

# Interview with Nicos Poulantzas

*(Nicos Poulantzas is one of the most influential figures in the renewal in European Marxism. He was born in Greece and is a member of the Greek Communist Party (Interior). He has lived and taught in Paris for over a decade. His writing has been primarily concerned with the theory of the state and of politics—in particular Political Power and Social Classes (1973) and Classes in Contemporary Capitalism (1975). He has increasingly been concerned with problems of political strategy under the diverse conditions of European capitalism: Fascism and Dictatorship (1974); The Crisis of the Dictatorship (1976) and State, Power, Socialism (1978).)*

**THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY STUART HALL AND ALAN HUNT.<sup>1</sup>**

*Your books are now widely influential in Britain but I think that it would be useful for people here to know something more about your personal political and intellectual development.*

Well let us say that I first met Marxism through French culture and through Sartre, as did many people of my class situation and of my age in Greece. At that time I was beginning to be able to work for myself at the age of seventeen or eighteen. We were in the post-Civil War situation, with the Communist Party declared illegal, which lasted until 1974. The conditions for the circulation of Marxist ideas were extremely difficult. It was impossible even to acquire the classical texts of Marxism and as a result I came to Marxism through French philosophy and through Sartre in particular. When I was at University I became involved in my first political activity on the Left, with the student unions or syndicates and then I joined EDA (United Democratic Left), that being a broad legal form of the Communist Party. At that time, however, I was not a member of the Communist Party.

After my law studies I came to Western Europe and at that time I continued to be actively involved in membership of EDA. But the big problem within EDA was that some of them were Communists and some were not; it was a kind of popular front organisation, but absolutely under the dominance of the Communist Party and without any real autonomy.

Developing an interest in Marxism through Sartre, I was much influenced by Lucien Goldmann and by Lukacs. My doctoral thesis was undertaken in the philosophy of law, in which I tried to develop a conception of law drawing on Goldmann and Lukacs. It was published in 1964; but from the moment it was published I began to feel the limitations of that orientation within Marxism. At this time I began to encounter Gramsci through *Critica Marxista* which was the most important journal of Marxism at that time.

I began also to work with Althusser, while still being influenced—as I always am—by Gramsci—which created a kind of agreement and disagree-

ment, from the beginning, with Althusser. It would take too long now to explain the kind of differences I had, which were not so much with Althusser but rather more with Balibar. With Althusser's first texts, which were mainly philosophical and methodological, I profoundly agreed and I always felt that Althusser has a kind of understanding in relation to the class struggle and its problems. The problem of structuralism was more a problem with Balibar than with Althusser. In *Political Power and Social Classes* there are definite differences between the text of Balibar and my text. I have spoken a little about these differences in *Social Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*.

Meanwhile I joined the Greek Communist Party before the split in 1968, which came one year after the colonels' coup and since then I have been in the Communist Party of the Interior. The Communist Party of the Interior has moved towards the Euro-Communist line. The Greek Communist Party of the Exterior, on the other hand, is one of the last Stalinist parties in Europe. I mean that in the strongest sense—in the sense of theoretical dogmatism, the total absence of internal democracy, and total dependency towards the Soviet Union.

*Your theoretical writings suggest that political alliances play a very central role in the project for a democratic socialism. Yet the alliance between the Communist Party of France (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS) has proved to be very fragile. What lessons do you think can be learnt?*

Well, I think that the main problem is not so much that of political alliances between political organisations. The main problem, as we know, is the political alliance between the classes and class fractions which are represented by those parties, because one of the lessons of the failure of this

<sup>1</sup> This interview took place in Coventry on April 5, 1979. Thanks are due to Phil Jones and Bob Jessop for assistance with the interview and to Sheila Ford for transcribing and typing the original interview.

alliance in France is exactly that it has mainly been seen and constructed as an alliance from the top. One cannot say it was a pure electoral alliance: it was not, because the "Common Programme of the Left" is a very significant fact in the history of the European Left. It was not a pure conjunctival electoralist type of alliance; but nevertheless it was very significant that neither of these parties tried to found this alliance in the base—that is, amongst the masses—by creating common organisations. We had some type of common actions in some organisations, between those organised by the parties and the trade unions, but we never achieved an original or specific type of organisation at the base which could crystallise this type of alliance. This was also a traditional failure of the "popular front" type of alliance. In the Third International strategy, Dimitrov was always saying that we must have specific types of base organisation, crystallising this type of alliance. This was not achieved during that period, nor has it been achieved by the Communist Party of France or the Socialist Party. But nevertheless your question goes much further. I think that the realisation of this type of alliance is only possible, given a change within the Communist Parties themselves. It is very clear that as long as you are working with the conception of the "dictatorship of proletariat" you are not going to be able to make a durable alliance with a partner who knows he is going to be eliminated during the transition to socialism when that dictatorship is implemented. So I think that revolutionary strategy towards democratic socialism requires the changes that have occurred in some Communist Parties of Western Europe and this is one of the conditions for achieving new forms of political alliance.

Now we come to the problem of Social Democracy, which is a very specific problem and which demonstrates that this question of alliances has much to do with the actual conditions of the specific country; and consequently that we must be cautious about making generalisations because we see that Social Democracy plays quite different political roles in the different countries in which it exists. For example, I do not see any possibility of political alliances with the type of Social Democracy you have in West Germany, or in Sweden. The situation is different in countries where Social Democracy is not a governmental party, as it has not been for many years in France. Then, in the present structural crisis of capitalism, we can see a shift of Social Democracy towards the Left and this is one of the conditions for a more durable alliance between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. I do not think we can speak of Social Democracy in general any more, given this structural crisis of capitalism. We cannot find, I think, a general tendency of the bourgeoisie to employ

Social Democracy as a solution to the crisis. Nor does the bourgeoisie have the economic power in all societies to offer to the working class the types of compromises that are needed for Social Democracy to have its political function fulfilled when it is in government, especially in the context of the austerity programmes we have now in Europe. It is not clear at all that a social democratic solution, which involves compromises with the working class, can be realised by the bourgeoisie through Social Democracy in the particular circumstances of each individual country in Europe. In these circumstances Social Democracy does not have any other solution than alliance with the Communist Party. In this specific type of situation (which is very different from the other types of situation) you find the integration of Social Democracy in the governmental apparatus, as in West Germany. I do not wish to comment on the situation in Britain but in Germany it is a very peculiar situation because Germany plays a dominating economic role in the Common Market, and so it still has possibilities of compromise with its working class. This is not the case at all in Italy or France and most probably also not the case in Spain. We should not speak nowadays, given the structural crisis of capitalism, of Social Democracy in general.

*Do you think this means that there is no longer a problem of "reformism" in general for the Left?*

No, I do not mean that; especially given the double character of the Social Democracy—that is, on the one hand trying to achieve a modernisation of capitalism but nevertheless, on the other, having deep roots in the working class. The problem confronting Social Democracy is to make the combination of the two; and given the structural crisis of capitalism, the inter-imperialist contradictions, and the uneven developments, the situation of Social Democracy in Europe is extremely different from one country to another. This game can be played in economically dominant countries in Europe like West Germany, and Sweden; but it cannot be played by Social Democracy in France or in Italy. In such conjunctures I think that one of the solutions for the Social Democratic parties is the left turn towards an alliance with the Communist Parties.

*You have already mentioned the question of Euro-Communism. It is becoming increasingly apparent that Euro-Communism is not a single phenomenon but that there are a number of diverse trends within what is called Euro-Communism. Do you think that it is helpful to distinguish between trends that can be labelled left and right?*

We speak here of general tendencies and one must not first personalise and then make a fetish of this distinction in a phenomenon which is relatively new. Now, in the strategy of the Third International, which was a strategy of dual power and frontal smashing of the state, the problem of reformism was in some sense a clear and an easy one. Everything was "reformist" which did not lead to the creation of dual power and achieving the possibilities of a frontal clash with the state. Now, when we speak of a democratic road to democratic socialism, such a strategy must not only profoundly transform but also maintain forms of representative democracy and forms of liberties (what we have called for a long time "formal liberties" but which are not just "formal"). This representative democracy must, at the same time, go hand in hand with the creation of direct democracy at the base. But the first point is important; if we can no longer speak of a sudden clash with the state but of the maintenance of and profound deepening of institutions of representative democracy under socialism, then the distinction between reformism and a revolutionary road becomes much more difficult to grasp, even if nevertheless it continues to exist.

It is very clear that in Euro-Communism you can find the reformist tendency and in this sense I think one can speak of a left wing and of a right wing Euro-Communism. For example, I think that when Elleinstein speaks of a gradual, peaceful, legal, progressive revolution, this is exactly the classical Kautskian way of posing these questions. But what would be the proper distinction between a left wing and a right wing Euro-Communism? There are a number of them. First of all, the question of the importance given to direct and workers' council democracy, which has always been a decisive continuum between reformist and a revolutionary road to socialism. Left wing Euro-Communism gives a much greater significance to rank and file democracy. The second one is the types of ruptures and the types of transformation envisaged in the very state itself: because even if we do not speak about "smashing the state", nevertheless left Euro-Communism is very conscious of the problem of the necessity of radical transformation, not only of the ideological apparatuses of the state but also of the repressive apparatuses themselves: whereas right wing Euro-Communism tends to see those apparatuses more or less as neutral apparatuses and consequently does not attach the same importance to their transformation. Left Euro-Communism retains the insistence on the moment of rupture in the state itself. It does not speak of a gradual progressive transformation of the state. It is very conscious that there will be a decisive turning point, which is not going to be a civil war but is nevertheless going to be a profound crisis of the state, with a shift in the

balance of forces inside the state itself. Right wing Euro-Communism does not examine this alternative very seriously. To be concrete whenever I have read Carrillo I have seen more right wing Euro-Communism positions and whenever I have read Ingrao of the PCI I have found more left wing Euro-Communism positions.

I think more and more that Euro-Communism is a specific phenomenon of *advanced* capitalist social formations. The whole problematic of the democratic road to socialism, of the revolutionary road to democratic socialism, is closely related to the specific stage of capitalist development.

*For you and for us the Italian experiment of the "historic compromise" is of enormous importance. Now in such a situation what sort of importance do you attach to the need for the establishment of some kind of national consensus?*

I do not have much confidence in this conception of national consensus. The Italian Communists themselves have never presented the historical compromise as a type of transition to socialism. Sometimes they have come close to saying this, but most of the time they have presented it as a specific strategy in a specific conjuncture in Italy; they have not presented it as a general model for the transition to socialism. Now, we have a second question, which is the famous question posed by Berlinguer after the Chile coup, about the importance of a broad national consensus. Well, I am very dubious about this position. There is a kind of analysis that derives from the Gramscian tradition and which is one of the most disputed points in Gramsci, where he suggests that the working class can have an ideological and political hegemony *before* achieving political power. To me the question of national consensus must be seen much more in the *process* of democratic socialism rather than as a *pre-condition* of democratic socialism itself. To say that one needs 80 per cent of the people in order to create the unity necessary for a left government is a contradiction in terms.

*You yourself are a member of the Greek Communist Party of the Interior and perhaps we can now turn our attention to the situation in Greece. In last year's elections the alliance in which your party participated, suffered a serious electoral setback, particularly at the hands of the orthodox Greek Communist Party. What is your analysis of this experience and how do you account for the attraction of the oppositionist strategy of the orthodox party? What lessons can you derive from this?*

Well there are some general reasons and there are

reasons which have to do more specifically with Greece. The general reasons have to do with the insufficient analysis and insufficiently coherent strategy within Euro-Communism itself. If the Euro-Communist turning point is taken by a constituted Communist Party, there is no possible contestation of this turning point, apart from that by the extreme left. But if you have a situation of a split, with the majority of the party being in an orthodox position, the lack of sufficient analysis of revolutionary strategy on the part of Euro-Communism becomes much more critical when you have to cope with the dogmatic fractions of the party. Then we have reasons which have to do very specifically with Greece and which are linked to the question of the Greek Civil War. I refer to the whole imagery and symbolic position of revolution during the Civil War. It has been the Communist Party of the Exterior, most of whose members were very active in the Civil War and who were exiled in other countries and have come back after 1974, which has been best able to mobilise this popular imagery of the Civil War. Let us say that they have succeeded in what Lister failed to do in Spain because—exactly as I said before—Carrillo has been able to make the turning point towards Euro-Communism in the Communist Party itself. It also has to do with the social conditions in Greece.

The Greek working class is a very feeble working class because most of Greek capital is not indigenous capital, it is a bourgeoisie rooted in the Mediterranean area and big shipping capital and so on. So the Greek working class does not have a very high level of class consciousness. You very rarely find in Greece a family where father and son are workers. We have a high social mobility into the petty bourgeoisie. We have some of the working class who become petty bourgeois and who migrate and become agents of the international Greek bourgeoisie. Either they come here to London and work in the shipping companies or they go to America. To me there is a feebleness of the Greek working class which has a relationship to the success of dogmatism in Greece nowadays. And of course it has to do with the errors of the Greek Communist Party—for example, the fact that, for long, we have tried to seek the official approval of the Soviet Union—not being able to make real criticisms of the Soviet Union and not being able to make a real alliance for the democratic road to socialism, because we hoped that the Soviet Union would choose between the two parties! This has been a very negative factor in the development of the Greek Party of the Interior.

*Can we turn to some theoretical questions? It seems as if there has been at some point a quite decisive turn*

*with respect to Leninism. Would you like to comment on that?*

That is absolutely true. I think that if there is a turning point it has been expressed in my book *The Crisis of Dictatorships* and it comes from very definite positions I took during the period of the Greek dictatorship. During that period we had two lines in the Greek Communist Party of the Interior. The one was the line of a (violent or less violent) frontal opposition to the dictatorship regime of external frontal opposition. The other line was one that thought that one could employ or utilise the internal contradiction between the fractions of the dominant class and the internal contradictions of the military regime.

After six or seven years of dictatorship I began to grasp theoretically and politically that these conceptions of the military dictatorship were associated with some views held by Marxists about the state itself. The state is seen as a kind of closed place which can be taken only by an external type of strategy, whether it be the Leninist frontal type of strategy or the Gramscian type of encircling of the state. In its place I began to think of the state as a condensation, a relation of forces, I developed this idea in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. At the same time I was beginning to see the significance that this could have for the strategy of opposition to the military regimes. Also I began to apply this conception of the state to the problem of the transition to socialism, which became clearer in my last book, *State, Power, Socialism*. It is clear to me that there is a crisis, and that crisis involves Leninism as such.

I think that the position with regard to Lenin is not exactly what my position is towards Leninism. I do not think that one can simply say that Lenin was only right with respect to the Soviet Union. I think one of the big insights of Lenin, as a strategist, and in which I believe, is not Leninist centralism, it is that Lenin was a convinced supporter of the rank and file and of the direct democracy of the Soviets. The thing that Rosa Luxemburg opposed in Lenin was not that he was too much of a centralist, or too oppressive toward the working class; it was much more that he crushed all the institutions of representative democracy and left only the institution of direct democracy of the Soviets. I think this is the Lenin that we can still employ. This is the Lenin of *The State and Revolution*, which is the most important Lenin. I think this is the positive aspect of Lenin.

The negative aspect involves the whole question of the application and the theorisation of the dictatorship of proletariat which revolves around the total smashing of representative democracy. It is not true to say that Lenin was not able to do anything else because of the conditions of the civil war

in the Soviet Union; nor that he could not do otherwise because of the different trends within the party. I think that there are some theoretical elements in Leninism itself that were related to both the situation during Lenin's period and afterwards under Stalin. There were definitely elements of centralisation and a conception of the party as bringing consciousness to the working class from the outside. This includes *What Is To Be Done?* which is an aspect of Leninism in which I do not believe any more. Further, I think that this conception of the party leads directly to the conception of "the State Party" and then to statism.

*Can we return to the question of Althusser. In Fascism and Dictatorship you make this specific criticism of Althusser, that he does not give the class struggle the place it deserves. Is it possible in Marxist structuralism of the Althusserian kind, to give the class struggle the place it deserves?*

In the way you posed the question, you have already given the answer, because you have spoken of structuralism. I have not. You would have to accept, first of all, that there is a global Althusserian conception, which I do not believe myself; most of us had so many differences between Balibar, Althusser and myself, not to mention others; we had huge differences at the beginning.

For Althusser himself, or what one can still retain from Althusserianism, I think that the problematic of structuralism is a false problematic applied to the basic guide lines of Althusserian thought. I do not think that it is true that Althusser, in his epistemological guide lines really has—in the theoretical conception itself—an absence, due to a theoretical impossibility, of history and of class struggle. I think there is a problem in this respect with Balibar, but not even with all of Balibar. So I would say that structuralism has not been the very essence of Althusserianism but it has been the *malade infantile*. There are some remnants of structuralism in Althusser and in the rest of us, in the theoretical conjuncture in which we were working; it was structuralism against historicism; it was Levi Strauss against Sartre. It has been extremely difficult for us to make a total rupture, from those two problematics. We insisted that for Marxism the main danger was not structuralism but historicism itself, so we directed all our attention against historicism—the problematic of the subject; against the problematics of Sartre and of Lukacs, and as a result we "bent the stick"; and of course this had effects in our theory itself. For example, it has had effect in my books in the distinction I made between "structures" and "practices" in *Political Power and Social Classes* which I did not pursue afterwards in

*Social Classes in Contemporary Capitalism.*

The remark I made in *Fascism and Dictatorship* with reference to Althusser concerned the ideological state apparatuses; it was a reproach I made to Althusser in the specific context of the discussion of the ideological state apparatuses and not a reproach about the core of the problematic with which we were then concerned. So I would still stand by the critical role of Althusserianism rather than with the substantive analysis.

*Much of your writing has been directed towards questions of the state and of politics, based upon the concept of "relative autonomy". What is your assessment of the capacity of a theory based on a concept of "relative autonomy" to grapple with the problems of the specificity of the state and of politics?*

I will answer this question very simply because we could discuss it for years. It is very simple. One must know whether one remains within a Marxist framework or not; and if one does one accepts the determinant role of the economic in the very complex sense; not the determination of forces of production but of relations of production and the social division of labour. In this sense, if we remain within this conceptual framework, I think that the most that one can do for the specificity of politics is what I have done. I am sorry to have to speak like that.

I am not absolutely sure myself that I am right to be Marxist; one is never sure. But if one is Marxist, the determinant role of relations of production, in the very complex sense, must mean something; and if it does, one can only speak of "relative autonomy"—this is the only solution. There is, of course, another solution, which is not to speak of the determinant role of the economic at all. The conceptual framework of Marxism has to do with this very annoying thing which is called "relations of production" and the determinant role of relations of production. If we abandon it then, of course, we can speak of the autonomy of politics or of other types of relations between politics and economics.

*But I suppose that one way of staying somewhere within the Marxist framework for understanding the relation between politics and economics without attempting to derive one from the other, even in a very complex way, is to posit the notion of "the conditions of existence" which one practice forms for another. What do you think of this alternative?*

For example if one talks not of relative autonomy; but of "conditions of existence"; such a position does not escape the difficulty; all that it achieves is

to translate the same difficulty into other words. If you say that something is the condition of existence or the necessary pre-conditions of existence of another instance you are still within the relative autonomy framework. Whatever type of formulation you give to it you still have the same core problem. Do we believe or not in a determinant role of relations of production? And if we do you are always going to be limited in the autonomy of politics in whatever way you can express it. The problem still remains, how to find the specificity and the autonomy without falling into the absolute autonomy of politics. It is the core of the Marxist problematic. Now we can probably formulate it better but this question of determination is the central core of Marxism.

The question was posed concerning the relation between "economics" and "politics", but of course the question also requires us to ask what we mean by "economics". Once you include class struggle and then you examine the relative autonomy of the state with respect to the dominant classes and to the class struggle then the problem of economics is different. The question has two terms, politics and economics, which we had to clarify in advance. When I speak of the final determination by the economic I already include the relations of production of social classes and of class struggle. There is no "economy as such" and then class struggle on another level. So when I speak of "the relative autonomy of the economic" already the economic has this other sense which embraces the presence of class struggle.

In addition we should note a further danger. If we speak only in terms of apparatuses we have another danger, that of institutionalisation. Apparatuses, after all, are material condensations of relations. In the famous example, it is not the church that created religion, it is religion that created the church. So if we speak in terms of apparatuses, of course, we can clarify the debate: but still we displace it, because we can speak only in terms of enterprises and apparatuses which already presuppose the relations of production themselves.

*In your latest book you seek to develop a notion of "authoritarian statism" which I understand as being the intensification of state control associated with the decline in political democracy. Is this theory simply a more sophisticated version of the much more traditional Leninist thesis that monopoly capitalism necessarily tends towards authoritarianism? Is it not true that the political reality of the experience of European and North American capitalism, is that intensified state control has developed alongside an expanding area of political democracy?*

This question raises a more general problem: can we find significant differences between *forms* of state that correspond to different stages of capitalism? It is certain that under monopoly capitalism, as seen by Lenin, the state has gone through very significant modifications which existed under fascism and also in the New Deal; you can find some common characteristics without resorting to a simple identification of these different regimes. In this sense you can speak in general of the fascist state and the parliamentary state as being two forms of capitalist state. You can find some common characteristics alongside the essential differences. What I tried to say about "authoritarian statism" was to find the general characteristics of a new phase of the state because I think that we are at a turning point in the organisation of the capitalist state. My object was to find a formulation that could designate the general characteristics of this turning point, without identifying it with a specific regime. So when I speak of "authoritarian statism" it does not mean that political democracy or representative democracy is going to end. "Authoritarian statism" can take extremely different forms. It can take neo-liberal forms as in France, or it can take a much more authoritarian form as in Germany. Nevertheless we are witnessing a decline of representative democracy in the classical sense without implying that there is a trend towards fascism. I tried therefore to distinguish between "authoritarian statism" and fascism.

*I think my anxiety can be expressed in terms of the political implications that flow from your conception of "authoritarian statism". The democratic transition to socialism to which you are committed depends upon the possibility, prior to any advance towards socialism itself, of creating the conditions for an expanded democracy. Yet the possibility of achieving this democratic advance would seem to be more remote as a result of the advance of "authoritarian statism".*

This is the whole problem. It is the question of rupture. The thing that I want to point out is that what democratic socialism requires is a deepening and an extension of liberties, of representative institutions and so on. This can not occur without a deep transformation of social and economic conditions. This is the conclusion that I draw: that you cannot struggle to expand political rights and liberties in a defensive position against the authoritarian tendency of today's capitalism. But I believe that we cannot save political democracy any more without profound modifications of the social and economic structures of capitalism itself.

*Can I ask you to clarify your idea of "authoritarian*

*statism". Is it merely a phase of the "interventionist state" or is it a distinct new type of state succeeding the liberal and the interventionist state ?*

I am not entirely clear myself because there is a general difficulty about the stages of capitalism. The Leninist conception was of two stages, the first that of industrial capitalism, the second stage that of monopoly capitalism. I have held the view that in these stages, we can have different phases but we cannot speak of a third stage. But I am no longer so certain about this position. Within this framework, "authoritarian statism" could not be a distinct stage as long as we retained the commitment to two stages. But now I think the problems are much more complicated. My earlier discussion of them very much revolved around the theory of state monopoly capitalism, and the debate within the PCF on this topic. Now I think that, even if we speak of phases of interventionist states, the contemporary transformations of the capitalist state are not therefore simply a phase; something much more important is involved in the emergence of "authoritarian statism".

*You tend to talk about the current stage of "authoritarian statism" in the context of the intensification of generic elements of political crisis as well as economic crisis. This begins to sound as if you are suggesting that the final stage of capitalism has arrived.*

Yes, I see the problem. It is a danger which I was not very conscious of and now I see when you speak of it. I see very clearly that there is a danger but I want to stress that it requires us to consider what we mean by the structural crisis of capitalism. In my text *The Crisis of the State* I try to analyse this structural crisis of capitalism, taking issue with some of the conceptions of the French Communist Party, and insist that the existence of such a crisis does not imply that it cannot be resolved.

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*What is the connection between this discussion of 'the state and the emphasis which you place on the role of the single dominant mass party ?*

I have tried to say that even if you do not have the massive, dominant governmental party what you do find is a relationship between two parties that are able to exchange political power between themselves. I had in mind the German model or even the British model, where even within the core of the state apparatus you could find a mixing of forces of Labour or Conservative, or of Social Democrats and of Christian Democrats, which tends to function as a single mass party of the bourgeoisie, in spite of

the differences that might exist between them. Even if we do have ordinary governmental changes in this sense they are superficial changes in the face of an institutionalised core of forces belonging to both parties.

*Can we turn to the question of your conception of Socialism. You now oppose a simple Leninist or vanguardist conception of "the party". In the concluding chapter of State, Power, Socialism, you talk about the need to combine forms of direct democracy and forms of representative democracy. But you do not explicitly discuss how these two different forms are to be articulated or combined.*

The problem is that these are extremely new questions, and we are increasingly becoming aware that we do not have any positive theory of democracy in Marx. We have the theory of capitalist democracy and the theory of dictatorship of the proletariat. But we do not really have this positive evaluation and theoretical foundation for the type of the articulation between direct and representative democracy. Now it is clear that, as long as we speak of representative democracy, the relative separation is still going to exist between the public and private sphere. This leads us to the more complex problem—of the relative separation of the state not being simply a question relating only to capitalist relations of production. If it is not necessarily tied to capitalist relations of production then perhaps the very question of the relative separation in capitalist relations of production itself becomes much more problematic. This is the first problem.

The second problem is about the vanguard party. We must be very clear. As soon as we speak of a plurality of parties in the transition to socialism and as long as we take this conception seriously, it is evident that you cannot "have your cake and eat it". It is very clear that in the Leninist tradition (although Lenin himself did not have a conception of the one party system) the conception of the vanguard party goes hand in hand with the conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the one party system. You can not, at the same time, say we are going to have a pluralism of parties and maintain the Leninist conception of the vanguard party because such a conception of the party implies or even requires the single party system. You cannot have both of them.

Consider the political party; I am not sure at all that a political party is the best form of organising even, in their differences, the new forms of social movements. For example, I am not sure at all that we must ask a revolutionary political party, to take under consideration the ecological problem, the feminist problem and so on. So the problem is not

only to have a party so good that it is not only going to be political but take up every sphere of social life and economic life. I think that this conception of the party as the unique centraliser, even if it is a very subtle centralisation, is not necessarily the best solution. I think more and more that we must have autonomous social movements whose type of organisation cannot be the same as that of a political party organisation. There must be a feminist movement outside the most ideal possible party because the most ideal party cannot include such types of social movements even if we insist that the revolutionary party must have certain conceptions of the woman question.

Secondly, does the party have a central role? Of course it has a central role as long as it believes that politics has a central role, and as long as the state has a central role. But then as long as we need some type of organisation, we must have a type of centralism or a type of homogeonisation of differentiations if we must make this articulation between representative democracy and direct democracy. If, up to the present, this centralising role has been played by the single party, in future some aspects of this role must be transferred from the party itself to the representative organs where many parties can play their own role. We must have this differentiation and non-identification between party and the state. And if representative institutions can really play their full role, the type of relations, or articulation will not have to be transmitted as in the east, through the party itself. In Italy, for example, in the regional assemblies with Communist and Socialist majorities, the co-ordination between forms of direct democracy, movements of citizens, ecological movements on the one hand and the representative democracy does not pass through the centralisation provided by the Communist Party itself.

An interesting problem, to which we do not have definite answers is (and of this I am profoundly confident) that pluralism of parties in the democratic road to socialism means necessarily changes in the function of the party itself. You cannot have, at the same time, the traditional Leninist conception of the party, and simply say that there ought to be other parties also. This does not work.

What must be the differentiation, what must be the transformation of the party? I do not believe that the party should be lost in or amalgamated with the different types of social movements. But nor can the party, as a cadre apparatus, successfully link the many different social or economic movements. We must also reconsider the classical view of Leninist centralism in which everything political is primary and the remainder is secondary. What is the feminist movement, what is the ecological movement, what are the other types of social movement? These are

not mere secondary movements in relation to the working class movement or to the party. Otherwise, everything becomes secondary. This question of primary and secondary relations must be rethought.

If Euro-Communism, like Marxism itself, is in crisis, it is because we are in an experimental stage where parties are trying to work out this different type of strategy. We see what is happening in Spain for example, we see what is happening in Italy; even in France we are in crisis; in France it is perhaps more difficult because the PCF functions as the French party has always functioned. It is also the party which sometimes makes the biggest breaks and then swings back; it goes from the most open party (for example, you have never seen any Communist Party so open to the question of women as the PCF), to the other side.

In this process there is a drawing back towards a traditional response, we see this clearly in the PCF. The changing conception of the party lies at the heart of these responses. There is an important response within the different parties which says "where are these new positions leading us" and they draw back in alarm. You find it also in Italy, you find it in Spain and in the other parties. This is not surprising because as yet there are no definite answers to these problems. But these are the problems which we must tackle; they will not go away, nor can we simply retreat to the old orthodoxy.

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