

Neo-Gramscian Hegemony and the International Order

• Outside of the cloistered academic world of American political realism the theory of hegemonic stability is dead. This fatality is the product not only of a sustained theoretical critique which has questioned its adequacy as a theory of collective action, as a theory of economic behaviour and as a theory of economic decline (see Strange, 1987; Snidal, 1985; and Guerrieri, 1988). An increasingly large array of historical evidence (Milward, 1984; Harper, 1986; Burnham, 1990) gleaned from recently available primary sources - the so-called revisionist view of reconstruction - has undermined an image of the postwar order as one in which a hierarchy of dominance was established amongst states by the direct exertion of United States hegemony understood in a behaviourist 'power over' or 'crude basic force' sense.

Whilst of course the United States and the Soviet Union have in the postwar period resorted to direct military intervention to re-establish 'imperialist colonial possession', it is equally clear that America's role in the reconstruction of Western Europe cannot be reduced to the exercise of such dominance. Neither is it feasible to argue that the United States

This paper assesses the neo-Gramscian analysis of the relation between states, arguing that it replicates the errors of Weberian pluralism. A capital relation approach is called for if we are to avoid over emphasising ideology in debates about capitalist restructuring.

unilaterally imposed its dominance over Western Europe in this behavioural sense through economic leverage rather than direct military intervention. Although clearly an intention of early American foreign economic policy this strategy had largely been abandoned by 1950 in the face of subtle but concerted resistance from the major Western European nations orchestrated primarily by Britain.

In partial recognition of the deficiencies of the realist notion of hegemony when applied to world orders, a sophisticated attempt has been made to reconstitute the concept in a self-consciously Gramscian fashion. The aim of this paper is to assess the explanatory power of the neo-Gramscian version of hegemony when applied to the study of international orders. I am not therefore interested in tracing the lineage of the concept or the extent to which this usage is a correct reading of Gramsci. The aim is rather to assess whether the application of the neo-Gramscian concepts of hegemony, historic bloc, extended state and civil society as developed by such writers as Robert Cox and utilised by the 'Amsterdam school of international relations'¹ provide the basis for a sophisticated understanding of the global inter-state system.

**Beyond
international
relations theory**

The most rigorous adaptation of Gramsci's thought to the study of the contemporary global political economy has been undertaken by Robert Cox and presented in his impressive analysis of the role of social forces in the making of history (Cox, 1987).

Cox's approach to the study of international relations is informed by a critical philosophy which aims to identify the potential for structural transformation and the determination of breaking points between successive structures which would, it is assumed, enable an organised working class to advance the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. His framework is oriented to a study of strategic consciousness and ideology formation at the ruling class level linking such formation to the historical cycle of successive world orders. This ambitious project is a valuable attempt to escape the theoretical bankruptcy of state-versus-society centred political realist analysis which as Halliday (1989) plausibly argues is Social Darwinism on an international scale, shorn of its explicit racism.

The notion of hegemony developed by Cox out of Gramsci's fragmentary *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci, 1971) is located within the discourse of 'transnational historical materialism'. This affords a structural concept of power wherein the constitution of a stable order is the result of a manufactured compatibility between dominant ideas, institutions and material capabilities. In a move evocative of the Parsonian model of dyadic interaction structured around 'pattern variables', Cox theorises that all structure is the outcome of interaction between these three variables (ideas, institutions and material capabilities) each of which possesses a real autonomy- 'no determinism need be assumed' (Cox, 1986 p.218). Hegemonic structures are distinguished from non-hegemonic inasmuch as those in control of institutions do not predominantly resort to the use of force since the controlled accept the prevailing power relation as legitimate. This acquiescence is strengthened if the controllers make concessions to the dominated and express their leadership in terms of a universal general interest. Whilst the power basis of hegemonic structures is thus implicit, the management of power relations in non-hegemonic orders is always to the forefront.

At the international level Cox's abstract triad is translated into the historical study of social forces generated by the production process, forms of state derived from state/society complexes and world orders - each level interrelated but with no universal causality assumed. Historical phases are thereby identified when a coherent fit has occurred between material power, the development of collective world images and the administration of an order through a set of institutions claiming universality. These are hegemonic phases - periods of relative stability in the international order - distinguishable from non-hegemonic phases where 'states advance and protect the interests of particular national social classes' (Cox, 1987a p.8), no single power can establish its legitimacy and international instability is the result.

Initially Cox theorised world hegemony as an outward expansion of internal national hegemony established by a dominant social class. In this reading world hegemony is not simply another order but one in which a dominant mode of production, culture and system of social institutions penetrates all countries within an orbit exploiting subordinate

modes of production - 'world hegemony is describable as a social structure, an economic structure, and a political structure; and it cannot simply be one of these things but must be all three.' (Cox, 1987b pp.171-2). As an analysis of the material capabilities (economic and political power) of nation states related to the cycle of *pax hegemonica* the neo-Gramscian approach is barely distinguishable from a sophisticated neo-realist account.² It simply yields a reading of the last 100 years as 1845-1875 - hegemonic; 1875-1945 non-hegemonic; 1945-1965 - hegemonic; 1965-present non-hegemonic (Cox, 1983 p.170).

For its advocates however the real inspiration of this adaptation of Gramsci lies in the exhortation to consider global structural change and world order in terms of 'the dynamics and dialectics of their normative (ethical, ideological, practical) as well as their material dimensions.' (Gill and Law, 1989).

The precursor to the creation of a hegemonic order is therefore the formation of a 'historic bloc' organised around a set of hegemonic ideas - a 'dominant ideology' - which temporarily forms the basis for an alliance between social classes. A successful bloc is thereby politically organised through the exercise of 'intellectual and moral leadership' and forms the organic (long-term) as opposed to conjunctural (short-term) link between political and civil society. For neo-Gramscians the state is held to comprise not only the machinery of government but also aspects of 'civil society' press, church, mass culture - which stabilise existing power relations. The emergence of a new historic bloc is the result of conscious planned struggle. Employing this 'extended concept of the state' - machinery of coercion plus machinery for the organisation of consent (Cox, 1987 p.409) - it is argued that a new bloc is not established by capturing the state but is established through the articulation of 'persuasive ideas and arguments (Gramsci's 'ethico-political' level) which build on and catalyse its political networks and organisations.' (Gill and Law, 1989 p.476).

A hegemonic world order therefore emerges out of the successful formation of an international historic bloc of social forces which in turn is premised upon the articulation of a dominant ideology accepted by subordinate classes. This international historic bloc is not simply a cross national alliance

of capitalist interests. Its success rests on the incorporation and persuasion of the working class to accept as legitimate a new institutional context and its associated values.

Seen from this perspective the implementation of the postwar Keynesian structure of accumulation rested on the articulation of the ideals of the corporate liberal international historic bloc which incorporated fractions of capital, the state and labour movement representatives in a trans-Atlantic alliance. Similarly it is argued that the implementation of a new 'regime of accumulation' depends ultimately on the attainment of a new transnational hegemony organised around the monetarist celebration of capital domination, free enterprise and open markets, inasmuch as 'the broad contours of any new regime of accumulation will be partly shaped by the ideological climate at the national and international levels.' (Gill and Law, 1989 p.489).

The pioneering application of Gramscian concepts to the international level in addition to the related writing of the 'Amsterdam school' (van der Pijl, 1984; Overbeek, 1990) represents an important attempt to re-cast academic international relations on a wider inter-disciplinary footing.

In its present form however the neo-Gramscian approach in its frantic attempt to escape the twin evils of 'economism' and idealism offers little more than a version of Weberian pluralism oriented to the study of the international order. The Weberian approach to the social order is committed to accepting both the structural variability and the historical specificity of data. Variables which comprise a social order the economy, the polity and civil society - are given no overall structure but rather each has a real autonomy which precludes overdetermination. This position is often championed by neo-Weberians as offering a methodology which has no preconceived image of society or its patterning and thus displaces both reductionism and theoreticism. Weber usefully summarises his 'middle way' between economism and idealism when he says that 'not ideas but ideal and material interests directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the "world images" that have been created by "ideas" have, like switch-men, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest.' (Weber, 1948 p.280).

Pluralism revisited

This factor approach is reflected in Cox's analysis to the effect that in the interaction between material capabilities, ideas and institutions no determinism exists, and relationships are reciprocal. The question of lines of force is a historical one to be answered by a study of the particular case.

However laudable in theory, the true consequence of this position is to produce a pluralist empiricism which lacks the power to explain either the systematic connection between values, social relations and institutions or the extent to which the historical appearance of capital as a social relation transforms the social order in such a way that all relations are subsumed under the capital relation as the basis of the valorisation process.

The Weberian framework is rooted in an analysis of social action which leads to an understanding of individual meanings and motives and the development of a typology of motivational characteristics. Actions are classified not only in terms of typical value orientations but also according to the types of means and ends to which they are directed - hence types of action and corresponding organisations must be analysed independently of one another. This approach cannot grasp the complexity of an increasingly interdependent global political economy in which, governed by the law of value, social relations between people take the form of relations between things. The social form of the capitalist relations of production invalidates an approach which simply begins from the individual. The principal substantive defect of Cox's unwitting restatement of pluralist analysis on an international level is that the *species differentia* of capitalism is obscured and the theory therefore remains fundamentally non-propositional allocating equal weight to each and any 'variable'.

An analysis of the inter-state system which recognises the centrality of the capital relation need not however be conflated with base/superstructure reductionism. The social relations of production are not simply another 'sphere' or 'factor' to be considered alongside normative or ethico-political 'levels'. The capital relation is the basis of the valorisation process on which the entire edifice of capitalism is constructed. The relations of production are not therefore the economic 'level'. Rather as Marx clarifies in *Wage Labour and Capital* 'the relations of production in their totality constitute what are called the social relations, society and specifically, a society at a definite historical stage of development.' (Marx and Engels, 1977 p.212).

The consequence of taking Gramsci's 'revision' of Marx at face value is to end up however unwittingly in the 'post Marxist' camp struggling to escape an economism which in reality owes more to the Second and Third Internationals than to Marx. In so doing the neo-Gramscian approach displaces an analysis rooted in the contradictions of the capital relation with a pre-occupation on the articulation of ideology. To what extent however is the restructuring of capital, the restoration of the conditions for profitability, or the development of a new 'regime of accumulation', dependent on the articulation of a 'dominant ideology' accepted by subordinate classes in the context of a wider historic bloc?

An analysis of how the current inter-state system developed in the crucial period of postwar reconstruction leaves little doubt that a neo-Gramscian factor approach necessarily leads to an overestimation of the importance of ideology in economic policy formation. A recent analysis of the pattern of postwar reconstruction inspired by Cox for instance suggests that a Gramscian approach with its emphasis on ideas and culture is better placed to explain certain aspects of inter-state relations than is realist theory (Gill and Law, 1988 p.79). These authors argue that in terms of a rational calculus of long-term costs and benefits for the United Kingdom, it is difficult to explain the priority given by the United Kingdom to relations with the United States and the Commonwealth at a time when a historic opportunity arose in the shape of the emerging European Community. This 'apparently irrational choice of policy', they suggest, is fully explained through a 'Gramscian analysis of the nature of the consciousness of the British leadership' (ibid p.79). An argument is therefore constructed that the path of British postwar reconstruction was determined largely by the 'world-view of the British ruling classes' with 'Anglo-Saxon cultural chauvinism' (perpetuated at institutions such as Harrow) 'at the heart of this world-view' (ibid). Gill and Law therefore conclude that a congruence existed between hegemonic ideas - the consciousness of the British leadership - and dominant material forces (which the document as a pattern of British foreign investment and trade focused largely on the United States and the Colonies) which shaped British foreign policy at this time.

**Ideology and
accumulation:
the case of
postwar
reconstruction**

Similarly their recent study of the structural power of capital is paradoxically an analysis of the 'tenacity of normative structures' (Gill and Law, 1989 p.480) which leads to the suggestion that a new regime of accumulation has its roots in the theories of 'organic intellectuals'.

The accentuation of this dimension of neo-Gramscian theory replicates the errors identified by Tomlinson (1981) in his discussion of the relation of economic policy to economic theory. The familiar presentation of the rise of the Keynesian accumulation regime, with which neo-Gramscian theory is in accord, suggests that it was introduced as a result of the Keynesian 'revolution' in economic theory cemented by the publication of the *General Theory* in 1936, overturning the previously dominant 'Treasury view' (Howson, 1975). Tomlinson points out that this presentation to which Keynes himself adhered (witness the infamous remark that 'practical men ... are usually the slaves of some defunct economist') implies that economic policy is derived from theory, that 'the history of policy is the history of theory (with lags)' (Tomlinson, 1981 p.77).

This accentuation of the role of ideology formulated by organic intellectuals in determining economic regimes carries with it the proposition that policy is conditioned by the consciousness of the policy maker. The barrier to the implementation of a new regime is the construction and articulation of a new ideology around which a new historic bloc can emerge. At the heart of neo-Gramscian analysis is therefore a slide towards an idealist account of the determination of economic policy. Alternatively an analysis rooted in the capital relation approach has little recourse to invocations of the 'nature of consciousness'. Constraints on public expenditure and deficits are not to be conceived as the product of the ideology of decision makers (Tomlinson, 1981 p.85).

Britain's preference in 1945 for an Atlantic and Commonwealth trading system had little to do with the consciousness of policy makers or the articulation of a persuasive ideology. Whilst it is true to suggest that British foreign investment in the United States increased in the latter half of the nineteenth century, this increase mirrored the general growth of the City of London as the world's major commercial and financial centre and the ability of sterling to

finance approximately 60% of *world* trade between 1860 and 1913 (Williams, 1968). The growth of British foreign investment and the extension of British banks into the banking structure of a number of foreign nations, not simply the United States, was concomitantly very high. Joslin (1963) indicates for instance that by 1914 British banks controlled a third of the deposits of the Brazilian banking system and over a quarter of those lodged in Argentina and Chile.

Secondly with regard to the pattern of British trade it is misleading to claim that 'most of it was in the United States' and the Commonwealth with very little directed to Continental Europe (Gill and Law, 1988 p.79). Whilst of course following the 1931 crisis in the international monetary system Britain continued to trade heavily with the nations of the Sterling Bloc and following the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 with the nations of the Sterling Area, Britain from 1910 to 1952 sold no more than 6% of its domestic exports in the United States compared with a figure averaging almost 30% of United Kingdom exports to Western Europe (Milward, 1984 tables 39 and 40). By 1938 the United Kingdom had an import surplus with every European country (except Greece and Turkey) with the flow in particular of European foodstuffs (with grain an exception) chiefly directed to the United Kingdom who drew 22% of her total food imports from Europe (Burnham, 1990 p.19).

A neo-Gramscian emphasis on ideas and culture with the scant and misleading addition of 'dominant material forces' cannot adequately explain the pattern of European postwar reconstruction. The restructuring of accumulation occurs in a context of inter-imperialist rivalry in which nation-states seek temporarily to overcome the contradictions of the capital relation which are manifest in uneven development. A neo-Gramscian approach submerges this focus on the contradictions of the capital relation and leads to the assertion that ideas are to be accorded equal weight to 'material capabilities'.

However, continuing the example of postwar reconstruction, it is evident that the primary barrier to rapid accumulation in 1945 was the uneven development of world capitalism which had produced disequilibrium in production and trade between the Eastern and Western hemispheres. To generate economic growth in 1945 Western Europe needed

to construct an international payments system which would facilitate trade and secure regular import of essential commodities and raw materials. The British state's economic strategy therefore turned on finding a solution to its balance of payments problems which were a manifestation of this disequilibrium. To expand the economy the state had to meet its existing balance of payments deficit (huge sterling balances and other accumulated liabilities since 1939) in addition to finding extra dollars to pay for imports of essential materials abundant only in the United States. The need to maximise accumulation was thus translated into the need to accumulate world currency. Britain's strategy was to construct an international payments system which allowed maximum commodity trade in inconvertible sterling whilst minimising the outflow of dollars needed for purchases in the United States. The British state's path to 1951 through the Washington Loan Agreement, the 1947 Convertibility crisis, the Marshall Plan, sterling devaluation in 1949 and Korean rearmament in 1950, was thus one bound by material constraints which were themselves products of uneven world development. These constraints - expressed directly in balance of payments crises - ruled out the viability of taking the European route. This is clearly shown in the episode of the Washington agreement where, in response to Richard Clarke's suggestion (from the Overseas Finance Division of the Treasury) to build a European group instead of accepting a US loan, Keynes sardonically observed: 'from which countries can we expect to borrow what we have failed to obtain from the United States? ... the alternative is to build up a separate economic bloc which excludes Canada and consists of countries to which we already owe more than we can pay, on the basis of their agreeing to lend us money they have not got and buy from us and from one another goods we are unable to supply.' (Keynes, 1979).

It was not therefore contending theories but fluctuations in the balance of payments which determined at what pace the British state would adopt multilateral trade and payments arrangements. European integration and the scrapping of Commonwealth relationships was materially inconceivable for the state since the viability of this route rested on the slow restructuring of production and trade to support generalised currency convertibility.

The British state's strategy was a response to the particular nature of uneven material development as it stood in the world economy in 1945. Strategic options were tightly circumscribed by this uneven development. The international restructuring of accumulation occurs in a context of inter-imperialist rivalry in which nation states struggle to overcome the contradictions of the capital relation. In obscuring this point the professed strength of neo-Gramscian analysis is in fact its greatest weakness. Taking the case of reconstruction as an example it is clear that when assessing the determinants of restructuring the starting point remains Marx's injunction in the 1859 *Preface* that:

just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge ... a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production. (Marx and Engels, 1987 p.263).

The attempt to move beyond 'economism' has the result that ideas, institutions and material capabilities are accorded equal weight. Analysis is thereby reduced to a pluralist factor study which offers a misleading appraisal of how capitalist social relations are reproduced and how capitalist crises are resolved. If it is believed that the transition from one 'regime' to another is largely a matter of constructing a historic bloc this obscures that the basis for the resolution of crisis is laid in the sacrifice of inefficient capitals as the means to further accumulation - as Weeks clarifies, 'the same process that makes crisis necessary also provides for recovery, renewed accumulation.' (Weeks, 1981). The foundation for a theory of the inter-state system lies therefore in a study of the material conditions which foster restructuring.

To put the point simply, capital does not wait for the articulation of the ideology of monetarism before restructuring. The articulation of ideology is important for the political legitimization of a set of policies that by and large have already been implemented. The contradictions of the capital relation and the nature of competition in the world market determine the path and the pace of particular state strategies.

They are not determined by groups of organic intellectuals gathered in cloistered circles who then produce a policy which state officials decide to implement. This latter idealist account of policy implementation is a type of pluralism which sees the state as at the behest of external pressure groups; only, in this case, membership of the groups is restricted solely to fractions of the ruling class. In neo-Gramscian analysis the focus is shifted from identifying the specific form of the contradictions of the capital relation to the question of how a ruling class fraction can articulate an ideology to win the hearts and minds of other capital fractions, the working class and key state personnel. Aside from the realisation that accumulation regimes are simply different 'modes of domination' (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979) in which the working class are either 'included' merely on an ideological level or transparently excluded as in the monetarist form, the structural dynamics of capitalism make recourse to the role of ideas clearly subordinate in an analysis of restructuring. Neither, as sociology has striven to grasp for the last twenty five years, does the systemic integration of capitalism depend on the social integration of individuals.

**Capitalist
reproduction,
ideology and
integration**

In presenting the argument that the historic bloc is the organic link between structure and superstructure organised around a set of hegemonic ideas comprising the dominant ideology (Gill, 1986 p.210), the neo-Gramscian framework falls foul not only of a mechanistic interpretation of Marx but offers a version of normative functionalism long discarded even by academic sociology. The major contribution for instance of Erving Goffman is to show that there is a considerable potential separation between the practices individuals sustain in day-to-day social reproduction and the overall symbolic order normatively sanctioned by dominant groups. As Giddens (1981 pp.65-6) usefully summarises, the taken-for-granted cannot inevitably be equated with the accepted-as-legitimate.

Drawing on Althusser, Giddens' account of ideology carries a sophistication which eludes the neo-Gramscian presentation. Cox (1986 p.218) sees ideology as a set of shared notions of the nature of social relations or as collective images of the social order. However an analysis of 'beliefs about' how society is constituted obscures a focus on the ideological effects

of material practices. The notion of a 'dominant ideology' consisting of shared beliefs legitimating a social order is thoroughly discredited on both empirical and theoretical grounds (see for instance Abercrombie *et al*, 1980). In its place is the understanding that in principle some of the most potent forms of ideological mobilisation 'do not rest upon shared beliefs (or shared normative commitments); rather they operate in and through the forms in which day to day life is organised.' (Giddens, 1981 p.68).

This understanding of the ideological effects of material practices has its roots in Marx's observation that capitalist reproduction is achieved largely through the 'dull compulsion of economic relations'. Marx's ironic double freedom whereby as a free individual a worker can dispose of his/her labour power as his/her commodity, whilst on the other hand he/she has no other commodity for sale - a worker is 'free of all the objects needed for the realisation of his labour-power' (Marx, 1976 p.273) - clearly indicates that capitalism does not rely on the social integration of individuals. Labour power exists only as a capacity of a mortal individual whose existence presupposes the daily reproduction of the means of subsistence. The owner of labour power must therefore appear continuously in the market as the only means within capitalism of securing material reproduction. This is the importance of Marx's prefatory methodological remark that 'my standpoint from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed ... can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains ... however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.' (ibid p.92). Individuals are to be theorised primarily as bearers of social relations and it is only by utilising this framework, crudely and incompletely constructed by Ricardo, that Marx could elaborate a sophisticated labour theory of value whereby the creation of new value takes place not by the virtue of the particularities of labour (spinning, joinery, jewel-making) but because it is labour in general, abstract social labour - 'and we see also that the value added is of a certain definite amount, not because his labour has a particular useful content but because it lasts for a definite length of time.' (ibid p.308).

The systemic integration of capitalism is achieved as the working class, as bearers of social relations, sell their labour power in order to meet their subsistence requirements.

Theories of incorporation and integration, of which the dominant ideology thesis is one, rely on the famous 'over-socialised concept of man' (see the still pertinent essay by D. Wrong, 1961). The working class have no normative commitment to capitalism, there is no social integration beyond the brittle bond of the callous 'cash nexus' which is liable to snap in recession.

The explanatory power of the concept of an international historic bloc pales therefore before the twin realisation that recovery from crisis is inherent in the process of capitalist reproduction and that the systemic integration of capitalism is not dependent on the internalisation of shared norms understood in terms of a dominant ideology.

**Conclusion:
Towards a
theory of the
international
state**

The neo-Gramscian approach to the world order seeks to replace state centred frameworks with a study of class forces and their operation in national/international contexts. Nevertheless the international order is still primarily one of politically constructed nation states which provide both the domestic political underpinning for the mobility of capital and offer rudimentary institutional schemes aimed at securing international property rights as a basis for the continued expansion of capital (Chase-Dunn, 1981). Whilst during the twentieth century the dominant force for global economic internationalisation has been the transnational corporation (see Picciotto, 1988; 1990), TNC's clearly favour an inter-state system founded on nation state imperialist rivalry. TNC's rely not only on the services provided by nation states in terms of internal security and the reproduction of a compliant working class; they also favour competition between nation states to enhance the structural power of transnational capital. The scramble of nation states to attract TNC's to their shores high lights this structural power which is further evidenced in the 'political and economic risk analysis' undertaken by TNC's in appraising concessions and inducements offered by nation states.³

It is a fallacy therefore to suppose that the importance of the nation state in the world order has diminished with the rapid internationalisation of capital. The starting point for a productive analysis of the international order is thus the recognition of the durability of the nation state - in other words it is incumbent upon analysts to develop a theory of the

international state. The elements of such a theory are not to be found in Weberian pluralism or Realist transhistorical pronouncements on the nature of power. Rather they are to be developed from the capital relation approach to the state (see Holloway and Picciotto, 1977; 1978) which recognises that historically the 'apparent separation' of the polity and the economy is bound up with the rise of capitalism as a distinct set of social relations. Whilst there remains an urgent need for a detailed historical analysis of the rise of Western European states the strength of the capital relation position is that it dispenses with the tautologous relative autonomy debate and posits both logically and historically (insofar as present research allows) the internal and necessary implication of the state in the social relations of production. This is not however to conflate state and capital in the manner characteristic of neo-Gramscian approaches as developed in their most sophisticated form by the 'Amsterdam school' of international relations.

Drawing on Gramsci, both van der Pijl (1984) and Overbeek (1990) develop the notion of a 'comprehensive concept of control' which represents the unity of a critical mass of interests forming the basis for a new programme and the constellation of (national and international) economic and class forces providing the structural context in which interests are politically articulated. A concept of control therefore represents a bid for hegemony: a project for the conduct of public affairs and social control which transcends narrowly defined fractional interests and which 'combines mutually compatible strategies in the fields of labour relations, socio economic policy and foreign policy on the basis of a class compromise entailing specific economic and/or ideological rewards for the dominated classes and class fractions involved.' (Overbeek, 1990).

In essence such 'concepts' are similar to Gramsci's notion of a historic bloc. Serving as the rallying point for a fraction of the ruling class and capable of attracting a mass following, a concept is potentially hegemonic if it combines satisfactory blue-prints for the handling of relations between fractions of capital. For the Amsterdam theorists concepts of control can be defined 'from certain ideal-types related to the functional perspective of specific capital fractions.' (van der Pijl, 1984 p.8). These ideal-types reflect the vantage point of circulating

and productive capital respectively and are developed as the 'money-capital' and the 'productive-capital' concepts of control from which 'historically specific, and increasingly synthetic, strategies for adjusting bourgeois rule and international relations to the ongoing process of internationalisation were developed' (ibid p.9). By way of concrete example van der Pijl argues that when productive capital is in crisis the money capital concept presents itself as the obvious, rational solution - 'it is this correspondence between the objective state of capitalist society and the particular solution proposed by a single class-fraction (in this case the bankers and owners), which allows the rest of capitalist society a view of the whole which under other circumstances only bankers have; hence, which makes for bankers' class consciousness to crystallise and gain the upper hand.' (ibid pp.334).

Consequently this neo-Gramscian approach apparently renders a theory of the state redundant. A new accumulation strategy is the result again of conscious planned struggle organised by intellectuals from the vantage point of capital fractions articulating a particular ideal which incorporates other elements of the ruling class, the state and the representatives of the working class. Both the state and working class struggle therefore recede from view in this approach since state strategy is explained as the outcome of fractional struggles which take place in cloistered ruling class circles by invitation only such as the meetings of the Trilateral Commission, the Mont Pelerin Society and the Bilderberg conferences.

The consequence of this approach is the view that an accumulation strategy pursued by the state can be explained as the outcome of a fractional struggle. As Clarke (1990) identifies, this merely moves pluralism one step further back since the restructuring of the forms of the state and of political representation are seen as the result of class and fractional conflicts which take place outside of the confines of the existing institutional forms of politics, so that there is a kind of 'state behind the state'.⁴ This type of fractionalist account is beset with the familiar problems of representation and calculation.⁵ Put briefly, whilst fractional interests may be represented in policy-making this process can never simply be reduced to such representation. Similarly the way in which any group conceives of its interest is always ambiguous and open to revision. The analysis of postwar reconstruction cited

above highlights the inadequacy of attempting to understand the development of an accumulation strategy in terms of the primacy of the political rather than one rooted in the imperatives which accumulation imposes on the particular form of the capitalist state.

The state as an aspect of the social relations of production must be seen at one remove from the interests of particular capitals since the form of the state dictates that its role is to address the contradictory foundations of accumulation in the guise of meeting the interests of capital-in-general. The conceptual distinction between particular capitals and capital-in-general is as Rosdolsky (1977 pp.51-3) points out not only the key to understanding the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, it also represents first and foremost a blueprint without which Marx's entire economic system could not have been developed. It is clarified in the *Grundrisse* that 'capital-in general is no mere abstraction. If I regard the total capital of, for example, a nation, as distinct from total wage labour (or landed property), or if I regard capital as the general economic basis of a class as distinct from another class, then I regard it in general.' (Marx, 1973 p.852).

The Gramscian inspired view that state policy is the result of ruling class fractions deciding a line which is then either forced on or chosen by state officials sanctions an autonomous view of the state released from the constraints inherent in its form as an aspect of the social relations of production. The example of postwar reconstruction clearly indicates that the state is neither autonomous nor external to accumulation as is implied by Cox (1987 p.5) when he argues that the state is 'content empty' and can 'consecrate a type of production relation as the dominant, legitimate, hegemonic form'. State strategy cannot be at the behest of a capital fraction since the state embodies the power of capital-in general against the direct demands of particular capitals - 'just because individuals seek only their particular interest, which for them does not coincide with their communal interest... the latter will be imposed on them as an interest "alien" to them, and "independent" of them, as in its turn a particular, peculiar "general interest".' (Marx, 1964 pp.45-6).

In terms of the overall circuit of capital, although there is an interdependence between capitals both in production and circulation this relationship is obscured in competition - the

locomotive force of the bourgeois economy in which everything is presented in an inverted fetishised form - as capitals seek by whatever means to secure the highest rate of return. The conflictual interests of particular capitals in competition are mediated through the mechanism of the market. The reproduction of total social capital (and paradoxically of particular capitals) therefore depends on the subordination of all particular capitals to the authority of the market. In this way the state meets the interest of capital-in general by enforcing the discipline of the market through the rule of law and the rule of money.⁶ The significant point is that within the capitalist system there is no other basis for the formation of the general interest other than the state. The state therefore does not have a political autonomy. Rather its role is to express the general conditions of accumulation and devise overall economic strategy. Whilst this may favour particular capitals at specific points this is an unintended consequence of policy and there is no necessary relation to their political representation. If we take a further example from the postwar period, it is often argued⁷ that the City of London forced its policies on the state to the long-term detriment of productive capital. But this overlooks the fact that the restoration of sterling was essential to restore productive capital, and far from acting as the fifth columnist it was the City and the Treasury with an interest in the restoration of sterling that offered the most resistance to American multilateral objectives. State strategy was therefore directed to restoring the conditions for general profitability.

The form of the capitalist state therefore delineates its role as removing barriers to accumulation - barriers realised as financial crises. In developing a strategy to expand accumulation the limits of state action are determined by the fact that such a strategy is constrained by an existing pattern of economic development which is a legacy of uneven world development.

The neo-Gramscian analysis of the international order at face value seems to hold out great potential for an insightful analysis of the inter-state system. On closer inspection however it simply offers a pluralist analysis of global capitalism which overemphasises the role of ideology in economic policy and regime formation, illegitimately invokes the dominant ideology thesis and fails to specify its implicit fractionalist theory of the state. By contrast the capital relation approach

to the state provides the elements from which a theory of the international state can be formulated as the basis for understanding the contemporary global inter-state system.

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1. For an overview of the 'Amsterdam' perspective on international relations see van der Pijl (1984) and Overbeek (1990).
 2. See for instance a similar account of *pax hegemonica* cycles in Keohane (1984) and Gilpin (1987).
 3. Gill and Law (1989) p.484 provide some interesting observations on this 'political and economic risk analysis'.
 4. For a more general critique of fractionalism, see Clarke (1978).
 5. Tomlinson (1981) discusses such problems.
 6. This interpretation of Marx is rigorously presented by Clarke (1988).
 7. An example of this misconceived argument is found in Fine and Harris (1986).

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