Labour/Le Travailleur

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Volume 50, 2002

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt50pre03

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)
1911-4842 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Matthews, W. (2002). The Poverty of Strategy: E.P. Thompson, Perry Anderson, and the Transition to Socialism. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *50*, 217–242.

Résumé de l'article

La question de la transition au socialisme préoccupe les Marxistes depuis le 19e siècle. Cette thèse mène une enquête sur la façon dont deux socialistes britanniques remarquables au 20e siècle — E.P. Thompson et Perry Anderson — cherchaient à répondre à la question « Qu'est-ce qu'il faut faire ? » En faisant cela, la thèse prévoit une révision des histoires conventionnelles de la nouvelle gauche. Elle constate qu'il y a eu beaucoup plus de continuité en tre la « première » et la « deuxième » nou velle gauche qu'il a été conventionnellement supposé. Et elle suggère aussi que cette continuité est évidente dans une comparaison en tre la stratégie socialiste de Thompson et celle d'Anderson du début au milieu des années 1960.

The Poverty of Strategy: E.P. Thompson, Perry Anderson, and the Transition to Socialism

Wade Matthews

"WHAT IS TO BE DONE?" The question has haunted socialists in the West since Marx and Engels hastily penned the *Communist Manifesto* in the frenetic months before the Europe-wide revolutions of 1848. For Marx, Britain, "demiurge of the bourgeois cosmos,"[1] was not only the geographical and material locus of the development of historical materialism, it was also the key to a transition from capitalism to socialism.[2] Given the definite association that scientific socialism's creators had established between the accumulation of capital, the character of property relations, and the nature of the transformation of those relations, Britain automatically appeared as the solution to the problem of a transition to an imagined socialist future.[3] Yet, despite the scientificity of their practice, Marx and Engels waxed and

[1]K. Marx, "The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850," in *Political Writings —Karl Marx; Volume 2: Surveys from Exile*, David Fernbach, ed. (London 1973), 130.
[2]As Engels in the "Preface" to the English edition of *Capital* suggested, Marx's "whole theory is the result of a life-long study of the economic history and condition of England." See F. Engels, "Preface," in K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I, trans. by B. Fowkes (Harmondsworth 1976), 113.
[3]"The English working class" — Marx repeatedly reiterated — "undeniably casts the decisive weight in the scales of social emancipation in general." See "Marx to Kugelman, London, 29 November 1869," in *Political Writings – Karl Marx; Volume 3: The First International and After*, D. Fernbach ed. (London 1974), 165. See also Marx, "The Class Struggles in France," 131; K. Marx, "Letter to the Labour Parliament," London, 9 March 1854, in *Surveys from Exile*, 277-9; and K. Marx, "International Class Conflict," in *On Revolution*, S.K. Padover, ed. (New York 1971), 36.

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waned on Britain's role as the necessary site of the explosion of the capitalist integument.[4] By 1870 Marx was arguing that the British working class, despite having everything materially necessary for a social revolution, lacked the requisite "*revolutionary passion*"[5] to fundamentally transform capitalist relations of production. For Engels it was not only the necessary insurrectionary fervour they lacked: the British working class was also devoid of a "sense of theory."[6] Indeed, by the 1880s the intimate relationship between industrial development and class struggle and proletarian revolution, which had been so critical to the construction of historical materialism, appeared to be unravelling as the growth of a revolutionary consciousness lagged behind developing productive forces. A more fundamental contradiction at the centre of Marxist discourse, however, obscured these questions. In brief, it was never clear to Marx and Engels how a transition to socialism would be effected at all — oscillating as they did between a conception of the transition as the product of the will of the working class and as a consequence (at times inevitable!) of the development of productive forces; alternating between a conception of their own intellectual practice as a "politics of revolution" and a "science of capitalism."[7] If they remained consistently ambivalent about the nature of the "new historic form," then they remained equally equivocal on how it would be realized. Would it be a consequence of the development of the productive forces or would it be the effect of developments outside of objective conditions working on the con-

[4]Although at times Marx shifted the burden of socialist transition to France, he always maintained that if the revolutionary spark was lit on the continent then it would nonetheless have its "roots in England." See Marx, "The Class Struggles in France," 130-1. And, of course, Marx had interesting things to say about the prospect of socialist revolution on the periphery of capitalism. For more on this see the collection of essays in the first part of T. Shanin, ed., *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the Peripheries of Capitalism* (London 1983).

[5]K. Marx, "The General Council to the Federal Council of French Switzerland," in *The First International*, 116 (emphasis in original). For more on Marx's' relationship to the British working class see E. Hobsbawm, "Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement," in E. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (London 1999, org. 1973), 11-129.

[6]F. Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (London, 1937, org. 1874), 27. Indeed as early as 1858 Engels had lamented that the "English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois." See K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Britain* (London 1954), 522, quoted in G. Stedman Jones, "Some Notes on Karl Marx and the English Labour Movement," *History Workshop Journal*, 18 (Autumn 1984), 127.

[7]For something like this distinction in the work of Marx see A.W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (London 1980), 32-64. But also see M. Desai, *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism* (London 2002), 37-53. This tension in Marx's work — between the "science of capitalism" and the "politics of revolution" — is in some ways homologous to the tension that Kant revealed in Enlightenment thought between science (deterministic) and morality (a product of free will).

sciousness of the working class? Would objective economic conditions or subjective will form the fundamental constituent of a transition to socialism?[8]

These problems — how might a revolutionary transition to socialism be effected? and what role might Britain play in such a transition? — were as real (and just as recalcitrant to solution) to Marxists in Britain in the 1960s as they were to Marx and Engels in the Victorian period. The Bolshevik revolution and the development of European social democracy had, of course, intervened in the 20th century to offer alternative solutions to these questions, but the problem of how a successful transition to the new historic form might be made in the West remained unresolved, a seemingly permanent ambiguity in Marxist theory and practice. Indeed by the 1950s the apparent successes and failures of communism and social democracy had rendered even more elusive a solution to the question of transition in the metropoles of capitalism. Just as communism was consolidated as a system east of the Elbe and social democracy was in the process of transforming the nature of the state to its west, it was just these two dominant theories of transition that were being increasingly called into question. For if Soviet communism had revealed in stark form its true nature in 1956, then social democracy, in the immediate period after the defeat of fascism, had exposed its ability to coexist with both capitalism and "the bomb."[9] Neither communism nor social democracy appeared an adequate solution to the problem of "what is to be done." The genesis of a New Left in Britain in this period was an effect of this (socialist) discontent.

II

The New Left was a product of a number of *contexts* — contexts, which were in equal measure international and domestic. On the one hand it emerged as a "socialist humanist" response to the ossification of international communism, which had been revealed most clearly — "through the smoke of Budapest" — in 1956, and to the abstract but potentially destructive determinism of cold war ideology and the logic of two camp politics.[10] On the other it emerged as a response to transforma-

[8]At least in his polemics with Bakunin, Marx was clear that economic conditions *not* will would bring about the transition to socialism. See *Marx on Bakunin* (1875); MEW XVIII 633f., cited in David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction* (London 1971), 211.

[9]The bomb became a central metaphor of New Left discourse. See for example Editorial, "Beyond the Bomb," *New Reasoner: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Humanism*, 1,4 (1957), 1-3.

[10]The reference is, of course, to the famous essay by E.P. Thompson of the same name. See E.P. Thompson, "Through the Smoke of Budapest," *Reasoner: A Journal of Discussion*, ed. E.P. Thompson and John Saville, Final Issue (November 1956), reproduced in D. Widgery, *The Left in Britain, 1956-968* (Harmondsworth 1976), 66-72.

tions in both capitalism and the ideology of social democracy in Britain.[11] Against the orthodoxies of "official" Marxism, the New Left sought to uncover the libertarian spirit within socialist discourse, a spirit that, according to Thompson, could be traced back to Blake, and Morris, and forward to the aspirations of communists during the popular front period.[12] It reaffirmed in opposition to Stalinism the value of morality over class interest; of humans over "things"; of the integrity and autonomy of ideas over mechanical conceptions of the relationship between base and superstructure; of "real men and women" over "resounding abstractions"; of "the revolutionary perspectives of communism" over the terrorizing dogmatisms of Stalinism; of the importance of moral choice and reason over anti-intellectualism; and of the agency of men and women over the determinism of beasts.[13] In short it sought to humanize socialism in the face of the "smoke pall" of Stalinist prohibitions.[14] But the New Left not only advanced a new interpretation of communism. Along with, but in opposition to, revisionism, it is also sought to illuminate the true nature of a transformed capitalist mode of production.

[11]For the international context see among a huge literature the following: J. Saville, "The XXth Congress and the British Communist Party," in R. Miliband and J. Saville, ed., *Socialist Register, 1976* (London 1976); B. D. Palmer, *The Making of E.P. Thompson: Marxism, Humanism and History* (Toronto 1981), 45-63; E. Hobsbawm, "1956," *Marxism Today* (November 1986); and J. Saville, "Edward Thompson, The Communist Party and 1956," in R. Miliband and L. Panitch, eds., *Between Globalism and Nationalism Socialist Register, 1994* (London, 1994), 20-32. For the domestic context see R. Miliband, "The Poverty of Labourism," *New Left Review*, 1 (January-February 1960); Anderson, "The Left in the Fifties," *New Left Review*, 29 (January-February 1965) 3-18; S. Hall, "The "First" New Left: Life and Times," in The Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group, *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left 30 Years On* (London and New York 1989), 11-39; and M. Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin* (London 1995).

[12]For the importance of Blake to 1956 and the New Left see B. D. Palmer, "Homage to E.P. Thompson — Part I," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (1993), 57-8. But see also E.P. Thompson, "God and King and Law," *The New Reasoner*, 3 (Winter 1957-8). For the importance of the popular front period to the New Left see Eric Hobsbawm, "Fifty-Years of People's Fronts," in E. Hobsbawm, *Politics for a Rational Left: Political Writing 1977-1988* (London 1989), 103-19; J. Saville, "The Communist Experience: A Personal Reappraisal," in R. Miliband and L. Panitch, eds., *Socialist Register, 1991* (London 1991), 1-28; and S. Woodhams, *History in the Making: Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson and Radical Intellectuals 1936-1956* (London 2001).

[13]E.P. Thompson, "Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines," *New Reasoner: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Humanism*, 1 (Summer 1957), 114, 109, 119, 109, and 122. For more on socialist humanism see E.M. Wood, "Falling Through the Cracks: E.P. Thompson and the Debate on Base and Superstructure" and K. Soper, "Socialist Humanism" both in H.J. Kaye and K. McClelland eds., *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (Philadelphia 1992) 125-53, and 204-33.

[14]Thompson, "Socialist Humanism," 111.

E.P. Thompson's "Revolution" and "Revolution Again!" were exemplary in this regard.[15] For not only did they appear as a classic statement of New Left politics, they also furnished the new political formation with the first tentative intimation of an alternative transition to socialism in Britain. Principally a missive against the rise of revisionism in the Labour Party and the ideology and political strategy of international communism, "Revolution" took as its touchstone the burgeoning breach between the socialism of the revisionists and that of the "Aldermaston generation."[16] Likening the gulf to that which emerged in the late 19th century between the Lib-Lab politicians and the new unionists and socialists, Thompson maintained that the old socialist generation of revisionists (and Labour fundamentalists) had effectively dropped the baton of socialism — the task of picking it up had now devolved upon a new generation of socialists.[17] The default of the revisionists was manifested not only in their accommodation to the logic of the capitalist process, but also in their surrender to what elsewhere Thompson termed "Natopolitan ideology";[18] it was a moral as much as a political capitulation to the forces of capital. For Thompson any transition to socialism necessarily implied the rejection of NATO, the mixed economy, and the "acquisitive ethos," but it was just these things that the revisionists were falling over each other to exalt. The revisionists had vacated the space of socialist debate. Yet the process of default did not stop there. As Thompson suggested, "Mr Crosland and capitalist values (can be) found on one side, socialist values on the other."[19] The capitulation was total. Despite revisionist claims that "capitalism had been reformed out of all recognition,"[20] Thompson maintained

[15]E.P. Thompson, "Revolution," *New Left Review*, 3 (May-June 1960), 3-9; and E.P. Thompson, "Revolution Again! Or Shut Your Ears and Run," *New Left Review*, 6 (November-December 1960), 18-31. "Revolution" was the catalyst for a spirited debate within succeeding issues of *NLR*. For this debate see C. Taylor, "Changes of Quality"; P. Marris, "Apathy: A Case to Answer"; J. Saville, "Apathy into Politics"; S. Encel, "Forward from Marxism", *New Left Review*, 4 (1960), 3-10; and H. Hanson, "Socialism and Affluence," *New Left Review*, 5 (1960), 10-6. "Revolution Again!" appeared as Thompson's response to this debate. "Revolution" also appeared in the New Left collection of essays *Out of Apathy* (London 1960). References in this paper will be to the article as it appeared in *New Left Review*.

[16]As a continuation of Thompson's critique of Soviet communism it obviously built on his earlier interventions in the debate over 1956. See Thompson, "Socialist Humanism"; and E.P. Thompson, "Agency and Choice — 1," *New Reasoner: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Humanism*, 5 (Summer 1958), 89-107.

[17]Thompson, "Revolution," 5.

[18]For Thompson's discussion of Natopolitan ideology see E.P. Thompson, "Outside the Whale," in Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, (London 1978), 1-34. The default of the Labour fundamentalists, Thompson claimed, was principally manifested in their refusal to admit that capitalism had changed.

[19]Thompson, "Revolution," 3.

[20]A. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London 1957), 517, cited in Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London 1994), 268.

that the basic contradictions of capitalist society — "expressed ... in opposed values" — remained "grounded in the private ownership of the social means of production."[21] Capitalism may have been transformed, but it had been transformed within the limits of this fundamental structure. For Thompson the "profit motive" — the very life-blood of capitalist society — persisted and generated conflicts which revisionism could not contain.

Yet Thompson's unravelling of revisionism was not intended to imply that alternative theories of transition were any more coherent or attractive. "Revolution" argued not only that the ballot box would not yield socialism — as the revisionists said it would — but also that the "statist" conception of capitalist transcendence — where socialism would be legislated from above — was equally misconceived. Both denied what Thompson saw as the integral role of human agency in any transition to socialism. If the proponents of an evolutionary transition to socialism had confused means with ends, then the proponents of a "cataclysmic" transition had asserted the necessity of means that were incommensurate with their ostensible ends. Yet, despite their apparent incongruity, both announced the state as the necessary medium of any socialist transformation of capitalist property relations. Socialist discourse on strategy, then, was caught between the stultifying and self-defeating pseudo-alternatives of "reform" and "revolution," and, as such, Thompson argued, it had not recorded any perceivable advance since the late 19th century. The tired opposites persisted to the detriment of any actual theory of transition.[22]

"Revolution," then, was not only negative in intent, in the sense of exposing the aporias of contemporary socialist strategy, it also proposed an alternative vision of a transition to socialism. And this essentially amounted to a re-interpretation of reform. Although in the last instance a transformation of capitalist property relations would involve a "transfer of class power"' and the assertion of "socialist democracy," where the "priorities of need overrule those of profit," the actual process of transition — and this sense of process was important for Thompson — would involve "unrelenting reforming pressures in many fields, which are designed to reach a revolutionary culmination." But this was not reform dressed up as revolution. Reform as envisaged by Thompson would trigger conflict rather than consensus. The becoming of socialism — already implicit in capitalist society itself — would involve the confrontation between "two ways of life," in the process of which each instance of conflict would result in the heightening of the "political consciousness" of the people. At the point where conflict exposed the full naked force of class power — that breaking point which a strident reform with revolutionary intent would induce — it would then be possible to affect a "revolution." But as Thompson sought to — again — remind socialists, the working out of objective economic

[21]Thompson, "Revolution," 5. Also see Thompson's intervention into the debate over classlessness in the pages of *Universities and Left Review*. E.P. Thompson, "Commitment in Politics," *Universities and Left Review*, 6 (Spring 1959), 50-5.
[22]Thompson, "Revolution," 6, and 7.

conditions would not generate such a point. In the last instance the success of any transformation in property relations would be dependent on "the consciousness and will of the people." The bourgeois mode of production would not collapse under the weight of its own contradictions — the fortress would fall as a result of simultaneous "warrening" from below.[23]

Through "Revolution" Thompson offered a vision of the present that was fundamentally contingent on both a reinterpretation of the past of socialist discourse and on a re-evaluation of the potential for transition to socialism in the future. By the early 1960s, however, the very premises of Thompson's analysis of socialist strategy — and indeed those of the New Left — had run up against the wall of objective conditions: the crisis of British capitalist development undermined its analysis of the 'new' capitalism; the emergence of détente, following the Cuban Missile Crisis, appeared to make impotent its fears of imminent nuclear destruction; its critique of revisionism underestimated the ability of the Labour Party to "fix" the consciousness of the British working class; and, finally, while its sociological analysis of the class structure of contemporary society hit some real theoretical targets it did not sufficiently appreciate that "affluence" was still dependent on the logic of capitalist relations of production. By the early 1960s, in short, the political failure of the 'first' New Left was apparent.[24]

[23]Thompson, "Revolution," 8. For Thompson a transition to socialism would necessarily be a process. See Thompson, "Revolution Again!," 24. Once again this reflected Thompson's historical concerns. For Thompson "the making of the working class" was a process not the mechanical result of transformations — the "factory system" — in the capitalist mode of production. As such it was important to his revision of Marxist understandings of class. For the classic statement of this understanding see the "Preface" to Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth 1991, org. 1963), 8-13. But much of this revision was prefigured in "Revolution" and "Revolution Again!" Thompson, "Revolution," 8. Thompson conception of "two ways of life" here prefigured his critique of R. Williams' understanding of culture as "a whole way of life" in his *The Long Revolution*. For this critique see E.P. Thompson, "The Long Revolution I," *New Left Review*, 9 (May-June 1961), 24-33; and "The Long Revolution II," New Left Review, 10 (July-August 1961), 34-. Thompson, "Revolution," 8; and 8. The reference here is to Thompson's understanding of the process of "reformism" in the labour movement in the late Victorian period. See E.P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English," in Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, 71.

[24]I intend "political" in the traditional narrow sense of that term — that is as a project for the capture of power. The intellectual achievements of the New Left, however, were as profound as its practical achievements were disappointing. It expanded conceptions of culture, and overturned its traditionally subordinate relationship to the "base" in much socialist analysis; it provided a continuation for the genuine revolution in historiography undertaken by a group of loosely connected Marxist after 1945; it challenged orthodox understandings of the political which would crucially influence the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s; it opened up socialist analysis to questions of race, the condition of the urban environment and youth culture; and finally, it did explore the nature of a socialist transition, and the nature of economic and political power, and it did declare that capitalist society was "all wrong

III

Marked initially by Perry Anderson's assumption of editorial authority, and completed by his subsequent control of its theoretical and political direction, a "palace coup" took place within *New Left Review* (*NLR*) in 1962, which gave rise to what is now called the "second" New Left.[25] Emerging as a direct reproach to the politics of the "first" New Left, the "second" New Left undertook a revolution against "Revolution." Not only did the new editors of the *NLR* — Perry Anderson, Tom Nairn and Robin Blackburn — maintain that the "first" New Left had failed to offer "any structural analysis of British society"; imperative to the construction, they maintained, of an adequate socialist politics, they also reproached it for the "populist" and "pre-socialist" character of its humanist politics.[26] According to the "second" New Left it was this "populist" idiom that principally contributed to the "first" New Left's political exhaustion and its inability to wrench the ideological initiative away from revisionism in its crucial polemic with the Labour Right. More damagingly, however, Anderson maintained that the early New Left had totally failed to attend to the central fact of mid-20th century political life: the simultaneous absence in Britain of a revolutionary socialist movement and a revolutionary theory upon which such a movement could be based. Its intellectual direction sealed its political fate. Rectification would only come from a new intellectual direction: western Marxism.[27] In reaction to these failures, *NLR* and the "second" New Left

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from foundation to roof." A transition to socialism was impossible in the 1960s as hindsight now will tell us, but because the New Left imagined such a happening the future landscape of revolutionary politics would not be quite so barren. See Thompson, "Revolution Again!," 21 for the quotation above.

[25]For accounts of the differences between the "first" and "second" New Left see Anderson, "The Left in the Fifties"; P. Sedgwick, "The Two New Lefts," in Widgery, ed., *The British Left*, 131-153; E.P. Thompson, "Open Letter to Leslek Kolakowski," in Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*; S. Rowbotham, "The Women's Movement and Organising for Socialism," in S. Rowbotham, *et. al.*, eds., *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (London 1979); P. Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London 1980); B.D. Palmer, *The Making of E.P. Thompson*; Hall, "The "first" New Left"; L. Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh 1994); and D. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left and the Origin of Cultural Studies* (Durham 1997).

[26]Anderson, "The Left in the Fifties," 17. See also Anderson, "The Origins of the Present Crisis," *New Left Review*, 23 (January-February 1964), 36.

[27]According to Anderson, the "theoretical lineage" of the Nairn-Anderson thesis descended "from the major tradition of Western European Marxism since the First World War — a tradition which has consistently been coeval with new forms of idealism, and a dialectical response to them within the evolution of Marxism itself." See P. Anderson, "Socialism and Pseudo Empiricism," *New Left Review*, 35 (January-February 1965), 34-5.

established itself, then, as a simultaneous objective and subjective challenge to the teleology of its predecessor.[28]

The inability of the British left to develop what Anderson termed a "strategic perspective," provided the touchstone for his (1965) analysis of the problem of the transition to socialism. Although only a particular manifestation of a problem endemic to international socialism, the dilemma of "how socialism is to be achieved," encountered specific and peculiar problems when it was applied to conditions in Britain. For here the position of the Labour Party provided a number of obstructions to a coherent solution to the "problems of socialist strategy." Indeed such was the magnitude of these barriers that it was "equally impossible," Anderson concluded, "to formulate a strategy from "inside" or "outside" the Labour Party." Given such inhospitable circumstances, any analysis of the question "what is to be done?" would, he contended, be "abstract and inorganic." Yet even under present conditions a "survey of possible alternatives," he maintained, possessed if not practical then certainly heuristic value.[29]

Launching his survey from an analysis of the weaknesses of the two preponderant theories of socialist transition, Anderson maintained that whereas "revolution" was objectively possible in "*backward, inchoate societies, dominated by scarcity and integrated only by the state*," like Russia and China, such a strategy represented an illogical, utopian and ahistorical alternative in advanced capitalist societies, such as those of western Europe. Here reform, as opposed to a strategy of the violent overthrow of the state through insurrection, had constituted the most effective socialist strategy, while social democracy, rather than communism, had appeared as the historically appropriate socialist ideology. Deliberately working within the constraints of the parliamentary framework of advanced democratic societies, reform had achieved initial success. Yet after more than half-a-century of socialist struggle, Anderson claimed, social democracy had not produced one post-capitalist society anywhere in the West. On the contrary, not only had social democracy not brought about socialism anywhere, it had also failed to "[effect] any major structural change in the societies in which it [had] acted."[30] Although the ap-

[28]For this programme see: P. Anderson, "The Origins of the Present Crisis,"; T. Nairn, "The English Working Class," *New Left Review*, 27 (March-April 1964); T. Nairn, "The Anatomy of the Labour Party," in R. Blackburn, ed., *Revolution and Class Struggle: A Reader in Marxist Politics*, (Glasgow 1977), 314-73; P. Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo Empiricism'; and P. Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," in P. Anderson and R. Blackburn eds., *Towards Socialism* (London 1965), 221-90.

[29]The quotations above are from Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 221. In this sense "Problems" was a concrete reaction to the failure of the political strategy of the "first" New Left. See also Anderson, "The Left in the Fifties."

[30]Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 233 (emphasis in original). According to Anderson, whereas in Russia and China "Leninism ... with all its inhuman costs, [had] represented an immense, promethean progress," in the west social democracy had merely served to institute "a great gulf" between the "historic aims" of socialism and the "contemporary ho-

parently inevitable medium of social transformation in the west, social democracy, in reality, had instead been absorbed and integrated into capitalist society. But how had this come about?

For Anderson, the critical weakness of social democracy was "*strategic*" — "a basic, ineradicable misconception of the nature of power in advanced capitalist societies and the means of attaining it." Social democratic strategy constituted a form of false consciousness that was principally characterised by a misreading of the nature of power in the West as coextensive with "the means of legislation." In reality, Anderson maintained, power constituted a concatenation of relationships mediated by the institutions of civil society. In Britain this form of "trans-electoral" power revealed itself as the "permanent hegemony of one social bloc over another." By failing to locate the true constellation of power, and by its exclusive concentration on attaining majorities in parliament, social democracy precisely delimited its ability to transfigure society in a socialist direction. It might attain government, as indeed it had in the past, but its ability to transform society was already curtailed by both the dispersion of the dominant bloc's power in civil society, and its own stated objectives. Consequently, social democracy was reduced to "impotence and demoralization." Given that its strategic antennae was focused — almost exclusively — upon the institutions of the state, social democracy, in this respect at least, was homologous with Leninism. In each model of social(ist) transition, civil society was negated by an exclusive concern with the state. Yet, as Anderson had already explained in "Origins of the Present Crisis," in the West the state is subordinate to civil society. The very "heteronomy of the State" in the West — and the consequent polycentric nature of power — appeared, then, as the predominant cause of the degeneracy of social democracy in the west. If social democracy left civil society untouched then there was no possibility of an effective transition to socialism.[31]

Such an awareness of the inevitable and inherent failure of social democracy was not, according to Anderson, a sufficient rationale for the implementation of Leninist strategies in the West.[32] What was required, in contrast, was the transformation of the political party from social democracy to socialism, its transfiguration from the bearer of a corporate strategy within capitalist society to the carrier of an hegemonic ideology opposed to capitalist society. In conditions where the social structure had been transformed and diversified, however, it was no longer credible for such a hegemonic party to be based exclusively on the working class. Rather it

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rizon" of the reform of capitalist society. In such circumstances social democracy was doomed." See Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 230, 235. Paradoxically, this claim represents — perhaps — the one unambiguous success of Marxist polemics.

[31]Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 235 (emphasis in original). See Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis," 47.

[32]Such a medium of transformation had already been outlawed by the terms of his distinction between the relative nature and place of civil society and the state in the east and the west. See Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 247.

must appeal to not only an independent stratum of progressive intellectuals who were perceived as crucial to the party's ideology and consciousness, but also to all the intermediate classes of modern industrial society. It must work in short for the construction of "*a new historic bloc*" based on the union of these intermediate classes and the working class. It would represent in essence "the dynamic unity of all the forces and ideals in society which are premonitions of a new human order."[33]

A hegemonic socialist party, Anderson argued, would precipitate a new consciousness which would institute a revolution in "society and man." The "*arc of action*" of a hegemonic party would embrace civil society and the state; it would be internally democratic; and, given the locus of ultimate power within civil society, it would be designed precisely to undermine the capitalist social formation in the interstices of the "*quick of social existence*." With its strategic purpose centred on the institutions of civil society it must be specifically tailored to change the consciousness of "men," rather than merely win votes. Only by transforming consciousness would an "integral socialism," as envisioned by Marx, be achieved: the battle would as a consequence be fought on a number of fronts simultaneously rather than concentrated on an illusionary centre of power. It would be on these fronts — in schools, factories, universities, and towns — that socialism would be won and lost. Hence, for Anderson, "men's" consciousness must be changed before the "formal attributes" of power could be secured for a socialist victory. As such a 'new historical bloc' would transform civil society first and then — as only the 'outer ditch' of civil society — capture the state.[34]

For Anderson a coherent — and temporally appropriate — socialist strategy in Britain, must come to terms with the distance that separated the Labour Party from an "ideal-type" hegemonic socialist party. A cogent analysis of this distance would form the pre-condition, he suggested, of "a serious socialist strategy." Given its failure to reap the political benefits of a sociological advantage, its signal inability to generate a mass character, and the absence of both a vibrant youth organisation,

[33]Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 241-2. At odds with conventional conceptions of political alliances and coalitions, a historic bloc would be underpinned by "an ascending integration," which would solder, and elide, the hopes of all onto a "higher level." Each interest would represent a partial demand of a particular sector, which would be dissolved in a whole — socialism — greater than the sum of its parts. Rendered universal, the hegemonic party would, hence, "hierachize" each sectors aims under the rubric of a programme for socialism. For Anderson's description of the present "historic bloc" see: Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis," 35-6 and 39-40; Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 242-3. In addition to these sociological strictures, an "ideal-type" hegemonic socialist party, Anderson argued, would transform past critiques of capitalism, such as romanticism, and remould them into a new consciousness capable of undermining the structures of the present.

[34]Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 244 (emphasis in original) and 245 (emphasis in original). Despite discussing the need to win over women to a socialist ideology, Anderson throughout this essay talked in gender-loaded terms.

and a national newspaper, the Labour Party, Anderson argued, "exists only as the inert, serialized unity of the British working class — a unity that is *inevitably* partial, because it is purely serial." But the distance between the Labour Party and an "ideal-type" hegemonic party was ultimately a condition, and a reflection, of its failure to articulate a hegemonic ideology, which "could bridge the gulf between working-class habits and values and middle-class culture." The non-hegemonic character of the Labour Party, in short, was the *camera obscura* of the corporate nature of the working class.[35]

Given the characteristic limitations of the Labour Party, Anderson moved on to ask how the party could be transformed to resemble more closely an 'ideal-type' hegemonic, mass socialist party. This was the key to a successful socialist strategy in the present. It was imperative, Anderson asserted, that a concrete strategy for socialism be "anchored in the objective structure of society, not merely in subjective sentiment." Most importantly, "it must be based on a coherent class analysis, which articulates and differentiates the whole society into a totality of concrete, specific social groups." In the current political conjuncture the answer to the strategic vacuum at the centre of Labour ideology rested with "the sociology of British society itself." A hegemonic socialist party must creatively read and interpret the text of British society to "unite the working class under its own leadership, and so win a permanent sociological majority of the nation." But such an objective would not be secured through a simple appeal for a majority vote. If the Labour Party was to secure an already existing objective majority, and as such "*unlock the social structure*," it must first transform the consciousness of the conservative section of the proletariat. Such an aim could be best achieved, Anderson maintained, through unionisation, which would at once transfigure the consciousness of the workers, liberating it "from elementary forms of mystification," and imbue it with a form of solidarity commensurate with Labour allegiance. The logic of such a process, however, could only be secured, Anderson argued, "on the *ideological plane*." Above all, if the Labour Party was to transform the consciousness of the working-class *in toto*, it must establish a "hegemonic socialist ideology."[36]

Every strategic failure, every absence already present in the contemporary Labour Party, was a product of its failure to generate such an ideology. As a consequence the strategic strictures that Anderson outlined — the need to generate a vibrant youth organization and a national press, the need to transform the character of the party and to win over both the conservative sections of the working class and women — were premised on the establishment of a hegemonic socialist ideology.

[35]Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 251, 256 (emphasis in original), and 259. In "Origins of the Present Crisis" Anderson tracked the evolution of the corporate working class. For his now well known argument on the corporate character of the post-Chartist working class see Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis," 33-4, and 40-3.

[36]Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 260; 263; 269 (all emphasis in original).

But the precondition of ideology, central to a concrete socialist strategy, automatically implied the problem of the absence, in the continental sense, of a British intelligentsia. Despite this absence, Anderson suggested, there was "a broad spectrum of groups" in Britain, "which in very different ways and different contexts are the vectors of the society's explicit ideas and values." These groups were imperative for socialist strategy "because of their role as *sources of consciousness* in society." Hence a socialist ideology, which attempted to transform the consciousness of society as a whole, and as such create a new historical bloc, must enlist the support of these centres of consciousness. Devoid of a socialist ideology, the Labour Party could not hope to challenge capitalist hegemony through political or organisational means alone. Not only must a socialist ideology, resting upon "a total vision of the world," challenge this hegemony at all points of civil society, but it must constitute what Kant termed a "philosophical anthropology"; it must resemble, in short, a "total theory of man," which could "visibly outdistance the shrunken social thought of capitalism." The ultimate goal, then, was "a new model of civilization, with its own values, its own relations, its own creativity."[37]

"Problems" was separated from "Revolution" primarily by context. The "second" New Left was a product of a 'colder' conjuncture characterised internationally by the "reactionary consolidation" of the fifties — exemplified best by the dominance of the institutional and ideological manifestations of "Cold War mobilisation" — and domestically by the simultaneous rise of revisionism and conservative chauvinism.[38] More immediately, the "second" New Left was born in a climate of economic and conservative crisis in Britain, and within a climate of ideological schism in the international communist movement betrayed in the open split between Moscow and Peking. By the beginning of the 1960s it was becoming increasingly apparent that the British economy was in a critical state. In Britain economic stagnation produced not revolutionary socialism, but a form of labourism which, under the pressure of international monetary logic, was prepared to oversee decline and administer the necessary fiscal anaesthetic to a decrepit capital base. At the same time, with the fall of Khrushchev in 1964, the political will and passion of destalinization and communist dissent appeared spent, while the force of revolutionary energy appeared to shift east to China and west to Central and Latin America. Following the rise of Brezhnevism, the People's Republic of China would appear as not only an adequate critique of re-Stalinization in the communist world,

[37]Anderson suggested that it was "absolutely necessary to consider the problem posed to the Labour Party by women." According to him, women tended to be overwhelmingly conservative. In order to transform the consciousness of women, it was imperative that the Labour Party "stand ... for the elementary rights of women in our society: equal pay for equal jobs ..., equal pensions, and equal educational facilities." Only through such a basis — that is through ideological means — could the conservative character of women be transformed. Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 276-89.

[38]Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, 148.

but also as a "practical model of an alternative and superior experience of socialist construction."[39] As the two great countries of the Atlantic revolution busily buried the ideals of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity under a barrage of napalm bombs in Indochina, this role would be increasingly filled by the Vietnamese revolution. The revolution of the Vietnamese peasantry offered "a fresh impetus to socialism from the backlands."[40] "Problems" and the early "second" New Left inhabit the space before this shift. Both would be quickly overtaken by events, which they had not considered.[41]

IV

In histories of the British New Left it has become conventional to place great emphasis on the break between the "first" and "second" New Left.[42] But much of this historiography has gone too far and has, consequently, neglected or underplayed the significant continuities that existed between the ostensibly distinct manifestations of the New Left. If one of the predominant tasks of the historian is to illuminate the discontinuities and continuities in history, then it could be suggested that much of the historiography on the New Left has not attended closely enough to the continuities that were maintained in the transition from the "first" to the "second" New Left. But we should not be surprised by this fact. The protagonists who towered over the movement — E.P. Thompson, Perry Anderson, and Stuart Hall — have likewise dominated the writing of its history. This history has been primarily polemical and has, for this very reason, often been at great pains to highlight the differences that separated particular formations within the New Left. The debate, moreover, between Anderson (and Tom Nairn) and Thompson over "the origins of the present crisis" does appear like a mountain forever separating the "first" and "second" New Left. Yet, as will be shown below, although Thompson and Anderson did come to blows over their interpretation of the history of British capitalism and its characteristic social structure, when it came to the question of socialist strat-

[39]Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, 109.

[40]V. Kiernan, "The Peasant Revolution," in R. Miliband and J. Saville eds., *Socialist Register, 1970* (London, 1970), p. 9.

[41]But even here the break would not appear as great as is usually supposed. Interpretations of the 'revolt' of 1968 in Paris can be seen as an attempt to create a new historic bloc among students, professionals, and workers. Indeed in many senses the failure of 1968 pronounced the denouement of attempts to substitute a revolutionary agent for the working class in the industrialised west. Equally important in this respect was the history of the Wilson government. Its performance demonstrated unequivocally that social democracy could not be reformed in a socialist direction.

[42]For this historiography see Anderson, "Socialism and Pseudo Empiricism"; Thompson, "An Open Letter"; Sedgwick, "The Two New Lefts"; Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, 138, 147-149; Palmer, *The Making of E.P. Thompson*, 59-63; Hall, "The 'first' New Left"; and Chun, *The British New Left*, 61.

egy they had more in common than either may have liked to admit.[43] But the New Left is now *history*, and for that reason a more nuanced view — without significant immediate polemical intent — of the movement may now be possible.

Despite the fact that "Revolution" and "Problems" can be found on different sides of the debate over the "origins of the present crisis," the similarities between the two analyses of socialist strategy are at first glance striking. Not only did Thompson and Anderson both announce their discontent with the strategies of "reform" and "revolution" in Britain, but their analyses also elicited certain prescriptive homologies. "Revolution" and "Problems" each placed an overarching emphasis on consciousness and ideas in any transition to socialism, while they both maintained that the narrow sociological base of extant socialist strategies and their "state fetishism" were a key reason for their failure. For Thompson and Anderson any adequate socialist strategy must be based on an appeal to both industrial workers and members of other classes. Focused on a radicalised Labour Party as the only viable medium of transition, both "Revolution" and "Problems" also sought to provide an intervention into the social process that was founded on an appeal to human agency, which hinged on the structural potency of intellectuals. Beyond these parallels Thompson and Anderson both emphasised the place of a re-invention of past radical traditions in any transformation of the consciousness of a potential socialist constituency, while they both over-estimated the stability of the socialist reform of capitalist society. While differences were evident, they do not cancel out or outweigh the isomorphism of "Revolution" and "Problems." At least at this point in the history of the New Left, then, there was a surprising continuity between its "first" and "second" manifestations. But we should not simply invert the fallacies of the conventional history of the New Left. There were of course important differences between "Revolution" and "Problems," not least in the manner in which Thompson and Anderson thought about the relationship between theory and experience.

Yet beyond the homologies outlined above, "Revolution" and "Problems" were also connected on a deeper "geological" level by two assumptions common to both analyses of socialist strategy: on the one hand the assumption that capitalism would not overcome its own contradictions (and indeed that it had exhausted its progressive potential and now only persisted because of ideological factors); and on the other on the assumption that ideas and consciousness played a causative role in the determination of the historical process, which led both Thompson and An-

[43]For accounts of this debate see K. Nield, "A Symptomatic Dispute? Notes on the Relation between Marxian Theory and Historical Practice in Britain," *Social Research*, 47 (Autumn 1980), 479-507; and R. Johnson, "Barrington Moore, Perry Anderson and English Social Development," in S. Hall, et al., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (London 1980), 48-73. But, of course, the debate still continues.

derson to maintain that socialism was an imminent (if not inevitable) possibility.[44] Indeed, these two assumptions common to each of their strategic strictures supported and implied one another. For if capitalism had exhausted its progressive potential — and was persisting only due to a number of ideological blockages — then all that was required was a strategy to remove those ideological blockages within the working class to effect a transition to socialism. It was these two assumptions which underwrote the illumination of socialist strategy in both "Revolution" and "Problems."

The assertion of the centrality of human agency to the making of history marked the pre-eminent conceptual manoeuvre of Thompson's break with the strategies of both "reform" and "revolution."[45] Accordingly "Revolution" and "Revolution Again!" placed great emphasis on the place of will — self-making — in any transition to a future socialist society. This accent on agency, however, was premised on the (unexamined) belief that something could be done — and done now — to effect a transition to socialism. Such an over inflated emphasis on the role of human agency in revolution led to the mistaken assumption in Thompson's analysis that not only had capitalism run its race, but that the revolution was already here — not in the sense that a transformation would inevitably come about, but rather in the sense that it was possible; indeed that the necessary values were already present in capitalist society. Although a voluntaristic assessment of the contemporary conjuncture loomed large in Thompson's analysis of socialist strategy, it was not characterised by a form of optimism. On the contrary Thompson was all too aware that "we may miss our revolution."[46] Yet even as this point revealed, the

[44]As R. Samuel suggested, "In 'Out of Apathy' (in which "Revolution" appeared) we depicted capitalism as a moribund social order whose race was nearly run — last stage capitalism, as we hopefully designated it ... a system in E.P. Thompson's words, 'ripe' and 'overripe' for destruction." See Samuel, "Born-Again Socialism," 46-7. According to T. Nairn, in a critique — which appeared as a part of the Nairn-Anderson thesis (of which "Problems" was also a part) — of *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson had failed to attend to the central question of contemporary socialist strategy: '*why had a socialist strategy not emerged in Britain, when material conditions had long ago made such a transformation possible*?' This was unambiguous: socialism was possible because capitalism had produced the material ground of its own transcendence. See Nairn, "The English Working Class," 52-3.

[45]Although space does not allow a full analysis, Thompson's accent on the importance of agency to the historical process had much to do with his wartime experience. See E.P. Thompson, "Introduction," in *There is a Spirit in Europe: A Memoir of Frank Thompson*, collected by T.J. and E.P. Thompson (London, 1949); M. Merrill, "Interview with E.P. Thompson," *Radical History Review*, 3 (Fall 1976), 4-27; and E.P. Thompson, *Beyond the Frontier: The Politics of a Failed Mission: Bulgaria 1944* (Stanford 1997) .

[46]See Thompson, "Revolution Again!," 18.

possibility of a revolutionary transition was always out there, already present within capitalist society itself.[47]

In "Revolution" Thompson effectively characterised socialism as a choice that was always open to the people. Socialism could be achieved if people, imbued with a socialist consciousness, willed it to be so. This belief led Thompson to construct a conception of socialist strategy that paid undue attention to the role of consciousness — to the neglect of objective economic considerations — in any transition to socialism. Revolution, in effect, purveyed a form of voluntarism, which was characterised by a vision of socialist transformation based on what we might call the work of "consciousness upon consciousness."[48] In this way the revolution would be preceded by a process of "fixing" the consciousness of the people, a service which the New Left — through its clubs, books, and journals — could, Thompson argued, effectively render. But this overlooked the structural barriers to any such transition. Thompson was emphatic that a revolution "cannot, and must not, rely exclusively upon the negatives of class antagonism."[49] Just as the factory system did not produce Chartism, so any transition to socialism in the present would not be the result of brute economic causes.[50] But while socialism would not merely be a result of the unproblematic working out of contradictions in the capitalist mode of production, neither would it be the product of a form of consciousness-fixing. Thompson in his emphasis on consciousness and ideology went too far the other way. And it was this inverted reductionism, which allowed the assumption that socialism was possible, and that capitalism no longer stood as a barrier to its achievement.[51]

[47]This was also evidence of Thompson's inadequate critique of the socialist experiment in Russia. It was not that socialism degenerated in Russia because they were "bad" socialists. Will — the preparation of a socialist consciousness — had delivered socialism in Russia. But this was not enough. A socialist consciousness on its own would not deliver socialism. Socialism failed in Russia precisely because it was based on will. What Thompson was effectively offering in "Revolution" was Leninism plus democracy.

[48]I borrow this phrase from I. Meszaros, *Beyond Capital* (London 1995), 314. Indeed the analysis of the socialist strategy of the New Left found here takes much from Meszaros' critique of Lukacs in *Beyond Capital.*

[49]Thompson, "Revolution," 8.

[50]As Thompson suggested in "Revolution Again!": "the first great phase of "working-class consciousness" (Chartism) was a creation out of diverse and seemingly contradictory evidence." See Thompson "Revolution Again!," 25.

[51]Space does not allow a proper consideration of the relationship between ideas and social reality. But see M. Godelier, *The Mental and the Material Economy: Economy, Thought and Society* (London 1986), 151; and L. Colletti, "Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International," in L. Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society* (London 1972), 67. The point that needs to be made is that the distinction between ideas and social reality is a false one.

Thompson's appeal to agency — to the necessity of will in any transformation of social relations in the present — was based, then, on the assumption that capitalism had exhausted its progressive, expansive potential. This assumption was not only mistaken but also utopian. Yet it was closely related to his interpretation of the transformation of capitalism following 1945. For Thompson, capitalism had been transformed by the effect of reforming pressures. *Laissez faire* capitalism had run aground in the inter-war period, and the first tentative steps toward socialist reform within capitalism had already been undertaken. This allowed Thompson to suggest that any transition to socialism in Britain could be relatively peaceful. But such an assessment of "socialist" reform in relation to capital — and its implicit assessment of the contemporary balance of class forces — was sustained by a minimization of the strength of capitalism, and its success in sustaining itself despite war, revolution and reform, and a consequent misinterpretation of the nature of its transformation since 1945. Thompson's awareness of the contingent nature of the historical process should have allowed him to perceive that those gains would or could be lost in a society that was still fundamentally based on "the private ownership of the social means of production."[52]

"Problems," however, was no less dependent on an appeal to consciousness in its conception of a transition to socialism. Reinforcing the practical political intent of "Problems," Anderson, in a related article, asserted that the "struggle for a liberated culture is not in any sense a secondary or supplementary one"; it was rather "inseparable from the notion of socialism itself." For Anderson — in conditions of advanced capitalism — "consciousness" *was* "the condition of any meaningful social change."[53] In an objective situation where — it was claimed — the material preconditions for the construction of socialism had long been operative, ideology and consciousness assumed pre-eminent roles in the maintenance of the status quo. Given the increasing tendency of the working class to become integrated within capitalist structures of thought and practice, it was now dependant upon an independent socialist intelligentsia to assume the role of mediator between culture and the working class. With the working class trapped within the prison of capitalist hegemony, intellectuals would now appear as the ultimate agent of social change. As the superstructure "irradiated the whole society as never before" with the dominant hegemony, and given that the "counter-attacking role of socialist culture ... becomes more and more crucial,"[54] it was incumbent, then, upon an autonomous socialist intelligentsia to create the conditions for the emergence of a genuinely hegemonic socialist party. The operations of such a party, given the dispersal of power in modern capitalist society, would be primarily undertaken in the realm of civil society. A hegemonic party must, therefore, first change the "consciousness of

[52]Thompson, "Revolution," 5.
[53]P. Anderson, "Critique of Wilsonism," *New Left Review*, 27 (September-October 1964), 27.
[54]Anderson, "Problems of Socialist Strategy," 270.

men" in the interstices of civil society, before it could then transform the institutions of the state in a socialist direction. Yet — as we saw with "Revolution" — this accent on consciousness hid the structural and determinate barriers to a socialist transition.

Anderson's analysis of socialist strategy was grounded in a conception of the evolution of consciousness that simultaneously allowed both theory and intellectuals to play a major role in the establishment of post-capitalist society. Given the role of ideology in the maintenance of the bases of power of the bourgeoisie, "*making social development conscious*," in Lukacs words, had become the primary task of socialist intellectuals.[55] But as we have seen, such a characterisation of the nature of the present crisis of socialist strategy — as the simultaneously *ideological crisis* of capitalism and the working class — presupposed that capitalism was formally redundant. An overemphasis, hence, on the role of consciousness in the genesis and solution of the problems of the present crisis went hand in hand with an underestimation of the endurance of capitalism as a mode of production. It is here that the problem of the neglect of the objective material structures of the present crisis in "Problems," as well as the assessment of the ideological constraints on the development of socialism and their emphasis upon consciousness and intellectuals as mediators of that consciousness, finds its source. Anderson developed a discourse on socialist strategy that was centred in the realm of ideology. Beset by an ideological crisis, expressed most transparently in a corporate form of consciousness, the working class, it was clear, could not attain a vision of a new society on its own. Such a form of consciousness would have to be revisited by intellectuals, who would remove the ideological constraints on the working class and release it back into history, as its revolutionary subject. But from the analysis of "Problems" it was equally clear that Anderson was unable to provide a definition of those material pre-conditions in which such a form of consciousness could be created. Consequently, Anderson, in "Problems," needed to define both the crisis of the present and the solution to that crisis at an abstract, purely ideological level. The "embourgeoisement" of the working-class was precisely a correlate of this ideological crisis, and as such, it further reinforced the necessity of theory, and the role of intellectuals, in the transposition of the ideological struggle to the material and political levels. In circumstances where everything was wagered on the struggle for consciousness, and in the absence of material or economic constraints, we are presented with a number of "ought-to-be's." A solution to the ideological crisis of the present, according to Anderson, would be found in the arena of consciousness mediated by the theory of a socialist intelligentsia, themselves an important network in a hegemonic socialist party. But Anderson's emphasis on the need to solve the "ideological crisis" of the working class as the pre-eminent obstacle to the develop-

[55]G. Lukacs, *Political Writings, 1919-1929: The Question of Parliamentarism and Other Essays* (London 1972), 14, cited in Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 297 (emphasis in original).

ment of socialism merely occluded the far more intractable barriers presented by objective forces.[56]

"Problems" was also — like "Revolution" — given to a form of inverted reductionism. It was precisely Anderson's attempt to avoid the theoretical *lacuna* of economic determinism that led him, like Thompson, to simply invert the fallacies of the orthodox conception of the relationship between base and superstructure.[57] It was in Anderson's attempt to reduce preponderant economic processes to an ideological crisis of the working class where we can most transparently see this reductionism at work.[58] As has already been argued, the occlusion of capital's recuperative powers was precisely a correlate of a concentration on the ideological aspects of the present crisis of socialist strategy. This voluntaristic operation was precisely an effect of capitalist stabilization in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Anderson's analysis of capitalism, and his emphasis on consciousness as a solution to the contradictions of capitalism, then, mirrored the analysis of Western Marxists, such as Gramsci and Lukacs, in conditions of capitalist stabilization in the 1920s. In both cases there was a tendency to not only underestimate "capital's staying power," but also to insist, in the words of Lukacs, that "the actual strength of capitalism has been so greatly weakened that ... *only ideology stands in the way*."[59] This was precisely the implicit effect of Anderson's assertion that it was the absence of a hegemonic consciousness that separated the working class from a socialist society. Ignoring the very present barriers effected by the dominance of capital at the level of relations of production, Anderson neglected to point out that no amount of revolutionary theory, articulated at the level of consciousness, could transform society while it left the material ground of society untouched. Political organisation, the establishment of a socialist party with a hegemonic ideology, could not alone deliver the quietus to the capitalist mode of production. The neglect of objective economic constraints to the development of socialism allowed Anderson to imply that the material conditions of the transcendence of modern industry had already been created, and now it was a matter of changing the consciousness of the working class. But he failed to note what Marx had always maintained, that "capital ceases to exist as such only where the development of these productive forces themselves encounters its barriers in capital itself."[60] It could not be produced within the minds of men and women, and consciousness itself would not undertake the work of the establishment of a new historic form. By not recognising this Anderson (and indeed Thomp-

[56]Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 316.

[57]Thompson, "Peculiarities," 80. See also Anderson, "Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism," 31.

[58]See the analysis in Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 316.

[59]Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, 262, cited in Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 318 (emphasis in original).

[60]Karl Marx, *Grundisse* (Harmondsworth 1973), 325, cited in Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 426.

son) missed an opportunity to explore the manner in which capital may extend the limits of its reproduction, and by doing so, overcome crises internal to its development.

If Thompson's socialist strategy rested on an appeal to the agency of the working class, which would then generate a theory of transition, Anderson made an appeal to the necessity of theory in the preparation of any transformation of relations of production. The concept of hegemony was a necessary correlate of Anderson's understanding of the nature, and distribution, of power in advanced capitalist societies; it was the necessary means by which the consent or ideological subordination of the working class was secured in bourgeois society.[61] And given the preponderance of civil society over the state, hegemony was secured by consent rather than coercion. Nonetheless, later commentators have drawn attention to the amputated and narrow interpretation of hegemony in Anderson's work during this period.[62] Indeed, Gregory Elliott has suggested that Anderson's understanding of hegemony issued in "a version of the 'dominant ideology' thesis."[63] Essentially, however, the poverty of his interpretation of hegemony was a direct result of his inadequate representation of the nature of capitalism, which in turn gave rise to a misleading account of the viability of capitalism, and its tendency to survive recurrent crises, it also prevented an awareness of the material structures of the present crisis. Anderson equated hegemony with *cultural supremacy*, while he maintained that the hegemony of a particular dominant class was a consequence of its members' ability to determine the preponderant "consciousness, character and customs" of a society.[64] In short, a particular social bloc was sovereign by virtue of its ability to make its particular ideological interests universal. But nowhere did Anderson root this con-

[61]Following a certain characterisation of the operation and locus of power in advanced capitalist societies of the West found in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, Anderson maintained that English society was characterised by the preponderance of civil society over the state. It was such a conception of the relationship of these two separate spheres of society, which allowed Anderson to maintain that in capitalist societies in the West, the sovereignty and authority of the ruling class was maintained through consent rather than coercion. Located in civil society, and guaranteed through assent, hegemony, or the ruling ideas, values and consciousness, was the principle means by which the ruling class secured and maintained its power, and consequently, by which it secured and maintained the subordination of the working class. Anderson's presumption that advanced capitalist societies were distinguished by the "supremacy of civil society over the state," was a direct correlate of both his understanding of capitalism as the product of the consciousness of the bourgeoisie and his conception of socialist change as dependent on the consciousness of the working class. Much the best introduction to Gramsci remains P. Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," *New Left Review*, 100 (November 1976-January 1977), 5-78. Anderson himself provided a critique of aspects of "Problem" in this work.

[62]See Johnson, "Barrington Moore"; and Elliott, *Perry Anderson*, 36.

[63]Elliott, *Perry Anderson*, 36.

[64]Anderson, "Origins," 39.

ception of hegemony in the forms of exploitation and domination characteristic of capitalist relations of production; he left the question of the genesis of hegemony open, or worse, it was seen to be simply a consequence of ideology and consciousness. For Anderson, therefore, hegemony was not seen as the characteristic product of conflict and consent, but rather as "an adjectival shorthand for fixed, unchanging and unequal relations of social and ideological power."[65] This gave rise, accordingly, to an undue emphasis on the role of consent in the construction of hegemony, and excluded an understanding of the way in which a dominant class created the structural conditions for the organization of consent.[66]

Anderson's uncritical acceptance of the Gramscian notion of hegemony thus prevented an awareness of the economic character of the present crisis and forced an undue preoccupation with civil society and the character of the superstructure. Not only did such a manoeuvre distort the historical analysis of the 'origins of the present crisis,' it also overdetermined his analysis of "what is to be done?" If civil society prevailed over the state, and hegemony, secured in the realm of civil society, was the principal means by which the dominant social bloc guaranteed its preponderance, then the task of socialists must become the "ideological conversion" of the working-class to liberate it from its subordinate position in relation to capitalist forms of consciousness. Anderson, like Gramsci, not only fundamentally misread the nature of capitalism, and underestimated its ability to transcend its own crises, but also overemphasised the role of consciousness in the maintenance of bourgeois power in capitalist society. In a reprise of Gramsci in the 1920s, Anderson, in the 1960s, asserted that the primary obstacles to the development of a socialist mode of production were primarily ideological. With the economic factor no longer an operative in the determination of politics, consciousness or ideology could assume the role vacated by the explicit contradiction between progressive forces of production and redundant relations of production.

These problems of socialist strategy and analysis were also to be encountered in Anderson's consideration of the nature and role of a hegemonic socialist party. For Anderson the party was a "substitute" for the absent revolutionary consciousness of the working class. In this sense it would be a hegemonic socialist party, armed with a hegemonic ideology, which would provide the working class with the necessary consciousness to challenge and transform the hegemony of the dominant social bloc. In Hegel's terms the party would act to "lift the veil" from the working class, and awaken it to a consciousness of itself as "the solution of the riddle."[67] Yet by presenting such a relationship between an "ideal-type" hegemonic party and a working class mired in a corporate consciousness, Anderson was prevented from

[65]Nield, "A Symptomatic Dispute?," 498.

[66]For Gramsci on consent see the following: J.V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford 1981), 35-45; and E. Morera, *Gramsci's Historicism: A Realist Interpretation* (London 1990), 164-6.

[67]Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, 339, cited in Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 378.

first recognising, and then analysing, the actual conditions of labour's subjection to capital at the level of relations of production. Structures would not change with changes in consciousness, because it was precisely by the operation of those structures that the working class was alienated not only from the object of their labour, but also by which it was "reduced to the status of a mere condition (cost) of production, totally at the mercy of capital's imperatives."[68] By failing to make such operations transparent Anderson confused — as Thompson had done — rather than elucidated the relationship between social being and social consciousness.[69] Anderson's attempt to define an "ideal-type" hegemonic socialist party, imbued with socialist theory by an independent socialist intelligentsia, was yet another species of substitutionism in Marxist theory. In order to close the distance between a working-class characterised by a corporate consciousness and a potential social bloc characterised by a hegemonic consciousness, Anderson was forced to posit the existence of a materially and socially independent strata of intellectuals who would not only constitute the leading figures of a hegemonic socialist party, but who would transform the consciousness of the proletariat. Such an attempt, however, to "bridge the gap between the ideal construct and the rather disconcerting real situation"[70] was merely an instance of substitutionism: namely the process by which the working class is relieved of its role in its own making. As Thompson later intimated, such an operation was destined to have authoritarian political ends.[71]

For Thompson and Anderson the crisis of socialist strategy was ultimately ideological. If the crisis was to be resolved then a solution would be found at the level of consciousness. Thompson and Anderson were both clear that a transition to socialism would necessarily be prepared by a transformation of consciousness. There is no intimation, in "Revolution" or "Problems," of the structural ground of such a transformation in consciousness. The failures of socialist strategy, hence, are not related to the development of objective economic conditions, but to a crisis of ideology in the working class. Thompson's analysis of the blockages facing a successful transition to socialism, then, was based on the fallacious assumption of

[68]Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 361.

[69]Thompson, "Peculiarities," 80.

[70]Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 326.

[71]Thompson, "Poverty of Theory," in Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 378. It could be suggested that Anderson, in his analysis of the problems of socialist strategy, re-presents and reinforces conditions which his analysis purportedly sought to undermine. If the working class is subordinate in society, then this subordination is reinforced by the terms of his analysis of their condition of subordination in "Problems." Such reinforcement occurs in his articulation of the relationship between intellectuals and the working class. It is at this point that we can better understand Thompson's critique of "Origins" as reducible to an "elite voluntarism." Thompson appeared clearer on this point: socialism would be made by the self-activity of the working class. But even here as we have seen Thompson did also suggest that a class of intellectuals had an important role to play in the institution of socialist consciousness among the working class.

the free agency of the working class. It is this assumption, that precipitates the "inverted reductionism" of his analysis. In an attempt to avoid the theoretical and practical traps of an economistic account of the historical process, the structure of society in "Revolution" and "Revolution Again!" was ignored in favour of an overestimation of the role of ideology and consciousness. Likewise Anderson was also prone to this inverted reductionism. The ostensible difference between the conceptions of theory and experience in "Revolution" and "Problem"' should not obscure the fact that both were grounded in similar assumptions and that both reached similar strategic solutions. If the appeal to agency allowed Thompson to substantiate his claim that it would be consciousness that would shift the present society toward socialism, then the concept of hegemony allowed Anderson to make the same suggestion.

V

Economic crises, according to Gramsci, could not of their own volition directly bring about a transformation in the character of property relations. For him objective economic conditions could "only create more favourable ground for the propagation of certain ways of thinking, of posing and solving questions which involve the whole future development of the state."[72] It was the collective will of the proletariat, as a social force, which was the "decisive element" in the socialist transformation of present conditions. Consequently, political organization "is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the shackles of traditional policies."[73] Here Gramsci was attempting to provide a solution to the problem of an adequate theory of transition from a capitalist to a socialist mode of production, which had concerned marxists since the late 19th-century. This problem had taken the form of not only the question of the transposition of the economic class struggle to a more general political level — the problem of the means by which a class-against-capital could be transformed into a class-in-and-for-itself — but also the question of the nature of the revolutionary subject itself. This was simultaneously a problem of knowledge, reason, and consciousness. "Problems" and "Revolution" had been dedicated to a survey of just these questions of socialist strategy in the present crisis of British economic and political development. Anderson and Thompson, however, did not so much undertake a proper examination of the possible solutions to these problems by situating them in their objective economic and social context, as make a "voluntarist wager" on a process by which the consciousness of 'men' would be transformed by the work of other forms of con-

[72]Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (London 1957), 172-3, cited in I. Meszaros, "Contingent and Necessary Class Consciousness," I. Meszaros, ed., *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness* (London 1971), 85.

[73]Gramsci, *The Modern Prince*, 173, cited in I. Meszaros, "Contingent and Necessary Class Consciousness," 85 and Meszaros, "Contingent and Necessary Class Consciousness," 85.

sciousness.[74] They both pinned their hope for a socialist future, and their understanding of the past, on the work of "consciousness upon consciousness." Essentially, Anderson and Thompson undertook a "leap of faith" made possible by both a neglect of objective economic conditions and by an undue emphasis upon the ideological blockages facing a socialist transformation of society. The New Left, in short, set itself tasks it could not solve. Today we can at least avoid these mistakes; and perhaps this is the greatest respect we can pay the tradition of British Marxism.

I would like to thank Eileen Yeo, Rob Stuart, Neil Rafeek, and Bryan Palmer who read earlier drafts of this article.

[74]See Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*, 282-422.