion, primarily

on the assumption that there would be a great degree of consensus across theoretical traditions, regarding the fact that it represents power as repression. We have also seen particularly through Foucault's conceptualization, that power relations outside the state also involve the individuals in a "web of relationship" as being simultaneously the wielder and subject of power relations. Foucault also observes explicitly, as we have seen that domination together with resistance is a central phenomenon in the history of societies. In other words, it suggests a certain hierarchy of power relations. In fact, as we shall see, he defines power as relations of hierarchy. We return now to the theorists under consideration, for an elaboration of this aspect of power relations.

To Parsons, such hierarchies not only do exist, they must exist, if systems are to survive, and collectively evolved values and the binding obligations arising thereof, are to be implemented. To quote: "It has been suggested that policies must be hierarchically ordered in a priority system and that the power to decide among the policies must have a corresponding hierarchical ordering, since such decisions bind the collectivity and its constituent units".

41 Parsons (1968), p.367.

However he refers to another feature of power systems alongside the above, what he calls and what we shall be calling after him, the tendency of equalization. In his words:

"Here it is a critically important fact that in the largest scale and most highly differentiated systems, namely the leadership systems of the most advanced national societies, the power element has been systematically equalized through franchise, so that the universal adult franchise has been evolved in all the western democracies. Equality of franchise, which, since the consequences are very strictly binding, I classify as in fact a form of power, has been part of a larger complex of its institutionalization".⁴² Of course, Parsons, true to the functionalist paradigm, explains this tendency thus: "It derives ... from the ... universalistic component in the patterns of normative order. It must be grounded in intrinsically valued differences among them, which are for both person and collectivities, capacities to contribute to valued societal processes".⁴³ The second component of Parsons' explanation is the tension or in his language the "boundary inter-change" between the political interests to

42 Ibid., p. 376.

43 Ibid.

secure control of productivity and services and the "economic interest" to collectivity control resources and what he calls "the opportunity for effectiveness" where too the "hierarchical structure of power can, under certain conditions, be modified in an egalitarian direction".⁴⁴ In fact, he goes on to argue against C.Wright Mills thesis of "cumulative advantage", which, though it might seem to be "inherent in the hierarchical internal structure of power systems, often in fact, fails to materialize at all or to be as strong as expected..." precisely due to a combination of these two foci of universalization.⁴⁵

So we now have, not one but two logics of power systems. In Hannah Arendt this dialectic of power systems expresses itself in the constant tension that she sees in the exercise of power on the one hand, and violence on the other. Violence and force epitomizes to her the power of the government, while power is communicatively generated by the people in action. Habermas has summed up "the motif 'that inspired Hannah Arendt to her investigations of the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century, the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the civil disobedience and student protests of the sixties'. In connection with

44 Ibid., pp. 379-80.

45 Ibid., p. 301.

emancipatory movements she is interested in the power of common conviction: the withdrawal of obedience to institutions that have lost their legitimacy; the confrontation of communicative power with the means of force of a coercive but impotent state apparatus; the beginnings of a new political order and the attempt ... to hold fast to the initial revolutionary situation, to give institutional permanence to the communicative generation of power".⁴⁶ "It is with this intention that she identifies attempts to institutionalize direct democracy in American town meetings around 1776, in the societies populaires in Paris between 1789 and 1793 in the Russian soviets in 1903 (1905?) and 1917, and the Ratedemocratie in Germany in 1918".⁴⁷ We may also note in passing that the equality of franchise that Parsons talks of, as reflecting the equalization of power, has precisely such history behind it rather than any "functional requirement" of the system.

To Foucault, however, the problem presents itself in a very different manner. For, having cut off the King's head, he has already removed one end of the power system. His concern is then, not with the exercise of power and its

46 Habermas, J., "Hannah Arendt's communications Concept of Power" in Lukes, ed. (1986), p. 82.

47 Ibid., p. 81.

outcome, between the sovereign and his subjects; it is rather with the interactions of power among the subjects themselves. However though the sovereign, the state, etc., no longer appear as relevant we still get a clue for further investigation. Foucault says, rejecting the notion of power as something substantive, "In reality power means relations, a more or less organized, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations"⁴⁸. Thus, to him power, by definition means hierarchy. That is to say, to him already, so soon as society has come into existence, an hierarchical ordering of relations has taken place. Moreover, central to his conceptualization is his famous inversion of Clausewitz' aphorism that power is war, continued by other means. In his problematic of power, therefore, strategies, tactics, struggle etc., are key concepts. "The history which bears and determines us has the form of war rather than that of language, relations of power not relations of meaning"⁴⁹.

From Foucault's rendering of power relations and their dynamics humanity is in a perpetual state of war. Unlike Marx though, this war is not between classes alone (which is determined by the dynamic of exploitative production relations) but everywhere, even within classes/groups and

48 Foucault (1980), p. 198.

49 Ibid., p.114.

between individuals (which is determined by the dynamic of domination and power relations).

Though Foucault would understandably disagree with the following we can nevertheless make a simplifying assumption: We assume that power is something that can be possessed. Now an hierarchically ordered set of relations would imply an asymmetric distribution among individuals, groups and classes. Looking at power relations therefore, as war, would mean that (i) those who wield greater power would seek to maintain and consolidate their domination and (ii) those who have less power would seek to reconstitute, or at any rate renegotiate the existing power relations. The outcome may reverse the situation but will only create, according to him, a new hierarchy. (i) above implies the constant endeavour to centralize power, (ii) would then refer to the equalizing tendencies. In the later article "The Subject and Power" Foucault explicitly states "Domination is in fact a general structure of power...".⁵⁰ And further asserts that the "domination of a group, caste or a class, together with the resistance and revolts which that domination comes up against (are) a central phenomenon in the history of societies."⁵¹ In fact in Power/Knowledge itself, he

50 Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), p. 226.

51 Ibid., p. 226 [emphasis added].

forcefully makes the point that "there are no relations of power power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are found right at the point where relations of power are exercised".⁵²

At this point it may be useful to take a look at some very interesting observations of Robert Michels. His well known "iron law of oligarchy" which postulates that democracy necessarily leads to oligarchy since power always tends to accumulate in the hands of leadership, is essentially connected to the problem of representation and delegation. His Political Parties discusses this problem in detail with a wealth of empirical material. All this is fairly well-known. Michels also discusses, in fairly great detail, at various points in his book, the actual process through which the equalizing tendency operates. But of course, in the ultimate analysis, the struggle of the masses is destined to be defeated. His archetypal model of a power system is the political party, or more precisely, the working class party, where the democratic ethos is the strongest. How the majority of the leadership tries to centralize power and the minority to decentralize, is discussed in terms of purely one factor -- the leadership

52 Colin Gordon, ed. (1980), p. 142 [emphasis added].

struggle. This is a problem that one encounters in Michels over and over again, since the underlying assumption is that the masses are always gullible and incapable by themselves. This assumption is or does not seem to be sustainable. If we leave that aside for the time being and consider that even Michels is obliged to observe that "The thesis of unlimited power of the leaders in democratic parties, requires however, a certain limitation."⁵³ This is so because theoretically, the leader "is bound by the will of the masses" and when threatened by the rise of new leaders, "The older leader must ... keep himself in permanent touch with the opinions and feelings of the masses to which he owes his position".⁵⁴ The rallying cry of the majority is centralization, while that of the minority is autonomy. Those of the minority, in order to gain their ends, are forced to carry on a struggle which often assumes the aspect a genuine genuine fight for liberty.⁵⁵ Or, take for instance, his his observation that : "The struggles within the modern democratic parties over this problem of centralization versus decentralization are of great scientific importance from several points of view. It would be wrong to deny that the advocates of both tendencies bring

53 Robert Michels Political Parties, The Free Press, New York and Collier-Macmillan Ltd, London, 1962, p. 172.

54 Ibid.,

forward a notable array of theoretical considerations, and occasionally make valid appeals to moral conceptions".⁵⁶

His ideological position regarding the role of the people in history, however, leads him to the conclusion that all that this tendency of decentralization does is to prevent the formation of one gigantic oligarchy, but installs in its stead a number of small oligarchies.

We can thus discern this dual movement in the operation of power-systems. We shall refer to this as the central paradox of power.

We would suggest that this central paradox of power can provide the key to understanding many other tendencies associated with power systems, like factionalism, coalitions and the like.

We now conclude the entire discussion in Part III. We have the following ideas to contend with:

(i) Power arises from people's collective action and has some forms of collective sanction tied to it, though it is not always rooted in will.

(ii) It is more than just state power; there are also other forms like popular power.

55. Ibid., p. 198.

56. Ibid., p. 266.

(iii) It is repressive as well as productive.

(iv) Related to (ii) and the two types of power therein, it has a paradoxical nature. We have referred to this as the central paradox of power.

We have before us, therefore, a whole series of contradictory or at least apparently contradictory statements regarding the nature and dynamics of power.

To take statement (iii) first, the first part of the statement is clear and perhaps does not call for any further explanation. The second part which states that power is also productive we have seen refers to the fact that it is that actualization of the human potential whereby society or a part thereof achieves its common ends. Productivity in the sense used here must include as indicated earlier achievement of all types of social ends which may then include such diverse activities as developmental activities, fight against socio-economic and political oppression/discrimination etc. Power then is at one and the same time repressive and productive (i.e., liberating). Even while it represses, it produces, and even while it liberates, it represses. The essence of power must therefore be seen as repression and liberation at the same time. The "transformative human action" that we can now redefine following our redefinition of action as being

related to interests can therefore be seen to manifest itself at once as repression and liberation.

If this is so then our statement (ii) becomes intelligible in that, these are not two separate categories of power - for example, the power of the state and the power of the people. Both these types of power are one and the same transformative human action. What then differentiates the two types of manifest forms, what makes the power of the state seem so overpoweringly omnipotent that popular power must, most often than not, submit to it, or so devise its strategies and tactics that it can make its way through the web of state-power. We can only deal with one aspect of this problem in the subsequent chapters. For the present, we submit that we go back to an insight of Hannah Arendt's that we have mentioned earlier. Arendt says: only when men live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them, what keeps people together after the fleeting movement of action has passed (what we today call "organization") and what, at the same time, they keep alive through remaining together is power. Or, consider the following:

"Even the most despotic domination we know of, the rule of the master over slaves who always outnumbered him, did not rest on superior means of coercion as such but on a

superior organization of power, that is on the organized
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solidarity of the masters".

The age old popular wisdom encapsulated in the phrase "unity is strength" probably means exactly this. In fact it seems to be a self-evident fact that if collective action is the basis of power, then power on an enduring basis can only exist, if "after the fleeting moment of action has passed" people can be made to still stay together and not disperse. What else can perform this function but organization. To Robert Michels too, organization is an indispensable means for articulation of collective interest. (Which, in fact, we have already seen, to him portends the end of democracy but that is not the issue here). The superior organization of the state then is the basis of its tremendous power. Other resources that it acquires to augment this power, for example the means of violence, can only be possible when and as long as this superior organization exists. For to quote Arendt again "In a contest of violence against violence, the superiority of the government has always been absolute but this superiority lasts only as long as commands are obeyed and the army and police forces are prepared to use their weapons. When this is no longer the case, situation changes

57 Arendt (1970), p. 201.

abruptly, not only is rebellion not put down, but the arms
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themselves change hands".

Finally, we now come to the central paradox of power, the dialectic of centralization and equalization. If this paradox is central to power and popular power must always confront state power then, from the above discussion it follows that it must develop its own organizations. And organization, being based on the principle of delegation and as a power system in its right must follow the same dialectic of centralization and equalization. In other words, we have replicated within organizations and institutions of popular power (in fact, even in those of state power) the very same dynamic that we see in the society at large. If this be the case, the same logic that makes organization a necessity, must make factions within an organization a necessity. Differing perceptions, differing strategies and tactics, differing action programmes all crystallize eventually into factions. We can therefore, legitimately argue with Foucault's inversion of Clausewitz's aphorism that "power is war continued by other means". From this, however, it does not follow that it is a Hobbesian "war of all against all" or for that matter an agglomeration of some sort of "rational individuals" (homo

58 Arendt, On Violence, p. 48.

economicus) and society is thus reduced to atomized individuals. For this leads to a logical contradiction. If power arises from collective action, then eventually this fact itself ensures that people stay together to achieve common social ends. The moment we start thinking of society as a collection of atomized individuals, power disappears. It thus cements as much as it divides.

In fact, this above situation points to one of the most compelling limitations on individuals within power systems. It is this staying together in the collectivity/organization that makes an individual powerful. But howsoever powerful the individual concerned may be he/she can only remain so as long as he/she remains with the collectivity. The only factor that matters is this, not the correctness or otherwise of his/her positions. "Expulsions" then becomes the ultimate weapon in factional struggles. Arendt once again, with characteristic insight sums up this in the following words.

"Whoever, for whatever reasons isolates himself and does not partake in such being together forfeits power and becomes impotent, no matter how great his strength and how
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valid his reasons".

59 Arendt (1970), p. 20 [emphasis added].

Before concluding this section we raise a final question: If power is so fundamental to human society, and power is but a war, a continuous state of war, then what does this vast juridical edifice of modern society mean? Laws, rules, conventions, procedures, constitutions do they at all mean anything? We would submit that all these themselves are the outcome of this war. That the war is not an end in itself but a continuous process of negotiation and renegotiation of power relations leading to creation of new laws, rules and procedures. This juridical edifice, we would further submit, places limits on arbitrariness of the coercive power of states, and the development of this edifice over centuries can only be taken as a pointer to an important fact that in the long run, the equalizing tendency has borne fruit and the development of democracy and curbs on the arbitrariness of power systems is an outcome of that.

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CHAPTER II

THE QUESTION OF POWER IN MARXIST THEORY

Introduction

At the outset it should be clarified that by Marxist theory we mean the entire theoretical tradition and scholarship influenced by it. We deliberately define it in very loose terms since it is necessary to emphasize its open-ended character. This is only to emphasize by challenging the hitherto dominant orthodoxy that there is no single correct Marxism, or a single correct line, in opposition to which all other interpretations amount to heresy and renegacy. We would make only one qualification in this regard. While talking of the Marxist theoretical tradition it is necessary to underline two fundamental conditions which any current claiming to be Marxist must fulfil. First, the methodological injunction of the irreducibility of the totality to its constituent parts or to a simple arithmetic sum of its parts must be fulfilled. Second, economic reductionism cannot be substituted with a total 'indeterminacy' that posits the same status to all 'levels' or 'elements' of a social formation. That is to say, the substantive proposition that 'social being determines consciousness' and not the consciousness of people that determine their social being must be fulfilled.

However, in this chapter we do not intend to go into

all the work done by later-day Marxists, except when absolutely necessary. The idea is not to underrate the value of work done by these scholars, but rather, to read once again, the classical texts of Marx and Engels, and to some extent Lenin, in the light of what we now already know about power.

We intend to take seriously, Engels' advice to J.Bloch in his now celebrated letter of September 1890 : "I would ... ask you to study this theory from its original sources and not at second hand; it is really much easier"¹.

However, in discussing the Marxist conceptualization of power, we shall be following a different route from the one followed in the first chapter. This is necessary in order to understand how exactly this question is posed and discussed within this tradition.

Marxism and historical materialism i.e. Marx's materialist conception of history, it is important to note, effected a fundamental break from all earlier political and economic theories by asserting that there is no abstract human nature, which remains essentially unchanged through history and which can explain why people act in particular

1 Marx-Engels, Selected Works (hereafter MESW), in one volume, Lawrence and Wishart, London, and Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1980, p. 683.

ways, develop specific values, build particular institutions etc. Marxism, for the first time underlined that social being determines consciousness. Human beings, individuals as well as aggregates are all shaped by specific circumstances, material conditions which they themselves create in the process of fulfilling their material needs. In other words, the only thing that remains constant through history, is humanity's endeavour to fulfil its needs, to survive and survive in a better way. That is to say that production for the fulfilment of these needs is the most fundamental activity of humankind. In the course of this, people change their conditions of production, improve their techniques and the scientific and intellectual aspects of their lives; in a word, they change their conditions of existence.² That is, they change themselves. It is for this reason that Marxism has not considered any other feature of human existence, as transhistorical - everything is determined by the specific historical situation in which it arises and survives. Marxism, therefore, refuses to discuss anything, power included, as an "abstract eternal

2 An elaboration of this idea can be found in most Marxist texts, and specifically in The German Ideology and Anti-Duhring. It can also be seen that the "development of the productive forces" is not simply economic. The introduction of the steam engine, for example, presupposes a certain level of development of science and ideas.

idea". It insists on studying power and politics in the operations of the specific mode of production/social formation in which it exists and is exercised.

A direct consequence of historicizing the domain of power and politics has been the most prevalent view that somehow, in some sense, like everything else, it must be derived from the economy and production relations. Second, to accord any sort of primacy or even autonomy to as "non-material" a thing as power, seems to lapse into some version of an idealist conception of history.³ Yet, with its claims to be a theory of revolution, Marxism cannot really reconcile itself to giving a secondary place to power. Revolution, after all, as understood in Marxism, is nothing but the political reorganization of the economy. That is to say, the exploited class must first seize power, and reorganize the economy and production relations. Needless to say, invention of terms and concepts such as 'relative autonomy of the superstructure', 'relative autonomy of the state', 'specificity of the political', 'determination in the last instance', etc. are only so many attempts at overcoming the tension between the theoretical status of the economic and the political.

3 See for instance Poulantzas' discussion of Foucault in State, Power, Socialism, NLB (1978) where he states, "In the end, explanations such as that given by Deleuze push Foucault's thought into the camp of idealism", p.68.

In the route that we follow in this chapter, we first take a look at the position of the classical texts and their treatment of state power, since it is primarily in these terms that the question is dealt with in Marxism.

Secondly, having cleared the mist somewhat, on the question of the state we shall then proceed to locate the sources of an alternate notion of power in the classical texts themselves.

All the while we read these texts keeping in mind, conclusions already arrived at in the previous chapter.

I

State Power and Political Power

In the writings of Marx and Engels the word 'power' is used in many different ways. Economic power, material power, social power are various usages that we encounter quite often in their writings. These are often used interchangeably to refer to what can loosely be called a 'social force'. 'Economic power', of course refers more specifically to the relations of property and control over means of production. Such a usage is very different from usages like 'labour-power' or 'productive-power' and are quite obvious and we need not go into them in any great detail. The usage of 'material' and/or 'social' power,

often corresponds to 'economic power' but is sometimes also used in the sense in which we use 'power'. Political power, as used by them, usually refers to state power. In some contexts, though, it refers to power outside the state, strictly speaking. That, however, is a rarer usage.

It is precisely in the sense of state power that Marx and Engels use this term in the Communist Manifesto, that, "political power properly so-called, is merely the⁴
organized power of one class for oppressing another". It is the same conception once again, when Marx, in his discussion of the phenomenon of Bonapartism, comments that "in order to preserve its (i.e. the bourgeoisie's - AN)⁵ social power intact, its political power must be broken". This is explicated by saying that "in order to save its⁶ purse, it must forfeit the crown". Political power clearly refers here to the state but 'social power', as we can see, is used synonymously with 'economic power' - the purse. Elsewhere in the same work, Marx refers to this social power

4 Marx-Engels Collected Works (MECW), Vol. 6, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 19 , p. 505 [emphasis added].

5 Karl Marx, Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, MESW, p. 131 [emphasis added].

6 Ibid.

as material power. He says of Louis Bonaparte, that while he has broken the bourgeoisie's political power and continues to break it daily, nevertheless, "by protecting its material power, he generates its political power anew".⁷ The term social power appears in the Communist Manifesto again in a different sense! "Capital is therefore, not a personal, it is a social power".⁸ This sense is more in line with the sense in which we use power as is evident from the preceding lines : "To be a capitalist is to have not only personal, but a social status in production. Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay, in the last resort, only by the united action of all members of society can it be set in motion".⁹ Here it is used not purely in the sense of an economic power, but as a collective product brought into motion by the united action of all members of society.

Once these preliminary distinctions are clear, we can move on to a discussion of political power proper. Insofar as this means, to the founders of Marxism, state power, we shall now proceed to examine their views on the state itself.

7 Ibid., p. 176.

8 Communist Manifesto, *ibid.*, p. 47.

9 *Ibid.*

A problem with reading the classical texts on this subject may be stated at the outset. The "instrumentalist conception" of state, so powerfully entrenched in the official Marxist orthodoxy since the collapse of the Second International and the ensuing controversies therein, often colours our reading of the texts themselves.

As Ralph Miliband has rightly noted, "As in the case of so many other aspects of Marx's work, what he thought about the state has more often than not come to be seen through the prism of later interpretations and adaptations. These have long congealed into the Marxist theory of the state or into the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state".¹⁰

It is taken almost as axiomatic, following Lenin's State and Revolution, that the state by definition is the organ of repression, instrument of class rule: the police, the standing army, the courts and prisons - all are in the service of the ruling class, which controls all this precisely because it controls all the means of production. Admittedly, the repressive role of the state vis-a-vis the exploited classes, has never been in question, so far as Marx and Engels are concerned. And Lenin was perfectly right in underlining this. In fact, as we have seen, even

10 R.Miliband, Class Power and State Power, Verso 1983.

theorists like Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault identify the power of the state or government with repression. Only, what they do not say, but Marxists do, is that it is not simply repression, it is class repression. From this however, it does not follow that the state exists only to perform this function, or that it exists only because the ruling class exists. There can be no doubt whatsoever, that to Marx and Engels, every state performed certain class functions, worked in the interests of the economically dominant class. Any amount of textual evidence can be marshalled in order to demonstrate this. Indeed many statements of Marx and Engels quite explicitly seem to say so. Take for example, Engels who, of the two wrote much more extensively on the subject. He asserts in The Housing Question that "The state is nothing but the organized collective power of the possessing classes, the landowners and capitalists, as against the exploited classes, the¹¹ peasants and workers".

In The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, he asserts that the state is "as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which

11 Engels, The Housing Question, MECW, Vol. , p. [emphasis added].

through the medium of the state, becomes the politically
dominant class".¹²

From these statements it is abundantly clear that, in Engels' view, political/state power, is very closely linked to economic/material power. It is also fairly clear, that in this linkage between the two, the latter i.e. economic power has some sort of primacy. This is so in the sense that the class which is economically dominant, and owns the means of production, is also able to dominate politically, by controlling the state power in some way.

However, in order to correctly understand the full import of statements, particularly of formulations of a theoretical nature, it is necessary to look at them as a whole. The above quotation from The Housing Question is completed by Engels by asserting that "the state is still to a certain extent a power hovering independently over society, which for that very reason represents the collective interest of society and not those of a single class".¹³

The second statement from The Origin of Family, asserting that the state as a rule is the state of the

12 Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, MESW (1980), pp. 577-78.

13 Engels, The Housing Question [emphasis added], p.

economically dominant class, is followed up by the assertion that, "By way of exception ... periods occur in which the warring classes balance each other so nearly that the state power, an ostensible mediator, acquires for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both".¹⁴

Of course, while making such claims, Engels is not for a moment denying the class-repressive nature of the state. What both assertions rule out, however, is the simplistic conclusion that state/political power is a mere function of, or a product of class power of the economically dominant class. Such a reading is however quite possible from Lenin's rendering of Engels, and the particular interpretation given by him in The State and Revolution.

Lenin, in the above-mentioned pamphlet quotes Engels from The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State, at length as follows :

"The state is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without Rather it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel.

14 MESW, p.578.

But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more, is the state".¹⁵

Lenin's rendering and explication of this paragraph in subsequent pages begins by emphasizing one aspect of what is said above, namely, that "the state is a product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms".¹⁶ All other insights in the above quote are simply not touched. From here Lenin goes on to assert that "(A)ccording to Marx, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ of oppression of one class by another".¹⁷ Till this point Lenin's exposition corresponds to Marx' and Engels'. But then he takes a step further : "... it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible ... without the destruction of

15 V.I.Lenin, The State and Revolution, Collected Works, Vol. 25, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1980, p. 391.

16 Ibid., p. 392.

17 Ibid.

the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling
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class".

Considering the fact that the pamphlet was written during August-September 1917, the heady days of the Russian Revolution, intended primarily as a polemic against those who, like Kautsky, sought to underplay this aspect, probably, this should be read primarily as a political text rather than an exercise in theory. Parenthetically, we may note that it was this simple equation - economic power = political power that subsequently gave birth to an understanding that mere socialization of the means of production would make the Soviet republic "a million times more democratic", as Lenin was fond of repeating.

Let us take a closer look at the passage from Engels that Lenin quotes. We can see that :

a) the state is a product of society at a certain stage of its development - the stage when society has got embroiled into insoluble contradictions.

b) though it arises from within society, it places itself above society, that is, to some extent becomes 'alienated' and independent of it.

c) that the state became necessary so that warring classes do not consume society in fruitless struggle, that

18 Ibid., p. 393 [emphasis added].

is, to protect the general interests of society.

d) The 'order' thus secured, that Engels speaks of, as Lenin is at pains to point out, is always to the disadvantage of the oppressed and exploited classes.

The deduction that we make in (d) is probably the maximum that we can extract out of Engels' statement in this regard.

In fact, on many more occasions, both Marx and Engels have observed that though the state fulfils the repressive function, it is not simply that.

It is true that in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Engels talks of a "public power" that exists in all states - which is the armed force. He goes on to say that "It may be very insignificant, almost infinitesimal, in societies where class antagonisms are still undeveloped ...".¹⁹

Further on, in the same text he says that "in most of the historical states, the rights of citizens are ... apportioned according to their wealth, thus directly expressing the fact that the state is an organization of the possessing class for its protection against the non-

19 MESW, 1980, p.577.

possessing classes. It was so already in the Athenian and Roman classification according to property. It was so in the medieval feudal state, in which the alignment of political power was in conformity with the land owned²⁰".

Having said all this he adds : "Yet this political recognition of property is by no means essential The highest form of the state, the democratic republic, which under our modern conditions of society is more and more becoming an inevitable necessity ... the democratic republic officially knows nothing any more of property distinctions.²¹ In it wealth exercises its power indirectly".

In Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, again, it is the same theme that he picks up :

"Society creates for itself an organ for the safeguarding of its common interests against internal and external attacks. This organ is the state power. Hardly come into being, this organ makes itself independent vis-a-vis society; and indeed the more so, the more it becomes the organ of a particular class".²²

20 Ibid., p.58.

21 Ibid. [emphasis added].

22 Ibid., p.617 [emphasis added].

In a letter written to Conrad Schmidt in October 1890, he again observes : "Society gives rise to certain common functions which it cannot dispense with. The persons appointed for this purpose form a new branch of the division of labour within society. This gives them particular interests, distinct, too, from the interests of those who empowered them; they make themselves independent of the latter and the state is in being ... the new independent power, while having in the main to follow the movement of production, reacts in its turn, by virtue of its inherent ²³ relative independence".

Here we find Engels even talking of "distinct interests" of state personnel, distinct from those of the rest of society - the basis of its independence.

Furthermore, in Anti-Duhring he adds that, "the exercise of a social function was everywhere the basis of political supremacy ... the political supremacy has existed for any length of time only when it discharged its social ²⁴ functions".

The preceding passage in the text discusses how prior to the state coming into being these social functions were

23 Ibid., p. 686 [emphasis added].

24 Engels, Anti-Duhring, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, p. 215.

performed by individuals, though "under the control of the community as a whole". These functions included : "adjudication of disputes; repression of abuse of authority by individuals; control of water supplies especially in hot countries; and finally, when conditions were still absolutely primitive, religious functions".²⁵

From the series of statements cited above we can see that,

i) the state comes into being in order to protect or take care of common interests of society such as 'guarding against internal and external attacks', 'adjudication of disputes' etc.

ii) though state protects the possessing classes, the 'political recognition of property is not essential', particularly in the most developed state - the democratic republic.

iii) the state personnel acquire distinct interests from the rest of society including logically, the ruling class.

From the above then it would follow that,

iv) state/political power is per se not a product of

25 Ibid., p.214.

the material/economic power of the dominant class, though it may and certainly does acquire control over it.

The notion of the state that we now have before us, is that of an organ that performs repressive functions, but was not brought into being for that purpose, but in order to 'protect common interests' and 'perform social functions'. This, we may notice, is very close to the second dimension of power - the productive or creative.

We still need to look at (iv) above more carefully. From all the textual evidence that we have reproduced and the repeated use therein, by Engels of the expression "society created" the state, we can legitimately suspect the construction by Lenin that the state was "created by the ruling class". For, this repeated usage is unlikely to be a mere coincidence or a slip. Two apparently contradictory positions seem to be embodied in these formulations. First, that the state is a creation of society in order to protect general interest and yet, second, this very state is an organ of the dominant and exploiting classes. The contradiction is resolved in Lenin's formulation by simply asserting that the state is a creation of the ruling class, for the very purpose of class-repression. Surely that is not what Engels has in mind.

Thus, in order to pursue Engels' train of thought further, we can only see these two aspects as two distinct

'moments' : the genesis of political power and its appropriation by the economically dominant class. In the quotation from Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, this is precisely what seems to be implied : the more the state makes itself independent of society (i.e. of general interests), the more it is appropriated by the dominant class. In all class societies, we can only see the two, thoroughly enmeshed into one another, so that it is impossible to distinguish between them. In fact, since its very rise is linked to the rise of class antagonisms, from the beginning, the two moments appear to be so functionally related to each other that political power appears only to serve the economically dominant class.

Yet, if we read the textual evidence more attentively and carefully, we can see that what is being said in all the above statements is simply that the economic and production relations, at a certain stage of historical development create the conditions for the emergence of state power and such power, once emerged, is simultaneously appropriated by the exploiting class. To ordinary common sense too, it should be clear that for X to be a condition of Y's existence, is fundamentally different from X being the cause of Y's existence.

It is possible to make sense of Marx's entire

discussion of Bonapartism, and in fact, even of the way he discusses 'Oriental Despotism',²⁶ where the political power of the state appears to play a much more fundamental role than merely 'reflecting' class interests, only if the above distinction is maintained. Bonapartism, according to Marx, we saw earlier, was the preservation of the bourgeoisie's social power by breaking its political power - a state where an adventurer gained control, taking advantage of the conflicts among various classes of society. This "Bonaparte Model", as Draper calls it, was extended later to Bismarck's 'revolution from above' in Germany and even to the Czarist Russian State since the 1860s. It is neither possible nor even necessary to undertake a discussion of this phenomenon

26 For a thorough discussion of Bonapartism, Oriental Despotism and Russian Czarism where the state played the most fundamental role in society, see Hal Draper, Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Vol. I, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1977. It is not important for our purposes, whether Marx's reading of Oriental societies and the notion of the Asiatic mode of production were right or wrong. It is more important to note that to Marx, the Oriental State was the 'state and landlord rolled into one', the Czarist state 'bred the capitalist class' or the phenomenon of Bonapartism 'balanced class interests'. How all these fit into Marx's overall conceptualization of state and political power is what we are really interested in. Interestingly, recent 'economic miracles', the four East Asian countries - South Korea, Taiwan, Hongkong and Singapore all show distinct parallels with the idea of the "state breeding a capitalist class".

here; suffice it to note that in his writings on the absolutist state in Russia, Engels comments :

"All governments, be they ever so absolute, are in the last analysis, but the executors of the economic necessities²⁷ of the national situation".

In another context again,

"Not only the Russian State in general, but even in its specific form, the Czarist despotism, instead of hanging in the air is the necessary and logical product of the Russian²⁸ social conditions ...".

Once it is clear that the state and political power are not simply derived from economic or material power (though conditioned by the economy) the question that naturally arises then is, what precisely is its genesis, in that case? Where does it emanate from? How precisely were the "general or common interests" protected before the institutionalized apparatus of the state came into being? Even if primitive communal societies were internally homogeneous, surely external threats were there, and so too were other common interests necessary for survival -- the production and reproduction of immediate life.

27 Quoted in Draper, op.cit., p. 585 [emphasis added].

28 Ibid. [emphasis added], p.585.

To pursue Marx and Engels' argument on this aspect, we begin by quoting at length from The German Ideology.

"Out of this very contradiction between the particular and the common interest, the common interest assumes an independent form as the state, which is divorced from the real and collective interests, and at the same time as an illusory community, always based, however, on real ties existing in every family conglomeration -- such as flesh and blood, language, division of labour on a larger scale, and other interests and especially as we shall show later, on the classes already implied by the division of labour, which in every such mass of men separate out, and one of which dominates all the others".²⁹

The contradiction that the authors mention, between particular and general interests, out of which the common interest assumes the form of the state, arises from the division of labour. As we can see from the above passage itself, this division of labour comes prior to the rise of the state, first and foremost, in their view, between sexes and within the family.

That is why they assert that,

29 The German Ideology, MECW, Vol. 5, p.46.

"The division of labour in which all (these) contradictions are implicit ... simultaneously implies the distribution, and indeed the unequal distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labour and its products, hence property.... Division of labour and private property are, after all, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity".³⁰

Though one need not agree that division of labour and private property are identical expressions, the important point to be taken note of here is that the division of labour, which is historically prior to the state already implies an unequal distribution of labour and hence property. It is not too much of a leap of logic, to conclude from here that property being the product of labour, the unequal distribution of labour is the basis of the unequal distribution of property. For as Marx and Engels say:

"With these (i.e. increased productivity, increased needs, and the increase in population - AN) there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the

30 Ibid. [emphasis added].

division of labour in the sexual act, then the division of labour which develops spontaneously or 'naturally' by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g. physical strength), needs, accidents etc. etc".³¹

It is worth noting that while they mention natural predisposition needs and accidents, they do not mention property.

Let us clarify, however, that to accord logical priority to unequal division of labour over unequal division of property is not to accord it historical priority. Historically, the two may have appeared, in certain conditions, simultaneously, but on no account is it possible then to accord unequal distribution of property any historical priority either.³² And here, in the historical division of labour we can already see the existence of power relations. Therefore, as the authors further go on to say:

"This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into a material power above us,

31 Ibid., p. 44.

32 This should not however be understood to mean that to Marx, this division of labour has priority over production. He is very clear when he says in The Poverty of Philosophy that "Labour is organized, is divided differently according to the instruments it has at its disposal ... it is slapping history in the face to want to begin with the division of labour ..." (MECW, Vol. 6, p. 183).

growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in the historical development up till now. The social power i.e. multiplied productive force which arises through cooperation of different individuals as it is caused by the division of labour, appears to these individuals, since their cooperation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them...".³³

There is a certain ambiguity in the above passage since Marx and Engels use the term social power, further explaining it as "multiplied productive force", but at the same time saying that the reality of this social power that arises through cooperation of different individuals, is that it is their own united power. Surely this social power cannot be used to refer either to property or technology or anything economic and material. Since Marx and Engels reserve the term political power, exclusively for the state, we can conclude that what they are referring to here is what we have been discussing so far -- political power or simply power.

33 MECW, Vo.5, pp.47-48 [emphasis added].

This conclusion is further reinforced by Marx's relatively unambiguous statement in Capital. Discussing the same theme of cooperation he says,

"In such cases the effect of the combined labour could either not be produced at all by isolated individual labour, or it could be produced by a great expenditure of time, on a very dwarfed scale. Not only have we here an increase in the productive power of the individual, by means of cooperation, but the creation of a new power, namely, the collective power of the masses".³⁴

Here the distinction between increase in 'productive power' is clearly made, from the new power created by cooperation -- the collective power of the masses. Though the context of Marx's discussion here too continues to be the sphere of production, it is clear that he sees the collective power of the masses being generated from this collective activity -- cooperation and the division of labour.

II

In the preceding section, we have deduced certain conclusions from the texts of Marx and Engels themselves,

34 Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p.309.

rejecting what can be called for shorthand, the reductionist theory of power.

In this section we shall take a look at certain other texts of the founders of Marxism which in a different and more direct way articulate the same conceptualization. We shall also bring into discussion here, certain very crucial and significant writings of Lenin.

In The Poverty of Philosophy, in the final section, on strikes and the need for workers' organizations Marx makes some very significant comments. His argument is notably against the utopian socialists: the Fourierists in France and the Owenites in England, who were against the idea of workers' organizations. After presenting their argument he ends with a rhetorical question, followed by his own comments. The entire argument is worth recapitulating. Marx's paraphrase of the 'socialist' argument:

"The Socialists say to the workers: Do not combine, because what will you gain by it anyway? A rise in wages? The economists will prove to you quite clearly that the few ha'pence you may gain by it for a few moments if you succeed, will be followed by a permanent fall. Skilled calculators will prove to you that it would take you years merely to recover, through the increase in your wages, the expenses incurred for the organization and upkeep of the combinations. And ... apart from the money question, you

will continue nonetheless to be workers, and the masters will still be masters, just as before. So no combination! No politics! For is not entering into combination engaging in politics?"³⁵

The last question encapsulates what the rest of the argument is: entering into combination is itself a political act. Marx details the fact that "combination has not ceased for an instant to go forward and grow with the development and growth of modern industry",³⁶ notwithstanding the economists and socialists. He does so primarily from the experience of the British working class movement -- the trade union movement in particular. Marx's argument further shows that combinations which emerged merely to further resistance for the maintenance of wages, ultimately become politically important, and "in the face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages".³⁷ So much so that Marx comments:

"This is so true that English economists are amazed to see the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages in

35 MECW, Vol. 6, pp.209-210.

36 Ibid., p. 210.

37 Ibid., p. 211.

favour of associations, which, in the eyes of these economists, are established solely in favour of wages. In this struggle -- a veritable civil war -- all elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character".³⁸ This argument thus sums up the idea that the power of the working class, in its battle against capital emerges from combination, i.e., a political act on the part of the class or a fraction or part thereof.

This same theme is echoed by Engels, writing on Trade Unions, in 1881, in the following words:

" ... the working people from the very beginning cannot do without a strong organization, well-defined by rules and delegating its authority to officers and committees. The Act of 1824* rendered these organizations (i.e. the trade unions -AN) legal. From that day labour became a power in England. The formerly helpless mass, divided against itself, was no longer so. To the strength given by union and common action was soon added the force of a well-filled exchequer --

38 Ibid.

* "An Act to repeal the Laws relative to the Combination of Workmen; and for other purposes therein mentioned [21st June 1824]" - Editor's footnote.

"resistance money" as our French brethren expressively call
it. The entire position of things now changed".³⁹

Of course, the expression "from that day" should not be taken too literally since it is only meant to emphasize the fact of the tremendous impact of legislation, since the basis of this strength, this power, as we can see above, was not the law but "union and common action".

It is further interesting to note that in this piece on the trade unions, Engels also comes to a notion of political power, which is distinct from state power.

"But a struggle between two great classes of society necessarily becomes a political struggle.... In every struggle of class against class, the next end fought for is political power; the ruling class defends its political supremacy, that is to say its safe majority in the Legislature; the inferior class fights for, first a share,
⁴⁰
then the whole of that power...".

Clearly here, "whole of that power" refers to absolute political supremacy, i.e., state power, whereas, the idea of a share in that power is a reference, in this case to a parliamentary representation.

39 MECW, Vol. 24, p. 384 [emphasis added].

40 Ibid., p. 386 [emphasis added].

Commenting that "Disraeli's Household Suffrage gave the vote to at least the greater portion of the organized working class"⁴¹ he goes on to add:

"That very measure opened out a new prospect to the working class. It gave them the majority in London and in all manufacturing towns, and thus enabled them to enter into the struggle against capital with new weapons, by sending men of their own class to Parliament"⁴².

This notion of a "political power" appears quite often in some of the later writings of Marx and Engels -- a power that is the outcome of collective action of the working class.

Thus Engels in an article written in 1878, writes:

"The working class of Germany, Italy, Belgium etc. is not yet a political power in the state; it is a political power only prospectively.... But in France it is different. the workmen of Paris, seconded by those of the large provincial towns, have ever since the great Revolution been a power in the state"⁴³.

41 Ibid., pp. 386-87.

42 Ibid., p. 387.

43 Ibid. The Workingmen of Europe in 1877, p.221.

This notion of the working class of France being a "political power in the state" is explicated by Engels, as follows:

"A national working class which thus, for nearly a century (not only) has taken a decisive part in every crisis of the history of its own country...".⁴⁴

This makes it clear then that the French working class is a political power because it politically acts as a class, unlike its German, Italian or Belgian counterparts, who are a political power, 'only prospectively'.

This is the real import of Marx's assertion in The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850, when he says : "If Paris, as a result of political centralization, rules France, the workers, in moments of revolutionary earthquakes, rule Paris,⁴⁵ or that :

"... the French proletariat, at the moment of a revolution, possesses in Paris, actual power ...".⁴⁶

Here we have a clearer idea of what generates the

44 Ibid., p. 222.

45 Karl Marx, The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p. 33 [emphasis added].

46 Ibid., p. 37.

revolutionary power of the working class : a class moving into collective action.

We have already referred to Lenin's pamphlet The State and Revolution, which was written in August-September 1917. But it is interesting to note that just a few months prior to that, in April 1917, he wrote an article in Pravda entitled, The Dual Power. This article is important because it spells out a conception of power that is distinct from a reductionist conception, though, of course, it is still couched in the language of 'state' and 'state power'.

In this article, Lenin notes that "the highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a dual power",⁴⁷ and asserts that "we must know how to supplement and amend old 'formulas' ...".⁴⁸

He goes on to add that the distinctive feature of this power is : "the source of this power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas"⁴⁹ ...".

47 V.I.Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 24, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1980, p.38.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., p. 39 [emphasis added].

This statement is extremely significant because though Lenin considers the second power i.e. the power of Soviets, also as a form of state power, he is saying two things in the above formulation which merit closer attention:

This power is based on,

- (i) the direct initiative of the people.
- (ii) equally importantly, direct initiative at the local level.

The implication of (ii) above is that even at the local level, direct initiative and collective action of the people generate power, even though the state i.e. its centralized apparatus may be in the control of the oppressing class/classes. To say this also takes us, in a sense, close to Foucault's notion of the ubiquity of power. Of course, in all fairness to Lenin, it must be stated that he considers this dual power only as a "transitional phase"
50
of the revolution.

So, from within the Marxist texts, we now have power as generated from collective action - both, conscious revolutionary activity, as well as, activity that human beings undertake "independent of their will".

50 Ibid., p. 61 : Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution.

From the discussion above we are therefore, now in a position to derive a non-reductionist conception of power. However, since this conception has been so overshadowed by the dominant reductionism in the Marxist theorizations of power, it is natural that the specificities of the operations and mechanisms of this domain, its 'internal logic', have remained practically untheorized, or, at any rate, undertheorized. The realm of politics was only seriously taken up as an object of theoretical pursuit by Gramsci. Some of the subsequent scholars - Marxist or influenced and informed by Marxism have taken up some related questions.

In the next section we briefly consider Gramsci's contributions.

III

Gramsci's Innovations : Marxist Theory of Power and Politics

Of all the subsequent Marxist scholars and theorists who have contributed to the development of a non-reductionist, Marxist theory of power and politics, we intend to discuss here, the contributions of Antonio Gramsci. This is not to underrate the work, often extremely insightful, of such theorists as Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, who have contributed in a big way, to the development of an understanding of the political level of

society, though these often leave little room for agency and human action. Poulantzas, though, subsequent to his famous debate with Ralph Miliband, had certainly moved away from a 'structural superdeterminism' that Miliband had accused him of.

However, our reasons for concentrating on Gramsci's contributions are different. They are very similar to Gramsci's own reasons for reading Machiavelli: Machiavelli⁵¹ "revealed something, and did not merely theorize reality". On Gramsci's reading, Machiavelli's The Prince has "the style of a man of action, of a man urging action, the style of a party manifesto"⁵². To him, therefore Machiavelli reveals the dynamics of politics - albeit in raw, untheorized form. "Anyone born into the traditional governing stratum acquires almost automatically the characteristics of the political realist, as a result of the entire educational complex which he absorbs from his family milieu ..."⁵³.

The same, we may say is true of a practical revolutionary like Gramsci. Practical political experience

51 Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, International Publishers, New York, 1987, p. 134.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p. 135.

plays the same role in Gramsci, that the "entire educational complex" does in Machiavelli.

Gramsci, thus reveals, as he theorizes. To him, as we saw to Lenin, living reality was more important than abstract theoretical formulations. Like Lenin, therefore, he is not hesitant to "amend and supplement old formulas", though still remaining within Marxism.

We have already noted, at the beginning of this chapter, the constant tension in Marxism, between a reductionist conception of politics and power and its claims to be a revolutionary theory of action.

Already in Gramsci, we find a serious effort to resolve this tension - to develop a full-fledged theory of politics - political science, as he calls it. Gramsci's writings, we believe, are not only an attempt to "theorize political reality", but also a revelation of the dynamics, the internal logic of power relations - which is essentially non-reductionist, though he often brings in statements from the classics which give a contrary impression.

That Gramsci does offer a non-reductionist theory of politics, which nevertheless remains Marxist, is what we shall try to demonstrate.

The central texts in this regard are The Modern Prince and The State and Civil Society.

Gramsci's discussion of Machiavelli's The Modern Prince begins with the following assertion :

"The modern prince, the myth-prince, cannot be a real person. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will, which has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action, begins to take concrete form. History has already provided this organism, and it is the political party - the first cell in which there come together germs of a collective will tending to become universal and total".⁵⁴

A collective will that has already asserted itself in action, which is crystallized and institutionalized now in the form of a political party - is the power of a determinate social group or collectivity. We may recall here, Hannah Arendt's observation that, what keeps power alive, after the fleeting moment of action is passed, is organization. Gramsci's notion of organization and collective will, of course, is different from Hannah Arendt's, since to Arendt organization is the polis, where free citizens interact - all are equal. Gramsci, however,

54 Ibid., p.129.

sees modern society split into classes, and irreconcilable class antagonisms. His "collective will" thus, is the will of a particular class/social group. True, Gramsci does talk of a national-popular collective will, but even that is a concept where, rather than a homogeneous "nation" he is referring to the popular classes - the working class and peasantry.⁵⁵

Gramsci confronts, in relation to his discussion of Machiavelli, "the question of politics as an autonomous science". His solution is somewhat confusing but the way he conceives it is interesting. He says : "... the solution can only be found in the identification of politics and economics. Politics becomes permanent action and gives birth to permanent organizations precisely insofar as it identifies itself with economics. But it is also distinct from it, which is why one may speak separately of economics and politics ...".⁵⁶

We shall discuss this confusing notion of "identification of politics and economics" in the last and final chapter, and argue that in a slightly different sense from Gramsci's, it can actually resolve the tension. For

55 See, for example, the discussion on this question on pp.130-32.

56 Ibid., pp. 139-40 [emphasis added].

the moment, let us note that, insofar as this identification exists, politics becomes permanent action and brings forth permanent organizations. One way of interpreting this statement is that as long as class antagonisms exist, permanent action of contending classes becomes necessary for their survival, for which purpose, "permanent organizations" expressing their collective will come forth.

Such organizations and parties are, however, not really all that permanent - in the sense that while classes/social groups permanently require a party to express their collective will, it need not necessarily be the same party that does so permanently.

"At a certain point in their historical lives, social classes become detached from their traditional parties. In other words, the traditional parties in that particular organizational form, with the particular men who constitute, represent and lead them, are no longer recognized by their class (or fraction of a class) as its expression".⁵⁷

The dynamics of politics and power relations now appear clearly independent of the economic. The organizational forms, the personnel - the leaders, become an obstacle in

57 Ibid. The State and Civil Society, p. 210 [emphasis added].

the expression of the collective will. The party becomes detached from its class, which would now seek a new weapon to express its will. This is a dynamic which Gramsci explicates thus :

"The first element is that there really do exist rulers and ruled, leaders and led. The entire science and art of politics are based on this primordial, and (given certain general conditions) irreducible fact".⁵⁸

Certainly, for a Marxist theorist to assert that the division between rulers and ruled or at the very least, between the leaders and led, is a primordial and irreducible fact, is an emphatic assertion of the "autonomy" of the domain of power-systems. Gramsci, in fact goes further :

"Yet it must be clearly understood that the division between the rulers and ruled ... is in fact, things being as they are, also to be found within the group itself, even where it is a socially homogeneous one".⁵⁹

The origins of this fact need to be studied separately, according to him, but the fact must first be recognized, rather than wished away.

58 Ibid., p. 144 [emphasis added].

59 Ibid.

We can see in Gramsci's political realism, right here, the expression of what we referred to in the first chapter as the central paradox of power. A social group seeking to express its collective will, through its organization - a hierarchically ordered system of leaders and the led - and the inevitable contradiction therein of centralization and equalization of power.

"Since the division between rulers and ruled exist even within the same group, certain principles have to be fixed upon and strictly observed ... for the belief is common that obedience must be automatic, once it is a question of the same group ... it must be unquestioning".⁶⁰

There are, of course, many other aspects and dimensions of Gramsci's theory of politics, his conceptions of the state and the concept of hegemony, crisis etc. which we shall not go into at the moment.

We have already demonstrated above that Gramsci's central concerns, and the conceptualizations therein, are essentially non-reductionist, though what has been said above is certainly not all that there is to his theory of politics.

60 Ibid., p.145.

We can now conclude our discussion of power in Marxist theory by noting the following similarities with the conceptions discussed earlier :

(i) Power arises out of collective action and the social division of labour.

(ii) Power cannot be reduced to a mere function of the economic.

(iii) As an expression of collective will and "production and reproduction of immediate life", it is creative too. And finally,

(iv) On Gramsci's development of Marxism, the central paradox of power, is an essential feature of power-systems.

In the next chapter we shall discuss, among other things, the Gramscian solution to the tension in Marxist theory noted earlier.

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CHAPTER III

PRAXIS, POWER AND STRUCTURE

Introduction

In this final chapter we shall turn our attention to what emerges as the most crucial question in our discussion of power thus far - that of action. The first question that needs to be discussed in this regard is the precise meaning of 'human action'. This is particularly important since the concept of action in Hannah Arendt is a very special one and since her concept of power is closely tied to it, it presents some special set of problems affecting even her concept of power and the political.

The second important question is that of the precise nature of relationship between the two concepts since it has an important bearing on the whole question of the status of power in human society.

Lastly, we revert to Steven Lukes' idea already mentioned in the very first chapter, that it is not possible to understand the second and third faces of power without reference to structural questions and institutional practices. Added to Lukes' point is Hannah Arendt's contention, again, that what gives endurance to power relations is 'organization'. Finally, by way of clarification, it needs to be asserted that to talk of

structural power is not to subscribe to some sort of 'structural superdeterminism' that does away with the very idea of human agency and action, which, if our argument thus far is correct, makes it impossible to understand power.

We shall argue in this chapter, that action is, in fact, much more than mechanical motion, or even something as special and rarefied as Arendt would have us believe - it is an ontological feature of the human condition. Further, we shall argue that, there is in the Giddensian ¹ sense, a necessary connection, a logical "tie-up" between action and power - that the genesis of power is immanent in the very process of collective and social human action. Having established these two points we shall finally conclude that the phenomenon of power, itself, is then embedded in the ontology of the human condition.

Having discussed the above questions, we then take a brief look at the theoretical implications of this claim. If power is necessarily generated through human action, human praxis, then it is as fundamental to human existence

1 Though we agree with Giddens that there is a necessary connection between action and power and also to a large extent with his notion of action as praxis, there are certain reservations that we have with regard to his precise exposition of how power is generated, via the somewhat problematic concepts of 'time-space distanciation' and 'structuration' etc. See, for instance, Giddens (1981), (1982) and (1984).

as the 'production and reproduction of immediate life', which is but a part of human praxis. If this conclusion is valid, then we can legitimately argue that power, and therefore politics, is implicated in what is called the 'economic base' itself.

I

To take our second problem first, we start by looking at the nature of relationship between power and action. We have seen thus far that power arises from human action. We now take a closer look at this relationship.

Since Hannah Arendt, of all the theorists considered so far, most explicitly, and repeatedly establishes this connection between collective human action and the genesis of power, we begin by taking a brief look at her conceptualization and the problems therein.

In On Violence, Arendt explicitly asserts that power needs no justification as it is inherent in political communities. She further elaborates this by making the observation that "power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert ...".² So, when she is saying that power is inherent in political communities, or that it is generated whenever people act in concert, Arendt is

2 H.Arendt On Violence [emphasis added], p.52.

simultaneously establishing a necessary connection between the two.

However, the problem with the above conceptualization is that though power is necessarily implicated in human action, action itself is not understood by her in the usual sense, the sense in which all social practices fall within its ambit. The paradigmatic basis of all of Arendt's theorization of politics is the ancient city-state of Greece, particularly Athens - the polis. The polis is based on a sharp differentiation, in Arendt's rendering, between the private realm and the public realm, the former representing the life of necessity that must be overcome, in order that man^{*} enter the public realm of politics and freedom.³

Crucial to Arendt's theory of action is the idea that all other types of activity, apart from political activity, are not free, but "performed in bondage to one or another kind of master, or done in unredeemable futility or impotence".⁴

* We deliberately use the term 'man' to retain the original sense of the Greek 'polis' -- where only the male head of the family was 'free' precisely by virtue of the fact that he lorded over the wife, the children and slaves.

3 H. Arendt, The Human Condition, p.31.

4 George Kateb, Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, evil, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1983, p.2.

In Arendt's words : "The raison d'etre of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action".⁵ Arendt distinguishes this action from two other types of activity - labour and work. These, she emphatically argues in The Human Condition, are fundamentally different from action. Labour (animal laborans) and work (homo-faber - the tool wielder or craftsman) are based on the very negation of 'plurality' which is the precondition for action. The 'plurality', she says, is two-sided, has two features - equality and distinction. "If political actors were not equal, they could not understand each other and work together. If they were not distinct from each other, they would not need words or deeds to make themselves understood...".⁶

As against this, workmanship and labour are described by Arendt thus :

"Workmanship ... may be an unpolitical way of life, but it certainly is not an anti-political one. Yet, this precisely is the case of labouring, an activity in which man is neither together with the world, nor with other people, but alone with his body, facing the naked necessity to keep himself alive. To be sure, he too lives in the presence of

5 H.Arendt, "What is Freedom" in Between Past and Future, Faber and Faber, London, 1961, p. 146.

6 G. Kateb, op.cit., p. 14.

and together with others, but this togetherness has none of the distinctive marks of true plurality. It does not consist in the purposeful combination of different skills and callings as in the case of workmanship ...".⁷

As is clear from the above, Arendt considers labour to be even more inferior to work. She further observes that though, it is true that labouring brings men together in the form of a labour gang where individuals may labour together as though they were one, yet :

"(But) this collective nature of labour, far from establishing a recognizable, identifiable reality for each member of the labour gang, requires on the contrary, the actual loss of all awareness of individuality and identity; and it is for this reason that all those 'values' which derive(s) from labouring, beyond its obvious function in the life-process are entirely 'social' and essentially not different from the additional pleasure derived from eating and drinking in company."⁸

So we see that 'action' in Arendt's vocabulary refers specifically to political action, which only free people are capable of undertaking. However, if this really be the

7 H.Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 212 [emphasis added].

8 Ibid., p. 213.

case, how are we to explain the fact that the modern working class, according to Arendt's own admission noted earlier in Chapter I, "has written one of the most glorious and probably the most promising chapter (sic) of recent history".⁹

This tension between Arendt's theoretically posited political incapacity of labour and the actual experience of working class movements in Europe, is never satisfactorily resolved.

She remarks at one point that it was because of the trade union movement fighting for the interests of the working class (i.e. the economic or non-political interests - AN) that led to "an extraordinary increase in (its) economic security, social prestige and political power".¹⁰ All that she states by way of explanation is that the working class became capable of action when "a distinction appeared only in those rare and yet decisive moments when, during the process of revolution, it suddenly turned out that these people, if not led by official party programmes and ideologies, had their own ideas about the possibilities of democratic government under modern conditions."¹¹

9 Ibid., p.215.

10 Ibid., p.216.

11 Ibid., p.216 [emphasis added].

That is to say that in these 'rare moments', when the working class acted on its own ideas about political institutions, it became capable of political action. But this hardly says anything new by way of explaining why it at all became capable of 'action', and why, in the first place, "a distinction appeared".

Arendt asserts that such is the case only by way of exception, and that, of the two trends in the working class, namely, the trade union movement and the 'people's political aspirations', the former has gone from 'victory to victory' while the latter, the 'political labour movement' has been defeated each time it dared put forth its own demands as distinguished from party programmes and economic reforms.¹²

To the extent that the working class does on rare occasions act politically it is because modern free labour is different from slave labour, not in any fundamental way of being personally free, but rather "that he is admitted to the political realm and fully emancipated as a citizen".¹³ And this fact, in her view, is a contradiction of modern society that "a whole new segment of the population was more

12 Ibid., pp.216-217.

13 Ibid., p.217.

or less suddenly admitted to the public realm, that is, appeared in public ... without at the same time being admitted to society ...".¹⁴

Considering that historically, the admission of workers into the political realm i.e. with citizenship rights, universal suffrage etc. were a consequence of working class struggles, rather than the other way round, Arendt's explanation, if at all it be one, does not really suffice. It is also worth noting that instances of the working class moving into political action are not really as rare and exceptional as Arendt makes them out to be.

With this limited and highly specific concept of 'action', we would submit, Arendt cannot really resolve this tension between the actual experience of the labour movement and its said 'incapacity' to act. The problem in our opinion lies precisely with her concept of action, which is why she makes the vain effort to explain "the cause" in terms of "the effect" i.e. the political action of the working class in terms of their admission into citizenship. It is this theory of action again which leads her "to pay a certain price" even in terms of her conceptualization of power, as Habermas has rightly noted :

14 Ibid., pp.217-218.

(a) "She screens all strategic elements, as force, out of politics.

(b) She removes politics from its relations to the economic and social environment in which it is embedded through the administrative system.

(c) She is unable to grasp structural violence".¹⁵

Without going into any of the details of Habermas' critique we would like to submit that the problem is resolved only if we modify Arendt's theory of action, wherein it includes all social practices. Only then is it possible to understand how and why collectivities, sharing a common fate, and therefore having common interests act 'politically' in Arendt's sense. It also then makes it possible to understand that power is implicated in and generated through, not just political action but through all such action as human beings collectively undertake - be it willed or be it carried on "independently of the will" of people involved.

Anthony Giddens is the other major theorist to dwell upon explicitly about action and its relation to power. "Power and freedom" he says, "in human society are not opposites; on the contrary, power is rooted in the very

15 Jurgens Habermas, Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power in Lukes, ed, 1986, p.84.

nature of human agency, and thus in the 'freedom to act otherwise'¹⁶".

Agency, in Giddens usage is a fundamental fact of human life.

"Action or agency, as I use it, thus does not refer to a series of discrete acts combined together, but to a continuous flow of conduct. We may define action ... as involving a stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporal beings in the ongoing process of events-in-the-world"¹⁷. Further : "The concept of agency as I advocate it here, involving 'intervention' in a potentially malleable object-world related to the more generalized notion of praxis"¹⁸.

He defines praxis in the following words : "I take praxis to be an ontological term, expressing a fundamental trait of human social existence"¹⁹. "To speak of human

16 A.Giddens A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, Macmillan Press Ltd, London and Basingstoke, 1981, p. 4 [emphasis added].

17 A.Giddens, Contemporary Problems of Social Theory, 1979, p. 55.

18 Ibid., pp. 55-56.

19 A.Giddens (1981), p. 53.

social activity as praxis is to reject every conception of human beings as 'determined objects' or as unambiguously 'free subjects'. All human action is carried on by knowledgeable agents who both construct the social world through their action but yet whose action is also conditioned or constrained by the world of their creation".²⁰

It is this notion of action as praxis, the ontologically constitutive feature of the human condition that power, in Giddens' notion is tied to. Further, as we have noted earlier, power according to him is not simply contingently related to human action or praxis. It is, according to him, logically tied to the concept of action. That is to say, there is a necessary connection between praxis and power. To quote :

"What is the nature of the logical connection between action and power? Although the ramifications of the issue are complex, the basic relation involved can easily be pointed to. To be able to 'act otherwise' means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or a state of affairs. This presumes that the agent is able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those

20 Ibid., pp.53-54.

deployed by others An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to 'make a difference', that is to exercise some sort of power".²¹

Therefore, Anthony Giddens clearly establishes a logical connection between praxis and power. However, we can also see that while he is claiming that power is necessarily implicated in human praxis, he does not say that it is generated in and through action alone. While we shall take up the question of generation of power in Giddens' framework later in the discussion, we can claim that power does appear in his framework as an ontologically embedded phenomenon of human society. That is why he says : "'Domination' and 'power' cannot be thought of only in terms of asymmetries of distribution but have to be recognized as

21 A.Giddens, The Constitution of Society : Outline of the Theory of Structuration, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1984, p. 14 [emphasis added].

It should be noted, however, that Giddens once again exercises a definitional fiat by simply not considering an individual to be an agent if he/she ceases to be able to "make a difference". Anyhow, we are not concerned here with an individual's capacity to wield power -- that, in our opinion is a structural feature of power systems and it matters little whether a specific individual really wields or chooses not to wield power. 'Retreat' in a battle may mean that the retreating army is not in a position to 'make a difference', but that is only the 'other side' of offence -- regrouping of forces, preparing for future assault etc., i.e. 'making a difference'.

inherent in social association (or, I would say, in human action as such). Thus - and here we must also reckon with the implications of the writings of Foucault - power is not an inherently noxious phenomenon, not just the capacity to say 'no'; nor can domination be 'transcended' in some kind of putative society of the future ...".²²

We shall return to our discussion of some other aspects of Giddens theory in the next section.' Before that we take a brief look at the Marxian notion of praxis and the relationship with power.

The Marxian Position

The Marxian position on action emerged as a result of Marx's dissatisfaction with, and critique of the concepts of action extant in both idealist and materialist philosophy of his time. As we shall shortly see, Anthony Giddens' notion of praxis as an ontological category is profoundly influenced by Marx and, in fact, there is a close resemblance between the two positions.

In the preceding chapter, we have seen that one of the major concerns of Marx and Engels, in elaborating their materialist conception of history or historical materialism

22 Ibid., pp.31-32 [emphasis added].

was to reject any notion of 'abstract human nature'. They certainly conceived the human subject as a conscious being acting with a definite purpose. "Men make history" Marx said in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, but completed the statement by adding that they do so "not as they choose, but in circumstances directly encountered from the past". These circumstances, handed over from the past, as it were, include the manner in which the people who make history are moulded by that past. This conception of the conscious human subject that runs through all of Marx's works, starting from his Theses on Feuerbach, where he most clearly and explicitly expounds his notion of praxis, though still in 'pre-Marxian' terminology.

Marx's dissatisfaction and uneasiness with materialism of the past, including that of Feuerbach was that it virtually negated the conscious human subject - the agent who 'makes history'. Hence activity, conscious activity, was only tackled by the idealists, though naturally, in an abstract fashion.

That is why in the very first Thesis on Feuerbach he says :

"The chief defect of all previous materialism (including Feuerbach's) is that the object, actuality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the object or

perception [Anschauung], but not as sensuous human activity, practice [praxis], nor subjectively. Hence in opposition to materialism the active side was developed by idealism - but only abstractly since idealism naturally does not know actual, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects actually different from thought objects : but he does not comprehend human activity itself as objective ... he does not comprehend the significance of "revolutionary",²³ of "practical-critical" activity (emphasis added).

The third thesis further adds:

"The materialist doctrine concerning the change of circumstances and education forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated".²⁴

However, while Marx makes this critique of Feuerbach's materialism and emphasizes the conscious human subject, he makes the important point that unlike what Feuerbach and old materialists seem to think, "the essence of man is no abstraction inhering in each single individual. In its actuality it is the ensemble of social relations".²⁵

23 Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, MESW, p. 28

24 Ibid., p. 28 [emphasis added].

25 Ibid., p. 29

Finally, having made these significant departures from old materialism, Marx takes the question of practice further, beyond 'practical-critical' or 'revolutionary activity' and asserts in the eighth thesis that "all social life is²⁶ essentially practical".

C.J.Arthur, in his stimulating study of the 1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (also referred to as the Paris Manuscripts) observes:

"In 1844 a turning point occurs in Marx's philosophical development. For the first time he attributes fundamental ontological significance to productive activity.* Through²⁷ material production humanity comes to be what it is".

In The German Ideology, Marx and Engels therefore, begin their exposition of historical materialism by stating the importance of this fundamental fact. They write that :

26 Ibid., p.30 [emphasis added].

* Arthur uses the term 'productive activity' to differentiate it from what he correctly points out, is the more ambiguously used term 'labour', in the earlier writings. Marx uses the term 'labour' for both, the ontological category, as well as the historically determined, alienated activity in the regime of private property.

27 C.J. Arthur, Dialectics of Labour : Marx and his relation to Hegel, Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 5.

"... men must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history'. But life involves before everything else, eating and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things. The first historical act is thus the production of material life itself ... a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life...".²⁸

Arthur notes that it is labour in this sense, as Marx's central, ahistorical, ontological category which is "the first-order mediation" as it were, between man and nature, through which humanity takes the raw material provided by nature, transforms it to reproduce their material life and in the process, transform themselves and nature.²⁹

We have, from the writings of Marx and Engels themselves then, two fundamental types of activity -- productive and 'practical-critical' or revolutionary -- both of which are subsumed under the generic category of praxis. The two types of activity, though they may be of different genre, however, are essentially the same in Marx's terms -- conscious, purposeful human activity, to transform the material and social world.

28 MECW, Vol.5, Moscow, 1976, p.42.

29 Arthur, op.cit., p.5.

Lukacs makes this point when he quotes the famous passage from Capital, where Marx observes that,

"What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it".³⁰

Having quoted this crucial passage, Lukacs goes on to make the point that "through labour, a teleological positing is realized within material being, as the rise of a new objectivity. The first consequence of this is that labour becomes the model for any social practice..."³¹

Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez in his The Philosophy of Praxis further elaborates Marx's notion of praxis as purposeful human action. "Man can also be the subject of biological or instinctive activities which are no more than simple natural

30 Quoted in G.Lukacs, The Ontology of Social Being 3. Labour, Merlin Press, London, 1980, p. 3 [emphasis added].

31 Ibid., p. 3.

acts, and which cannot, for that reason, be regarded as specifically human. Human activity properly speaking only occurs when actions designed to transform an object are initiated on the basis of an ideal result or end, and culminate in an actual, concrete result or product...".³²

"Like all human activity, the practical activity that takes the form of human labour, artistic creation or revolutionary praxis, is an activity adapted to ends whose fulfilment requires a level of cognitive activity.... In all practical activity, the subject acts upon a material existing independently of his consciousness and of the various manipulative operations necessary for its transformation, a transformation that demands, above all in human labour, a series of physical, corporeal acts without which the alteration or abolition of those properties preventing the emergence of a new object with new properties, could not be carried out".³³

This then is the Marxian notion of praxis—purposeful human activity with a view to transforming the natural and social world. We can already see here the close affinities

32 Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez, The Philosophy of Praxis (tr. by Mike Gonzalez), Merlin Press, London. Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1977, p. 150.

33 Ibid., p. 155.

of this concept with Giddens' concept of praxis as intervention in 'events-in-the-world' whereby human beings construct the social world which in turns conditions their actions.

We have already noted in the previous chapter and the discussion therein, that, on our re-reading of Marx and Engels, power is generated in both these types of activity. Though there is no explicit claim that power is necessarily generated in productive activity we may briefly recall what Marx and Engels had to say about how the division of labour i.e. the unequal distribution of work comes about.* For, we may recall that they considered "classes" to be already "implied in the division of labour" and even considered it to be an identical expression with private property. In that sense, power, we saw, was already in operation. How this division of labour actually came about is now worth looking at more closely:

"With these (i.e. increased productivity, increased

* It should be clarified that asymmetries, hierarchies, domination and contestation etc. are referred to not as a reversion to a purely conflictual notion of power, but only to identify the operations of power, as they constitute essential features of power, even though it is generated collectively in praxis. We have already, in chapter I, while discussing the internal logic of power, argued that contestations, domination, resistance are constitutive features of power, though its creative/productive dimension is always present.

needs and the increase in population - AN) there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then the division of labour which develops spontaneously 'naturally' by virtue of natural pre-disposition (e.g. physical strength), needs accidents, etc.etc."³⁴

This means that the division of labour and the implication of power implied therein is a 'natural process'. Needs, physical strength, accidents etc. can only determine who will be fixed where, in this division of labour. And this natural i.e. necessary, inevitable, process is a consequence of the development of the productive forces, increased needs, increase in population etc. To recall the statement from the Poverty of Philosophy, "Labour is organized, is divided differently according to the instruments it has at its disposal"³⁵. And, Marx and Engels believed this development of productive forces and instruments to be an inexorable law of history.

On the basis of the two propositions,

(i) that productive forces develop continuously through history,

34 MECW, Vol.5, p.44 [emphasis added].

35 MECW, Vol.6, p.183.

(ii) that division of labour occurs naturally, with the development of productive forces
it can easily be deduced that,

(iii) the social division of labour itself is a 'natural' or necessary process.

In our earlier discussion we have shown that Marx and Engels considered this social division of labour as already implying classes because it meant unequal division of work. We have already seen, in our discussion in chapter II, that according to Marx and Engels the creative/collective dimension of power is present in the very process of production -- in cooperation. Now, we can see that its second dimension, that is, ... [domination and hierarchy etc.] after "second dimension, that is ... 'domination' or 'hierarchy' -- a necessary effect of power to be in operation within the process of labour, productive activity. In fact, we may then conclude that power is necessarily generated in and through human praxis. That is to say, power is there in the very ontology of human 'being'.

In the first chapter we saw that Foucault too, takes power to be inherent in society, its presence is simply given and does not stand in need of being explained. That is to say, without using ontological vocabulary, he nevertheless considers it to be so.

II

We now come to the relation between power and structure. This discussion becomes important for two reasons. Firstly, it is clear by now that the source or basis of power is human action or praxis. It is also stressed that not only does power arise from action but exists only in 'actualization', to use Arendt's phrase. This idea is not Arendt's alone; Michel Foucault too has emphasized the point that "power exists only when it is put into action"³⁶. This immediately creates a problem. If we talk of power as capacity or capability, we are also talking at the same time of a potentiality, which may not be actually realized at any given time. In that case, to say that power exists only when it is put into action seems to involve a contradiction. This again is the situation with Giddens' 'agent' who ceases to be one, if he/she fails to act or becomes incapable of 'acting' and 'making a difference'. This, in a way, implies that power is embodied only in agents whose actions bring it into existence while they act. Put differently, it makes it difficult to conceive of power existing on an enduring basis.

We would suggest, on the other hand, that power generated continually through praxis, does not exist either

36 Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), p.219.

as 'disembodied spirit' or as the individual agent's attribute; it rather 'objectifies' itself so to speak, embodying itself in structures/institutions/organizations. It exists on an enduring basis as an attribute of the structure, which is itself not anything permanent but constantly being formed and reformed. The individual agents' capacity to exercise and wield power is derived from the place he/she occupies in the structure.

Secondly, it is also important to discuss this question because there exists an influential school of scholarship whose exclusive emphasis on structures reduces the notion of human agency and action to an insignificant feature of social life. Action and practice in this tradition becomes a mere 'formality', reflecting the 'articulation' of different 'levels' of 'structures'. If our argument thus far is correct, then such a position becomes an obstacle in understanding power itself.

To take the second point first, the whole school of French 'structuralist-Marxism', inspired by the work of Louis Althusser, presents precisely such a rigid conception of 'structure' that individuals/agents appear simply as 'supports' or 'bearers' of structural attributes. Further, the Althusserian notion of a 'structure-in-dominance' still does not get us out of a reductionist theory of politics. Though formally, the autonomy of the various 'levels' of the

structure (e.g. economic, political, ideological etc.) are emphasized, the idea of 'determination in the last instance', in its specifically Althusserian rendering holds that the economic is determinant in the last instance in the sense that it determines which level or element will be dominant in a social formation.

37

It is precisely for this serious underestimation of the role of human agency and praxis and its dialectical relationship with structures that Poulantzas' important works on power, particularly Political Power and Social Classes, despite important insights, remains flawed.

Ralph Miliband, in his well-known debate with Poulantzas, on the capitalist state has correctly criticized him on precisely this score. While not going into other issues of the debate, we believe that Miliband is perfectly right in challenging Poulantzas' contention in the above-mentioned book, that "everything happens as if social classes were the result of an ensemble of structures". Miliband's comment that his "exclusive stress on 'objective relations' suggests ... that what the state does is ... wholly determined by these objective relations; in other words, the structural constraints are so compelling as to

37 L.Althusser & E.Balibar, Reading Capital, Verso 1979, p.319.

turn those who run the state into merest functionaries and
executants of policies imposed upon them by 'the system'.³⁸

In a sense therefore, he rightly contends, "Driven out
through the front door, 'economism' reappears in a new guise
through the back".³⁹

This structuralist framework in fact proves to be in
Poulantzas, the main obstacle to an effective theorization
of power. While his entire effort is directed at trying to
locate the 'specificity of the political' and provide a non-
reductionist theory of power, reductionism inevitably
appears through the backdoor as Miliband has noted.

And it is precisely this framework that lends a
peculiar circularity to his argument. Therefore, he says
that "class relations are at every level relations of power
(emphasis original): power, however, is only a concept
indicating the effect of the ensemble of the structures on
the relations of the practices of various classes in
conflict".⁴⁰ Classes themselves are to him, however, not
simply economic categories, lodged in the sphere of
production but (as we see in the past quoted by Miliband

38 R.Miliband, Class Power and State Power, Verso 1983,
p. 32.

39 Ibid., p. 40.

40 N.Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes,
Verso (NLB) 1982, p. 101.

earlier) themselves "the result of an ensemble of structures".

Elsewhere, he asserts, "class relations are no more the foundation of power relations than power relations are the foundation of class relations".⁴¹ What then are they? We shall see later, that this evasiveness and the inability to squarely confront the issue of class and power relations results from the virtual negation of human agency and praxis, that is so characteristic of structuralism.

A more interesting conceptualization, which we mentioned earlier, is that of Anthony Giddens and his 'theory of structuration'. In his conceptualization, 'structure' "refers to rules and resources instantiated in social systems, but having only 'virtual' existence" as opposed to institutions which refer to "structured social practices that have a broad spatial and temporal extension: that are structured in what the historian Braudel calls the longue duree of time, and which are followed or acknowledged⁴² by the majority of the members of society". Through this distinction Giddens explains, structures are constantly recreated by human agents in a constant process of structuration. "Power" according to Giddens, "is generated

41 Ibid., p.99.

42 A.Giddens (1982), p.9.

in and through the reproduction of structures of domination
which includes the dominion of human beings over the
material world (allocative resources) and over the social
world (authoritative resources)".⁴³

Giddens then appears to argue that it is the production and reproduction of structures of domination, that is inherent in human praxis that generates power. In fact, these structures of domination (over the material and social world) are the very condition for human praxis to realize its purpose. We have noted earlier and Giddens repeats it over and over again that "Power is the capacity to achieve outcomes.... Power is not, as such an obstacle to freedom and emancipation but is their very medium, although it would be foolish, of course, to ignore its constraining properties".⁴⁴ And, these structures are the very medium of power par excellence. Structures (having only virtual existence) and institutions, which are structured social practices "deeply sedimented in time" are, on this view not

43 A.Giddens (1981), pp. 91-92. Giddens uses the term allocative resources to refer to 'material features of environment' (i.e. raw materials, material means of production and produced goods etc. Authoritative resources refer: in his terminology, to ways in which human relations are ordered, their chances of self-development and self-expression are structured or organized etc.

44 A.Giddens (1984), p. 257.

merely constraining; they are equally enabling. In fact, this way of looking at structures/institutions/organizations, as not simply constraining elements, but also as the very media which enable human agents to achieve their purpose, is but a logical extension of the two-dimensional view of power.

Just by way of contrast we may note that in the Althusserian tradition, the structure (of relations of production, for example) "determines the places and functions occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of these places, in so far as they are supports (Trager) of these functions".⁴⁵

To Giddens the continuous process of structuration through human praxis is, we have seen, absolutely crucial. He further explicates his notion of the generation of power through his concept of 'time-space distancing'. That is to say, the specific way in which any society overcomes or dissolves constraints of time and space. For it is with this "time-space distancing" and the closely linked notion of "storage capacity" that he elaborates his idea of generation of power, wherein structures are so essential.

45 Louis Althusser, Reading Capital, p.180.

To briefly recapitulate his argument, he considers band societies to be characterized by a low level of time-space distancing since (i) the mobile character of society 'does not involve a mediated transcendence of space'; they do not involve regularized transactions with others who are physically absent. (ii) Illiteracy constrains transcendence of time, except that tradition in a broad way maintains contact with the past, through the continuity of similar beliefs and practices.

"Storage capacity" in this context, points to the capacity any given society develops to overcome these 'time-space' barriers. Storage of material resources refers, apart from mere physical containment of these goods, to the organization of the productive system (which he calls 'range of time-space control'). So, for instance, "agriculture in general and irrigation agriculture in particular -- each increase storage capacity, as contrasted to hunting and gathering".⁴⁶

"In agriculture", he further explicates "the earth itself is regarded as a 'store' of potential produce; the garnering of products here involves biting quite deeply into time, since even relatively rudimentary forms of agriculture necessitate advance planning of a regularized character".⁴⁷

46 A.Giddens (1981), p.94.

47 Ibid.

Storage of authoritative resources, on the other hand, involves "the retention and control of information and knowledge",⁴⁸ where the invention of the written word has played the most crucial role. It is Giddens' contention that writing, everywhere, has originated primarily as a means of recording information relevant to administration. He cites the example of Sumer where "writing seems to have been used exclusively to record and tally administrative details ... listing, collating -- what are these but the first origins, and always the main foundations of what Foucault calls 'surveillance'? The keeping of written 'accounts' -- regularized information about persons, objects and events --⁴⁹ generates power that is unavailable in oral cultures".

What we can clearly see in Giddens' account of generation of power through time-space control, is the crucial role played by structure/organization (in a very loose sense). For what else is storage capacity achieved through, if not from the structured practices that any 'society' evolves in the course of its social practice, in order to 'bite into' time and space. In that sense structures are the very media or, more properly, mediations of human praxis, and on Giddens' account generative of

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., pp.94-95 [emphasis added].

power. Put differently, human praxis generates power, in and through structures, in which power remains embodied in an enduring sense. Defined in this loose manner, structures encompass all those forms that bring people together to act, binding them in specific relations, on the basis of certain rules and practices, which nevertheless are in a continuous process of change. The social division of labour, institutions, organizations and so on, all fall within the ambit of this definition of structure.

Giddens, in fact, fittingly concludes his discussion of 'storage capacity' by quoting Louis Mumford, describing the city as a very special type of 'container' for the generation of power. The quote is worth reproducing:

"The first beginning of urban life, the first time the city proper becomes visible, was marked by a sudden increase in the power in every department and by a magnification of the role of power itself in the affairs of men. A variety of institutions had hitherto existed separately, bringing their numbers together in a common meeting place, at seasonable intervals: the hunters' camp, the sacred monument or shrine, the paleolithic ritual cave, the neolithic agricultural village -- all of these coalesced in a bigger meeting place, the city The original form of this container (the city)

lasted for some six thousand years; only a few centuries ago
50
did it break up".

This seems to directly echo Hannah Arendt's observation
that,

"The only indispensable material factor in the
generation of power is the living together of people. Only
where men live so close together that the potentialities of
action are always present can power remain with them, and
the foundation of cities, which as city-states have remained
paradigmatic for all western political organization, is
there-fore, indeed the most important material pre-requisite
51
for power".

The idea of quoting Mumford and Arendt at this point is
simply to highlight the underlined aspect of cities -- as
the general paradigm of all modern (and not simply western)
political organization. Of course, Mumford talks of the
decline of the city in the traditional sense, in the modern
epoch, but there is still a certain sense in which the city
remains the paradigm of modern political organization. It
coalesces modern industry, institutions of knowledge and

50 Louis Mumford, City Invincible, quoted in *ibid.*,
pp. 96-97.

51 H.Arendt (1970), p. 201 [emphasis added].

information, communications, into one big centre of power.

This can further be understood by contrasting it with Marx's observations regarding the French peasantry, which incidentally has often been misconstrued to imply that he considers the peasantry of France to be like a "sack of potatoes" simply because of their economic relations. True, Marx attaches fundamental importance to their economic situation, but he explains why they "fail to produce ... a political organization" in the following words:

"The small peasant proprietors form an immense mass, the members of which live in the same situation but do not enter into manifold relations with each other. Their mode of operation isolates them instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. Their isolation is strengthened by the wretched state of France's communications and by the poverty of the peasants. Their place of operation, the small holding permits no division of labour, no application of science and therefore no diversity of development, variety of talent or wealth of social relationships".

52

The city by contrast, we may say, coalesces all these aspects of human social intercourse that Marx finds lacking

52 Karl Marx, Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte : Surveys from Exile, Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 238-39 [emphasis added].

in the French countryside. The second point that the above passage brings out clearly is how important Marx considers these manifold aspects, varieties of social relationships, science and knowledge in the constitution of the political organization of the French peasants and, we may extend the argument, of any social group or collectivity for that matter. Finally, it may be noted that these manifold relationships that Marx finds 'lacking' are precisely the enabling structures -- 'lacking' not in the sense of complete absence (for that is never the case) but in the sense of being inadequate in generating the peasantry's power.

Paul Ricoeur, in an extremely insightful foreword to Bernard Dauenhauer's book The Politics of Hope makes the following observation, based on Merleau-Ponty's extension of the linguistic model of langue and parole to the field of action:

" ... in the same way (as in language) an efficient action is the one which grafts initiative, the equivalent of parole on the plane of praxis, upon institution, the practical equivalent of langue. As is easy to see, this 'legacy' of Merleau-Ponty to political thought is of the utmost value. It provides the key to the phenomenon of institution which ... (is) the first paradox with which political analysis has to come to terms. In a sense, all the

other paradoxes -- including the most intractable of all, that of coercion -- may be considered as extensions of the basic paradox of institution, i.e. the kind of sedimented phenomenon which offers both a support and a resistance to action...".⁵³

Dauenhauer comments that, on Merleau-Ponty's account, institutions "are the necessary mediations which allow people to see that their efforts can be genuinely efficacious. It is through institutions that power is amassed and distributed as well as that power can be circumscribed".⁵⁴

From our own discussion too it emerges that power comes into being, as the enabling capacity for transformative action in and through structures/organizations/institutions. The first consequence of this conclusion is that the field of power extends far beyond the field of production. To say that the field of power extends beyond productive activity has certain implications. It could, for instance, be interpreted to mean that though generated exclusively in productive activity, its field of operation, however,

53 Bernard P. Dauenhauer, The Politics of Hope, Routledge and Kegan Paul, New York and London, p. xiii, Forward [emphasis added]. 1986.

54 Ibid., pp. 133-34.

extends to other domains of society at large. Or, that productive activity is in any case, only one of the spheres in its field of operation, as significant or insignificant as any other. Clearly, our argument has been till now that power is generated in all human praxis, and its field of operation envelopes all social institutions. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that productive activity being the most fundamental of human activities, remains in a very important sense the focus of the field of operation of power. Struggle for control of production, control of resources etc. remains an extremely important concern of its operation not merely in the global struggles of classes but also in innumerable local struggles. In fact it could probably even be suggested that these concerns usually shape the precise operations of power, to some extent. In that sense alone is it possible to understand how and why, despite its autonomy, the two domains remain functionally so closely related and further, why most often political power is appropriated by the economically dominant class. It is in this sense that we understand Foucault, when he says that effectively, relations of power remain enmeshed in and participate in a common circuit, with production relations. That there is a highly complex and dialectical relationship between the field of power and the field of production, between the strategic political relation of forces and the

class relations in any society hardly needs to be further emphasized. In the preceding chapter itself, we have seen how Gramsci was trying to grapple with this complex problem, arguing about the irreducibility of power and politics to the economy. We may recall the Gramscian solution to the "question of politics as an autonomous science" :

" ... the solution can only be found in the identification of politics and economics". We had noted the ambiguity in his elaboration of the above theme that "politics becomes permanent action and gives birth to permanent organizations, precisely, insofar as it identifies itself with economics".

This identification of the field of power with that of production was however not elaborated by Gramsci in any systematic way.

To Poulantzas however, we owe the real insights into this "identification" of the two fields or levels as he calls them. Poulantzas asserts that

"it is necessary to distance ourselves from the formalist-economist position according to which the economy is composed of elements that remain unchanged through various modes of production ... such a conception obscures

the role of struggles lodged in the very heart of the relations of production and exploitation".⁵⁵

No doubt Gramsci too, had talked of the 'politics of production' particularly with relation to the factory council movement but there does not seem to be any systematic exposition of the idea of 'identification'. Subsequent work done on the capitalist labour process, particularly since Harry Braverman's path breaking Labour and Monopoly Capital have also highlighted what Poulantzas has called the 'struggles lodged in the heart of relations of production'.

From this insight he goes on to conclude that,

" ... neither in the pre-capitalist modes nor in capitalism has this space (the economy) ever formed a hermetically sealed level capable of self-reproduction and possessing its own 'laws' of internal functioning. The political field of the state (as well as the sphere of ideology) has always, in different forms been present in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production".⁵⁶

He further illustrates with the example of feudalism how extra-economic coercion or "the exercise of legitimate

55 Nicos Poulantzas, State, Power, Socialism, NLB (1978), p. 15 [emphasis added].

56 Ibid., p. 17.

violence is implicit in the relations of production, since surplus labour has to be extracted from direct producers who possess the object and means of labour".⁵⁷

He asserts that the economic process is class struggle and is therefore, relations of power. In fact Poulantzas very explicitly, in his dialogue with Foucault, in the above-mentioned work, reaches the very same conclusion that we stated earlier: that the field of power extends beyond the field of production. In fact, time and again one feels, Poulantzas stretches his paradigm to the limit and retreats.

For instance, he states :

"Not only do class struggles have primacy over and stretch far beyond the state, but the relations of power also outmeasure the state in another sense: relations of power do not exhaust class relations and may go a certain way beyond them.⁵⁸ Of course, they will still have a class pertinency".

He, however, stops short of granting any sort of autonomy to power relations vis-a-vis production because they push one "into the camp of 'idealism'",⁵⁹ though he

57 Ibid., p. 18.

58 Ibid., p. 43.

59 Ibid., p. 68.

conceptualizes power relations as extending beyond class struggles and the state.

As a result we have contradictory formulations like the one below :

Proposition 1 : If class powers are not reducible to state and always out-measure its apparatuses, this is because, being rooted in the social division of labour and in exploitation, these powers have primacy over the apparatuses that embody them, most notably the state (p.38).

Proposition 2 : But does this mean that the state has only a secondary and insignificant role in the material existence of power? By no means. The state plays a constitutive role in the existence and reproduction of class power..." (p.38).

If proposition 1, i.e., that these powers have primacy over the apparatuses that embody them is true, then proposition 2 cannot be true. For, in that case, the apparatuses, including the state, must have a secondary role (though maybe, not an insignificant one).

Here Poulantzas is talking of the ruling/dominant class, because the question of state is involved. However, with some modification, he could as well be talking of any other class or social group. But let us take the ruling

class itself. How is it possible to maintain that its powers have primacy over the state and that the state plays a constitutive role in the "existence and reproduction of class power"? It is worth noticing that he does not talk of production or generation, but only existence and reproduction of class power, where the state's role is constitutive. The production or generation of class power is "rooted in the social division of labour". That is why they have primacy. The state's role is secondary in its production, because power is being generated in the very process of labour which cannot but take place through the division of labour. Poulantzas therefore, poses the problem of primacy but hedges in accepting its consequences, because to him, both, the division of labour and the state represent merely the effect of the "ensemble of structures". He does not see the primacy, in fact the ontological primacy of the very real and living process of labour and praxis.

Here again, we would suggest that it is futile to pose the question of primacy as between power and the apparatuses (structures) which embody them. We would rather agree with Giddens, Ricouer and Merleau-Ponty that it is only through these structures that power becomes manifest. The state, of course, has its own specificities and cannot be generally subsumed under a generalized statement of this nature. Being a very special type of institution it naturally calls for

separate discussion which is not our concern here. However, in a very general sense, even the state may be said to be, like any other institution, the medium of power of the dominant class.

III

We can see one thing very clearly now : the realm of production is not a purely economic one. In Poulantzas' terms there are struggles lodged in the very heart of the production relations. Nor for that matter, is the political level, as the dominant interpretation of Marxism has been at pains to point out, purely political. Struggles over economic interests are of crucial and even fundamental importance in politics. We may separate the two spheres of production and politics, for analytical convenience, but in reality the two remain enmeshed into one another. Foucault too, we have earlier noted had stated that "the relations of power do indeed remain profoundly enmeshed in and with economic relations and participate with them in a common circuit".⁶⁰

Increasingly, this problem has been encountered by various Marxist scholars.

60 M.Foucault in Colin Gordon, ed. (1980), p.89.

For example, in his intervention in the Miliband-Poulantzas debate, Ernesto Laclau takes up the text from Marx's third volume of Capital where he says that in all pre-capitalist and particularly feudal mode of production "the property relationship must simultaneously appear as a direct relationship of lordship and servitude". This passage, which both Poulantzas and Balibar quote says that, "under such conditions the surplus labour for the nominal owner of land can only be extorted from them by other than economic⁶¹ pressure...".

Discussing the notion of 'the economic' in Balibar (Reading Capital) and elaborating his own conception Laclau says,

"Balibar undoubtedly perceives the problem. Thus he states : 'surplus labour cannot then be extorted without other than economic pressure' Even before we have analyzed the 'transformed forms' for themselves, we can conclude that in the feudal mode of production they will not be transformed forms of the economic base alone.... Not directly economic but directly and indissolubly political and economic'; ... but if different modes of production do

61 Quoted in E.Laclau, Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory, Verso 1979, p. 74.

not contain homogeneous elements such as 'the economic', 'the juridical', and 'the political', what becomes of the scheme of determination in the last instance by the economic"⁶²?

In his later work, co-authored with Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, he returns to this theme. Drawing heavily on the numerous empirical studies on the labour process, he goes on to talk of what has been called the 'politics of production', which, in his view "challenge the idea that the development of capitalism is the effect solely of the laws of competition and the exigencies of accumulation"⁶³.

They go on to argue that "if this split between a logic of capital and a logic of workers' resistance influences the organization of the capitalist labour process, it must also crucially affect the character and rhythm of expansion of the productive forces. Thus, the thesis that the productive forces are neutral, and that their development can be conceived natural and unilinear, is entirely unfounded"⁶⁴.

62 Ibid., pp. 77-78.

63 E.Laclau and C.Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy : Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, Verso 1985, p. 79.

64 Ibid., p. 80.

Though one can disagree reasonably with Laclau and Mouffe's conclusions, there is no doubt that there is a serious point that they are making. We think it is extremely important to maintain the specificity of both the domains -- that of production and that of politics. One cannot be collapsed into the other, and it still makes sense to study and understand the two domains separately as well as in their interrelations. But the above discussion should certainly lead one to raise the legitimate question as to how, the domain of production itself, the dialectic of productive forces and production relations itself is influenced by the logic of power relations. How then can one see politics as simply a reflection of the logic of the economy? This then, can be one way of looking at the Gramscian solution of the "identity of politics and economics". The whole range of questions that this opens up is not the subject of our discussion here. But understood in this way, we can probably see the sense in which Gramsci talks of politics as an autonomous science, and why, more than simple laws, analysis of conjunctures is so central to his enterprise.

We conclude this chapter then with the following observations :

(a) Power is generated as a continuous process in and through praxis.

(b) The generation and existence of power on an enduring basis is mediated through structures which embody it.

(c) Power is therefore lodged in the very ontology of human existence.

(d) The field of power, it follows from (c) is all pervasive and includes the domain of material production.

(e) (d) above however, does not obliterate the specificities of the two domains -- the political and that of production. It does, though seriously challenge the base/superstructure dichotomy in the sense of one simply reflecting the other.

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CONCLUSION

The discussion the preceding chapters reveals that power is a much more complex phenomenon than it appears to be, at first sight. It is no doubt true, that like all concepts in social sciences, power too, must remain, to borrow Lukes' phrase, 'an essentially contested concept'. Despite that, however, it has been possible to locate some of the more fundamental aspects of power -- certain common features. This commonality again, is relative, for there is unlikely to be any consensus even regarding these common features.

We saw as a first approximation, that power is something that intrinsically and solely involved contest, conflict and repression. We also saw power here as an individual attribute. Instances involving exercise of power were instances where an individual A got individual B to act in a way that B would not otherwise do or to act in a way contrary to B's real interests. These were the terms in which the entire discussion in the 'Three Faces of Power' debate was carried on, till Lukes raised the more fundamental questions of structures and institutional practices in the exercise of power. Lukes, we saw also raised questions about the more sub-terranean levels of unobservable conflict in the exercise of power.

Lukes' intervention in this debate therefore, opened the way for raising further questions. The most fundamental of these being, whether power must always involve conflict, coercion and repression ? And must it be only that ?

In trying to answer these questions we saw that, as against this one dimensional view of power, there actually existed what we have called the two dimensional view of power. This view sees power not simply as coercive/conflictual/repressive but also as consensual/creative/productive, though the first dimension always remains.

The major protagonists of the one-dimensional view, except Lukes, claim to be in the Weberian tradition. They have interpreted Max Weber's definition that power is "the probability that an individual in a social relationship may achieve his will despite resistance from others" in a particular way i.e. in terms of individual conflict of wills.

A logical extension of the one-dimensional view of power, i.e., power as repression, is that power per se, is inimical to human freedom; it is the very anti-thesis of freedom. For, if it is simply conflict and repression, freedom is only possible by delimiting the field of power. Being, however, placed in the behaviouralist tradition,

pluralist theorists do not derive such conclusions, for 'freedom' being a normative concept, does not fit into the framework of a 'rigorous, value-free science', that they seek to develop. Their preoccupation, rather, has been with studying 'hard facts', shorn of all normative concerns, whatever that may mean. This 'disinterested' search for statistical correlations between phenomena, establishing or seeking to establish constant conjunctions among different phenomena of social life, has therefore prevented them from drawing such conclusions.

The two-dimensional view of power, on the other hand, cutting across diverse theoretical traditions, explicitly sees power as simply the 'other side' of freedom. In fact, even as the very condition of freedom. Even on our re-reading of Marxism, we find that power is not simply the anti-thesis of freedom. In the course of our entire discussion, we have seen that though power necessarily involves conflict and contest, it is at the same time a liberating or creative force. In fact, it emerges in our reading of the various texts, as the force through which human praxis, as a collective endeavour, achieves its purpose, transforms the natural and social world.

We are, therefore, confronted with two extremely contradictory propositions. How can something be, at the same time, repressive and liberating ?

This dichotomy between power as repression and power as a creative force -- the capacity to achievements or outcomes, corresponds to the somewhat awkwardly formulated distinction between 'power over' and 'power to', in existing power studies.¹

In these studies the two appear as two different types of power, two different powers, as it were.

Our study of power reveals however, that the two are not two distinct powers, but two dimensions of one and the same phenomenon. The contradiction, however, remains. We have a notion of power that is, at one and the same time, repression and the condition for freedom -- the ability to realize desired outcomes.

How can this contradiction be resolved ? We would suggest that it cannot and that this contradiction actually forms the basis of the central paradox of power, an inherent

1 See for instance, Dennis H. Wrong (1988), Power : its Forms, Bases, and Uses, Basil Blackwell, preface, 1988 edition. Wrong, in the above preface, in fact says that "'power over' is unquestionably a special case of 'power to'" (p. ix) which comes very close to the point that we seek to make later on, that the two are not really two distinct powers. In fact, implicit in Wrong's statement, is precisely the notion that power as coercion is only secondary to power as a creative/productive force. Also see Jeffrey C. Isaac, Power and Marxist Theory, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1987, p. 83.

tendency in all power relations. We therefore, agree with Paul Ricoeur's observations :

"That man is inconceivable in full solitude, that his humanity relies on others, and that not by accident, but by essence -- this major thesis is common, in spite of important competing interpretations to Hegel, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Arendt, Gadamer, and more generally to most phenomenological or hermeneutic trends of philosophy.... If man is never free alone, then any political philosophy which claims to define freedom by the autonomy of the will is basically wrong. What shows its radical falsity is the fact that it is condemned to hold all specific features of politics as extrinsic, accidental and deplorable. The nemesis which hits all these theories, -- including contractual ones -- is their impotence to give an account of the paradoxes which specify political activity. In this sense, the theory of autonomy is anti-political by principle".²

Dennis Wrong, in the above-mentioned preface to his book notes this same paradox of power in somewhat different terms when he says,

² P. Ricoeur, in B. Dauenhauer (1986), Foreword, p. xii.

"Power is both a generalized capacity to attain ends ... on the one hand, and an asymmetrical social relation among persons...".³

We have already demonstrated in the preceding chapters that power and politics are intrinsic to human social praxis and therefore, ontologically embedded in the human condition. The understanding of power that we have outlined immediately runs against any notion of autonomy of the individual will. In that sense, both power and freedom are intrinsically paradoxical concepts.

In fact, it may be argued that precisely because power is creative/liberating, it is repressive. Particularly if we see this in the context of conflict-ridden class societies, it is clear that for any social group to achieve its ends, it must overcome the resistance of others. And if we argue that there may be conflicts, even when classes do not exist (the conflict of innumerable 'free wills', for instance), then we can easily see this argument to be valid in all conditions of human society's existence.

We may add further, that not only are power and freedom, in themselves, paradoxical concepts, but that the relationship between the two is also paradoxical for the

³ Dennis Wrong (1988), *ibid.*, p. x.

same reasons. If power is the condition of freedom, and conflict and contestations are its essential features, then it follows that freedom itself is equally a matter of contest and conflict. Contestation is above all a question of altering relations of domination and hierarchy and therefore of expanding the domain of freedom and it is possible to conceive of situations where, in fact, relations of power exhibit equilibria, however unstable, in which relations of domination and hierarchy do not exist. These, however, are likely to be very rare instances in the real history of societies.

II

In order to take our conceptualization of power further we may tentatively suggest a few more points, subject of course, to further investigations.

To begin with, we can sum up our previous discussion by representing power as a series of necessary mediations through which human praxis materializes or realizes its purpose. Power itself is a mediation, which is further mediated by structures, through which it becomes operative. Any collective human activity generates power, but in generating it, it also generates those structures through which power becomes effective. We spoke in the third chapter of power 'objectifying' itself in these structures and

becoming a structural attribute. We agree with Wrong again, therefore, when he says that,

"The unequal distribution of power is not the result of the unequal distribution of purely individual attributes and capacities, but reflects the workings of major institutions⁴ of a society and the legitimations of these institutions".

It can very easily be empirically demonstrated that in any situation, an individual 'holds' or 'wields' power, only to the extent that he/she occupies a place in the given structure that confers such power upon him/her. It can also be reasonably shown that these structures, in turn, embody power; act as enabling or constraining factors only to the extent that the collectivity that brings the structure into existence, 'confers' power upon it. That structures/organizations/institutions become powerless and impotent as soon as people withdraw their support to them is a point⁵ that can easily be empirically demonstrated - except of course, in the case of the state, where even after people withdraw support, political power may maintain itself for a sufficient length of time, on the basis of pure force. Even there, this is only possible as long as the internal unity of the state organization remains intact. For instance, if

4 Ibid.

5 This point is also repeatedly stressed by Hannah Arendt, as we have seen earlier in the discussion.

the armed forces were to revolt, state power would naturally become impotent.

The idea of power embodying itself in structures, or objectifying itself can have many further ramifications. For, in that embodied form, it does accrue to individuals or groups of individuals who occupy specific positions in the structure. This position, it is true, they occupy as 'representatives' of the social group in question, but it gives them power not only to act on behalf of their social group, but also vis-a-vis the group itself. We can recall Gramsci's emphatic assertion that the division between the leaders and the led and the 'rulers' and the 'ruled' is a primordial and irreducible fact. We would suggest that this is precisely why this division is such a primordial fact.

Now, for any social group to achieve its ends, it becomes necessary therefore, to 'enhance' its power vis-a-vis the other. But in so doing, it also enhances the power of specific individuals whom it empowers to represent its interests.

And as we saw in the first chapter itself, the very logic by which organizations become necessary for a determinate social group's interests, is also the logic by which factions become inevitable within these organizations. We can now add that the very logic which makes it necessary

that a given social group enhance its power, is also the logic that make the drive for enhanced power between factions inevitable. In other words, we gradually have a situation described by Hobbes as the most fundamental human trait -- "a perpetual and restless desire for power that ceaseth only in death".⁶

Put in another way, power becomes an end in itself. That is to say, this objectification of power then acquires a fetishized form. Much in the way that Marx talks of the fetishism of commodities, we may talk of the fetishism of power. It appears before us as something external to us, that we must acquire and keep acquiring, first as a means to our ends and then, for its own sake.

In fact, it is even possible to talk of an "expanded reproduction" or "accumulation" of power, drawing an analogy from Marx's Capital. This "expanded reproduction" can in fact be understood as the process whereby power acquires the capacity to augment itself, reproduce itself on an expanded scale, by laying its hands on anything -- wealth, knowledge,

6 Quoted in Murray Forsyth, "Thomas Hobbes : Leviathan" in Murray Forsyth and Maurice Keens-Soper, A Guide to Political Classics, Plato to Rousseau, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 131.

It is interesting to note that Forsyth, immediately after the above quote, says, "obviously, power here must not be crudely equated with 'power over others', but more generally, with the means to acquire, the actual acquisition of those things that men at different times desire", *ibid.*, p. 131.

information, technology, communications, arms and so on. We use the term "expanded" reproduction only to underline that a new acquisition of any of the above resources increases power manifold. So much so that often these resources would appear to be the very basis of power.

III

If our argument above is correct then it follows that, power relations are in a certain sense relations of war, as Foucault would say. From the fact that they are ontologically embedded in human society and the fact that they are relations of war 'continued by other means', we can say that the vision of a society, the future 'good life', free of all conflict and struggle stands seriously questioned.

As Michel Foucault says: "Furthermore, if it is true that political power puts an end to war, that it installs or tries to install the reign of peace in civil society, this by no means implies that it suspends the effects of war or neutralizes the disequilibrium revealed in the final battle. The role of political power, on this hypothesis, is perpetually to reinscribe this relation through a form of unspoken warfare; to reinscribe it in social institutions,

in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies
7
themselves of each and everyone of us".

The above statement of Foucault's, we understand to mean, that all power relations, in essence are a negotiation and re-negotiation of power; a continuous process of a now open, now concealed warfare.

Since the main subject of our discussion here is power and Marxist theory, we clearly see a glaring incompatibility between such an understanding of power and the Marxist vision of a future 'good life', i.e. communism as the resolution of all contradictions in society.

However, we would like to emphatically state, that Marxism cannot simply be reduced to this future vision of communism. It seems that such a projection of humankind's future state is a residual legacy of Hegelian thought on Marxism, as has been suggested by numerous scholars. This putative vision seems to be Marx's early counterpart of Hegel's Weltgeist, realizing itself, human history as the final and ultimate unfolding of the world spirit.

It makes much more sense, in terms of Marxist theory itself, to see communism, not as humankind's ultimate telos,

7 M.Foucault, in Colin Gordon, ed. (1980), p. 90.
[emphasis added].

but as Marx and Engels themselves do, in The German Ideology when they state,

"Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things".⁸

It is not our intention here to go into all the intricacies of Marxist theory on this and various other related questions that may arise from the understanding of power outlined above. We only wish to emphasize that the concept of power, on this reading, is not incompatible with the fundamental propositions of Marxist theory. We also wish to emphasize that the vision of communism as humankind's ultimate destiny, does not constitute an indispensable part of Marxist theory.

This was probably Marx's spirit when he said of the Paris Commune, that the working class did not expect miracles from it, for they had no ready-made utopias to introduce. "They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant".⁹

8 MECW, Vol.5, p.49.

9 Marx, MESW (1980), p.291.

On our reading of power, as relations of war, whose central paradox is the dialectic of centralization and equalization, through which new rules, procedures, institutions come into existence which seek to impose limits on its unrestrained abuse, power, in the long run tends towards greater dispersal. Old rules, procedure, laws, institutions give way to ever newer ones. But this certainly does not seem to be a process whose final end is the equal distribution of power among all members of society. It can only be seen as a continuous, endless process.

"Freedom", says Marx in the Critique of the Gotha Programme, "consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it".¹⁰

If communism is freedom as defined above then, it can only mean that 'real movement' which continuously struggles to evolve newer social institutions, wherein society wields power to place effective checks on the state and make it subordinate to its own power. To the extent that private property means, the appropriation of state power by a particular class or some classes, the abolition of private property can be seen as a necessary condition for making the

¹⁰ MECW, Vol.24, p.94.

state subordinate to society as a whole. However, as our foregoing discussion has revealed, and recent experiences have shown, it cannot be a sufficient condition for the same.

We may thus state in conclusion that a reading of Marxist theory which gives fundamental ontological primacy to human praxis and agency is perfectly compatible with a non-reductionist conceptualization of power and politics. Such a reading does not have to simply 'derive' all power and power relations from the relations of production, since in such a reading, relations of production themselves are, simultaneously, relations of power.

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3088