

TELLING THE TRUTH ABOUT CLASS

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One of the central questions of social theory has been the relationship between class and knowledge, and this has also been a crucial question in the history of socialism. Differences between people – acting and knowing subjects – may influence our view of the chances of valid cognition. If there are irreconcilable discrepancies between people’s positions, going perhaps as far as incommensurability, then unified and rational knowledge resulting from a reasoned dialogue among persons is patently impossible. The Humean notion of ‘passions’, the Nietzschean notions of ‘resentment’ and ‘genealogy’, allude to the possible influence of such an incommensurability upon our ability to discover truth.

Class may be regarded as a problem either in epistemology or in the philosophy of history, but I think that this separation is unwarranted, since if we separate epistemology and the philosophy of history (which is parallel to other such separations characteristic of bourgeois society itself) we cannot possibly avoid the rigidly-posed conundrum known as relativism. In speaking about class (and truth, *and* class and truth) we are the heirs of two socialist intellectual traditions, profoundly at variance with one another, although often intertwined politically and emotionally. I hope to show that, up to a point, such fusion and confusion is inevitable.

All versions of socialist endeavour can and should be classified into two principal kinds, one inaugurated by Rousseau, the other by Marx. The two have opposite visions of the social subject in need of liberation, and these visions have determined everything from rarefied epistemological positions concerning language and consciousness to social and political attitudes concerning wealth, culture, equality, sexuality and much else. It must be said at the outset that many, perhaps most socialists who have sincerely believed they were Marxists, have in fact been Rousseauists. Freud has eloquently described resistances to psychoanalysis; intuitive resistance to Marxism is no less widespread, even among socialists. It is emotionally and intellectually

difficult to be a Marxist since it goes against the grain of moral indignation which is, of course, the main reason people become socialists.

One of the greatest historians of the Left, E.P. Thompson, has synthesized what can be best said of class in the tradition of Rousseauian socialism which believes itself to be Marxian.¹ *The Making of the English Working Class* is universally – and rightly – recognized to be a masterpiece. Its beauty, moral force and conceptual elegance originate in a few strikingly unusual articles of faith: (1) that the working class is a worthy cultural competitor of the ruling class; (2) that the *Lebenswelt* of the working class is socially and morally superior to that of its exploiters; (3) that regardless of the outcome of the class struggle, the autonomy and separateness of the working class is an intrinsic social value; (4) that the class itself is constituted by the *autopoiesis* of its rebellious political culture, including its re-interpretation of various traditions, as well as by technology, wage labour, commodity production and the rest. Whereas Karl Marx and Marxism aim at the *abolition* of the proletariat, Thompson aims at the *apotheosis* and triumphant survival of the proletariat.

Thompson's Rousseauian brand of Marxism triggered a sustained critique by Perry Anderson, one that is now half-forgotten but still extremely important. Although his terms are quite different from mine, Anderson sought to show that Thompson's conviction that he was a Marxist was erroneous.² Thompson had participated in a number of movements and intellectual adventures inspired by Marxism, and his fidelity to radical socialism – under twentieth-century circumstances – meant loyalty to Marxism's revolutionary legacy. But Thompson had to ignore the Faustian-demonic encomium of capitalism inherent in Marx, and so he had to oppose 'critical theory', and then theory *tout court*.³ Anderson later described this decomposition of 'Western Marxism' – away from class to 'the people' – in conceptual terms,⁴ a diagnosis that has been proved right by events since.

ROUSSEAU VERSUS MARX

The main difference between Rousseau and Marx is that Rousseau seeks to replace (stratified, hierarchical, dominated) society with *the people* (a purely egalitarian and culturally self-sustaining, closed community), while Marx does not want to 'replace' society by annihilating 'rule' and the ruling class *as such*, but believes that capitalism (one specific kind of society) might end in a way in which one of its fundamental classes, the proletariat, would *abolish itself* and thereby abolish capitalism itself. It is implied (it is *sous-entendu*) that the moral motive for such a self-abolition is the intolerable, abject condition of the proletariat. Far from its excellence – extolled by the Rousseauians – it is, on the contrary, its wretchedness, its total alienation, that makes it see that it has 'nothing to lose but its chains', and that it has 'a world to win'. In the

Marxist view it is not the people's excellence, superiority or merit that makes socialism – the movement to supersede, to transcend capitalism – worthwhile, but, on the contrary, its being robbed of its very humanity. Moreover, there is no 'people', there are only classes. Like the bourgeoisie itself, the working class is the result of the destruction of a previous social order. Marx does not believe in the self-creation or the self-invention of the working class, parallel to or alongside capitalism, through the edification of an independent set of social values, habits and techniques of resistance.

Thus there is an *angelic* view of the exploited (that of Rousseau, Karl Polányi, E.P. Thompson) and there is a *demonic*, Marxian view. For Marx, the road to the end of capitalism (and beyond) leads through the completion of capitalism, a system of economic and intellectual growth, imagination, waste, anarchy, destruction, destitution. It is an *apocalypse* in the original Greek sense of the word, a 'falling away of the veils' which reveals all the social mechanisms in their stark nakedness; capitalism helps us to *know* because it is unable to sustain illusions, especially naturalistic and religious illusions. It liberated subjects from their traditional rootedness (which was presented to them by the *ancien régime* as 'natural') only to hurl them onto the labour market where their productive-creative essence reveals itself to be disposable, replaceable, dependent on demand – in other words, wholly alien to self-perception or 'inner worth'. In capitalism, what human beings *are*, is contingent or stochastic; there is no way in which they *are as such, in themselves*. Their identity is limited by the permanent re-evaluation of the market and by the transient historicity of everything, determined by – among other contingent factors – random developments in science and technology. What makes the whole thing demonic indeed is that in contradistinction to the external character, the incomprehensibility, of 'fate', 'the stars', participants in the capitalist economy are not born to that condition; they are placed in their respective positions by a series of choices and compulsions that are obviously man-made. To be born noble and ignoble is nobody's fault, has no moral dimensions; but alienation appears self-inflicted.

Marx is the poet of that Faustian demonism: only capitalism reveals the social, and the final unmasking, the final *apocalypse*, the final revelation can be reached by wading through the murk of estrangement which, seen historically, is unique in its energy, in its diabolical force.⁵ Marx does not 'oppose' capitalism ideologically; but Rousseau does. For Marx, it is history; for Rousseau, it is evil.

It was Karl Polányi who best described the foundations of Rousseauian socialism, of which he himself was an archetypal representative.⁶ According to Polányi, the great discovery of Rousseau was the discovery of 'the people'. This is not as trivial as it may seem. The common assumption of

all philosophy – in contradistinction to Christianity – is that raw, untutored humanity is worthless. Ancient Greek philosophy, to which all subsequent lovers of wisdom were supposed to have supplied nought but footnotes, held that virtue was knowledge. But knowledge (science, philosophy, even *litterae humaniores*) is a social institution, possible only in certain situations of high complexity, sometimes called ‘civilization’, which would allow the growth and betterment of that knowledge. Thus, augmenting science presupposes a necessary or at least plausible perfectibility of civilization and the general salutary character of social institutions useful or indispensable for the advance of cognition.

Rousseau reversed the philosophical trend of more than two millennia when he said that arts, letters, sciences, ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ did not contribute to the moral progress of humankind – on the contrary. The basic intuitions of persons living in circumstances which would not be conducive to the advance of knowledge and the ever-growing refinement of arts, mores and manners were, he thought, superior to whatever complex, unequal and sophisticated societies could boast of. Superior in what sense?

These intuitions were deemed to be superior because the development of civilization required an ever-growing separation between humans – high culture, according to Nietzsche, presupposes slavery that can sustain a leisured aristocracy dedicated to war and play and beauty – to the extent that all ‘virtues’ are necessarily confined to a few. Even in societies where essential communication still takes place among people personally acquainted with each other (affection and sympathy are possible only among such persons) the main ‘civilizational’ transactions are dispatched by abstract mediation such as script. In order to maintain a modicum of fairness and uniformity in society, it is necessary to codify law and religion. People will believe and revere the same prescriptions (‘values’) by reading or being read to (by officials), instead of coming to agree as a result of shared experience and feeling. Script and code (uniform law, scriptural religion, formal education, high art) will change from tools of mediation in society, aiding contact and co-operation, into a social goal, a motivational source of future action – in other words: authority. But this is an authority based on the familiar transformation of a tool into an end or a goal. It is a ‘fetish’.

Rousseau thought that we would have remained both more virtuous and much happier were we bereft or at least rid of mediation. He knew it was too late, and his recipes for a solution are famously desperate; they take essentially the shape of a *purge*, ‘cleansing’, *épuration*. All Rousseauian socialist solutions (for this reason extremely popular in peasant societies, that is, in societies with a still strong cultural recollection of peasant experience and ideals) aim at simplification. Simplification towards a more natural (or, with

luck, a completely natural) way of life. It is, after all, Karl Polányi's famous thesis that market societies are not natural, that they are the exception rather than the rule in history.⁷ On the one hand, he resists the idea that capitalism is a natural order, whose emergence was only prevented in the past by scientific and technological backwardness and blind superstition; and he resists the idea that competitiveness and acquisitiveness are 'instincts' characteristic of all societies, only repressed in the past by chivalric and religious 'false consciousness' (and here he is of one mind with Marxists in 'historicizing' competition and the market.) On the other hand, Polányi regards non-market societies as 'natural' for being in the historical majority. He believed that we should orient our social action towards a re-establishment of what modern capitalism has falsified.

The other great Rousseauian socialist, Marcel Mauss, has shown that most acts of exchange in the history of humankind were motivated not by a desire for gain, but for ostentatious display and the satisfaction of pride.⁸ Yet another Rousseauian socialist, Georges Bataille, one of the few truly prophetic geniuses, has generalized Mauss's point in drawing attention to society's *need* for unproductive losses, waste and destruction, which contradicts any notion of utility.⁹ Sacrifice, he reminds us, etymologically means 'the production of the sacred'. The sacred is the result of *unnecessary* bloodshed. Non-genital and non-reproductive sexuality has long been considered 'a waste'. All these elements have been classified under the rubric of 'the irrational', since only equitable exchange conforms to the official idea of rationality which cannot, ever, account for a surplus which appears as 'savage' or 'illusory'. But then bourgeois society, in the guise of 'representative government', has always equated 'the people' with the 'irrational'. The apposite clichés (savage 'crowds', 'masses') have been inherited from the late Roman republic.

Rousseau's innovation was the unheard-of provocation of declaring the people – the servants of passion – morally and culturally superior to reasoned and cultured discourse and its *Träger*, the civilized elite of Court and University, and even the counter-elite of *belles-lettres*, experimental science, and the Enlightenment pamphleteering and journalistic culture to which Rousseau himself, of course, belonged. Against that discourse, again in terms of Roman republican controversies, Rousseau championed the martial, athletic, bucolic and folk-art virtues of nature-bound, egalitarian communities.

In the famous Second and Third Maxims of Book IV of his treatise on education, Rousseau says: '*One pities in others only those ills from which one does not feel oneself exempt*'. And: '*The pity one has for another's misfortune is measured not by the quantity of that misfortune but by the sentiment which one attributes to those who suffer it*'.¹⁰ These maxims are the kernel of a manifesto for solidarity. Pray consider: Rousseau does not presuppose anything else but bare

humanity in any individual. This presupposition is purely personal, subjective, psychological – available through introspection. It is based, as is well known, on fear: fear of suffering, which we can understand in others as well. There is no external or ‘objective’ measure for suffering, nor is there any need for it; it is sufficient for us to have a feeling for the perils lurking around us in order to have a feeling for the probable predicament of others. We pity others to the extent of our understanding and sympathy for a situation we can imagine ourselves to have been in, and to the extent of our picturing *their* feelings at such a juncture. On this small foundation stone – a pebble, really – is the edifice of a solidary community built.

To wish to put an end to imaginable and avoidable suffering is enough for the construction of social justice, since fear and imagination are natural givens in the human animal, but there is another hidden idea here, an idea even more revolutionary. This we could call the rejection of any and all theodicy. The church explains suffering by sin. How could a benevolent and omnipotent God cause suffering and death? Only as a retribution for something inherent in all humans but at the same time willed by all humans: the original sin of disobedience. (Reductionist theories of human nature play the same role in modern agnostic societies.) If we do not think that original sin is indeed inherent in human nature, suffering is unnecessary; and vice versa, if suffering is felt and understood in others, if then it can be counterbalanced by the succour of those who may not be good but who have an instinctive distaste for the ominous threat of visible misfortune in their environment – well, then the plausibility of original sin seems remote.

Moreover, if suffering is avoidable, there is nothing to prevent us from assuming that the alleviation of human suffering is a duty. We are bound by duty only in cases that appear feasible. If suffering is not natural, in the sense that it is not a necessary consequence of our natures, then it must be social and historical, subject to change – and why should we not hasten that change? If, say, inequality is caused by natural selection, revolutions are meaningless; if it is not, making revolutions is meritorious.

Rousseauian socialism is anti-theodicy; it opposes the tragic and conservative view of original sin or natural *fatum* with the splendid philosophical fiction of free-born men and women who are everywhere in chains. If the free-born are reduced to a servile condition, the culprit cannot but be society, the wrong kind of society. If human nature does not need to be moulded to be receptive to freedom, since we are free by definition, it is social organization that wants changing.

Human nature being tantamount to liberty, our true nature is the source of the liberty that is falsified and denied to us; hence the assumption that those enslaved are morally superior to the slavers. Rousseau’s theory suggests

that there is a separate culture and a separate morality inherent in the people; a culture and a morality that attracts the sympathy and the solidarity of all persons of good faith.

This brings us back to E.P.Thompson's Rousseauian socialism. He formulated the matter with classical simplicity when he described eighteenth century radicalism's

... profound distrust of the 'reasons' of the genteel and comfortable, and of ecclesiastical and academic institutions, not so much because they produced false knowledges but because they offered specious apologetics ('serpent reasonings') for a rotten social order based, in the last resort, on violence and material self-interest And to this we must add a ... cultural or intellectual definition of 'class'. Everything in the age of 'reason' and 'elegance' served to emphasise the sharp distinctions between a polite and a demotic culture. Dress, style, gesture, proprieties of speech, grammar and even punctuation were resonant with the signs of class; the polite culture was an elaborated code of social inclusion and exclusion. Classical learning and an accomplishment in the law stood as difficult gates-of-entry into this culture These accomplishments both legitimated and masked the actualities of brute property and power, interest and patronage. A grammatical or mythological solecism marked the intruder down as an outsider.¹¹

Thompson is quite right: since Parmenides, 'reason' has always or nearly always been a symbolic mark of ideological mastery, opposed to 'the people' as the repository of unreason.¹² But the trouble with Rousseauian socialism is not that it unmasks the high-falutin pretensions of ruling-class doctrine, but that in doing so it treats the 'demotic' as 'natural'. Whatever seems to be beyond the ken of demotic culture, (in our case, working-class culture but in Rousseau's case, peasant folklore), Rousseauian socialism holds to be unnecessary or artificial. This would be true only if the proletariat were pristinely self-created and not the complicated product of capitalist society.

The main idea of Rousseauian socialism is, obviously, equality. Equality is a many-sided notion, but within this tradition it means the renunciation of the superfluous, from luxury to the cultivation of the self, from agonistic competition (resulting in *excellence*) to the enjoyment of high art divorced from the needs of the community. The Greek word for equality, *homonoia*, also means etymologically 'being of one mind'. The Rousseauian community is frugal, musical and martial. It is hostile to individuation and text.¹³ It is also hostile to *opinion*. Opinion is an aspect of sociability in bourgeois

society, while being the traditional enemy of philosophy, the counterpart of the quest for truth. The empty variety of individual opinions is reducible to a mind bent to the service of powerful interests, an expression of the self which is neither a result of an unbiased, dispassionate contemplation of reality (nature) nor an authentic outward sign of inner feeling. The competition of diverse opinions is not even a competition of egos for their own sake, merely a competition for quick adaptation to the demands of power with the aim of advancement: an adaptation without a true belief in the excellence of the opinion assumed.¹⁴ Bourgeois sociability is false; the people – restored to its natural status – is (or was) authentic. ‘True feeling’ as the criterion of adequate elementary morality is reminiscent of the Calvinistic idea of ‘justifying faith’ in Rousseau’s Geneva.¹⁵

Equality, thus, is opposed not only to hierarchy, but to variety or diversity as well. The expression ‘chattering classes’ was invented much later by Don Juan Donoso Cortés, but Rousseau was certainly opposed to *Öffentlichkeit* qua ‘talking shop’. Opinion as instrument is a travesty of any honourable intellectual endeavour. The same would go, I am afraid, for any ‘freedom of expression’ conducive to a frivolous parataxis of competing egotisms. Rousseauian socialism is moralistic, not historicist. Lukács said that nature becomes landscape when one looks at it as it were from outside, when one is separated from it. For Rousseau and the Rousseauians, ‘the people’ is nature not landscape; it is not considered from afar. Solidarity, pity, sympathy have ordained closeness. Propinquity enjoins a modesty of political aims. The emancipation of the people does not mean the abolition of the people (as in Marx the emancipation of the proletariat means – decisively – the self-abolition of the proletariat). It means the abolition of *aristocracy and clergy*; basically, it is not the abolition of ‘class’ but the abolition of ‘caste’ or ‘estate’, whereby the Third Estate – the commoners – become The Nation.

THE REALLY-EXISTING WORKING CLASS (AND BOURGEOISIE)

Why (and how) could modern socialists mistake the abolition of caste for the abolition of class? There are several reasons.

One is the oldest conundrum of the workers’ movement, to wit, the fact that wherever successful proletarian movements or revolutions have taken place, they triumphed not against capitalism, but against quasi-feudal remnants of the old regime that, naturally, went against their self-understanding and their self-image. All the endlessly complicated debates about class consciousness are influenced by this primordial fact. This is also why Arno Mayer’s theory concerning ‘the persistence of the old regime’ is so crucial to Marxist debates.¹⁶

Class struggle, as prosecuted by the workers' movement, instead of extolling the paradoxical, demonic 'virtues' of capitalism, was forced not only to attack it, but also to defend itself. It defended itself by insisting on the excellence of the 'Grand Old Cause', the moral superiority of those who fought for working-class autonomy, supposing they were an exception to the general rule of bourgeois society. This resulted in an enduring achievement which lasted about a century, from the 1870s to the 1970s: the creation of a counter-power of working-class trade unions and parties, with their own savings banks, health and pension funds, newspapers, extramural popular academies, workingmen's clubs, libraries, choirs, brass bands, *engagé* intellectuals, songs, novels, philosophical treatises, learned journals, pamphlets, well-entrenched local governments, temperance societies – all with their own mores, manners and style. A Hungarian sociological survey from 1906 shows that a working-class housing estate in Transylvania has one portrait of Marx and one of Lassalle per flat, workers are teetotal in a heavily drinking society, and open atheists and anticlericalists in a polity dominated by the church militant; church weddings are frowned upon, there are attempts at a healthy diet, non-competitive sports (not shared with outsiders) are encouraged (in Central Europe there were special socialist workers' athletic championships and mass musical choir contests until 1945); non-socialist charities are rejected, parties are held only in daylight to avoid immorality, and at least the men are trying – in a country of barefoot illiterates one generation away from the village primeval – to read social science and serious history. Admirable as this is, it must have been, for all intents and purposes, a *sect*.

This counter-power developed its own political superstructure and ideology, from 'reformist' social democracy to revolutionary anarcho-syndicalism, a whole separate world where the bourgeoisie's writ did not run.¹⁷ The amalgamation of Rousseauian and Marxian socialism resulted from the special interests of this established counter-power or adversary power: the workers' movement was often Rousseauist in regard to itself and Marxist in regard to the bourgeois enemy.

What did this mean in terms of its struggle? In the nineteenth century there had to be struggles against throne and altar, for universal suffrage, for the right to organize and to strike; then national unity was re-forged in the Great War as if the class struggle could be switched off at will; after that war the proletariat liberated the miserable Eastern peasantry that had been kept in a servile condition (this was the most massive historical achievement of the communist regimes)¹⁸; later it had to create Popular Fronts and Résistance alliances against the fascist peril – there was always something that prevented proletarian politics (in Marx's sense), apart from heroic episodes by revolutionary minorities.

The reasons for this in post-1914 socialism seem self-evident: the need for self-legitimation of the workers' movement in view of its defeat but persisting power, and its repeated contribution to bourgeois revolutions liquidating the semi-feudal remnants of the old regime. A dispensation oriented to transcending capitalism remained – and still remains – utopian, while the 'secular' triumph of social democracy in the West and the transformation of the old regime into a tyrannical state capitalism under Bolshevik rule in the East offered a vindication for the movement, justified mainly by a puritanical and egalitarian system closer to Calvin's and Rousseau's Geneva than to Marx's classical Walpurgis night.¹⁹ 'Welfarism' was not limited to the West: the Soviet bloc's idea of legitimacy was also a steady growth of income, leisure and accessible social and health services. 'Planning' was a common idea of Mao's Red China and de Gaulle's bourgeois and *patriotarde* and *pompiériste* France. Jacobinism was common to both. The *staatstragende* community, the addressee of welfare statism and egalitarianism, had to be defined somehow: it was the people, offered equal dignity by 'citizenship'.

To help us understand this properly, it is useful to return to what Thompson was complaining about in his debate with Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn. In a celebrated series of essays,²⁰ the latter tried to demonstrate that the weaknesses of the British workers' movement were caused by a peculiarity of British capitalism: it was the economic preponderance of efficient and market-friendly farming on the great estates and the disproportionate political influence of the landed aristocracy, both richer and more powerful than the incipient bourgeoisie – if there is such a thing (culturally) at all in England – that limited the breadth of vision, the vigour and the scope of any proletarian socialism in the British Isles. This was also, according to Anderson, the reason for England's subsequent decline in all the respects that are crucial to the criteria of European 'modernity', including an astonishingly large number of blind spots in British 'high culture', especially in the so-called social and human sciences.²¹

The great emotional force of 'class' as a special English *socio-cultural* problem – defined in the common usage as an intricate system of almost tribal markers such as diction, dress, speech habits, even posture, forms (and ritualistic denials) of courtesy, diet and the like – has its roots in this. These caste-like, sometimes quasi-ethnic differences of 'class' gave a special *cachet* to the class struggle in England, denying the possibility of a bourgeois-Jacobin ideology of 'community' or 'national unity'. Conservatives on the Continent would vehemently deny the mere existence of the class struggle, but High Tory ranters and satirists like, say, Peregrine Worsthorne or Auberon Waugh (indeed, both Waughs, *père et fils*), would declare their enjoyment in doing down the widow and the orphan, and were constantly waging a gallant

fight against the vulgarian with his ‘job’, ‘holiday’, ‘telly’ and ‘pop “music”’. In England, the class enemy was highly visible, but he or she was never or almost never ‘the bourgeois’, but ‘the toff’, ‘the terrific swell’ opposed to those who were common as muck. Even today the supposedly yuppified, classless ‘estuary English’ has a ‘posh’ version.

All this has pre-modern accents. It seems obvious that for the creation of ‘a people’ the annihilation of the upper classes would be necessary, as in eighteenth-century France, where *only* the Third Estate became *the nation* and where class relations had been ethnicized (the aristocracy: Nordic; the people: Celtic, Gallic; cf. Norman blood in England, Varangians in Russia, etc.). Class identity of this kind is definitely pre-socialist. Socialist movements had used it in the past, creating enormous difficulties for themselves later. Its use succeeded only where they could combine the specific demands of the usually small and culturally (and sometimes ethnically) ‘different’ proletariat, with the general (or ‘bourgeois’) democratic enthusiasms of the usually peasant, provincial majority led by the middle classes and journalistic opinion: for republic instead of monarchy, universal suffrage, anti-clericalism (or *laïcité*), agrarian reform (i.e., redistribution of land), reduction of birth privileges, a citizen army, ethnic minority rights, votes for women, and the like.

This was a fundamental dilemma of Austro-Hungarian and Russian social democracy and, later, of East and South Asian communism (in India and Nepal, to this very day). During the *belle époque*, socialism in the East was faced with either the prospect of victory at the helm of a bourgeois democratic revolution against an aristocratic old regime with elements of modernizing militarism (*die Soldateska*), or certain defeat and annihilation while preserving the purity of the ‘Western’ proletarian idea. When Gramsci called the October revolution in Russia a ‘revolution against *Das Kapital*’, he was apposite and to the point in this sense (not that Lenin and Trotsky knew exactly what they were doing). But even earlier, it was clear that universal suffrage, socio-cultural egalitarianism, democratic parliamentarism and a more secular and tolerant, less militaristic society would be realized east of the Rhine, south of the Alps and west of the Pyrénées, *only* by the socialist movement, not by the feeble liberal bourgeoisie, in predominantly farming societies.

On the whole, socialists decided to assume the leadership of non-socialist, democratic revolutions. The result was *nationalism*, both in the debacle of August 1914 and in the unavoidable transformation of Leninism into Stalinism. The truth is that modern capitalist societies as we know them today would have been entirely impossible without movements whose ‘false consciousness’ was precisely socialism. Socialism as a political movement was a tool of capitalist modernization not only in the East, but also in Central and Western Europe; the bourgeoisie itself did, historically speaking, very little

by way of creating, or even fighting for, modern capitalist society.²² Let us recall that the allegedly bourgeois revolutions of the nineteenth century were invariably led by the landed gentry; these revolutions had been completed in Central and Eastern Europe in 1918-19 by the socialist workers' movement – this latter case being one of the most important and most neglected aspects of the vexed problem of the origins of fascism and national socialism, directed both against the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This may sound strange to Western ears, but is thoroughly comprehensible for a German, an Italian, an Austrian or a Hungarian of a certain age and/or *Bildung*.²³

The bourgeoisie wrought gigantic changes in the texture of the world – economic, social, technological, scientific, artistic and ideological – but almost nowhere did it play a leading political role.²⁴ Bourgeois power (even social and cultural hegemony) proved impossible in the absence of a *modern* (in practice, a Lassallean-Marxist) socialist movement. This seems to be the unspoken, never openly stated conclusion of the debate between Anderson and Nairn and their adversaries. The decline of England, the unchanging *personnel* of British politics and public administration and the other elements of decadence so poignantly and pugnaciously described by Anderson and Nairn must be – at least partially – caused by the lack of a modernizing revolution led by the proletariat. It is, I believe, rather significant that the most 'contemporary' ideological campaign in favour of a modern capitalism in Britain was conceived not by mainstream liberal or social democratic ('labourite') tendencies, but by a *côterie* of former communists (the 'New Times' crowd around *Marxism Today*, a once-Communist monthly). When English Marxists like Anderson and Nairn were discussing the lack of a revolutionary bourgeoisie in Britain, they must have been painfully aware of the even more glaring lack of a revolutionary *workers'* movement, which seems to have been the only effective weapon against any kind of aristocratic rule, wherever such a rule existed and persisted. But they were more or less hobbled by their desire for an authentic *proletarian* revolution, which has never occurred in its anti-capitalist purity anywhere – yet.

This perhaps explains why the origin of capitalism, especially English capitalism, is such an important political question or *Kampffrage*. The 'Brenner Debate' was and remains decisive in this respect. But it is in the work of Ellen Meiksins Wood that all the threads come together, and the theoretical and political consequences are most clearly stated.²⁵ Answering Anderson's harsh questions about 'the "absent centre" of English social thought', Wood insisted: 'The individualism and ahistoricism of English social thought, its fragmentation, have more to do, then, with the advance of capitalism than with its inhibition'.²⁶ She characterizes the parallel and contrast with continental Europe thus:

While in France Bodin was describing the state as a unity of 'families, colleges or corporate bodies', Sir Thomas Smith defined the commonwealth as a 'multitude' of free individuals. While the French state continued to serve as a lucrative resource for the propertied classes, the English were increasingly preoccupied with individual appropriation by purely 'economic' means.... The replacement of corporate entities by individuals as the constituent units of society, the separation of the state and civil society, the autonomization of the 'economy' – all these factors associated with the evolution of English capitalism conduced to the atomization of the social world into discrete and separate theoretical spheres. And with it came a detachment of the social sciences from *history*, as social relations and processes came to be conceived as *natural*, answering to the universal laws of the economy²⁷

This seems to be the very opposite of Perry Anderson's view. But it is, at the same time, another Marxian correction of E.P. Thompson's Rousseauism. The emphasis in Wood's work on the separateness or autonomy of the 'economy' and 'the economic' points, rather promisingly I think, towards a much-needed Marxian political science. This autonomy of the economy may account for peculiarities in English political culture that would, according to Perry Anderson, explain the lack of a radical socialism in Britain, the substitution of 'class culture' for 'class' and the notorious (and idealized) absence of great, salvific social theorems in the national culture. But the sudden modernization of Britain under Thatcher and Blair yields surprising results, as Anderson himself recognizes in another of his breathtaking surveys:

By the [nineteen-]eighties, the net effect of these changes was a marked disjuncture between high culture and politics in Britain. In most European cultures, such a pattern has historically been quite frequent. In many, indeed, the normal stance of intellectuals has tended to be oppositional, swinging against the pendulum of regimes rather than with it. In England, this has not been so. Here, the larger portion of the intelligentsia has generally sung in harmony, if not unison, with the established power of the day, from the time of Coleridge's first scoring of its part after the Napoleonic wars. The present position is an anomaly in this record²⁸

Nevertheless, the problem remains: part of the Left will see 'class' in cultural and political terms, and this is indeed an effective aid to sustaining an opposi-

tional stance against 'a rotten regime' in the name and on behalf of a people judged capable of achieving for itself a cultural and moral autonomy vouchsafed by a working-class politics.²⁹ The case of England is crucial for several reasons: it is traditionally 'the distant mirror' of capitalism.³⁰ It cannot possibly be denied that the shift to culture in class theory was and is caused by the fate of socialism (i.e., of the workers' movement): to succeed only in the sense of making capitalism more modern, democratic, secular and (perhaps) egalitarian via cross-class alliances forces the workers' movement to abandon the specific proletarian calling envisaged by Marx. Western and Northern social democrats, Eastern and Southern communists alike have replaced emancipation with equality, Marx with Rousseau. Marxian socialism has never been attempted politically, especially not by Marxists.³¹ Egalitarianism and statism (in democratic and tyrannical versions) were the hallmarks of the main official versions of socialism, everywhere.

These are also the key elements of the contemporary popular image of socialism, and the key elements of the colourful pop ideology of the 'new social movements' as well, aiming at righting injustice by enlarging and radicalizing the idea of equality and trying to impose this idea on the bourgeois states and international financial organizations they despise (they themselves do not wish to take power; theirs is an *étatisme* by proxy). The 'statism by proxy' of the new social movements (we won't vote for you, we won't smash your power through revolution, but we want you to draft bills and pass acts of parliament and UN and EU resolutions that we deem useful and edifying), in spite of their many beauties and quite a few successes, is still statism, experimenting with a radical idea of equality of all living beings, hesitating between straight reformism and utopian self-sufficiency and exodus.

The retreat to egalitarianism, statism and 'culture' thus appears to be a quasi-permanent feature of socialist movements. In almost every case, this can only be explained by the fact that they must engage with an adversary, bourgeois society, which is replete with historical imperfections derived from the caste societies out of which they emerged.

FROM CASTE TO CLASS TO PEOPLE

That the retreat from Marx to Rousseau is a also tendency *among Marxists*, as in the most important case of E.P. Thompson, is of particular importance. Technically, this is sometimes a reaction against an alleged rigid determinism in Marxian class theory (an allegation effectively refuted by G.A. Cohen)³², but more frequently (again, also in E.P. Thompson's case) it happens owing to a fatal misunderstanding concerning the conflation of 'class' and 'caste' (*Stände*, *états*, or in Hungarian, *rendek*). Caste society, the remnants of which are still with us, even today, is based on a view of human nature radically

different from the Enlightenment view, so ingrained in modern thinking as to be almost invisible and implicit, scarcely in need of being articulated.

For most of history, humanity was not thought to have been co-extensive with humankind. Women, slaves, foreigners, children were almost invariably excluded everywhere, but so were people who had to work for a living (*banausoi*), people who had become retainers in a chieftain's retinue, persons exercising trades that were ideologically considered repellent or religiously taboo, people with physical deficiencies, whole nations subjugated in war, persons belonging to another religion or denomination, persons without property, enemies of the state, members of 'inferior' races, and so on. These and many others were not supposed to share with the rest the prerogatives of full-fledged human beings. There was resistance to this state of affairs among some Stoics, Cynics and Epicureans, the early Christians and some medieval heretics, some Buddhists and other assorted riff-raff. But on the whole the title of 'man' (let alone of 'citizen', which is still limited by nation-states)³³ was a prerogative circumscribed by criteria of excellence, hence the absence of an idea of equal and universal rights and obligations.

Caste or 'estate' is a whole life, with dimensions capitalism has since nullified. Let me quote a few words from the greatest authority on the caste system:

...the lot of the Shudras is to serve, and...the Vaishyas are the grazers of cattle and the farmers, the 'purveyors' of sacrifice...who have been given dominion over the animals, whereas the Brahman-Kshatryas have been given dominion over 'all creatures'... [T]he Kshatrya may order a sacrifice as may the Vaishya, but only the Brahman may perform it. The king is thus deprived of any sacerdotal function.... The Brahman naturally has privileges.... He is inviolable (the murder of a Brahman is, with the murder of a cow, the cardinal sin), and a number of punishments do not apply to him: he cannot be beaten, put in irons, fined, or expelled....³⁴

The contrast with modern capitalist society could not be more obvious: each caste (or estate) is a complete way of life, embodying a cosmological principle. Caste is a differential system of privileges, endowments and 'gifts' which represent a model of the social world, based on a philosophical doctrine concerning human functions, and a scale of values, embodied by various closed groups whose commerce with one another is a function of their respective rungs on the ladder of human values, religiously determined. All this is strengthened by a well-entrenched system of prejudices. The English word *villain*, French *vilain*, has its origin in the late Latin *villa-*

nus, villager, peasant. 'Ignoble' originally means a person devoid of noble rank. The Hungarian *paraszt*, 'peasant', originates in the Slav stem **prost*, 'simpleton', etc., all signs that contempt and deference did not need excuses. Medieval ditties made fun of hunchbacks, beggars, cripples, fat people and, simply, the poor. Explanations for the ill-fate of some were, apart from social theodicy, racial and warlike. The upper castes were (in the whole Indo-European area) supposed to be *fair*, the servants, the aborigines, the slaves, the foreigners, *swarthy*.³⁵

The tripartite scheme of social hierarchy (*oratores, bellatores, laboratores*) does indeed identify social groups with human functions, but in ascribing function to person and group and vice versa, if these persons and groups remain within their prescribed or pre-ordained confines, it absolves them from responsibility: *responsibility is conceivable only in transgression, not by the fact of differential human condition*, such as membership in a social class. Choice (and the 'quality' of the individual) does not enter into it at all, and therefore misery does not need the intricate theodicy which is the bad luck of Christendom.

The target of egalitarian rebellion was always this ascription and adjudication, i.e., doubt concerning just deserts, and the ambiguity of the idea of 'God's children' and the radical distinctions regarding dignity (and the sheer scope of human life) inherent in caste society. The complaint that kings and barons are not chivalrous and gallant, that monks and nuns are not sagacious and chaste, is perennial. For the rebels, the world is turned upside down, merit trampled underfoot, while crime is rewarded with honours and plenty. Virtue, unlike moral goodness or intelligence, adheres to caste, not to persons or to humanity as such. What is virtue for one caste, is not for another. Pride is good in one, humility in another. Achilles, the greatest warrior, is incomprehensible apart from his semi-divine, princely heroism which coexists with extreme prickliness, sulkiness and sensitivity and a morbid preoccupation with slights and with the insufficient deference shown to him by equals whom he was bound to consider inferiors – a universal type encountered in ancient epics. Heroism is very much a matter of bodily integrity and beauty, athleticism, elegance, sexual glamour and a pronounced distaste for being 'dissed'. Heroism is play and display; all this is allowed under the disquieting but glorious threat of death on the battlefield, the untimely deaths of rich young men.³⁶

In sharp contrast with caste, class is an abstraction (I do not mean only a scientific idealization, but a *lived* abstraction as well) in a society where freedom of contract exists. In such a society subordination, hierarchy, domination, rank, dignity, etc., are not only random, totally unconnected to the quality of the individual, but also *seen as such*. Fate is no longer, as in Greek

tragedy or Corneille (and as late as Kleist), an accident of birth, but an accident of the social division of labour and other similar historical kinds of serendipity.

If it is true, and I think it is, that Marx's theory does not purport to be a theory of human nature as such, but a theory of capitalism, then the immortal words of *The Communist Manifesto*, according to which '[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles', must be false. Class is unique to capitalist society. Class is, first of all, a structural feature of the system; belonging to a class is a condition legally and, quite often, socially, open to anybody. This openness of class as a contingent social position is what makes capitalism great and gives it the aura of Mephistophelian liberation through ever 'more extensive and more destructive crises', as the *Manifesto* also puts it. In order to achieve this gigantic 'creative destruction' (an expression of Schumpeter's inspired by Bakunin) there was a need to unleash the forces of individual freedom – a freedom, that is, from a legally and coercively enforced classification of human beings into groups of birth and status.

Addressing class as such is, intuitively, very difficult.

Within the production process, the separation of labour from its objective moments of existence – instruments and material – is *suspended*. *The existence of capital and of wage labour rests on this separation. Capital does not pay for the suspension of this separation which proceeds in the real production process* – for otherwise work could not go on at all.... But as use value, labour belongs to the capitalist; it belongs to the worker merely as exchange value. Its living quality of preserving objectified labour time by using it as the objective condition of living labour in the production process is none of the worker's business. *This appropriation, by means of which living labour makes instrument and material in the production process into the body of its soul and thereby resurrects them from the dead, does indeed stand in antithesis to the fact that labour itself is objectless, is a reality only in the immediate vitality of the worker – and that the instrument and material, in capital, exist as being-for-themselves.... But to the extent that labour steps into this relation [with its moments of material being], this relation exists not for itself, but for capital; labour itself has become a moment of capital*.³⁷

The distinction between castes could not be farther away from this portrait of the worker who may be alienated and exploited, but certainly is no stranger to capital; on the contrary, he is one of its 'moments', one of its

structural features. This is clearly not something anybody could abolish by decree or by law. If the worker is a feature of capital, the worker can change capitalism into something else only if he or she changes himself or herself, in an extra-moral sense.

Looked at from the ulterior vantage-point of the revolutionary, we may rather confidently say that *the abolition of caste leads to equality; but the abolition of class leads to socialism*. Yet as we have seen, the retreat from socialism to egalitarianism, from Marx to Rousseau, the retreat from critical theory to ahistorical moral critique, from Hegel and Marx to Kant, has been the rule, rather than the exception, in the history of the Left. It is therefore in need of some explanation.

First, one has to take into account the psychological needs of opposition to any system one was brought up in. All social systems – through mythologies, patriotic chronicles, traditions and the like – pretend and, indeed, must pretend that they are natural, and that their failings are due to inherent clashes within human nature, and that unhappiness all too obviously caused by impersonal factors is somehow retribution, either visited upon people because of their imperfections, or because of some fatal breakdown in the system itself caused by ingratitude, impiety or the inscrutable decree of a higher force of some sort. Blaming the system will always appear as an easy pretext for failing to blame oneself, dissatisfaction being always regarded as a weakness of the unsuccessful, of the insufficiently noble or the insufficiently insightful – in short, of the Thersites of this world. People have to be on a solid moral footing if they are to dare to say ‘no’. Thus, it seems necessary to establish that there is an innate excellence residing in those who have been held by the ruling order to be inferior, and that the inversion of the established moral order or moral hierarchy happens to be both the superior truth and a satisfactory motivation for its reversal. The oldest rhetorical tricks can be employed here:

Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.... But woe unto you that are rich! For ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! For ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! For ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets. But I say unto you which hear, Love your

enemies, do good to them, which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.³⁸

The moral order is reversed, but even the threat of that reversal is turned upside down, for those who would suddenly find themselves at the bottom of the moral heap will be forgiven and saved. This sums up nearly all revolutionary manifestoes we can think of. The scary flip of the moral coin is made unthreatening – even the frightening curse, ‘ye shall mourn and weep’ is made good – by the invocation of universality: ‘love your enemies’. But the right to forgive will be conferred upon those who did not have the power to forgive, and thus to condemn, before. Power is being taken away and given anew; this is why the Son of Man is also called the Lord.

A second reason why the retreat from socialism to egalitarianism has been the rule is the need for a trans-social or meta-social foundation for the possibility of a change which might reduce or even obliterate injustice and domination. This is (intuitively) the suppleness, the plasticity, the flexibility, the malleability of human nature and the randomness of intellectual, aesthetic or physical endowment, distributed capriciously among all ranks, races, creeds and provinces. In other words: a belief in the possibility of equality without upsetting too much the shape of society which – even if equality of income, opportunity, status and access to political power were achieved – would still contain elements of domination, either by government (tempered by law), or by various social hierarchies of command and control in the workplace, education and family, as well as a continuing social division of labour.

But domination married to equality would not contradict the possibility of equality only if the perpetual re-creation of inequalities is constantly upset by new forces ‘from below’ which constantly re-establish equality.³⁹ Redistribution (the only way to perpetually impose and re-impose equality if the other customary aspects of society remain essentially the same) can be implemented only by an extremely strong state able to defeat the resistance of those from whom something shall be taken away. But the strength of the state is apt to reinforce domination concentrated in the hands of the few, which will, then, further reinforce domination, naturally unfavourable to an equality of condition or of social positions, and so on without end. All this is likely, though, only if the malleability of human nature is allowed free rein by the dominant or ‘hegemonic’ culture; hence the permanent *Kulturkampf* concerning the pre-social or ‘natural’ equality of persons *before* redistribution, from ‘blue blood’ to natural selection to the Bell curve.⁴⁰

Third, egalitarianism was (and up to a point, still is) an expression of a dynamic of individuals uprooted from ‘caste’. As well as fighting against the market system, socialists found themselves still fighting against the remnants

of a feudal order, i.e., *for* a system where surplus value would be extracted on the market (from people legally free and assenting to obligations arising from contract), not through coercion and social-cum-religious conditioning. Put more simply, they had to execute successful bourgeois *and* proletarian revolutions at the same time. Hence the endless wrangling of nineteenth-century social democrats about the problem of the peasantry, when they sometimes had to advocate the creation of competitive small farm businesses in order to win the rural allies they needed to enable them to smash the landed aristocracy and gentry, the political ruling stratum of most countries until quite recently.⁴¹ Central European socialists (especially in Germany and Austria-Hungary) worried a great deal about *their* capitalism not being created by an autochthonous bourgeoisie, but in fact this was much more generally true.⁴² The problem of Kautsky and Lenin (and Luxemburg and Szabó and Dobrogeanu-Gherea and Mariátegui) may actually be a universal problem.

Fourth, *et nunc venio ad fortissimum*, there is a deep moral and psychological difficulty with Marxism, intertwined with the historical problematic. Marxism, after all, proposes the abolition of the proletariat, not its apotheosis. Because of reification and alienation, it holds with Simone Weil that *la condition ouvrière*, being a worker, is the worst condition a human being can find herself or himself in. (And Simone Weil is quite right in believing that perfect solidarity with the working class means the assumption of, and acquiescence in, servitude and squalor. But this is, of course, the opposite of the sense of solidarity in the tradition of non-Marxian socialism.) The meaning of Rousseauian socialism is the re-establishment of the purity of the people through the forcible destitution of the upper castes and the exclusion of extraneous economic elements such as commerce; the people is held to be capable of discovering its virtue, which has been obliterated or corrupted by oppression and inequality, servitude and deference. This presupposes an Essence of Man to be found through philosophical means, an essence whose vacuity historical materialism was created to demonstrate. The 'enlargement' of Marxism in the normative sense (with, usually, some kind of Kantian moral philosophy) nearly always means a retreat towards equality and Rousseau.⁴³

On the other hand, this ever-recurring retreat makes good psychological sense. It is well-nigh impossible to wage a battle to the death (which revolution, however slow and gradual, necessarily is) if there is no sense that it is fought on behalf of people who deserve sacrifice, whose cause is morally superior because *they* are superior to the foe. The anti-luxury ideas of Rousseau and his countless ideological forebears declare 'the great and the good' to be superfluous. This notion may be plausible (although still unpleasant) in the case of caste society, but in the case of class society, Marx is adamant that

... in my presentation, capital profit is *not* ‘merely a *deduction* or “robbery” on the labourer’. On the contrary, I present the capitalist as the necessary functionary of capitalist production and show very extensively that he does not only ‘deduct’ or ‘rob’, but forces the *production of surplus value*, therefore the deducting only helps to produce; furthermore, I show in detail that even if in the exchange of commodities *only equivalents* were exchanged, the capitalist – as soon as he pays the labourer the real value of his labour-power – would secure with full rights, i.e. the rights corresponding to that mode of production, *surplus value*.⁴⁴

This is not consonant with the millenary voice of rebellion. That voice, on the contrary, tells us that ‘we was robbed’, the thrifty by the thrifless. That honest toil was not paid in full, owing to the superior coercive power of the mighty. That ascribing a necessary ‘productive’ role to the ruling classes is pernicious ‘ideological’ mendacity. All value is created by the workers – this is Lassalle’s view, and not Marx’s.⁴⁵ All official and triumphant ‘socialist’ art from Soviet social realism to Latin American muralists glorifies proletarian might, sinews, purity, work and victorious confrontation with the puny and unclean enemy – unlike the few works of art truly inspired by a Marxian vision, from George Grosz and Gyula Derkovits to the more extreme avant-garde. These latter creations are almost invariably dark and pessimistic. Their problem was succinctly summarized by Georg Lukács thus: ‘[T]he objective reality of social existence is *in its immediacy* “the same” for both proletariat and bourgeoisie’.⁴⁶

The working class is not situated outside capitalism. It embodies capitalism as much as the bourgeoisie does. In a way perhaps even more: reification touches it in a radical manner. Nevertheless, Lukács emphasizes the inextricable interrelatedness of ‘rationalization’ and irrationality brought about by capitalist crises.⁴⁷ The redemption of ‘social evil’ is possible only if ‘evil’ is separated from the redeeming feature; but this is not feasible. Since it is not only classes, i.e., human groups, that are divided from one another, but whole social spheres and, especially and crucially, ‘the economy’, which is separated from the other realms of social life by capitalism, the economy is *quasi*-liberated from the yoke of bloodline (birth) and the ancient fusion of politics, religion and custom.⁴⁸ But the separation of the economy from the rest, owing to the specifically capitalist method of extracting surpluses on the market, as it were ‘peacefully’, instead of through direct coercion, as before, creates a commonality between the fundamental classes in capitalism where the mere conquest of power by the lower classes may not overcome

the separation and therefore will fail to establish a classless society – as has indeed happened.

The pressures which resulted in one of the characteristic abandonments of the Marxian class view are impeccably described in another of Ellen Meiksins Wood's excellent books.⁴⁹ In a series of sharpish attacks on a number of post-Marxist semi-converts, she selected authors (whose subsequent careers she on the whole accurately predicted) who tried – in view of the repeated defeats of socialist movements and the even then perfectly clear *cul-de-sac* of communist parties in or out of power – to find, at first, a substitute for the working class as the vanguard of revolution; but unlike the New Left, not in the 'person' of Third World peasants, inner-city blacks or young intellectuals, but in a new cross-class coalition of rebellious 'people' desirous of a new kind of democracy. *The Retreat from Class* shows how the transformed concept of 'democracy' (from the ancient Greek understanding of it as the rule of the free-born poor, to the idea of pluralism and the division of power, acceptable to the ruling class, so much so that the original democratic idea came to be seen as 'anti-democratic') contributed to the change of the socialist *telos* from an end to exploitation and domination (*ergo*, classless society) into a mere hope for cultural 'hegemony'. A hegemony, that is, of egalitarian forces bent on abolishing discrimination, privilege, social exclusion: but even within egalitarian discourse these authors (Wood's 'new true socialists') stressed recognition rather than redistribution (to use Nancy Fraser's subsequent phrase), and pluralism rather than socialism.⁵⁰ The problem here is basically the same as during the 'revisionism' debate around Eduard Bernstein's book, or the ongoing quarrel on 'reformism'.⁵¹

This weighty heritage inspires Rousseauian socialism. It is the rearguard battle of 'the people' which is and isn't identical with bourgeois society. This was certainly what made Marat, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Desmoulins, Hébert and Gracchus Babeuf so lofty and unforgiving: humiliation, not alienation. In semi-feudal peasant societies, such as the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, it was this, the spirit of *jacquerie* combined with an intimation of a *sansculotte* revolution, which gave a special vigour and savagery to the idea of 'class' and 'socialism', since both were combined with strong remnants of 'caste' and 'equality'. Neither Marat and Saint-Just, nor the English Levellers and their successors about whom E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Christopher Hill, Raphael Samuel and their confederates wrote, dreamed of a kind of egalitarian change that would be conducive to a society of market, contract and money. But while overturning caste changes countless things – hierarchy (status, if you wish), moral nomenclature, relations of obedience and deference, prescribed biographies, connubiality and commensality, spatiality and religion – it cannot touch the

economy, which has just come into its own right as an autonomous sphere of the human condition. Above all, it does not replace hierarchy with equality, only caste (or estate) with class.

This is what happened to West European social democracy and ‘euro-communism’⁵² (and British radicalism from Lloyd George and Keir Hardie to Attlee, Bevan, Laski and Beveridge), and to East European, Chinese and Vietnamese ‘communism’: they have unwittingly and unwillingly either created or reinforced and modernized capitalist society in their countries. It is not certain that the anti-globalization movements of today, with their sincere calls for planetary (the word ‘international’ is avoided nowadays, for some reason) equality will not contribute to yet another rebirth of a more attractive, slimmed-down, fairer and smarter capitalism, after destroying the superannuated global financial institutions and the more shameless neo-conservative governments – even though the anti-globalists, too, obviously want much, much more.

EPILOGUE

Our argument has established that revolutionary mobilization in the past was almost invariably aimed at the economic, social, cultural, racial, legal, religious, racial, sexual and intellectual humiliation inherent in ‘caste’; it was an egalitarian mobilization against aristocratic orders of variegated kinds. It is true that ‘democracy’ in practice never meant the effective rule of the lower orders, albeit their influence has increased from time to time (never for long, though), but it alleviated a burden we neglect too easily. Equality of dignity, the principle of civic rights and liberties (even if most often honoured in the breach), shifted the struggle for emancipation to new levels, both more profound and more intractable.

Let’s not forget that bourgeois liberty, i.e., modern (liberal) capitalist class society, was not quite safe until very recently. It should not be forgotten, either, that this element played an important role in the anti-fascist struggle (not understood by purely and uncompromisingly proletarian radicals like Amadeo Bordiga and some, by no means all, left communists). An explanation is here in order. Fascism and National Socialism are constantly interpreted, not without justification, as instances of ‘reactionary modernism’, as a sub-species of twentieth-century revolutionism, etc., initially in order to stress their not negligible parallels and similarities with ‘communism’, especially Stalinism, often under the aegis of the (untenable) ‘totalitarianism’ dogma. However justified and novel these approaches were, they contributed to the (all too frequent) neglect of the obvious. Southern and Catholic fascism wanted to introduce the *Ständestaat* (always translated as ‘corporate state’ but literally meaning ‘the state of estates’, a sort of new caste society), based on

the theories of Othmar Spann, Salazar and others, all inherited from Count Joseph de Maistre, the Marquis de Bonald and Don Juan Donoso Cortés, with a mix of the ‘elite’ theories of Vilfredo Pareto and others. There were variants of the same neo-feudalism in Nazism, too, with racist and sexist elements of ‘arischer Männerbund’ (Aryan male fraternity) and similar pseudo-historical nonsense, very much in vogue then among fashionable people like Carl Schmitt and others of his ilk.

What all this verbiage amounted to was a quite serious attempt to re-introduce caste society, that is, human groups with radically different entitlements and duties (against uniformizing and levelling, ‘mechanistic’ conceptions of egalitarian liberalism and socialism *and* bourgeois individualism): the *Führerprinzip* in all occupations (witness Heidegger’s infamous ‘Rektoratsrede’, i.e., commencement address); vocational groups dissolving classes (e.g., steel-workers would have meant, in the future, Krupp and Thyssen *as well as* the steel-workers proper); untouchables (Jews and other condemned races), and so on. The fascists were quite serious in wanting to go back to before 1789, as they (or at least their predecessors) had been announcing loudly since the 1880s. Since pre-modern and aristocratic memories were still alive in Central and Southern Europe, the modernist-egalitarian impulse against fascism was quite strong, and since this impulse was carried by the Left, and since the murderous attack of fascism and Nazism was directed against them *and* the liberal bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, small wonder that Popular Fronts were born and were quite sincere in their fight *against the revival of an oppressive past*, and against an anti-egalitarian and anti-Enlightenment obscurantism. This fight was pre-socialist in its historical and ideological character, but unavoidable (and one has to admire the gall of Horkheimer and Adorno in disregarding this aspect altogether).

So, egalitarian, anti-aristocratic and anti-caste – thus ‘Rousseauian’ – struggles were fully justified as late as the Second World War. We forget the backward-looking character of fascism and Nazism at our own peril. Serious attempts to create a new nobility were launched, beginning with the *vitéz* or warrior ‘estate’ in the first, radical phase of Vice-Admiral von Horthy’s counter-revolution in Hungary and ending in Himmler’s SS mystique; the *vitéz* (former First World War soldiers, commissioned and non-commissioned, of impeccably Gentile ancestry) were offered land and a small stipend and were organized in quite an effective knights’ order from 1920; their Supreme Captain was the Regent, von Horthy, himself. The *vitéz* order was revived in Hungary after 1989, albeit only as a nostalgic association of the extreme right. But ‘corporatist’ ideology is still alive in contemporary Hungary; from time to time there are proposals to revive an unelected upper chamber consisting of delegates of all ‘respectable professions’, all the bishops,

etc. Most recently such a proposal was advanced by a 'socialist' prime minister, a former Communist central committee member.

But since the rather recent global triumph of capitalism, egalitarian mobilizations against caste, although still the dominant form (*viz.* battles against poverty, for jobs, against local and global discrimination, for gender and racial equality, for fairness for the indigenous or 'first' peoples, and so on) appear insufficient, because inequality (if still a pertinent term at all) has different causes from those it had in the past. When, in the vast literature of the disillusioned Left, we read about the irrelevance of class, the vanishing proletariat, we can still see the unconscious amalgamation of caste and class. Since the *immanent*, intra-capitalist fight for equality led by socialists possessed by the 'false consciousness' of fighting against alienation and exploitation, has ended; since the historically forced synthesis of these two aspirations has been dissolved through the final evanescence of the remains of aristocratic order, deference and birth privilege; since the 'socialist' states have reverted to capitalist type, as a result of the successful conquest of agrarian aristocratism by 'communist' parties;⁵³ it is for the first time that pure capitalism makes an appearance.

One should be careful here. The historically-forced synthesis of egalitarianism and socialism is obviously not over in the 'developing' world where egalitarian movements based on the petty merchants of the bazaar, the peasantry and the lower clergy ('Islamic radicalism') are attacking the Westernized elites and military states with an islamicized Khmer Rouge rhetoric or, in Latin America, with an 'indigenous' millenarism. It is a telling fact that 'revolutionary openings' are on offer again on capitalism's periphery, where new strategies of the 'weakest link' and of 'combined and uneven development' are reformulated for the benefit of a new generation of 'vicarious revolutionary' dupes.

That said, on a global plane capitalism appears in the stark, unforgiving light of its final triumph. It is completely, utterly, absolutely itself. It is like Rome being perfectly realized in Byzantium. We reconstruct Roman society from the legal documents written later and elsewhere, in which Roman law was generalized and synthesized by people culturally remote from Latium but who nevertheless understood, and what is more, lived and experienced 'Rome' in its unadulterated Roman 'haecceity' as *Romaioi*. Balzac and Dickens might not be able to understand the completed ultra-capitalism of today, but we see that we are the accomplished heirs of their characters.

There has never been an experiment in Marxian socialism. It is an open question if there can ever be one, *if* indeed Marx was right in his fundamental assumptions. The stumbling block was and remains the paradox of class, that is, of the exploited as a collective revolutionary agent. In the battle for

equality before the law, defining the task of the revolutionary agent was quite easy, as we can see from the Putney Debates (1647) where Rainborough is arguing against Ireton and Cromwell: since nobody is responsible for their mothers and fathers, what can birthright then possibly mean? The claimants are outside, the lords within; the former are clamouring to get in, the latter protesting against people with no property, i.e., with no interest in the common weal, getting in; but nobody doubts that it is worthwhile to be inside.⁵⁴

In modern capitalism, there is no inside, as there is no upwards direction. There is no route by which you can leave and there is no place that is fundamentally unlike yours and there is no one who is not, in some way, *yourself*. The primary quality of labour – that which ought to be liberated by socialist action – is not injustice. It is a general and irremediable divorce of persons' inner forces, desires and capacities, from the aims at the service of which they must develop and exercise these forces. The best characterization I know of this is by Moishe Postone:

Alienated labor ... constitutes a social structure of abstract domination, but such labour should not necessarily be equated with toil, oppression or exploitation. The labour of a serf, a portion of which 'belongs to' the feudal lord, is, in and of itself, not alienated: the domination and exploitation of that labour is not intrinsic to the labour itself. It is precisely for this reason that expropriation in such a situation *was and had to be* based upon direct compulsion. Non-alienated labour in societies in which a surplus exists and is expropriated by non-labouring classes ['castes' in my sense, GMT] necessarily is bound to direct social domination. By contrast, exploitation and domination are integral moments of commodity-determined labour.⁵⁵

As far as we are aware, only direct (coercive) social domination was ever overturned by popular revolt. As the experience of so-called 'real socialism' shows only too clearly, a change in legal ownership (of the means of production) from that of private citizens or their associations to that of the state or government means as little (for the workers) as the passage of a company from ownership by a family into that of a pension fund. The 'expropriation of the expropriators' did not end alienation. The illusion that capitalism was ever defeated is linked to the non-Marxist idea of an anthropological turn away from 'artificial' society (the anarchy, wastefulness and inefficiency of the market, self-destructive individualism, greed and assorted social pathologies, etc.) to true human nature where people will act (not work) creatively after

their hearts' desire. This is, again, Rousseau, not Marx – or at least not the mature Marx – the analyst of bourgeois society.⁵⁶ Marx's historicism is thorough and radical. He did not describe the human condition when describing capitalism; indeed, his description is meant as a refutation of any such idea, and this refutation is pursued throughout his *oeuvre*. As Postone puts it: 'The "essence" grasped by Marx's analysis is not that of human society but that of capitalism; it is to be abolished, not realized, in overcoming that society'.⁵⁷

Neither value nor labour are perennial qualities of human existence, nor is class. Class, in contradistinction to 'caste', is not a framework for a whole life or a *Lebenswelt*. This is why the disappearance of the cultural identity of the old working class does not change the fundamental character of capitalism one whit. Class, not being a human group with common interests and common moral and cultural values such as, say, solidarity and contrariness, but a structural feature of society, is not an actor. *Contra* E.P. Thompson, it is a 'thing'.⁵⁸

Class is that feature of capitalist society which divides it along the lines of people's respective positions in relation to reification/alienation, i.e., their degree of autonomy vis-à-vis subordination to commodities and value. The concomitant differences in wealth, access, etc., could, in principle, be remedied by redistribution and mutual 'recognition'. But greater equality of this kind (which may appear as a utopia right now, but there are very strong forces pushing towards that utopia which is well within the realm of possibilities) can achieve better consumption, but not better 'production' – that is, not unalienated labour. Equality, arrived at through redistribution, does not and cannot preclude domination and hierarchy – a hierarchy moreover that, unlike in aristocratic systems, does not build upon a cosmology and a metaphysics that could effect a reconciliation with reality (and what else is reality than servitude and dependence?).

No doubt the cruelty, craftiness, low cunning and high logistics used in the expropriation of surpluses go on as always, but the enemy is less and less a culturally circumscribed bourgeoisie as described in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*,⁵⁹ but a capitalism without a proletariat – and without a bourgeoisie – at least, without a proletariat and a bourgeoisie as we know them historically, as two distinct cultural, ideological and status groups not only embodying, but *representing* 'socialism' and 'capitalism'.⁶⁰ It is this representation which happens to be obsolete, and perhaps it was secondary to begin with, in spite of its mobilizing force which makes the blood flow faster when listening to the *Marseillaise* or the *Internationale* (curiously, *both* were played at East European demonstrations at the beginning of the twentieth century).

The truth about class is not a proud self-representation through a legitimizing ethic: this belongs to an era of conflict between rebellious universalism

(read: egalitarianism) and particularism (read: aristocratism and the *esprit de corps* of haughty elites from dukes to abbots). The dominant ideology of the new, purified capitalism is, naturally, freedom. Freedom, as conservatives have been pointing out since the late eighteenth century, means the uprooting of corporate, *standesgemäß* identities and replacing them with mobility, flexibility, elasticity, ease, a propensity to, and a preference for, change. It is, in appearance, ‘classless’. But it isn’t. It does not ‘prefer’ the bourgeoisie as a closed, culturally identifiable, status group (‘estate’); instead it underpins capitalism as a system.

Some people mistake the absence of identifiable cultural and status groups on either side of the class divide for *an absence of class rule*. But this is false. The capitalist class rules, but it is anonymous and open, and therefore impossible to hate, to storm, to chase away. So is the proletariat. Legal, political and cultural equality (equality here only means a random distribution of – very real – advantages and privileges) has made class conflict into what *Capital* makes it out to be. Class conflict is dependent on the extraction of surplus; it is not a battle between two camps for superior recognition and a better position in the scheme of (re)distribution. That battle goes on still, to be sure, but it is essentially the battle of yesteryear. The bourgeoisie is by now incapable of autonomous self-representation; the representation of its interests is taken over more and more by the state. Since the state represents, and looks after, capitalism, the old-style self-representation of the working class is moribund, too, but the state is *not* supplanted – as was the case, at least symbolically, in the past – by political institutions of counter-power. Thus revolutionary proletarian movements, although they now barely exist, are cast into outer darkness.

The truth about class is, therefore, that the proletariat had, historically, two contradictory objectives: one, to preserve itself as *an estate* with its own institutions (trade unions, working-class parties, a socialist press, instruments of self-help, etc.); and another one, to defeat its antagonist and to abolish itself as a class. We can now see that the abolition of the working class *as an ‘estate’, as a ‘guild’*, has been effected by capitalism; capitalism has finally transformed the proletariat (*and* the bourgeoisie) into a veritable class, putting an end to their capacity for hegemony. Class hegemony of any kind (still quite vivacious and vigorous in Gramsci’s time) was exactly what was annihilated. Class as an economic reality exists, and it is as fundamental as ever, although it is culturally and politically almost extinct. This is a triumph of capitalism.⁶¹

But this makes the historical work of destroying capitalism less parochial; it makes it indeed as universal, as abstract and as powerful as capitalism itself. What political form this may take, we don’t know.⁶² Nevertheless, it is now truly the cause of humanity. There is no particular, local, vocational, ‘guild’

bias to this cause, nor is any possible. The truth of class is of its own transcendence. The proletariat of the *Manifesto* could stand outside because it could lose nothing but its chains. No one is outside now – although not in the sense of Antonio Negri: nation-states and classes continue to exist, and they do determine our lives.⁶³

The question is, could there be a motivation for a class that exists in deprivation – and is now even deprived of a corporate cultural identity – to change a situation which is dehumanizing and dangerous, but not humiliating to the point of moral provocation?

We don't know.

What is certain is that the last flowers have fallen off the chains. The working-class culture which inspired so much heroism and self-abnegation is dead. That culture was modernist in the sense of taking aim at hierarchy and trying to achieve a secular, egalitarian and rights-based society. This the working class mistook for socialism. It is not. It is capitalism. Capitalism could be itself only if and when aided by socialist delusion.⁶⁴ We are now free of this delusion. We see the task more clearly. But all the rest is utter defeat.

NOTES

This is an edited and abridged version of a longer manuscript.

- 1 *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Penguin, 1963.
- 2 A first-rate specimen of the decaying art of polemic, worthy of its target, is Perry Anderson's *Arguments Within English Marxism*, London: NLB/Verso, 1980. He says in an important passage: "Today, too, Thompson is entirely justified in summoning historical materialism again to take full and self-critical measure of [William] Morris's greatness. However, his ulterior theorization of the reasons why Marxism as a whole long failed to take up the legacy of Morris cannot be so easily accepted. The former, he maintains, pertains – or at least pretends – to "knowledge", the latter to "desire". These are "two different operative principles of culture" which may not be assimilated to each other. Spelling out the distinction, he writes: "The motions of desire may be legible in the text of necessity, and may then become subject to rational explanation and criticism. But such criticism can scarcely touch these motions at their source." What is wrong with this account? Essentially that it substitutes an *ontological* for a *historical* explanation of the record of relations between Morris and Marxism". (p. 160). Bingo. Rousseauian socialism can be (and is) empiricist, utopian and moralistic (and, occasionally, *passéiste*) but never, ever, historicist (in the sense of *Historismus*, not the Popperian nonsense;

- cf. Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, I-II, Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1936; see also Meinecke's *Machiavellism* [a translation of his *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte*, 1925], ed. by Werner Stark, New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998, esp. the chapter on Ranke, pp. 377-391).
- 3 E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, London: Merlin, 1978.
 - 4 Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984. The book also contains instructive political analyses. The term 'Western Marxism' originated with Karl Korsch (q. v.), was made popular first by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his epochal *Adventures of the Dialectic* [1955] Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1986, pp. 30-58 (and reinvented by Anderson himself in his famous *Considerations on Western Marxism*) London: NLB, 1976, where he notes rather presciently the shift of Marxist theory away from economics and politics to culture and art, another telling sign of decline for a revolutionary doctrine: see pp. 49-74.
 - 5 To quote the perhaps most famous words in the modern history of ideas: 'All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind'. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* [1847], ed. by Gareth Stedman Jones, London: Penguin, 2002, pp. 222-3.
 - 6 In an essay written but never published in English, and available only in Hungarian translation: 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau' [1953], in K. Polányi, *Fasizmus, demokrácia, ipari társadalom*, Budapest: Gondolat, 1986, pp. 244-258.
 - 7 Karl Polányi, *The Great Transformation* [1944], Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.
 - 8 *The Gift*, London: Routledge, 1970. Cf. the chapters 'Don, contrat, échange' and 'Sources, matériaux, textes à l'appui de "l'Essai sur le don"', in Marcel Mauss, *Oeuvres* 3, présentation de Victor Karady, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969, pp. 29-103. Paul Veyne has also demonstrated how in the ancient Greek city-states, this kind of display became a system, *euergetismos*, the system of 'good works' whereby the richest aristocrats were forced by the community to sacrifice large chunks of their wealth for public purposes (military, naval, religious and athletic) in exchange for honours, but on pain of confiscation and exile, *in lieu* of taxation. Honour was equated with giving up, not amassing, wealth. *Civisme* meant sacrifice. See his *Bread and Circuses*, London: Penguin

- Books, 1990, an abridged version of *Le Pain et le cirque*, Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1976.
- 9 See his *The Accursed Share*, New York: Zone Books, 1991. Cf. Georges Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, ed. by Allan Stoekl, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 116–129; for background see his 'The Moral Meaning of Sociology', in Bataille, *The Absence of Myth*, ed. by Michael Richardson, London: Verso, 1994, pp. 103–112. On war as play, he spoke in a radio interview (on Nietzsche) with Georges Charbonnier on 14 January 1959, see Bataille, *Une liberté souveraine*, ed. by Michel Surya, Paris: Farrago, 2000, p. 130.
 - 10 *Emile, or On Education*, ed. by Allan Bloom, New York: Basic Books, 1979, pp. 224, 225.
 - 11 E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*, New York: The New Press, 1993, pp. 109–110. Rousseauian socialism was often attracted to counter-cultural *intermundia*, far away from official 'polite' culture. Bataille, the alleged 'crazed pornographer' is a case in point; see his texts from the 1930s anti-Stalinist left subculture, *L'Apprenti sorcier*, ed. by Marina Galletti, Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1999; cf. *Laure: Une rupture*, ed. by Anne Roche and Jérôme Peignot, Paris: Éditions des Cendres, 1999 (letters of Laure, Bataille, Boris Souvarine, Pierre Pascal, Simone Weil). The subversive potential of demotic or popular culture was shown to great effect by Robert Darnton; see his *The Great Cat Massacre*, New York: Vintage, 1985, and particularly *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. It is small wonder that it was he who pointed out the parallels between the clandestine literature of pre-revolutionary France and the underground *samizdat* literature in Eastern Europe (of which the present writer was a modest practitioner); see R. Darnton, *Berlin Journal 1989-1990*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1991. It is pretty characteristic that defeated Marxian socialists would retreat to the 'antinomian' stance and discover the 'authentic' proletarian culture, like Jacques Rancière in his *The Nights of Labor*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989. It is significant that Rancière was Louis Althusser's comrade-in-arms and ends up as an ally of E.P. Thompson.
 - 12 This does not mean, of course, that Rousseauian socialists are averse to faux-naïf appeals to reason. See, for instance, P.-J. Proudhon, *Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire, 1849*, ed. by Daniel Halévy and Hervé Trinquier, Paris: Éditions Tops, 1997, p. 141.
 - 13 At the same time, Rousseau would extol the merits of a music rooted in a parochial community, necessarily based on the cadences of an ethnic language. As in Rousseau, 'Lettre à d'Alembert' [1758], in Jean-Jacques

- Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, V, Pléiade edition, Paris: Gallimard, 1995, p. 15.
- 14 '... the Savage lives in himself; sociable man, always outside himself, is capable of living only in the opinion of others and, so to speak, derives the sentiment of his own existence solely from their judgment'. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. by Victor Gourevitch, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1990, pp. 198-9.
 - 15 For a neo-Weberian analysis of puritan elements in Rousseau's views on inwardness and moral economy see Alessandro Ferrara, *Modernity and Authenticity: A Study of the Social and Ethical Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, pp. 111-151.
 - 16 Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime*, New York: Pantheon, 1981.
 - 17 See the classical statement about the oligarchical tendency in (mainly socialist) political organizations: Robert Michels, *Political Parties* [1915], London: Macmillan, 1968; cf. Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972, esp. pp. 88-145.
 - 18 See G.M. Tamás, 'Un capitalisme pur et simple', *La Nouvelle Alternative*, 60-61, March-June 2004, pp. 13-40.
 - 19 'Meta'-capitalist transcendence had to stay utopian in order to be able to fall back on moral rather than historical criticism. This amounted to a transition from Hegel to Kant, which, as Lukács well demonstrated, is a certain sign of defeat. The philosophical manifesto of the 1918 German revolution shows this clearly in its theologizing metaphysical rhapsody: see Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 237-8.
 - 20 See Thompson's famous essay 'The Peculiarities of the English', *Socialist Register 1965*, written against Anderson's 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review*, I/23, January/February 1964, and Tom Nairn's 'The English Working Class', *New Left Review*, I/24, March/April 1964.
 - 21 See the series of superb and gloomy reports in Perry Anderson, *English Questions*, London: Verso, 1992, pp. 48-104, 121-192, 193-301. This *réquisitoire* of English decadence and philistinism has many parallels in Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* [1869], ed. by Samuel Lipman, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
 - 22 This, perhaps necessary, tactic of the socialist movements was criticized very early on. See the important essay of the greatest Hungarian Marxist before Lukács, Ervin Szabó (an anarcho-syndicalist), 'Politique et syndicats', *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, 1909, t. 1, pp. 57-67; cf. Ervin Szabó, *Socialism and Social Science*, ed. by J.M. Bak and G. Litván, London: Routledge, 1982. The clearest statement of the problem as regards

- Bolshevism is to be found in Herman Gorter, *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* [1920], London: Wildcat, n.d. [1989]; cf. Herman Gorter, 'Die Ursachen des Nationalismus im Proletariat' [1915] and 'Offener Brief an den Genossen Lenin' [1920], in A. Pannekoek and H. Gorter, *Organisation und Taktik der proletarischen Revolution*, ed. by Hans Manfred Bock, Frankfurt/Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1969, pp. 73-87, 168-227.
- 23 Ervin Szabó attributes the 1848 revolution in Hungary to a class conflict between landed gentry and landed aristocracy; see his 'Aus den Parteien und Klassenkämpfen in der ungarischen Revolution von 1848', *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, 1919, pp. 258-307 (fragment from a larger work in Hungarian, this latter considered a classic).
 - 24 See Perry Anderson, 'The Notion of Bourgeois Revolution' in *English Questions*, pp. 105-118. The whole concept of 'bourgeois revolution' seems to disintegrate as a result of late twentieth-century Marxist research.
 - 25 She was even able to appropriate the dividends of the most blatantly conservative work of historiography which, during the Thatcher decade, declared the bankruptcy of the plebeian school in history initiated by the CPGB Historians' Group in the 1950s: see J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Clark proves himself to be the scourge especially of E.P. Thompson, in 'a tract for the times' quite enjoyable in its acidity and its fashionably anti-snob-bish return to those supremely unfashionable writers, Sir Lewis Namier and Sir Herbert Butterfield; see esp. pp. 141-161, 258-276.
 - 26 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1991, pp. 91-2.
 - 27 Ibid.
 - 28 'A Culture in Contraflow', in Anderson, *English Questions*, p. 300. See also his essays in *A Zone of Engagement*, London: Verso, 1992.
 - 29 This is a problematic best illuminated in a few wonderful books by T.J. Clark such as *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* [1973], London: Thames and Hudson, 1999. See his masterpiece, *Farewell to an Idea: Fragments from a History of Modernism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, the best summation in existence of the intricate and profound *identity* of modernism and political radicalism (my favourites are the chapters on Pissarro and on 'Freud's Cézanne', pp. 55-167); summations though, disturbingly, are of *the past*, are they not?
 - 30 There is a book, sadly overlooked, in spite of its many merits, which analyses the political aspect of Marx's picture of England: David MacGregor, *Hegel, Marx, and the English State*, Toronto: University of Toronto

Press, 1996, especially strong on contracts and the Factory Acts; cf. David MacGregor, *The Communist Ideal in Hegel and Marx*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

- 31 The only exceptions are the failed revolts of Left Communists, Council Communists, anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists. It is only they who ever tried to elaborate a Marxian political project. See [Philippe Bourrinet], *The Dutch and German Communist Left*, London: ICC, 2001 and the numerous and voluminous works of Hans Manfred Bock. There is a recent re-edition of Anton Pannekoek's *Workers' Councils* [1948], ed. by Robert Barsky, London & Oakland: AK Press, 2003.
- 32 'A compressed statement of [Thompson's] argument: Production relations do not mechanically determine class consciousness (p), therefore: Class may not be defined purely in terms of production relations (q). P is true, but q does not follow from it. We are at liberty to define class, with more or less ... precision, by reference to production relations, without inferring, as Thompson says we are the bound to do, that the culture and consciousness of a class may be readily deduced from its objective position within production relations. The opponent Thompson envisages commits the same fallacy as his critic. He too supposes that if p is true, then q is true. That is why he bases a denial of p on a denial of q , and erects a mechanical Marxism which ignores the open drama of historical process. The difficulty is not the opponent's premiss, whose innocence Thompson fails to disprove, but the hasty reasoning with which he follows it. Thompson's motive is to insist on p , with which we have no quarrel. But he mistakenly supposes that one who accepts a structural definition of class, and so rejects q , is thereby committed against p . There is no good reason to think that'. G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* [1978], expanded edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 74-5. The antiquated, 'period' feel of Cohen's analytical style, quite extraneous to the book's main argument, not to speak of its historical and philosophical sensibility, does not detract from its value, notwithstanding its untenable theory of 'theory' and such. Moreover, what G.A. Cohen has to add on class is even more important: "The separation of the free worker from his means of production" – the phrase encapsulates the structured characterization of the proletariat ...: his "freedom" is his ownership of his labour power, his "separation" is his non-ownership of his means of production. The text thus recommends individuation of social forms (and thereby "economic epochs of the structure of society") in production relational terms ... [T]he production relation binding immediate producers will be broadly invariant across a single social formation: there will be no unordered *mélange* of

slaves, serfs, and proletarians ... [We] say that there are as many types of economic structure as there are kinds of relation of immediate producers to productive forces. From the Marxian viewpoint, social forms are distinguished and unified by their types of economic structure, as individuated by the production relations dominant within them' (pp. 78-9). It is an open question, though, whether this is valid also for non-capitalist societies, where the separation of the economy from the rest of society and *la chose commune* has not happened.

- 33 See my 'On Post-Fascism', *Boston Review*, Summer 2000, pp. 42-6, reprinted in A. Sajó, ed., *Out and Into Authoritarian Law*, Amsterdam: Kluwer International Law, 2002, pp. 203-219. Cf. G.M. Tamás, 'Restoration Romanticism', *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 7/4, October 1993, pp. 379-401.
- 34 Louis Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus* [1966], complete revised English edition, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 66.
- 35 See Georges Dumézil, *La Courtisane et les seigneurs colorés*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, pp. 17-36.
- 36 A splendid book on this theme: Georges Dumézil, *Heur et malheur du guerrier*, Paris: Flammarion, 1992, influenced, alas, by the waffle on 'der arische Männerbund' and 'die kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen' (Stig Wikander, 1938 and Otto Höfler, 1935, respectively), but no matter: I recommend the superb chapters on the Tarquinius, Indra the sinner, and the comparison of the Horatii and the Aptya. See also the incomparable treatise of the great Émile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1993, esp. vol. 1, book 3, ch. 1 on 'La tripartition des fonctions', and ch. 2, on 'Les quatre cercles de l'appartenance sociale', pp. 279-319, and vol. 2, book 2, 'Le droit', pp. 97-175.
- 37 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* [1857-1858], London: Penguin, 1993, p. 364.
- 38 Luke 6, 20-2, 24-8.
- 39 I tried to demonstrate, long ago, that this is an illusion: G.M. Tamás, *L'Oeil et la main*, Geneva: Éditions Noir, 1985 (original Hungarian *samizdat* edition: 1983).
- 40 A compendium of anti-egalitarian prejudices, very much a predecessor of neo-conservative views of our own day, but funnier, is Max Nordau's *Degeneration* [a translation of *Entartung*, 1892], with an introduction by George L. Mosse, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, with amusing rants against Ibsen, Tolstoy, Baudelaire, Wagner, Nietzsche, Huysmans and others. It was enormously popular when it appeared precisely because it pointed to the impotence of egalitarianism, especially of Christian and Jacobin origin, against bourgeois society.

- 41 It is quite astonishing to see the power of the old landed interest until the Second World War in the westernmost state of Europe; see David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990, with highly instructive appendices. The data first collected by W.D. Rubinstein are inventively and entertainingly interpreted. The book bolsters some of the Anderson–Nairn claims, albeit belatedly. The peasant question was raised by Karl Kautsky; the debate raged in Germany, Austria–Hungary and Russia; there was also an interesting contribution from Rumania, by Constantin Dobrogeanu–Ghera on ‘the new serfdom’; later, the criticism of Lenin, Trotsky and the October Revolution *from the Left* was frequently based on the need of the ‘socialist revolution’ to distribute land to the peasants, creating thereby petty entrepreneurial capitalism in agriculture, that had to be ‘liquidated’ subsequently by the centralizing re–distributive state in a violent self–repression of the revolution or, according to the Stalinists, the liquidation of phase I of revolution by phase II (‘collectivization’ through massacre and famine).
- 42 Cf. Perry Anderson, ‘The Notion of Bourgeois Revolution’. The historical points are discussed in Ellen Meiksins Wood’s illuminating book, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*, London: Verso, 2002, esp. pp. 95–146. Apart from its striking originality, it contains an excellent survey of recent controversies, around Perry Anderson’s *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* [1974], London: Verso, 1992 and *Lineages of the Absolutist State* [1974], London: Verso, 1979, and the Brenner Debate (see *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* [1976], ed. by T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). There is a sharp attack on Ellen Meiksins Wood and Robert Brenner by Ricardo Duchesne in ‘On the Origins of Capitalism’, *Rethinking Marxism*, 14(3), Fall 2002, pp. 129–137, which for lack of specialist expertise I cannot appraise, but as an outsider, I am not wholly convinced. Central and East (including Russian) experience seems to me to bear out Meiksins Wood’s contentions, as far as I can judge.
- 43 This is what Andrew Levine fails to see in his interesting book, *A Future for Marxism? Althusser, the Analytical Turn and the Revival of Socialist Theory*, London: Pluto, 2003. It is quite ironical that the two authors who in the nineteen–seventies tried to recreate a pristine left theory, Louis Althusser and G.A. Cohen, should be Mr Levine’s heroes in a book which accepts egalitarianism (in John Roemer and others) and ‘normative’ political philosophy (in the later G.A. Cohen) as an egress for wayward Marxism without any further ado. Andrew Levine’s contention that

G.A. Cohen and others have brought Marxism into the ‘mainstream’ is rather extraordinary. Imagine a system of beliefs that has influenced the lives of hundreds of millions of people on four continents, taught around nocturnal camp-fires in dozens of civil wars and hundreds of trade union institutions, debated by dozens of revolutionary or reforming governments, brought into the ‘mainstream’ of a tiny and transient chapter in the history of thought, analytically styled political philosophy. Academic myopia often beggars belief. Whatever analytical remains from analytical Marxism is rather the ‘period piece’ feel, a combination of Oxford flippancy and Cambridge philistinism, besides a commendable striving for clarity. Being ‘no-nonsense’ and ‘tough-minded’ and ‘anti-bullshit’ is more a question of style than anything else. Just as nobody takes seriously Spinoza’s Euclidean pretensions or Hobbes’s aspirations to be ‘scientific’, and just as this does not prevent us from appreciating their work, the ‘analytical’ style of a certain Marxian writing, however secondary, does not preclude its insights from being illuminating or useful. But it is strange, passing strange, that an eccentric manner should be considered ‘mainstream’, while the grand tradition of post-Renaissance European social philosophy – of which Marxism is, of course, a part – should be seen as marginal. Andrew Levine also speaks about the ‘insularity’ of French academic philosophy, which reminds one of the famous English headline, ‘Fog over Channel, Continent cut off’. Marxists used to be internationalist revolutionaries, didn’t they?

- 44 ‘Notes on Adolph Wagner’ [1879–80], in Marx, *Later Political Writings*, ed. by Terrell Carver, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 232.
- 45 In the draft programme of German social democracy you could find the sentence: ‘Labour is the source of all wealth and all culture’. To which, Marx responds: ‘Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use-values (and what else is material wealth?) as labour, which is itself only the expression of a natural power, human labour power. This line can be found in any children’s primer and is correct in so far as the *implication* is that labour requires certain means and materials. However a socialist programme cannot allow a bourgeois phrase like this to conceal the very *circumstances* that give it some sense’. ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’, in Marx, *Later Political Writings*, pp. 208–9.
- 46 ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’, in Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [1923], Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000, p. 150.

- 47 ‘The transformation of the commodity relation into a thing of “ghostly objectivity” cannot... content itself with the reduction of all objects for the gratification of human needs to commodities. It stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can “own” or “dispose of” like the various objects of the external world. And there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic “qualities” into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process This rationalization of the world appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate the very depths of man’s physical and psychic nature. It is limited, however, by its own formalism On closer examination the structure of a crisis is seen to be no more than a heightening of the degree and intensity of the daily life of bourgeois society. In its unthinking, mundane reality *that* life seems firmly held together by “natural laws”; yet it can experience a sudden dislocation because the bonds uniting its various elements and partial systems are a chance affair even at their most normal. So that the pretence that society is regulated by “eternal, iron” laws which branch off into the different special laws applying to particular areas is finally revealed for what it is: a pretence. The true structure of society appears rather in the independent, rationalized and formal partial laws whose links with each other are of necessity purely formal (i.e. their formal interdependence can be formally systematized), while as far as concrete realities are concerned they can only establish fortuitous connections’ (Ibid., p. 101). It appears that contingency is the outcome of the extreme rationalization (described by Max Weber) of society’s technological, administrative, legal, logistical, military, etc. sub-systems in a framework of outlandish randomness. No truly rational control is conceivable over such a collection of disparate ‘facts’.
- 48 I spoke about this problem *à propos* Fichte (the Rousseauian and Kantian revolutionary genius) in ‘Fichte’s “Die Bestimmung des Gelehrten”: A Sketch’, *Collegium Budapest Workshop Series 12*, Budapest: Institute of Advanced Study, 1997, *passim*, and in ‘From Subjectivity to Privacy and Back Again’, *Social Research*, 69(1), Spring 2002, pp. 201–221.
- 49 *The Retreat from Class* [1986], London: Verso, 1998.
- 50 ‘In order to place ourselves firmly within the field of articulation, we must begin by renouncing the conception of “society” as founding totality of its partial processes. We must, therefore, consider the openness of the social as the constitutive ground or “negative essence” of the existing, and the diverse “social orders” as precarious and ultimately failed attempts to domesticate the field of differences’. So write Chantal

Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau in their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* [1985], London: Verso, 2001, pp. 95–6. Wood's response is rather cruel: 'After much theoretical huffing and puffing, has not the mountain laboured and brought forth – pluralism? The alternative – which always lurks menacingly in the background – is a doctrine according to which some external agency, somehow uniquely and autonomously capable of generating a hegemonic discourse out of its own inner resources, will impose it from above, giving the indeterminate mass a collective identity and creating a "people" or "nation" where none existed before. The sinister possibilities inherent in such a view are obvious'. *The Retreat from Class*, p. 63. (Two remarks here: I think more highly of Mouffe's and Laclau's talents than Meiksins Wood does; and I think the 'sinister possibilities' are already quite obvious in Gramsci's Machiavellianism. The end result, though, is indeed pluralism and the egalitarianism of 'recognition' of the contemporary NGO variety.)

- 51 An extremely interesting anthology of texts from the *Socialist Register*, centred around a few seminal articles by Ralph Miliband, discusses the case of Britain while considering the general problem of whether the construction of a cross-class alliance led by labour could ever achieve socialism: David Coates, ed., *Paving the Third Way: The Critique of Parliamentary Socialism*, London: Merlin, 2003, with contributions by Ralph Miliband, John Saville, Leo Panitch, Colin Leys, Hilary Wainwright and David Coates.
- 52 See Ernest Mandel's prescient *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism*, London: NLB, 1978. The PCI's overall political role was not all that different from that of Labour or the SPD or SPÖ.
- 53 See G.M. Tamás, 'Un capitalisme pur et simple'. There is an earlier, non-socialist essay by the same author, with some realization of this problem; See G.M. Tamás, 'Socialism, Capitalism and Modernity', in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy Revisited*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 54–68; see also my 'Victory Defeated', in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Democracy After Communism*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, pp. 126–131.
- 54 David Wootton, ed., *Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writing in Stuart England*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, pp. 285–316. Gerrard Winstanley said, 'This is your inward principle, O ye present powers of England. You do not study how to advance universal love. If you did, it would appear in action'. (*Ibid.*, p. 321). This is the authentic voice of revolution.

- 55 Moïshe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* [1993], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 160.
- 56 The philosophical doctrine of a reconstructed people – reconstructed through the abolition of commerce and the market proper – is Fichte's, in *Der geschloßne Handelsstaat* [1800], ed. by Fritz Medicus and Hans Hirsch, Philosophische Bibliothek #316, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1979, esp. pp. 89–126; cf. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage des Naturrechts* [1796], ed. by Manfred Zahn, Phil. Bibl. #256, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1991, pp. 156–184; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Staatslehre, oder über das Verhältniss des Urstaates zum Vernunftreiche...* [1813, posthumous], in I.H. Fichte, ed., *Fichtes Werke* IV, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1971, pp. 497 *ad fin.*
- 57 Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, pp. 62–3.
- 58 See Thompson's famous preface to *The Making* (p. 11): '...class is a relationship, and not a thing...'
- 59 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. It is quite instructive to compare the grand portraitists of the late bourgeoisie, Henry James, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, André Gide, Roger Martin du Gard, Robert Musil, Italo Svevo, Alberto Moravia, Tibor Déry – with Walter Benjamin. The last generations of the old bourgeoisie are distinguished by a certain weakness and tenderness towards small things; it is the first non-labouring class that has no discernible social or political function. Politics is still made by the *grands seigneurs* or the new professionals (lawyers and apparatchiki); glory, elegance and courtliness are still preserves of the nobility together with sports, duels, military prowess and sexual licence. Arts are the only terrain where neither professionalism nor 'caste' plays an important role. Inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*), plush comfort, solitude, *consumption of culture* (from newspapers to operas) are the world of the *flâneur* which he escapes by *flâner*. It is only Mann and Déry among those listed above who could be said to have been conscious of an apocalyptic dimension to all this (think of the function of toothache in *The Buddenbrooks*). These authors all believed that it should be proletarian socialism, however barbaric it may turn out to be, which takes the place of the ailing, self-indulgent, morbidly eroticized microcosm of the cultivated bourgeoisie with its Mahler and Debussy and Klimt and Schiele. They never thought of corporate management, tabloid television and pop music.
- 60 About this the best Marxian (or any kind of) analysis is by Robert Kurz in his largely untranslated books and his periodicals (*Krisis*, its lighter Austrian counterpart, *Streifzüge*, and now *Exit*). He is the thinker closest

to Moishe Postone I know of. I believe he is the most original thinker on the German, and perhaps European, Left nowadays. He deserves to be more generally known.

- 61 The intellectual history of the highly interesting and important discussions (chiefly among Marxists) on class as a problem of political philosophy is summarized (and an original solution thereof is attempted) on a very high theoretical level by Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff, *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987. It is a thousand pities that I cannot argue with it here.
- 62 A starting point in envisaging the future function of the class-in-itself would surely be the imposing work of Erik Olin Wright, the greatest authority on class today. There are continuing sociological investigations about this: see the innovative work of Stanley Aronowitz and Michael Zweig. None of the above makes their kind of valuable work superfluous, quite the contrary.
- 63 On the debate concerning the new imperialism, see G.M. Tamás, 'Isten hozta, Mr. Bush', *Élet és Irodalom* (Supplement), 22 April 2005.
- 64 'Revolutionary theory is now the sworn enemy of revolutionary ideology – and it knows it': Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* [1967], §124, New York: Zone Books, 1995, p. 90.