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The Twilight of the British State

'External conflicts between states form the shape of the state. I am assuming this "shape" to mean—by contrast with internal social development—the external configuration, the size of a state, its contiguity (whether strict or loose), and even its ethnic composition . . . We must stress that in the life of peoples external events and conditions exercise a decisive influence upon the internal constitution.'*
Otto Hintze, *The Formation of States and Constitutional Development* (1902)

Only a few years ago, the break-up of Britain was almost inconceivable. Southern, catholic Ireland had broken away from the United Kingdom in 1922; but there seemed little reason to believe that the protestants of Northern Ireland or the other minor nationalities of Wales and Scotland would follow their example. Conditions were different in these other cases. Southern Ireland had been a conquered country, displaying most of those features which in this century have come to be called 'under-development'. Upon that basis, and mobilizing the deep-laid cultural differences provided by Catholicism, a largely peasant society had produced the classical nationalist reaction against alien rule which ended in 1922. As the century's history of anti-imperialist struggle unfolded, this seemed more and more a typical episode of it. Although unusually close geographically to the metropolitan centre, southern Ireland had in fact been separated from it

by a great socio-political gulf, by that great divide which was to dominate so much of the epoch: the 'development gap'.

For this very reason, it appeared improbable that other regions of the British Isles would follow Eire's example. There were episodes of conquest in the histories of northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, true enough. But these had been followed or accompanied by episodes of assimilation and voluntary integration—and until the 1960s it looked as if the latter tendencies had triumphed. All three societies had, at least in part, crossed over the main divide of the development process. Unlike southern Ireland, they had become significantly industrialized in the course of the nineteenth century. All three had turned into important sub-centres of the Victorian capitalist economy, and around their great urban centres—Belfast, Cardiff and Glasgow—had evolved middle and working classes who, consciously and indisputably, gave their primary political allegiance to the imperial state.

Through this allegiance they became subjects of one of the great unitary states of history. Absorption, not federation, had always been the principle of its development. From the period of Norman feudalism onwards, the English state had expanded its hold over these outlying areas and peoples. Until in 1800—as one constitutional authority puts it—'there existed the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and in the process of its development there was not the smallest element of federation'. None of the constituent countries of this multi-national state 'retained even a modified sovereignty: that of each was melted in the general mass'.[1]

Such is the theory of the British state, and the notion of the British parliament's total sovereignty still praised and defended in current debate. To understand it as more than that would be misleading. The 'general mass' has not, on the whole, been taken to mean civil society. The 'unitary state' in this form was compatible with civil variety in the different countries composing it: it did not necessarily seek to impose a uniform culture, language, or way of life. There have been examples of forced levelling, for instance in Wales or the Scottish Highlands; yet in the main 'Anglicization' was left to the slower, more natural-seeming pressures of one large central nationality upon the smaller peripheric areas.

In spite of the pressure, a lot of latitude was left by the system to the personality of the smaller nations. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British imperialism even encouraged such circumscribed patriotisms. A conservative pride in local colour and traditions went well with the grand design. Hence, until the secession of southern Ireland in 1922, a general formula of 'Home Rule' for all three countries was widely discussed and approved of. While the centre remained strong, such an approach did not appear too threatening. On the other hand, for the same reason—the strong, magnetic pull the metropolis had over its fringe

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* *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze*, London 1975.

[1] C. F. Strong, *Modern Political Constitutions*, 8th revised edition, London 1972, chapter 4, section IV.

lands—pressure for genuine self-government was not very great. Apart from the exception, catholic Ireland, it remained weak until the 1960s.

Since then, in only a decade, it has swelled into the major political issue of the 1970s. It is worth underlining how quite unexpected and puzzling this change has been. Vague expectations about a possible transformation, or even collapse, of the British system after the defeat of its empire had been commonplace not for years but for several generations. Worried prognostications of this order go back to the 1890s or even earlier. It never took much political imagination to grasp that: 1. Great Britain was quite unusually and structurally dependent upon external relations tied up with its empire; 2. Britain was due for demotion or outright defeat at the hands of the bigger, more dynamic capitalist states that expanded from the late nineteenth century onwards. Hence the loss of its critical overseas wealth and connections was bound to promote internal readjustments—or perhaps, as left-wing observers imagined with relish, a real social revolution. There was something suitable about this: the most inveterate and successful exploiters ought to suffer the most sensational punishment.

There is no doubt that the old British state is going down. But, so far at least, it has been a slow foundering rather than the *Titanic*-type disaster so often predicted. And in the 1970s it has begun to assume a form which practically no one foresaw. Prophets of doom always focused, quite understandably, upon social and economic factors. Blatant, deliberately preserved inequities of class were the striking feature of the English social order. Here was the original proletariat of the world's industrial revolution, still concentrated in huge depressed urban areas, still conscious of being a class—capable of being moved to revolutionary action, surely, when the economic crisis got bad enough. As for the economic slide itself, nothing seemed more certain. A constantly weakening industrial base, a dominant financial sector oriented towards foreign investment rather than the re-structuring of British industries, a non-technocratic state quite unable to bring about the 'revolution from above' needed to redress this balance: everything conspired to cause an inexorable spiral of decline. The slide would end in break-down, sooner rather than later.

Clearly the prophecies were out of focus, in spite of the strong elements of truth in them. The way things have actually gone poses two related questions. Firstly, why has the old British state-system lasted so long, in the face of such continuous decline and adversity? Secondly, why has the break-down begun to occur in the form of territorial disintegration, rather than as the long-awaited social revolution? Why has the threat of secession apparently eclipsed that of the class struggle, in the 1970s? In my view the answer to both of these questions depends mainly upon one central factor, unfortunately neglected in the majority of discussions on the crisis. This central issue is the historical character of the British state itself.

The Logic of Priority

The most important single aspect of the United Kingdom state is its

developmental priority. It was the first state-form of an industrialized nation. From this position in the general process of modern development come most of the underlying characteristics of the system. A specific historical location furnished those 'external conditions', in Hintze's sense, that 'exercised a decisive influence upon the internal constitution'. Critical analysis of the state-form has been retarded by two inter-related factors. The conservative account which has always insisted on the system's uniqueness is in reality a mythology, and has been an important ideological arm of the state itself. But critical rejection of these mystifications, above all by Marxists, has normally reverted into complete abstraction. Thus, a pious bourgeois cult of British priority and excellence has been countered by insistence that there is 'in reality' nothing special about the British state: like all others, it represents the dominance of a capitalist class.[2]

In development terms, it represented the dominance of the first national capitalist class which emancipated itself from city or city-state mercantilism and created the foundations of industrialization. From its example, much of the original meaning of 'development' was derived. For this reason the English—subsequently 'British'—political system was, and still remains, 'unique' in a non-mystifying sense. These are peculiarities that owe nothing to the inherent political virtues of the British, and everything to the conditions and temporality of capitalist development in the British Isles. The multi-national state-form that has ruled there from 1688 to the present time could not be 'typical' of general modern development, simply because it initiated so much of that development.

This initiation goes back to the revolutionary era of English history, between 1640 and 1688. It is not necessary here to discuss the various

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[2] 'Marxist political analysis has long suffered from marked deficiencies . . . notably in relation to the nature and role of the state, and has shown little capacity to renew itself. . .', notes Ralph Miliband in *The State in Capitalist Society* (London 1969, pp. 6–8). Apart from Gramsci, 'Marxists have made little attempt to confront the question of the state in the light of the concrete reality of actual capitalist societies'. But his own analysis remains focused upon 'the many fundamental uniformities . . . the remarkable degree of similarity, not only in economic but in social and even in political terms, between the countries of advanced capitalism' (p. 9). However, theory-construction equally demands advance on the terrain of differentiation and specific analysis: the developmental uniqueness of states as well as their uniformities. A characteristic example of the traditional application of Marxist theory to Britain is *The British State*, by J. Harvey and K. Hood, London 1958—see particularly chapter 2, 'The Marxist Theory and the British State'. On the other side, there is of course a huge literature devoted to panegyric of the Constitution, along the lines of Sir David Lindsay Keir's *The Constitutional History of Modern Britain since 1485*: 'Continuity has been the dominant characteristic in the development of English government. Its institutions, though unprotected by the fundamental or organic laws which safeguard the "rigid" constitutions of most other states, have preserved the same general appearance throughout their history, and have been regulated in their working by principles which can be regarded as constant.' These institutions 'have all retained, amid varying environments, many of the inherent attributes as well as much of the outward circumstance and dignity which were theirs in the medieval world of their origin. In no other European country is the constitution so largely a legacy from that remote but not unfamiliar age . . .', and so on (8th edition, London 1966, chapter 1). By far the most useful and disrespectful classic of constitutional lore is Walter Bagehot's *The English Constitution*. Sir Ivor Jennings's *Parliament* (London 1939) contains two exemplary mainstream summations of myth in its opening sections, 'Authority Transcendent and Absolute' and 'The Importance of Being Ancient'.

accounts which have been given of the causes or unfolding of the upheaval.[3] But few critics would dispute that it signalled the end of absolutism in the British Isles. By the beginning of the next century, only the Celtic areas in the north and west retained a basis for restoring the absolute monarchy; and this attempt failed finally in 1746. Thus, the late-feudal state had effectively disappeared by the end of the seventeenth century, and the way had been opened—at least—for the development of a bourgeois society.[4] To the conditions of that society there corresponded a new type of political state, first theorized by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. 'In the aftermath of the crisis . . . it became clear that despite differences in emphasis there was a strong converging tendency so that by the early eighteenth century the search for sovereignty was moving almost all the European countries towards the concept of the impersonal state', writes one historian of the idea of the state.[5] This common tendency, in time, produced the modern constitutional state of the nineteenth century. In 1843 Marx delineated the latter's emergence as follows. The political revolution which had destroyed feudalism 'raised state affairs to become affairs of the people, (and) constituted the political state as a matter of *general* concern, that is, as a real state, necessarily smashed all estates, corporations, guilds and privileges, since these were all manifestations of the separation of the people from the community . . .' It posited a collection of abstract individuals—'citizens'—whose collective will was supposedly represented by the abstract authority of the new state. The real life of these individuals, as property-owners, religious believers, workers, family men and women, etc., was consigned to the realm of 'civil society'.[6]

This relationship between society and state was—as Marx indicates in the same place—first completely formulated by Rousseau, and realized in practice by the French Revolution. This second revolutionary era, from the American revolt of 1776 up to 1815, marked the definitive establishment of modern constitutionalism. Absolutism has been far stronger over most of the European continent than in England. Hence, 'On the Continent, the full development of constitutionalism was delayed until the nineteenth century, and . . . it took a series of revolutions to achieve it.'[7] It was these revolutions which formed the typical modern idea and practice of the state, imitated and reduplicated on an ever-increasing scale up to the present day. 'With the exception of those of Great Britain and the United States', points out the same author, 'no existing constitution is older than the nineteenth century, and most of those which existed in the first half of that century have since either

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[3] These are summed up in Lawrence Stone's *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529–1642*, London 1972.

[4] In England, Absolutism was 'felled at the centre by a commercialized gentry, a capitalist city, a commoner artisanate and yeomanry: forces pushing beyond it. Before it could reach the age of maturity, English Absolutism was cut off by a bourgeois revolution', writes Perry Anderson in *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London 1974, p. 220. An earlier bourgeois revolution had occurred in the Netherlands, but this model did not lead to a comparable sustained priority of development. There, the 'transitional' state form quickly decayed into a highly conservative patriciate.

[5] J. H. Shennan, *Origins of the Modern European State, 1450–1725*, London 1974, p. 113.

[6] Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (1843–4), p. 166.

[7] C. F. Strong, op. cit., p. 25.

entirely disappeared . . . or been so fundamentally amended and revised as to be in effect new.'[8] But, of course, the association of the English and American systems is misleading here: the American was the first-born of the moderns, and only the English represents a genuine survival.

Alone, it represented 'a slow, conventional growth, not, like the others, the product of deliberate invention, resulting from a theory'. Arriving later, those others 'attempted to sum up at a stroke the fruits of the experience of the state which had evolved its constitutionalism through several centuries'.[9] But in doing so (as panegyrists of Westminster have always said) they could not help betraying that experience, which remained (in a sense far less flattering than the panegyrists believe) inimitable. Because it was first, the English—later British—experience remained distinct. Because they came second, into a world where the English Revolution had already succeeded and expanded, later bourgeois societies could not repeat this early development. Their study and imitation engendered something substantially different: the truly modern doctrine of the abstract or 'impersonal' state which, because of its abstract nature, could be imitated in subsequent history. This may of course be seen as the ordinary logic of developmental processes. It was an early specimen of what was later dignified with such titles as 'the law of uneven and combined development'. Actual repetition and imitation are scarcely ever possible, whether politically, economically, socially or technologically, because the universe is already too much altered by the first cause one is copying. But this example of the rule had one interesting consequence it is important to underline in the present context.

Most theory about the modern state and representative democracy has been, inevitably, based upon the second era of bourgeois political revolution. This is because that era saw what Marx called 'the completion of the idealism of the state', and the definition of modern constitutionalism. It established and universalized what is still meant by the 'state', and the relationship of the political state to society. Hegelian-based idealism and Marxism were both founded upon study of 'The *classic* period of political intellect. . . the *French Revolution*' and its derivatives.[10] As such, they naturally—even legitimately—neglected the preceding evolution of the English state. Far less defined and universalizable, this process embodied, and retained, certain original characteristics that in the later perspectives seemed 'anomalous', or even inexplicable.[11] These

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[8] Ibid., p. 36.
[9] Ibid., p. 28.
[10] 'Critical Marginal Notes on the Article "The King of Prussia and Social Reform, by a Prussian" ', in Marx and Engels, op. cit., p. 199.
[11] The 'marked deficiencies' of analysis noted by Miliband (note 2 above) have unfortunately an influential origin in the history of Marxist writing: the deficiencies of Marx's and Engels' own views on the British state. The odd situation these views represent has been insufficiently emphasized by their biographers. From mid-century onwards the main theorists of the following century's revolutions lived in the most developed capitalist society, and the central part of their main achievement, *Capital*, was based to a great extent on study of its economy. Yet they wrote very little on its state and hegemonic structures. Compilations of their writings on Britain (e.g. Marx and Engels, *On Britain*, Moscow 1953) are among the thinnest of such volumes. Also, their outstanding writings touching on relevant political questions were all early, and were never improved upon: the striking examples here are Engels's *Vorwärts!* articles on 'The Condition of England' (now in

traits have remained the preserve of worshippers within, and puzzled comment without. It is for this reason that the present political crisis in Britain raises such far-ranging and theoretical problems. While comparable to other problem-situations in Western Europe in a number of ways—e.g. Italy, as regards its economic dimensions, or Spain and France as regards its neo-nationalism—there is something important and *sui generis* about the British case. It is, in effect, the extremely long-delayed crisis of *the* original bourgeois state-form—of the grandfather of the contemporary political world. The passing of this ancestor calls for more than superficial commentary.

An Imperial State

The non-typical features of the British state order can be described by calling it 'transitional'. More than any other society it established the transition from the conditions of later feudalism to those of modernity. More than its predecessor, the Dutch Republic, it gave impetus and direction to the whole of later social development. Yet for this very reason it could not itself be 'modern'. Neither feudal nor modern, it remained obstinately and successfully intermediate: the midwife of modern constitutionalism, perhaps, as much as a direct ancestor.

Internally, this system presents a number of 'peculiarities' related to its historical location. It replaced late-feudal monarchy by a rule which was—as it remains today—patrician as well as representative. Because in this original case a spontaneously emergent bourgeois 'civil society' created the state, pragmatically, civil society retained an unusual dominance over the state. The only comparable examples were to be in social formations directly hived from England, like the white colonies or North America. Elsewhere the armature of the state itself was of incomparably greater significance in development: all the progeny of the '*classic* period of political intellect' were to be relatively state-dominated formations, reflecting the harder circumstances of historical evolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In turn, this original English civil hegemony had certain implications for the nature of civil society itself, to which I will return below.

But for the moment it is essential to stress something else. From the

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Collected Works, vol. 3) and his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (*Collected Works*, vol. 4). These date from 1844 and 1845. Marx's own general political ideas were formed before his exile in England. As Colletti observes in a recent introduction to the *Early Writings*, he 'already possessed a very mature theory of politics and the state . . . (and) . . . Politically speaking, mature Marxism would have relatively little to add to this' (*Early Writings*, Pelican Marx Library, London 1975, p. 45). This 'mature theory' was wholly drawn from Continental study and experiences. There were to be no further experiences compelling them to a more searching inquiry into the prior universe of the British state: their long exile coincided largely with an era of quiescence and growing stability in Britain, and this seems to have rendered them largely incurious about their immediate political milieu. The absence of curiosity led them to persist in a view (very marked in their occasional articles and letters on Britain) of the state as a façade or mask of capitalist realities. The evident archaism of the state did not, therefore, qualify their vision of these realities as the prefiguration of what other, later-developing societies would have to undergo. But their enormous authority in other directions has always tended to justify this blind spot, and so underwrite the 'marked deficiencies'.

outset, all these internal conditions were interwoven with, and in reality dependent on, external conditions. As well as England's place in developmental sequence, one must bear in mind its place in the history of overseas exploitation. As Marx indicated in *Capital*, success on this front was bound up with the primitive accumulation of capital in England itself.[12] The new English state's ascendancy over its competitors in colonization accompanied the crystallization of its internal forms. Hence, a double priority was in fact involved: the temporality of England's new capitalist social system was in symbiosis with the country's maritime and conquering adventures. The latter remained a central feature of world history until the Second World War—that is, until long after English industrial capitalism had lost its pre-eminence, and indeed become a somewhat backward economy by many important indices. It was the extraordinary external successes of the transitional English state that permitted it to survive so long. Otherwise, it would certainly have gone down in the wave of new, state-ordered, nationalist capitalisms which developed in the course of the nineteenth century. It too would have been compelled to suffer a second, modernizing revolution and the logical reorganization of its constitution and state: precisely that second political upheaval whose absence has been the constant enigma and despair of modern Britain.

But in fact the advantages gained through developmental priority were for long decisive. As the 'industrial revolution' waned from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the more conscious and systematic exploitation of these advantages compensated for domestic backwardness. A 'New Imperialism' took over from the old, with the establishment of a financial control of the world market as its core. This mutation accorded supremely well with the character of the patrician state. It safeguarded the latter for another half-century, at the cost of ever-greater external dependency and ever more pronounced sacrifice of the domestic economy. As will be suggested in more detail below, this pattern has reproduced itself without fail not only into the last years, but into the last months and days of the present crisis: a slow, cumulative collapse determined not by the failure of 'British capitalism' alone, but by the specific underlying structures of an archaic state and the civil class-system it protects.

'Imperialism', in the sense pertinent to this prolonged trajectory, is somewhat different from the definitions now customarily given to the term.[13] As with constitutionalism, theory has naturally been pre-

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[12] See *Capital*, chapter XXXI, 'The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist': 'The colonial system ripened trade and navigation as in a hot-house . . . The colonies provided a market for the budding manufactures, and a vast increase in accumulation which was guaranteed by the mother country's monopoly of the market. The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there.' (Pelican Marx Library, London 1976, vol. I, p. 918.)

[13] The best review of theories of imperialism is Benjamin Cohen's *The Question of Imperialism: the Political Economy of Dominance and Dependence*, London 1973. The general view of imperialism advanced there perceives it as rooted in 'the external organization of states' (p. 234), and to that extent accords with the theory of this book. Unfortunately, Cohen fails to relate this theme of external state-order sufficiently to that of uneven development, and so is forced to fall back on nationality and nationalism as 'given facts'

occupied in the main by later and more systematic developments: in this case the formation of modern European empires between 1880 and 1945, and the nature of the informal US system which followed them. However, England's pattern of foreign exploitation and dependency has lasted from the sixteenth century to the present, uninterruptedly. Like the state-form it made possible, it preceded and conditioned the rise of later rivals and—even while adapting to this new world, as in 'New Imperialism'—remained itself of a somewhat different nature.

This nature is best understood in terms of the social order which it fostered in England. A régime so largely concerned with overseas and naval-based exploitation required, above all, conservative stability at home. It demanded a reliable, respectful hierarchy of social estates, a societal pyramid to act as basis for the operations of the patrician élite. This was, of course, quite a different need from the later forms of imperialism. These emerged into an England-dominated world: 'late developers', often with far greater real resources than the British Isles, impelled by a restless internal dynamic of development. This was to be the case, above all, of Germany. The later empires were either industrial-based, like Germany; or else strongly militaristic in outlook, by compensation for the lack of economic potential, like the Italian, French and Portuguese systems. Indeed, more or less aggressive militarism was the general accompaniment of later nineteenth-century colonization and expansion. The British empire alone was not in essence either of these things. It had been constituted before the others, on a scale which gave it lasting advantages in the later conflicts. And it had been formed overwhelmingly by naval and commercial strategy in which land militarism was of small account.[14]

The following paradoxes must therefore be taken into account. The pioneer modern liberal-constitutional state never itself became modern: it retained the archaic stamp of its priority. Later the industrialization which it produced, equally pioneering and equally world-wide in impact, never made England into a genuinely industrialized society. Even more evidently, the cramped foundations of the Industrial Revolution quickly became archaic and *dépassé* when set against the unfolding pattern of general world industrialization from the late nineteenth century onwards.

The two paradoxes are, of course, organically connected. No recovery from industrial 'backwardness' has been possible, precisely because no second revolution of the state has taken place in England: only the state could have engendered such a recovery, by revolution from above—but

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rather than as developmental functions (see pp. 255–7). In reality uneven development generates these 'given facts' of imperialism and nationalism for the contemporary era (*c.* 1750–2000), not vice-versa.

[14] In his article 'En Route: Thoughts on the Progress of the Proletarian Revolution' (*Izvestia*, 1919, reproduced in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. 1, New York 1945), Trotsky commented: 'England's insular position spared her the direct burden of maintaining militarism on land. Her mighty naval militarism, although requiring huge expenditures, rested nevertheless on numerically small cadres of hirelings and did not require a transition to universal military service.'

the old patrician structure of England's political system, incapable of such radical action, has also resisted every effort at serious reform up to the present day. This astonishing resistance, in turn, must be explained in terms of external relations.

During the very period when industrial backwardness began to present itself as an inescapable problem, between the 1870s and 1914, and foreign competition began to overwhelm England's economy, the archaic mould of society and state was greatly reinforced there. This was the work of the 'New Imperialism', consolidating and reorienting the vast inheritance of previous colonization and overseas trade. Less and less able to compete with the new workshops of the world, the ruling élite compensated by extended control of the world's money market—by building up a financial centre in the City of London. During the long period when sterling was the world's main trading currency—it lasted until after the Second World War—these unique and formidable financial institutions remained at one level the nucleus of world capitalism. Long after the industrial centre of gravity had moved to North America and Continental Europe, they kept their pre-eminence in the area of capital investment and exchange.[15]

Thus, one part of the capital of England was in effect converted into an 'offshore island' of international capitalism, to a considerable degree independent of the nation's declining domestic capitalism. This type of finance-capital imperialism rested, in other words, on a marked division within British capitalism itself. The latter became the victim of a split between the consistently declining productive sector and the highly successful City sector. Naturally, City institutions monopolized the outstanding talents and energies of the business class; in addition, they exerted virtual hegemony over the state in virtue of the élite social solidarity so strongly rooted in English civil society. This hegemony provided the material basis of the state's 'backwardness'. It was a 'backwardness' perfectly congruent with the demands of the controlling elements in British capitalism—elements which enjoyed the conservative societal hierarchy of 'traditional England' and which, if they did not actually approve of the industrial degeneration, had no urgent reasons for redressing it.[16] External orientation and control implied external dependency. In this sense, it is true to say that such external dependency

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[15] The modern imperialist turning of the UK economy is outlined, and its long-term significance suggested, in S. Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy 1914–1950*, London 1962; see especially 'Foreign Investment and the Problem of Empire', pp. 19–23.
[16] At a number of places in his celebrated *Imperialism* (1902), J. A. Hobson used southern England as an image of the successful, imperialist side of British capitalism: a countryside of plush 'parasitism' drawing tribute from overseas via the City, supporting 'great tame masses of retainers' in service and secondary industries, and riddled with ex-imperialist hirelings. 'The South and South-West of England is richly sprinkled with these men', he continued, 'most of them endowed with leisure, men openly contemptuous of democracy, devoted to material luxury, social display, and the shallower arts of intellectual life. The wealthier among them discover political ambitions . . . Not a few enter our local councils, or take posts in our constabulary or our prisons: everywhere they stand for coercion and for resistance to reform' (pp. 150–1, 314, 364–5). Not a few of them were active very recently, in forming para-military and strike-breaking organizations during 1973 and 1974. The only big difference brought by seventy-five years is that the 'niggers' they were aiming to put down were mostly white: the other, 'unsuccessful' side of British capitalism north of them.

provided the essential condition for the original accumulation of capital in England; for both the industrial revolution *and* its 'failure', or at least its incomplete and limited character in England itself; and for the one-sided compensatory development of liberal, City imperialism that has carried the old order into the last quarter of the twentieth century.

English Civil Society

In his critique of Hegel's theory of the state, Marx insisted that it was not the idea of the state which constituted civil society; rather, the real new nature of civil society—modern or bourgeois society—was responsible for the state. He posited a typical duality of modern conditions, therefore. The competitive, material anarchy of middle-class society evolved as its necessary complement an abstract political state-order: the new liberal or constitutional state. The key mystery of this relationship was representation. The representative mechanism converted real class inequality into the abstract egalitarianism of citizens, individual egoisms into an impersonal collective will, what would otherwise be chaos into a new state legitimacy.[17] However, as noted previously, Hegel and Marx alike were in part theorizing the later, 'typical' circumstances in which middle classes developed a form of dominance more hastily and competitively, against much greater feudal obstacles, and often by revolutionary effort. Although Marx's view of the priority of civil society applies with particular emphasis to England, the accompanying abstract duality does not. The latter reflected the historical experience of the Continental states.

In the English evolution which had gone before, the middle classes developed more gradually and created a civil society which stood in a substantially different relationship to the state. The conquering social class of the mid-seventeenth-century civil wars was an agrarian élite: landlordism in a new form, and with a new economic foundation, but emphatically not the urban bourgeoisie which later became the protagonist of modern European development. Although no longer feudal, and allied increasingly closely to the urban middle class, this class remained a patrician élite and concentrated political power entirely in its own hands. In a way quite distinct from later 'ruling classes' it constituted

[17] 'The most important characteristic which distinguishes the burghers (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) from the other sections of the national community is their individualism . . . (Civil society) remains basically a multitude of self-seeking individuals, impatient of customs, traditions, and privileges, and apt to conceive freedom as the absence or at least the minimum of political obligations. Such a society threatens not merely the rest of the nation but the supreme public authority itself . . .' This is Z. A. Pelczynski's summary of Hegel's view of the political challenge of bourgeois society (*Hegel's Political Writings*, 'Introductory Essay', Oxford 1964, p. 61). This political challenge is taken up much more trenchantly in Marx's early critique of Hegel and (as Colletti emphasizes in his presentation of the *Early Writings*, op. cit.) taken to a supremely logical conclusion, 'a critical analysis of parliamentarism and of the modern representative principle itself' (p. 42). The only way forward was the dual dissolution of egoistic 'civil society' and the state power corresponding to it. But this was an enormous short-circuit historically, which failed to question the basic assumptions of Hegel's view sufficiently: it was not in fact true that bourgeois society is necessarily 'impatient of customs, traditions', etc., etc., and wholly dependent upon an alienated state power for its cohesion. It employed customs and traditions (England was the striking example of this), invented others, and generated the cohesive power of nationalism to hold itself together.

the actual personnel and machinery of the English state. The latter was not the impersonal, delegated apparatus to be formulated in nineteenth-century constitutionalism. On the contrary, in a way which was not repeatable by any typical bourgeois stratum, one social class *was* the state. Hence, one part of civil society wholly dominated 'the state' and lent it, permanently, a character different from its rivals.

In a standard work on the subject, Samuel Finer points out how: 'The importance of this tradition is that it has preserved not only the medieval forms but the medieval essence: this was that the king governed—but conditionally, not absolutely. At the heart of the English political system—now embracing the entire United Kingdom—there was always a core of officials, who initiated, formulated and executed policy . . . (and) . . . political opposition has never sought to abolish this key-nucleus of the working constitution, but only to control it . . . The form taken by an Act of Parliament links the present to the past and attests the underlying continuity of the medieval conception of government.'[18] This continuity has not been one of 'medievalism' in a literal sense. But what was preserved was the essence of rule from above, in that 'transitional' mode established by 1688: an élite social class took the place of the failed English absolute monarchy—a collective 'Prince' which now employed the symbolism of the crown for its own ends. This class framed representative rules for its own members, in the most limited version of property-owning parliamentarism: less the foundation of 'democracy' (in the Enlightenment meaning) than a new variety of constitutional aristocracy, like a medieval republic upon a grand scale. Its landlords became akin to the self-perpetuating and co-optive élite of such a republic—but in a city-state become a nation-state.

In relation to the body of civil society, this ruling class established a tradition of informality (as opposed to the formality of the 'normal' state-form); personal or quasi-personal domination (as opposed to the impersonality inseparable from later states); non-bureaucratic and relatively de-centralized control with a weak military dimension (as distinct from 'rationalized', rigid and militarized control.) It established a low-profile state which, with the rapid economic development towards the end of the eighteenth century, easily became the minimal or laisser-faire state depicted by classical political economy. The patrician state had turned into the 'nightwatchman state' of the Industrial Revolution, and presided over the most dramatic initial phase of world industrialization.[19]

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[18] S. E. Finer, *Comparative Government*, London 1970, chapter 5, 'The Government of Britain', p. 139.

[19] Marxist and other commentators have often been unable to resist the inference that the minimalist Victorian state so devoted to laisser-faire must have registered an internal change of nature: the mythical middle-class takeover (after which Britain's ruling class merely *looked* archaic, and was actually an instrument of industrialism, etc.). Perhaps the most striking expression of this view recently is Harold Perkin's *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780–1880*, London 1969, an analysis justly influential for its account of eighteenth-century hierarchy and the birth of modern class consciousness. He points out that 'It was . . . the peculiar relationship of the English landed aristocracy to society and hence to the state which created the political climate for the germination of industrialism' (p. 67), and that laisser-faire was not in essence an industrialists' ideology at all: 'The truth is that the English landowners had sold their souls to economic development long before the Industrial

This minimalist, crypto-bourgeois state form reposed upon two vital conditions. One we have already noticed: the successful commercial and colonial strategy that embraced the interests of both élite and middle class together. The second lay in the constitution of civil society itself. The relative absence of a strong, centralized state armature in the nation dominating world development was possible only because that national society possessed a different kind of cohesion. It is the nature of this cohesion which in many ways presents the main problem of modern British development, above all in comparative perspective.

It is clearly not the case that English bourgeois society resembled the paradigms imagined by Hegel and Marx: the dissolution of feudal integuments into a 'state of nature', an unadulterated morass of conflicting egoistic drives, the war of each against all first theorized by Hobbes. Certain sectors of the new industrial bourgeoisie may have looked like that; they were certainly pictured as like it in some celebrated literary vignettes of the nineteenth century. Yet on any broader view the picture is quite unsustainable. The new stratum of 'economic men' were never more than a minority, and a relatively powerless minority (indeed, one way of looking at the subsequent problems of capitalism in England is to say that they have never become nearly strong enough politically and culturally). They existed inside a larger civil order whose striking characteristics were (to a degree still are) practically the contrary of the great anti-bourgeois myths.

In a sense not true of any other contemporary state, Finer notes that the English Constitution is 'a facet, a particular aspect of the wider life of the community. It is an emanation, not an epiphenomenon: it springs out of British social structure and values, it is not something that some group

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Revolution (and) when it came they were more than ready to accept its logic, the freedom of industrial employment from state regulation' (p. 187). Yet he is unable to refrain from depicting a mid-Victorian Triumph of the Entrepreneurial Ideal, and the conventional view that 'the entrepreneurial class ruled, as it were, by remote control, through the power of its ideal over the ostensible ruling class, the landed aristocracy which continued to occupy the main positions of power down to the 1890s and beyond . . . Neither contemporaries nor historians have doubted that the capitalist middle class were the "real" rulers of mid-Victorian England, in the sense that the laws were increasingly those demanded by the business-men and . . . their intellectual mentors' (p. 272). In fact, there was no such Triumph, or change of nature, for the reasons he himself indicates: the ruling élite could adjust relatively easily to the laisser-faire conditions of primitive industrialization—'seizing on Adam Smith' (in his own words) 'as in an earlier age they had seized on Locke, to justify their instincts by the borrowed light of reason' (p. 187). If one seriously, believes that the 'entrepreneurial class' took over nineteenth-century Britain, them the entire subsequent history of entrepreneurial backsliding and chronic industrial failure becomes incomprehensible. In fact, successful enterprise moved away from industry altogether after the first cycle of industrialization and, far from dislodging the élite or the state, formed a new alliance with them on the foundation of City-centred imperialism. A generation later this ruling complex discovered a new 'borrowed light of reason' in J. M. Keynes. Important studies stressing the continuity of the ruling class include W. L. Guttsman, *The British Political Elite*, London 1963, and *The English Ruling Class*, London 1969. Ivor Crewe's Introduction, 'Studying Elites in Britain', to *The British Political Sociology Yearbook*, vol. 1, London 1974, contains a devastating critique of the failures of social science in Britain to confront its main problem: 'So far no sustained empirical analysis of the British power structure has appeared', he points out, in a society where 'it is natural to conclude that a small, economically and educationally privileged group of high traditional status possesses a pervasive and decisive influence in British affairs' (pp. 13–15).

has superimposed upon these.' One symptom of this is what he calls 'the powerful and pervasive role of interest groups . . . related in turn to the wide proliferation of autonomous private associations' in English life.[20] This aspect of social structure probably derives from the original, spontaneous development of the state in England. State power was appropriated by a self-regulating élite group which established powerful conventions of autonomy: that is, of forms of self-organization and voluntary action independent of state direction. By their efficacy, these in effect came to function as a civil substitute for the state. They imparted to the body of civil society a consistency that rendered the state-skeleton less significant under English conditions. Such traditions of autonomous responsibility had a class basis: they represented originally the civil-cum-political authority of the agrarian élite. However, they could be imparted to the bourgeoisie also, given the relatively gradual emergence of the latter class within the old patrician mould. There was a sufficient common basis of interest to make this possible.

There were at least three dimensions to this common interest. One lay, of course, in the successful expansion and defence of overseas empire. A second can be found in the degree of economic homogeneity between the governing landed class and the bourgeoisie: while remaining a genuine social aristocracy, the former had long ago ceased to be a feudal estate economically. During the eighteenth century it consolidated its position by a successful revolution from above, the 'agrarian revolution' which provided one of the necessary conditions for the better-known industrial development that followed. Using its state hegemony to expropriate the peasantry, the landowning élite built up a capitalist agriculture that prospered in harmony with the industrialization process until the later nineteenth century, by which time Great Britain had become overwhelmingly dependent on imports of food and the agrarian sector had become relatively unimportant. The third binding factor—and the one which has aroused most critical attention—consisted in the joint front formed by the landowners and the bourgeoisie against the proletariat which arose in the Industrial Revolution. There is little doubt that this is the key to understanding the class composition of modern English civil society, for the pattern lasted from the 1840s until after the Second World War. It is also the key—for the reasons already advanced—to an understanding of society-state relations, and so of the state itself.[21]

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[20] S. E. Finer, op. cit., p. 131.

[21] In a critique of my and Perry Anderson's earlier views about this crucial point, Richard Johnson writes that 'their main explanatory notion, aristocratic hegemony, *turns out to be nothing more than the principal theme of English Liberal ideology* . . . (where). . . the roots of evils has been seen *precisely* as "feudal", "aristocratic" or "military" residues in an industrial-democratic world. The *New Left Review* analysis conforms to this very English tradition of radical liberalism: it does not surpass it, still less unmask it.' ('Barrington Moore, Perry Anderson and English Social Development', in *Cultural Studies*, No. 9, Birmingham, Spring 1976, p. 21.) In reality, the author continues, both the élitist phenomena which we stressed and the more blatantly *bourgeois* aspects of British existence were '*pressed into the service of capital as a whole*' (p. 25). However, this critique answers itself. What *is* 'capital as a whole' in the specific circumstances of British social development? Not an undifferentiated and abstract category, but an imperialist formation with a meaningful and sustaining relationship to the retrograde forms our analysis underlined: it was the capture of Liberalism by Imperialism which nullified the former's radical aspect, and gave the working class the task of recovering and accentuating that radicalism as a necessary part of its own

The most common pattern in the formation of modern states was that the middle classes, whether in a social revolution or in a nationalist movement, turned for help to the people in their effort to throw off the burden of 'traditional society' (absolutism, feudalism, or the imported oppression of colonial régimes). During the '*classic* period' the French Revolution had given the sharpest and most influential definition to this conflict. However, developmental priority was to impose and retain quite a different pattern on England. The Civil War of the 1640s was the English conflict that most nearly corresponded to the later model (the 'first bourgeois revolution'). Yet, while ending absolutism and opening the way to capitalism, it had given in many respects the weakest and least influential definition to the general movement which followed in Europe. In spite of its importance, its *political* imprint on subsequent developments was almost nil.

The patrician class and state provided the necessary conditions for industrialization. Thus, these material conditions encouraged the middle class to bury its revolutionary inheritance, at the same time as the spread of Enlightenment ideology made the concepts of the previous century (the 'Puritan Revolution') outmoded and useless for farther political progress. Towards the end of the century, external forces were again decisive in cementing the alliance. The prolonged overseas struggle with France ended in a successful war against the French Revolution—that is, against most of the political meaning of the 'classic period'. This crucial victory in the great-power struggle consolidated the paradox: already an archaism in certain obvious respects, the English (now 'British') patrician state none the less remained able to lead and dominate world development for another half-century. No rival comparable to the French *ancien régime* would appear until the unification of Germany. During these noon-day generations, Great Britain accumulated reserves of capital—and not only economic capital—which would sustain its antique forms for far longer than the radicals and early socialists of the nineteenth century dreamed.

In effect, these conditions prevented the 'second bourgeois revolution' in the British Isles—that 'modernizing' socio-political upheaval that ought to have refashioned both society and state in logical conformity with the demands of the new age. This was not because radical intellectuals and movements did not call for such a change. On the contrary, both before and after 1789, a good deal of the blueprints for modernity were drawn up in Britain (and to a remarkable extent they were conceived in the most curious 'stateless society' of the eighteenth century, Scotland). In the 1830s and 1840s, what seemed at the time the strongest radical movement in Europe, Chartism, struggled to realize these ideas. In the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels supplied the most celebrated formula for bourgeois revolution: 'At a certain stage in the development of those means of production and exchange, the conditions under which feudal society

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political advance. This 'second bourgeois revolution' remains in that limited sense on the historical agenda, but it is surely not the case that recognizing this entails a general ideological retreat to old-fashioned radicalism. It is true that we did not 'unmask' radicalism; but then, no Marxist analysis ever 'unmasks' any phenomena in this Phantom-of-the-Opera sense.

produced and exchanged, the feudal organization of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.'[22] The radical formula was not enactable in Britain partly because the 'conditions of feudal society' had already been burst asunder and replaced by pre-modern, transitional ones; partly because of the external triumphs of these transitional forms; and partly because of the threat which the dispossessed and the new proletarian masses presented to them.

This 'threat' would, of course, have been the opportunity for a bourgeois class desperate to get rid of real feudal 'fetters'. But classes embrace political revolution only when they see no other route forward. In spite of the enormous social tensions of the industrial revolution, this was never the case for the English middle class. It was possible, though not easy, for them to arrive at a workable compromise with the political ruling class. This possibility always determined their long-term course, fortifying them against the social threat from underneath and removing most of the substance from their radicalism. Bourgeois radicalism did not vanish from the British political scene: it reappeared in many guises later in the nineteenth century, between the 1870s and 1914, represented by leaders like Joseph Chamberlain and David Lloyd George, and it is still represented today by certain aspects of both the Liberal and Labour Parties. However, its relegation to a secondary (and often regional) status proved permanent. Patrician liberalism had defeated radical liberalism, and its victory has marked the whole evolution of the political system since then.

This was a 'compromise' quite distinct in nature from the ones arrived at in late-developing nations like Germany and Japan. There also the new bourgeois classes were driven into alliances with landowning élites against the threat of revolt or social turbulence—alliances which also sacrificed the Enlightened inheritance of egalitarian progress and democratic politics, and encrusted capitalism with all sorts of pre-modern features. But in these other cases a new, forced industrialism was entering partnership with more genuinely archaic landlord classes—with social orders which had never gone through an equivalent of 1640, let alone a 1789. This linkage with military late-feudalism was different in its whole developmental character from the English alliance with a post-feudal, civilian, parliamentary élite. It subordinated capitalism to militarized 'strong states' whose inevitable external aim was to contest Great Britain's already established territorial and economic domination.

Both the cost and the gains from the English class-compromise were less dramatic, more long-term (and, of course, not so much of a threat to world peace). The cost was the containment of capitalism within a patrician hegemony which never, either then or since, actively favoured the aggressive development of industrialism or the general conversion of society to the latter's values and interests. Permanent social limits were thus imposed upon the 'industrial revolution' and the British

[22] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, p. 489.

entrepreneurial stratum. As we shall see later, in a curious—and again unique—fashion, the emergence of working-class politics would merely confirm these limitations, and in its own way render the 'second political revolution' even more distant.

The gains were represented by the effective social subordination of the lower classes—a structural domination achieved by the re-formation of civil society and the enactment of a long-term social strategy, rather than by state or military means. What the re-formation created was a clearly demarcated order of classes, in the stable form most appropriate to overseas-oriented exploitation. High social mobility, individualism, egalitarian openness, *la carrière ouverte aux talents*, restless impatience with tradition—the traits of dynamic capitalism were systematically relegated or discounted, in favour of those which fitted Britain's particular kind of empire. From the later half of the nineteenth century onward a similar neglect and relegation of technical and applied-science education was noticeable—the type of formation most important in all later stages of industrialization, after England's pioneering lead. This imbalance was never to be corrected, in spite of (at the time of writing) almost a century of complaints on the subject.

The Intelligentsia

What did this social strategy of containment consist of? It was pointed out earlier that the civil conventions of self-organization and regulation were imparted to the middle class, on the foundations of growing common interests. This, rather than state bureaucracy or armed repression, would furnish the cohesion of English progress. However, such a strategy needed an instrument—the civil equivalent of state-directed authority, as it were, a pervasive power capable of acting upon civil society at large. This instrument was the English intellectual class. In a broad sense of the term, stretching from literary and humanist thinkers on one side to the Church and 'civil servants' (the English word for functionaries) on the other, the 'intelligentsia' played an unusually central and political role in promoting social integration.

The more habitual use of the term indicates an intellectual stratum distanced from society and state: thinkers and writers distanced from and critical of the status quo. In the English social world, however, almost the reverse is the case. This is undoubtedly another of those anomalies that have made the comparative grasp of British development so difficult. From the inside the phenomenon has been elusive simply because virtually everyone concerned with analysis of the British state has been a member of the class in question: myths of British civilization have rendered self-scrutiny unnecessary. From the outside, judgement has been impeded by the developmental singularity of the thing: an intellectual class of great power and functionality, yet not either created by or in critical opposition to the state—neither a state-fostered technocracy (on the French model) nor an 'alienated' intelligentsia (on the Russian model). In addition, of course, it should be remembered that both sociological and Marxist analysis of intellectuals has been very slow in advancing any adequate general theory of intellectual groups.[23]

[23] The *locus classicus* for critical analysis of this phenomenon has become Noel Annan's essay

The nucleus of the English intellectual class was formed by civil society itself, not the state. From the mid-nineteenth century up to the present day, this civil armature has been created by a small number of private, élite educational institutions: the 'Public Schools' and the old universities. Although, in recent times, the latter have become financially dependent upon the state and enlarged the social basis of their recruitment, this has not altered their essential mode of operation. Originally, patrician liberalism depended upon a supposedly 'natural' governing élite: a land-based stratum with certain social characteristics of caste. The functional intelligentsia formed from the 1830s onwards was in essence a still more artificial perpetuation of this, where civil institutions gradually replaced landowning as the foundation of hegemony.

Discussion of this issue has often been clouded rather than clarified by theories of general élitism. It is often argued that all states depend on some form of élite stratification and specialization, and that democracies engender oligarchies. But the British state is in this respect also distinct: it is a case, and really the only case, where oligarchy engendered democracy through an organic social strategy that preserved its own nature (and, naturally, deeply marked and infirmed the 'democracy' which emerged). In this case, élitism was neither fossil survival nor aberration: it has remained the enduring truth of the state. British Labourism is the story of how working-class politics made its own compact with that truth. The bourgeoisie made an alliance with the English form of landlordism, and this was expressed by the formation of the liberal intelligentsia; in turn, that stratum took charge of the emergent political force of the proletariat in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In the archetypal person of J. M. Keynes it conceived the new, most general formula for this second alliance, which has lasted from the Great Depression to the present and seen the Labour Party become the main support of the declining state.

'The Intellectual Aristocracy', in J. H. PLumb (ed.), *Studies in Social History: a Tribute to G. M. Trevelyan*, London 1955. This at least gives some overall sense of the authority of this informal tradition. Unfortunately little advance has been made upon it, not surprisingly in view of Crewe's strictures (see note 19, above). The most useful, though still quite inadequate, way to approach it is via study of the educational system. On the principle that the anatomy of the ape is contained in that of *homo sapiens*, the reader could do worse than begin with the report *Elites and their Education*, by David Boyd (National Foundation for Educational Research, London 1973). This demonstrates that since the Second World War there has been very little alteration in élite formation: a slight decrease in 'Public School men' in the ranks of the state bureaucracy has been compensated for by a slight but appropriate increase in the army, the navy, and the banks. Dr Boyd (an American) concludes that the outstanding trait of this immutable mafia is the near-complete absence of 'inter-generational mobility': the clerisy perpetuates itself to an astonishing extent simply by breeding, and the occasional co-option of a few lower-bourgeois upstarts who normally become the most impassioned defenders of the system. Commenting dolefully on the last of many efforts to 'modernize' the recruitment of higher state cadres, Leslie Moody of the Civil Service Union said: 'The point is, that you can lay down as many provisions as you like, but if the appointment to top jobs is by selection boards, then the preferences of those on the boards will be reflected. You can't legislate prejudice out of people's minds. . .' (*Guardian*, 30 October 1973). Mr Moody's hope was that by the 1980s things might be a little better. On the Marxist side, it is Gramsci's *Gli Intellettuali* which furnishes some elements for the analysis of intellectual strata in traditional societies; but here too little has been added by subsequent work. For a critical account of Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', see Perry Anderson, NLR 100, 1976–7. Most treatments of the subject have tended to focus on the question of revolutionary intelligentsias (e.g. Alvin Gouldner's recent work) rather than on their role in stable societies like England.

From this forward glance one gains already some idea of the astonishing social strength of the system. Embodied in the intelligentsia, the social strategy responsible for this endurance was neither that of revolution from below, nor that of revolution from above—the two main avenues whose interaction has defined so much of modern history. It averted the former, which remained a possibility until the defeat of Chartism; but without embarking on the latter either. It exorcised the spectre of a second, radical revolution—yet without creating the 'strong state' and the right-wing or nationalist social mobilization which was the alternative way of catching up. Alone among the major powers of 1815–1945, Great Britain was able to evade the choice. Priority and external success let the country remain socio-economically 'backward' (at least from the 1880s) without driving either the lower class and intellectuals, or the economic ruling class, to despair. And throughout the epoch, such adjustment as proved necessary to maintain the system in being was conceived, publicized, and largely enacted by this exceptionally active, confident and integrated intellectual class. If the external secret of old England's longevity was empire, the internal secret lay here: in the cooptive and cohesive authority of an intelligentsia much more part of the state, much closer to political life and more present in all important civil institutions than in any other bourgeois society.

The world-view of this social group is a conservative liberalism, and in terms of socio-political strategy this entailed the preservation of rule from above by constant adaptation and concession below. The general social conservatism of modern England demanded the retention of fixed distinctions of rank: stability before mobility. Yet in modern conditions such stable cohesion was only possible where the lower classes acquired a minimum of confidence in the system—that is, in English terms, a trust in 'them', the rulers. This belief in the concrete nature of the constitution—our way of doing things, etc., as different from the abstraction of post-1789 constitutionalism—depended in turn on 'their' capacity to offer sufficient concessions. Adequate adaptation thus conserved the patrician essence, and strengthened its accompanying mythology, in a continuing dialectic against the new pressures from below.

A misplaced mysticism has been natural enough, considering the success of the machinery. But in reality such a political order worked through the unique conjunction of two factors: a social stratum able to enact it—the governing intelligentsia—and the material or external conditions enjoyed by the whole society. The long-term strategy in question has certainly never been employed anywhere else (giving rise to the idea of the peculiar 'cleverness' of the British ruling class). It could not be. More centralized and rigid state-systems do not work in that way at all: no administrative bureaucracy—even in the shape of the most dazzling products of the French *grandes écoles*—can function with the powerful, pervasive informality of England's civil élite. Neither the feudal absolute state, nor—in the Marxist phraseology—the democratic committee-state of the bourgeoisie could possibly imitate it. But this is merely to state that the *typical* forms of pre-modern and contemporary polity are different.

A strategy of compromise presupposes the restriction of the political dialogue to what can be demanded or conceded in this fashion. As we

saw, the social formula was originally contrived between the post-1688 landlord class and the middle classes, and grew from common interests. The latter furnished sufficient homogeneity among the upper strata for mutual adjustments to be possible, and for the question of power never to be made too acute. This is the point of a flexible compromise-strategy. It keeps the issue of command, or the source of authority, at a distance; instead, the political process is restricted to the apparent exchange of influences—to trading within a social continuum, certain of whose features are seen as unalterable.

However, this plainly poses a problem regarding the integration of the working class. Since the First World War the final form of the English political world, and of its myth, has been the inclusion of the working class. In 1844 Engels wrote that Toryism had begun to alter course (under Peel), because 'it has realized that the English Constitution cannot be defended, and is making concessions simply to maintain that tottering structure as long as possible.[24] The new, alien element of democracy would destroy it; and in British conditions, democracy would become '*social* democracy', the transition to socialism itself. This was in an essay explaining the Constitution to the readers of *Vorwärts*. It did not occur to Engels, Marx or other radicals that the tottering structure would absorb the proletariat politically without even becoming 'democratic' in the sense intended. Still less could they conceive how the resultant non-democratic proletarian movement might turn into an essential prop of the archaic state and the essentially inegalitarian society they contemplated with such contempt. The strategy of 'concessions' was enormously stronger than then seemed likely; the 'tottering' aspect of the system was merely its constant motion of adaptation and containment. Provided with both an internal mechanism of development and highly favourable external conditions, it was able to broaden its social basis in successive stages between 1832 and 1918. At the latter date, the concession of universal male suffrage coincided with the maximum territorial extension of the British Empire after its victory in the First World War.

The Working Class

The working class did not have interests in the social order in the same sense as the middle classes; there was no basis for the same sort of compromise as the latter arrived at with the landlords. However, another proved possible—and indeed so satisfactory that after 1945 the labour movement was to play in many respects the major part in securing another generation of existence for the old state. Far from diminishing with the latter's slide towards collapse after the 1950s, this alliance has if anything grown stronger. It was to be the Labour Party that made the most determined effort to restore the fortunes of British capitalism in 1964–7; when this attempt failed, it became in turn the main political buttress of the state in a more straightforward conservative sense. It rebuilt consensus after the outbreak of class conflict under the Heath Conservative government. This consensus took the form of a negotiated suspension of the economic class struggle—the 'Social Contract'—as the precondition for another, more cautious effort at capitalist restoration.

[24] 'The Condition of England, II', in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 491 and pp. 512–13.

Like its predecessors, this policy was associated with complete (if not rather exaggerated) fidelity to the Constitution and all its traditions. The House of Lords has become the target of some attacks as an 'anachronism'; this is the limit of Labour's iconoclasm. The very fact of the existence of the 'Social Contract' at this late hour, and with these implications, shows the depth of the real social-class alliance behind it.

The most common version of national class alliance—as I remarked above—lies between the popular masses and a middle class which undertakes the establishment of a modern state. That is, of a constitutional democracy with standard forms. It is also true that numerous 'deviant' versions exist: the popular support for the middle-class counter-revolutions of 1918–39, and mass acquiescence in many third-world military and one-party régimes. Yet it should be acknowledged that all have something in common, as would-be modernizing states (even if in some cases, as with the fascist dictatorships, this revolutionary side was mainly appearance). The British variety has been very different. It is a social alliance based not upon a modernizing bourgeois revolution, but upon the conservative containment and taming of such a revolution. Whereas in the former process the masses are normally led by middle-class cadres into the overthrow of an *ancien régime*, in the latter they are deprived of such leadership. Under British conditions the intellectuals were not radicalized: they moved more and more into that peculiar service of the old order mentioned previously, as an extensive, civil-based, autonomous corps of *chiens de garde*. Without the leadership of a militant radicalism, the masses were unable to break the system.[25]

The waves of social revolt generated by early industrialization, from the period of Luddism to the 1840s, fell away in mid-century and revived only in very different forms towards the end of the century. Had there existed a true confrontation between the bourgeoisie and a feudal caste closer to its origins, the political reforms of 1832 would have figured as simple palliatives—a doomed effort to arrest the tide. In fact, they signalled a turning-point in the other sense. After 1832, the bourgeoisie became steadily more positively reconciled to the state. And in the wake of this reconciliation, through the defeat of Chartism, the working class became negatively reconciled to the same old corruption, to élite hegemony, class distinctions, and deference to tradition.

Having failed to break through, the working class was forced to retreat upon itself. Political defeat and the accumulation of powerful social

[25] Connoisseurs of these debates on the UK Left will know that no statement like this can be made without provoking accusations of crazed idealism, subjectivism, historicism, mere radicalism, neglect of mass struggle, or worse. To anticipate: the specific (imperialist) character of UK capitalism and its place in general development led to a particular state-form marked by 'continuity' (traditionalism, etc.) and a high degree of integrative capacity—both of the 'new' entrepreneurial classes and of the working class; but this historical success had as its other face equally distinctive failures (in 'modernization', adaptability, etc.) which, since the 1950s, have become steadily more dominant, presaging a general mutation of the state; the passage towards this crisis is so far led by renascent 'bourgeois radicalism' (in the shape of Scottish and Welsh nationalism), rather than by the class struggle in the metropolis, although this may soon change.

pressures from above compelled the formation of a deeply defensive, somewhat corporative attitude. This was to be defined most clearly—as the basis of the twentieth-century workers' movements—by the trade-unionism that arose in the later decades of Queen Victoria's reign. Devoted to the piecemeal improvement of workers' conditions within the existing conservative social framework—a status quo now strengthened by two further generations of imperial success—this movement moved only very slowly and reluctantly back towards any political challenge to the state. Though increasingly strong in itself, trade-unionism remained mainly deferential to the state and Constitution. Rather than perceiving political revolution as the road to socio-economic betterment (like so many Continental movements), the British workers preferred to see a pragmatic politics evolve bit by bit out of their economic struggle. This lower-class corporativism has remained easily satirizable as a kind of quasi-feudal life-style: insisting on one's limited rights, while continuing to know one's humble position in the wider scheme of society.[26] Conservative apologists have naturally made much of British working-class political Toryism, undeniably a principal source of straight political conservatism ever since the extension of the suffrage.[27] However, it is difficult to see what alternative pattern of development was available, in a country where all the upper orders had so successfully exploited their unique position of developmental priority, and evolved such a strong civil hegemony at the core of the most successful of imperial systems.

The upper-class compromise carried a certain cost with it, in spite of its irresistible seduction: social sclerosis, an over-traditionalism leading to incurable backwardness. So did the lower-class alliance—though here the cost has been harder to identify, and slower to make its burden apparent. This dilemma is best understood in terms of the peculiar traits of English nationalism. The more characteristic processes of state-formation involved the masses in a positive role. As I argued in 'The Modern Janus' (NLR 94), the arrival of nationalism in a distinctively modern sense was tied to the political baptism of the lower classes. Their entry into history furnished one essential precondition of the transformation of nationality into a central and formative factor. And this is why, although sometimes

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[26] Two recent articles giving a vivid impression of the current condition of working-class attitudes are Michael Mann, 'The New Working Class', *New Society*, November and December 1976.

[27] For example, R. McKenzie and A. Silver, *Angels in Marble: Working-Class Conservatives in Urban England*, London 1968. Discussing the 'deference' ideology of lower-class conservatism, the authors point out: 'One of the pervasive conditions promoting the survival of deference is the modest role accorded "the people" in British political culture. Although it is a commonplace of research on stable democracies that general electorates are typically uninvolved in politics . . . it is only in Britain that this is so largely consistent with the prevailing climate of political values. Though modern constitutions typically locate the source of sovereignty in "the people", in Britain it is the Crown in Parliament that is sovereign. Nor is this a merely technical point. The political culture of democratic Britain assigns to ordinary people the role, not of citizens, but of subjects . . .' (p. 251). So far from being a 'technical' point, the concept referred to has dominated the debates on devolution (see below): the crucial constitutional issue (and impossibility) is the conservation of the absolute sovereignty of the Crown in Westminster. At a far deeper level, such distinctions are not bourgeois-constitutional trivia (as so many Marxists have held): they manifest the nature of the state, and the whole material history which produced that state.

hostile to democracy, nationalist movements have been invariably populist in outlook and sought to induct lower classes into political life. In its most typical version, this assumed the shape of a restless middle-class and intellectual leadership trying to stir up and channel popular class energies into support for the new states. When successful—and of course, though many other factors are involved and nationalist ideology has always exaggerated its part, it has succeeded more often than not—this positive rôle has been prominent in the later political histories of all societies. It has often established the key myth of subsequent political development. At its most characteristic this is perhaps the myth of popular revolution or national-liberation struggle—a model of popular action and involvement which haunts the state, and is returned to repeatedly by later generations (often very blindly and conservatively).

Obviously, this has the implication that where mass initiative was little used in national histories such 'myths' may be correspondingly negative, or easily travestied by states that owe nothing to them: modern Germany and Japan are possibly the most usual examples here. But Britain is also a case in point. The older seventeenth-century revolutionary tradition of the major nationality, England, had been effectively buried. There was no second political revolution, so that the more radical tendencies of the bourgeoisie were diverted and absorbed into the dense machinery of civil hegemony. As this happened the new working class was also diverted and repressed: the defeat of early nineteenth-century radicalism forced it into a curious kind of social and political *apartheid*. This condition was almost the opposite of the active intervention from below which figured in so many modern revolutions; so, therefore, was the mythology, or underlying political consciousness, which it generated.

Nationalism is always the joint product of external pressures and an internal balance of class forces. Most typically it has arisen in societies confronting a dilemma of uneven development—'backwardness' or colonization—where conscious, middle-class élites have sought massive popular mobilization to right the balance. But obviously the position of Britain—and in the present argument this means mainland England on the whole—was unusual in this regard. Here was a society which suffered far less from those external pressures and threats than any other, during a very long period. Now we can see how unusual was the internal class dynamic which corresponded to such external good fortune. The working class was not 'mobilized' in the ordinary sense, except for purposes of warfare: it was neither drawn into a revolution from below nor subjected to a 'revolution from above'. Instead it was contained and stratified into a relatively immobile social order—the one world society which faced practically *no* developmental problem until well into the twentieth century.

Thus, the popular 'great power' nationalism formed on this basis could not help being especially conservative. It was innocent of the key, populist notion informing most real nationalism: the idea of the virtuous power of popular protest and action. In its peculiar, dignified concept the people are the reliable backbone of the nation; not the effective source of its authority, not the real makers of the state. This makes for a subtle yet profound difference in the stuff of modern English politics. In its long

struggle against economic decline, the political world has been in fact struggling—although largely unwittingly—against the particular absences and defects deriving from this class structure. Bourgeois radicalism and popular mobilization were eschewed for the sake of conservative stability. This led to a politically inert nationalism, one too little associated with internal divisions and struggle, too socially complacent and deferential. Given the position of the British Empire until the 1950s, this nationalism was periodically and successfully mobilized for external war—each episode of which further strengthened its inward conservatism, its conviction of an inherited internal unity. But this very conviction and complacency made it extraordinarily difficult to achieve any kind of internal break—any nationalist renaissance *against* the now hopelessly stultifying inheritance of the state. There was simply no tradition of this kind. Stability had become paralytic over-stability; the adaptive conservatism of the successful nineteenth-century system had turned into the feeble, dwindling, incompetent conservatism of the last generation.

All efforts to break out from this declining and narrowing spiral have failed, whether to the right or to the left. The reason is in part that neither the political right nor the left has any tradition of effective internal popular mobilization at its command: there is neither a revolution nor a counter-revolution embodied in the substratum of popular awareness. Hence, governments have invariably appealed to the nation as a whole, much too successfully. Spurious conservative unity is the bane of modern British politics—not, as so often maintained by superficial critics, insuperable class divisions or party oppositions. Seen from the side of the working class too, therefore, imperialist society in Britain presents a development paradox. This is the country where a deep-laid strategy of class alliance achieved the highest degree of popular integration into the affairs of the state. But this was never 'integration' in the more typical sense of individualistic breakdown of the proletariat, through upward mobility and an aggressive capitalist ideology. Instead, it assumed a more corporate and passive form, in accordance with the traits of post-Industrial Revolution development under imperial conditions. The result was a particularly powerful inter-class nationalism—a sense of underlying insular identity and common fate, which both recognized and yet easily transcended marked class and regional divisions. However, far from being a model of politically effective nationalist ideology, this complex was to become useless outside imperial conditions. The reason is that its pervasive strength is inseparable from an accompanying conservatism—which in turn serves as an inhibitor of radical change or reform.

The bulk of the intelligentsia continues to subscribe to this peculiar variety of nationalism (not surprisingly, since it played such a big role in building it up). But so does the working class, under the aegis of British Labourism. Hence the two main sources of change have remained tied into the old structure. They maintain their historic allegiance to a form of nationalism which is in fact reverence for the overall nature of the modern (post-1688) British tribe. This is a faith in the mystique of that system, not in the people who made it (*they*, the revolutionaries of the 1640s, have been suppressed and travestied throughout the era in which this modern

tribalism arose). Such faith is in 'the Constitution', and beyond this fetishization in the capacity of 'we all' to surmount difficulties, win battles, etc. But 'we all', as 'we' are actually organized, means those who effectively control the social order; hence the sentiment is very close to belief that 'they' will continue to see we are cared for (though of course they may need to be reminded of their duties sometimes).

There have been numerous analyses of the economic contradictions of post-empire Britain, depicting a society hoist by the petard of its own past success in industry and finance. But the economic vicious circle is mirrored—and rendered inexorable—by this corresponding contradiction on the plane of politics and ideology. Here also imperialism cast society into a shape inadaptable to later, harder conditions of existence. It forged a state which, although very 'flexible' in certain respects—those most noticed and revered by apologists—is incapable of change at a deeper level. On *that* plane, where the modern political principle of nationality really functions, it is bound by a suffocating, paralytic pride in its own power and past glories.

Nationalism, whether of the right or of the left, is of course never really independent of the class structure. Yet its particular efficacy as a mobilizing ideology depends upon the *idea* of classlessness—upon the notion that, at least in certain circumstances and for a period of time, what a society enjoys in common is more important than its stratification. In England, the specially strong stratification created by the failure of the 'second bourgeois revolution' made the normal egalitarian or radical version of this notion impossible. The ordinary texture of English social life denies it. Hence the only effective version has been one which ignores these class divisions against an 'outside' enemy—at the same time implicitly reconsecrating them, as the tolerable features of a 'way of life' basically worth defending against the world. Time and time again this defence has in turn fortified in-built resistance to radicalism. That is, to all tendencies (democratic or reactionary) which might aim to really demolish the creaking English snail-shell of archaic pieties, deferential observance and numbing self-inhibition.

Origins of the Crisis

'Moderate', 'orderly', 'decent', 'peaceful and tolerant', 'constitutional'; 'backward-looking', 'complacent', 'insular', 'class-ridden', 'inefficient', 'imperialist'—a realistic analysis of the British state must admit these two familiar series of truisms are in fact differing visages of the same social reality. That arcadian England which appeals so strongly to foreign intellectuals is also the England which has, since the early 1950s, fallen into ever more evident and irredeemable decline—the United Kingdom of permanent economic crisis, falling standards, bankrupt governments, slavish dependence on the United States, and myopic expedients. The appealing, romantic social peace is inseparable from the twilight. Though imaginatively distinguishable, resistance to modernity is in reality not separable from the senility of the old imperialist state. They are bound to perish together.

The preceding analysis suggests that the origins of this long crisis, still

unresolved, go back a long way.[28] They may also suggest the basic reason why resolution is so difficult, and has been so long delayed. The fact is that emergence from the crisis demands a political break: a disruption at the level of the state, allowing the emergence of sharper antagonisms and a will to reform the old order root and branch. But in this system, possibly more than in any other, such a break has become extremely difficult. The state-level is so deeply entrenched in the social order itself, state and civil society are so intertwined in the peculiar exercise of the British Constitution, that a merely 'political' break entails a considerable social revolution.

The governing élite and the liberal intelligentsia, and the dominant sector of the economic ruling class, all have an obvious vested interest in the state. The industrial bourgeoisie and the working class do not.[29] Yet the latter have never succeeded in undoing and modernizing the state, in spite of their potential power. As far as the entrepreneurial class is concerned the absence of will is more understandable. The combination of British-Constitutional ideology, their weak political position in relation to the City, and their fear of 'socialism' has turned them into a particularly supine and harmless sub-bourgeoisie. Since the defeat of Joseph Chamberlain's more industrially-oriented 'social imperialism'—a right-wing attempt at a new, more radical class alliance—they have exerted little substantial influence on the state.[30] As for the working class, the main lines of their own integration into the twentieth-century state were decided by the same defeat: the defeat of right-wing imperialism was the triumph of 'liberal imperialism', from 1906 onwards—the permanent victory of the City over the British economy, and of patrician liberalism

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[28] The original analysis to which this one (and all others like it) owe a great debt is Perry Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', NLR 23, Jan.–Feb. 1964.

[29] In this and comparable analyses, the split between finance and industrial capital always receives a great deal of attention, as a basic feature of the underpinning of the state-structure. But in an acute comment in his article 'Imperialism in the Seventies—Unity or Rivalry?' (NLR 69, Sept.–Oct. 1971), Bob Rowthorn points out how a division of interests within the industrial sector itself has enormously accentuated the political results of that split. 'Paradoxically', he observes, 'the weakness of the British state is to be explained not by the simple decline of British capitalism as such, but by the very *strength* of the cosmopolitan activities of British capital, which has helped to undermine further its strictly domestic economy' (p. 46). Imperialism left a legacy of very large firms with overseas operations, as well as the City: it is their combined interests which have remained largely independent of the UK state and its 'strictly domestic' economy, and so have helped cripple all vigorous efforts to revive the latter (by import controls, action against overseas investment, etc.). Hence, he concludes: 'Leading sections of the British bourgeoisie have been effectively "de-nationalized", not through their own weakness but through the weakness of the British state and their own home base. The overseas strength of British big *capital* has compounded the debility of British capitalism . . .' (p. 47).

[30] Recent emphasis upon 'buried history' excluded from the Establishment versions has focused mainly upon working-class and popular material; but there is an outstanding quantity of bourgeois data that has suffered a similar fate, no less relevant for understanding the overall pattern's significance. Chamberlain's right-wing, tariff-reform imperialism is an outstanding example of this—the buried relics of a forsaken ruling-class strategy which prefigured a very different state-form in the twentieth century. As L. S. Amery put it, for tariff-reformers the State 'should be a creative force in economic life, vigorously directing the nation's energies . . . developing the empire', etc. (*The Fundamental Fallacies of Free Trade*, London 1906, pp. 5, 17, 92). Chamberlain himself predicted that if his social-imperialist strategy was defeated by the Free Traders, Britain would fall into a long decline comparable to that suffered by Holland and Venice—see *Imperial Union and Tariff Reform*, his 1903 speeches.

over the class strategy and outlook of the British state. The era of New Imperialism had put the old class alliance under severe strain, from the 1880s onwards. The external threat from a more militarized and competitive world combined with new internal menaces, from a more restless and organized working class and a tiny yet significant trend to disaffection among the intellectuals.

However, that period of crisis was resolved by a reaffirmation of liberalism—in effect, a reaffirmation of the underlying strategy laid down in the earlier nineteenth century, and described above. This has become the traditional mode of hegemony, most identified with the Constitution, the British road of compromise, and so on. Now, the problem before it was the more effective incorporation of the working class—of a working class, which, in the two decades before 1914, had begun to emerge from trade unionism and demand a limited political voice of its own.

Previously the enfranchised part of the working class had given its allegiance to the Liberal Party. But at the very period of that Party's triumphant return to power, in 1906–14, a new Labour Party had been formed. Although extremely moderate in ideology, and more an expression of trade-union interests than a socialist party in the Continental sense, this movement none the less clearly represented a class point of view. Between 1914 and 1924, when the first Labour government took office, this point of view was effectively subordinated to the underlying consensus. It may be that this achievement was only possible so quickly and so decisively because of the First World War. Indeed, maybe the general strategic victory of liberalism should be attributed as much to this factor as to its electoral and reforming successes in 1906 and 1910–11. It is certainly true that neither the Tory right nor the more militant and syndicalist elements of the working class were really reconciled to the solution up to 1914. The clear threat of both revolution and counter-revolution persisted until then, and the old order was by no means so secure as its later apologists have pretended.

But external success settled the dilemma, in accordance with the main law of British history. The victory of the Entente drew both Tory and revolutionary dissidents back into the consensus. The war effort itself signified a huge development in state intervention, upon lines already present in the Liberal Party's reform programme of Edwardian times: public enterprise and control of the economy, and social welfare. As was to happen also in the second world conflict, the ideological reinforcement of all-British patriotism coincided with important structural developments favourable to working-class interests. These developments took the form of the constant extension of state activity and influence, and ultimately—after the Second World War—of the pioneer 'welfare state' which for a brief period served as a model for other capitalist countries. In the above analysis, the emphasis has been placed on the strong élite character of the British state, and its bond with a markedly hierarchical yet cohesive civil society. This may appear in some ways at odds with the great expansion of state functions initiated first by Liberalism and then by Labourism. But the contradiction is only apparent. In fact, the growth of the state—a theme which fuelled polemic and political debate from the 1880s onwards—has never seriously

changed its underlying nature. This has been demonstrated by the character of the growth itself: random, *ad hoc* formation of new agencies and functions, which rarely question the basic principles of government. This amoebic proliferation has merely surrounded and preserved the essential identity of the British Constitution. The endless pragmatic expediency of Westminster governments has multiplied state activity in response to successive challenges and demands, above all the challenges of war; it has done so (normally quite consciously) in order to conserve the vital mystique of Britishness, not to change or dilute it.

Externally, this line of development was of course made feasible by imperialism. The ruling class retained a position strong enough, and secure enough psychologically, to pursue the strategy of concession in graduated doses to more organized pressures from below. There was—or seemed to be, until the 1960s—surplus enough for the exercise to be valid. While the particular evolution of the class struggle in Britain strongly favoured its continuation, in spite of the difficult passage of Edwardian times. Working-class politics evolved on the back of trade unionism in Britain, emerging quite empirically as a kind of collective, parliamentary voice for a corporate class interest. Hence internally too there was a notable tendency to accede to the concession strategy. It was only rarely that the political leaders of 'British Socialism' perceived a new state and constitution as the precondition of achieving class demands. Normally, the perception was that *the* state could be bent in the direction of these demands. Class political power of the type which became feasible after 1918 (year of the foundation of the contemporary Labour Party) was only the strongest way of doing this.

The class alliance of twentieth-century Britain is essentially devoted to the exorcism of 'power' in any disruptive sense, and to the maintenance of social consensus at almost any cost. Obviously the decisive test of this strategy was the attainment of elective power by a working-class based movement. It was argued previously that the intelligentsia had played a key, often ill-understood role in the mechanism of hegemony, as the agents of the state-society bond—the 'state-substitute' officers of civil society, peopling the profusion of para-state or semi-official bodies the English state characteristically depends on. But now a definitely lower-class political force had emerged into the state arena under war conditions, in an irreversible way: the 'masses' whom the patricians were supposed to look after were threatening, though still quite mildly, to look after themselves. This could only be coped with in terms appropriate to the system by the formation of a new intellectual leadership—the creation of a new bond between this awakened sector of civil society and the old state. Fortunately, the very conditions which had presided over the birth of Labourism were highly conducive to this. The corporative aspect of working-class politics meant that it was weak in ideological leadership, and relatively unaware of the problematic of power: the most articulate ideology of naissant Labour politics, Fabianism, was at its feeblest on this issue. 'Gradualism' did much to pave the way for the shift in power relations that actually occurred.

This shift took the form of the transfer of a substantial part of the old Liberal intelligentsia into the ranks of the Labour Party itself. The 'ranks'

is, of course, a formal way of speaking; what they actually migrated to were the higher echelons of the movement, rapidly finding themselves promoted and elected into posts of power. From 1918 onwards an ever-growing stream of intellectuals who would previously have adhered to the Liberal Party (or at least been satellites of Liberalism in the wider sense) moved to the Labour Party. They took Liberalism (in the crucial deeper sense) with them. Their liberal variant of the British state creed was readily accepted as the guiding light of the new movement: British Socialism with that unmistakable, resonantly moderate and pragmatical emphasis on the 'British'. From the same moment onwards, the Liberal Party itself declined. No significant part of the intelligentsia shifted back towards it until the 1960s, when it began to look as if Labour might be drifting into a bankruptcy of its own.

One does not require even the most tenuous form of conspiracy-theory to explain the change. The Liberal Party, after laying the foundations of the 'welfare state', had been deeply discredited by the war experience, and still more by the experiment in coalition government with Conservatism after 1916—a régime presided over by the one-time chief of Liberal radicalism, David Lloyd George. Reaction against the war and the post-war slump (when working-class militancy was severely defeated) was therefore also against Liberalism in the old form. The progressive arm of the intellectual class turned to the new movement, where it was overwhelmingly welcomed. In the guise of socialist novelty, tradition established a new lease of life and the integration of the proletariat into the British state assumed a new level of expression. By then, it was only in that guise that the system could perpetuate itself. Liberalism developed better without the vestment of the old Liberal Party. The change took time, naturally. It was not until the end of the Second World War in the 1940s that the process was complete. But by that time, liberal thinkers like Keynes and Beveridge had forged the intellectual and planning framework for the new era of reform, and the political leadership of Labourism had become wholly dominated by traditional, élite cadres. These created the more interventionist state, and the social welfare systems of post-Second World War Britain, in continuity with the Liberal Party pioneers of the early 1900s.[31]

[31] In his *Politicians and the Slump: the labour Government of 1929–31*, London 1967, Robert Skidelsky warns commentators on attributing too much to the formulated Keynesian doctrines themselves: 'The absence of developed Keynesian theory was not a decisive barrier to the adoption of what might loosely be termed Keynesian policies, as is proved by the experience of the United States, Germany, France and Sweden which in the 1930s all attempted . . . to promote economic recovery through deficit budgeting.' (pp. 387–8.) But in Britain such 'social engineering' depended upon 'a resolute government . . . exploiting the differences between industry and the City' (as these had been outlined in the major document of the era, the Macmillan Report on *Finance and Industry*, London 1931, Cmnd. 3897). Although correct in the abstract, what such analyses ignore is that the nature of the state is incompatible with this sort of strategy: no such 'resolute' régime has ever come into being, even with the modest equipment in 'social engineering' Labour acquired during and after the Second World War. The reason is that a strategy of 'making capitalism work' *in that sense* remains semi-revolutionary in British conditions (i.e. it implies radical re-formation of the state in a more than simply administrative way). As Skidelsky has indicated elsewhere, the most 'resolute' proponent of that kind of reform, Oswald Mosley, was driven into the ranks of counter-revolution by the sheer impossibility of the task: see 'Great Britain', in *European Fascism*, edited S. J. Woolf, London 1968, and his subsequent biography of Mosley.

Earlier, middle-class radicalism had been defeated, and a continuity established which 'contained' capitalist development within a conservative social nexus. Now, working-class radicalism had been diverted and blunted in an analogous fashion, and with similar results. This second solution of continuity carried the working class into its own version of 'containment'; proletarian opposition to free capitalist development united politically with that of the élite traditionalists. The weakening, ever more backward industrial basis was made to carry not only the old snail-shell but a modern 'welfare state' as well. Its triumph, which has only recently become its disaster, lay in evolving a system which both Dukes and dustmen could like, or at least find tolerable.

British Socialism, when perceived in its underlying relationship to the state (or equally, in its inner morality and reflexes) should be called 'Tory Socialism'. In the later 1930s and 1940s a new generation of liberal thinkers invented 'social-democratic' forms for the Labour Party, based upon largely spurious parallels with Continental socialist reformism: Evan Durbin, Hugh Gaitskell and (in the 1950s) Anthony Crosland. Failing as completely as most Marxists to focus upon the specific character of the English state and constitution, these pretended that the Labour Party was a movement of modernizing egalitarianism—in effect, that it was engaged on (if indeed it had not already achieved) the second, radical social revolution which the middle class had failed to produce. The events of the period 1964–70 were an ironical refutation of these ideas. The cringing Labour conservatism of 1974–6 has been their annihilation. The Labour Party's so-called 'social revolution' of the post-war years led not to national revival but to what Tony Benn now describes as 'de-industrialization': that is, to rapidly accelerating backwardness, economic stagnation, social decay, and cultural despair.

The immediate origin and political condition of this long-delayed crisis was the political harnessing of the working class to the socially conservative British Constitution. In many polemics this process has been crudely mistaken for 'surrender to capitalism', or 'reformism'—for instance, the social reformism of German Social-Democracy since the Second World War. In fact the Labourist 'surrender' has been to a particularly antique form of bourgeois society and constitution, and the resultant balance of class forces has been to a significant extent directed *against* capitalism, in the sense of industrial modernity and the individualistic, mobile but more egalitarian social relations accompanying it. The form of capitalism which it actively assisted—foreign-oriented investment and finance capital—was itself a constant impediment to more dynamic industrial growth. Labourism allied the proletariat to the inner conservatism and the main outward thrust of imperialism; not to domestic industrialism. As a result, it became a principal agent of 'de-industrialization'.

One may also argue that it turned into *the* main cause of 'the British malady' (etc.), at least from around 1965 onwards. Nobody would rationally have thought that a capitalist class so socially conservative and so tied to monetary imperialism could easily change its historical skin, and quickly give birth to a régime of dynamic modernization. It was the

Labour Party which channelled the 'radical' elements and social forces capable of that. It was Labour which returned to office in 1964 with the only plausible-sounding scheme of radical change—a programme of combined and concerted social and technological modernization, envisaging the ending of social privilege, and 'putting science and industry first'. Within three years this programme was utterly defeated, and the Harold Wilson of 1970 was reduced to posturing as the Premier of a 'natural governing party'—the party now thoroughly at home with the traditions of British state hegemony, wielding an easy Tory authority over the propertied class once afraid of it.[32]

External Solutions

Since the final failure of Labourism to achieve (or even seriously attempt) Britain's second political revolution, the state has entered into a historical cul-de-sac from which no exit is visible—that is, no exit along the sacrosanct lines of its previous development. British political life has revolved helplessly in diminishing and sinking circles, from which both main political parties try to strike out in vain. They imagine that 'left' or 'right' wing solutions are feasible without a radical break in the crippling state form which corsets them both and forces all new policies back into a dead centre of 'consensus'. The party-political system itself (of which Labour has become the main defender) makes it next to impossible to obtain any new departure from within the system. The two-party equilibrium, with its antique non-proportional elective method and its great bedrock of tacit agreement on central issues, was formed to promote stability at the expense of adventure. It was never intended that stability should become catalepsy. But all that 'stability' meant was the comfort of external supports which rendered internal growing-pains unnecessary; now that these have vanished, inert conservatism has inevitably turned into increasing non-adaptation to the outside world.

Nothing is more significant during this last era of thickening twilight than the role of what one might label imaginary external solutions: the magic escape-routes indulged in by one government after another as their

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[32] Among many lugubrious chronicles of conceit and decay, perhaps the most compact and useful is *The Decade of Disillusion: British Politics in the Sixties*, edited by D. McKie and C. Cook, London 1972, especially the chapter by Peter Sinclair, 'The Economy—a Study in Failure'. The latter's account of the National Plan fiasco conveys the oscillation between megalomania and incompetence that has characterized most key state operations in recent decades: 'The impression brilliantly conveyed to the electorate in 1964 was that some undefined negative attitude implicit in "stop-go" and some unspecified kind of governmental amateurism were all that had deprived Britain of rapid growth in the fifties and early sixties. Purposive and dynamic government would suddenly restore her rightful rate of growth (i.e. by Planning).' In reality the National Plan was to consist 'of little more than the printed replies to a questionnaire sent to industries about their estimates of inputs and outputs on the assumption of 25% real growth by 1970 . . . (!) . . . The hope was that this stated assumption would justify itself by encouraging business to create the additional capacity required to make its "prediction" come true . . . The truth is that its targets could not conceivably have been achieved.' (pp. 103–4) Shortly afterwards the agency set up to perform this feat of levitation, the Department of Economic Affairs, 'withered away unnoticed and unannaled'. Perhaps the most sobering picture of the actual capitalist reality beyond the various new styles, starts and visionary scenarios punctuating governmental life from 1964 to the present is *British Capitalism, Workers and the Profit Squeeze*, London. 1972, by Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe.

economic growth-policies collapse around them, broken in pieces by the contradiction of a non-growth state. Since the 1950s boom, the most important of these has been the European Economic Community. British governments refused to join the EEC earlier, during its expanding phase, because they retained too strong a faith in imperialism. Re-baptized as the 'Commonwealth', they still thought the system might go on furnishing Britain with the external support-area it was used to. This illusion dwindled away in the 1960s. Each administration after the Macmillan Conservative government then turned to the Common Market as the only possible realistic alternative. The Labour Party mouthed strident patriotic opposition to Europe when out of office, in 1961–3 and again in 1970–74; but when returned to power, it always moved back into a negotiating stance with the EEC, and finally staged the referendum that confirmed British membership in 1975.

British entry can therefore be described by the two words which apply to almost everything in post-Second World War history: 'too late'. It took place when the long developmental phase of the EEC was nearly over, and world depression was looming—so that the British entered a Community itself falling into stalemate and self-doubt. In addition, entry had taken place for a predictable and illusory reason. Although not exactly a surrogate for Empire (like the Commonwealth or EFTA), the Common Market was beyond any doubt seen as the external answer to the British disease. The stimulus of entering a vigorous, competitive capitalist area was intended to do what domestic economic policy had so obviously failed to do: force the fabled 'regeneration' of British industry. Internal levitation had failed, with a dismal succession of thuds; exposure was supposed to accomplish the miracle instead.

Painful as the effects were expected to be, the assumption was that they would be less awful than drastic internal reform. Europe was perceived essentially as bracing bad medicine. But the point of the treatment was revival of the patient, not decent burial. Even fervent Europeanists still regularly transmitted surreal notions on how good it would be for the Continent to have lessons in democracy from the Mother of Parliaments. Neither side in the debate relaxed its grip on the udders of island constitutionalism for a moment.[33] In fact it is dubious whether entry could have had much beneficial effect on the British economy even ten years sooner, unless a much more radical internal programme had been adopted—unless (e.g.) the Labour 1964 policies had been taken seriously and fought for, instead of being thrown overboard at the first signs of trouble. Without a programme of (in Benn's sense) 're-industrialization' in some sort of conjunction with the new EEC external field of forces, it was always possible (as opponents argued) that these forces would have been overwhelming economically. But 're-industrialization' is not really a question of economic policy in Britain. This is the characteristic empirical-minded error made by successive governments since 1945 (and still made by Benn and his supporters on the Labour left wing). It is, in

[33] I wrote a short account of this passage in our affairs which appeared as NLR 75 and as *The Left Against Europe?*, London 1973, arguing that from any progressive standpoint ranging from the mildly reforming to the revolutionary no fate could be worse than national isolation in the grip of an unreformed UK state.

fact, a call for revolution. More exactly, it is a call for the 'revolution from above' which the British state-system has been built upon denying and repressing ever since the Industrial Revolution. It is a call—therefore—which has not the most remote chance of being effectively answered by the existing state, and the deeply rooted civil structures which sustain it.

This impossibility is the immediate context for both the so-called 'economic crisis' and the problem of peripheral nationalism; as such it deserves closer study. The keynote of all appeals for economic renaissance between the 1880s and the present day has been the industrial sector: the wish is to re-establish the primacy of the productive sector over the City and finance-capital—and hence, of the technologist and the industrial entrepreneur over the banker and the broker, of the 'specialized' scientist or business man over the non-specialized (or 'amateur') gentleman-administrator who has governed both the political system and the state bureaucracy. The exercise is presented as the formation of a new, healthier equilibrium: righting the balance left by aristocracy and empire, 'stimulating' industry to a better performance in comparative terms. Once achieved, this more competitive industrial basis will provide export-led growth, leading to a harder currency and so to a renewed foundation for London finance capital also. Sterling will regain its place as a valid international trading currency (even though second to the US dollar), and this all-round revival would signify new life for the state.[34]

Sometimes the operation has been seen as state-contrived or directed (as under the Wilson government of the 1960s); sometimes as a matter of 'liberating capitalism', freeing the entrepreneurial spirit from state obstructions and burdens (e.g. the Heath government of 1970–72, whose rhetoric has now been taken up by Mrs Thatcher, with the usual empty radicalism of opposition). Yet these prescriptions are not as different as they appear. Since the whole problem lies in the fact that Britain does not possess a dynamic but frustrated capitalist class capable of responding to 'liberation' in the simple-minded Friedmannite sense, state intervention is in fact inevitable (as Heath swiftly found out). The historical 'balance' that has to be righted is in reality so ancient, so buttressed by manifold social customs and ideology, and the domestic capitalist class is so short-sighted and dependent, that nothing except vigorous intervention from above can conceivably make an impact.

However, there exists no state-class of 'technocrats' or administrators capable of doing this. The political and administrative class is irremediably compromised, socially and intellectually, with the old patrician order. Such 'strategies' exist only as recurring fantasies of liberation: perpetual 'new starts', bold dreams of dynamism solemnly enunciated in manifestos and dramatic 'reports' every year or so when the

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[34] The most interesting general analysis and verdict on economic policy and the state is that provided by *The United Kingdom in 1980: the Hudson Report*, London 1975. Its main argument was that failure in economic policy was inseparable from the structure; personnel, ideology and recruitment of the state. This abrasive commonplace produced an unprecedented chorus of abusive dismissal from virtually the whole corps of *chiens de garde*: the intelligentsia choked as one over this bitter foreign pill. I tried to describe the spectacle at the time in *Bananas*, No. 1, London 1975.

government changes hands (or even when it does not). These furnish a fleeting euphoria to commentators, wholly founded upon the fact that they and their readers have forgotten the previous instalments. The predictable failure of each new bold initiative is simply suppressed, even as it takes place; by oniric magic, a new dream-corner materializes which the nation has to get round, into the land of the righted balance and 'soundly-based' prosperity. The external observer perceives a constant decline, with occasional plateaus; the English spirit sees constantly-repeated hard luck, and Chancellors of the Exchequer who failed to 'get it quite right' *this* time, but, *next* time . . .

To interrupt this cycle of delusions would require a change of élites. It would entail the radical removal of the entire traditional apparatus of state and civil intelligentsia—that is, of that stratum which, in spite of its liberalism and constitutional gentility, is as much of a stranglehold upon English society as were the Prussian Junker class, the Italian Risorgimento Liberals, the Spanish landowners or the old Dutch burgher class on their respective countries. Élite changes of that kind never occur by modulation and negotiation: they need a break (which may, of course, assume many different forms). No state ever reforms itself away into something so strikingly different—least of all one with this degree of historical prestige, residual self-confidence and capacity for self-deception.[35]

From the early 1960s to 1975 the European Community provided a constantly recurring external support for illusions of rejuvenescence: the vital outside succour which would render internal revolution unnecessary. But as faith in this empire-surrogate evaporated (almost from the instant of entry) another and still more potent formula took its place. The procession of quasi-divine strokes of good fortune and helping hands that had helped the wheelchair through the twentieth century received an incredible climax. From around 1970 it became steadily clearer that oil exploration in the North Sea was going to yield great results, with the obvious promise of an eventual reversal of the chronic British balance-of-payments crisis, a restoration of sterling, and a state-aided industrial investment programme of modernization. After furnishing the British state with the greatest colonial domain, the Gold Standard, victorious allies in two world wars, the EEC and the protective

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[35] It should not be assumed that the UK state's immutability implies absence of *wish* to reform itself; on the contrary, as with other *ancient régimes*, the drowning sensation produces an almost ceaseless quest for insignificant change. 'In the ten years between 1964 and 1973', notes one authority, 'this Constitution's quality of flexibility has been predominant. Never before has there been so much talk or so much actual change, always within a framework which has been kept intact . . .' P. Bromhead, *Britain's Developing Constitution*, London 1974, p. 217. This wave of frenetic tinkering was devoted to making the old machine more 'efficient' while keeping it intact: a contradiction in terms pondered over by many Royal Commissions and Inquiries (described in, e.g., Frank Stacey, *British Government 1966–1975*, Oxford 1975, see especially chapter XII). Possibly the finest monument to this 'stage army of the good' (Stacey, op. cit., p. 215) was the Redcliffe-Maud reform of Local Government, a superbly unradical and unpopular administrative overhaul that conveyed the maximum impression of novelty with the minimum of real change. The only genuinely radical reform to emerge, from the Kilbrandon Commission's Report on Devolution, was brought about by a threat of death to the framework itself: the political eruption of Scottish and Welsh nationalism in 1974.

American Empire for its old age, God out-did his own record of generous favouritism. The final version of imperial exploitation was discovered in the mud of the North Sea. Practically from the grave itself there seemed to arise the last great, miraculous escape route, the ultimate external cornucopia.

This last phase in the pattern of external dependency has, of course, been perceived by most political leaders in the usual way: salvation at the eleventh hour. Providence will pay off Great Britain's debts, and allow her ancient state to slither into the twenty-first century. In an outbreak of euphoria without precedent, one Minister after another has conjured up the light at the end of the tunnel. If only the British can hang on, in a few years all will be well. The North Sea income will pay off the debts many times over, and leave a huge surplus for industrial investment. What all Chancellors of the Exchequer failed to do, nature will accomplish. At the same time, like any heir expecting a fortune, the government has hugely expanded its borrowings from abroad. Combined with the soaring inflation of 1974–6 (which afflicted Britain more than her main industrial competitors), this led to a chronic sterling devaluation crisis. Partly 'managed' by government—in order to favour export industries—this collapse none the less threatened to become total in 1976. While waiting on the oil revenues to flow in, shorter-term salvation was obtained by a loan from the International Monetary Fund in December.

Foreign governments, and foreign observers generally, naturally have a differing perspective on this conjuncture. There is no reason why they should take this latest version of the British redemption myth seriously. But there are plenty of reasons why they should conclude that both the IMF loan and North Sea oil will merely be another chapter of false hopes.[36] They will be used to avoid painful changes, not to promote them; to put off drastic reforms once more, not to make them palatable. Consensus and inertia will see to that. To furnish one or two extra 'chances' for a state like this one is meaningless. It involves placing more credence in the re-birth ideology of politicians than in the character of the state which they serve. The former deals in round-the-corner optimism; the latter in a tri-secular accumulation of imperial complacency and slow-moving certainties, all firmly cemented into the instinctive reflexes of the huge extended family that really governs England. As long as that family is there, conducting its business in the drawing-room conversational monotone of tradition, further stays of execution will be used for its real historic aim: to change just as much as is necessary for everything to go on as before.

Class and Nationalism

The conservative essence of the British political drama occupies a smaller and smaller stage, and goes on in an ever-dimmer light. In the declining spiral each new repetition of the play, although advertised by the players

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[36] They need only read J. P. Mackintosh's astringent account of the behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings around the loan, in *The Times*, 13 December 1976, should a doubt have crossed their mind that contemporary British statesmanship is invariably myopic farce acted out like Greek tragedy.

as the same, has a new note of hollowness or approaching night. Each time the forces capable of extinguishing the performance move a little closer to the actors and the ancient scenery, and loom more noticeably over events.

There are the outside forces, upon which this analysis has placed so much emphasis. The disappearance of empire and the dwindling place of its child, the City, in the fabric of international capitalism; the failing industrial sector and currency, and the gathering intolerance of the capitalist powers for this chronic malingerer who, in spite of every assistance and sympathy, still cannot shake himself into new life. Internally, the class struggle also advances with its own threat of disruption. Since 1974, when the miners' strike led to the overthrow of a Conservative government, the Labour Party has accomplished apparent miracles in restoration of the consensus: this was (as *The Times* stated then) what it was elected to do. The latest round of crisis-and-redemption has only been possible at all on the frozen ice of the class struggle, obtained by means of the 'Social Contract'—perhaps the last desperate form of that deep class-alliance the state has always relied upon.

How thick the ice looks, in the declarations of Labour Ministers and trade-union leaders who have supported the agreement! How thin and short-lived it may soon become, as inflation and unemployment continue to increase during 1977! It would be broken altogether by the return of the Conservative Party to office, even before it melts under force of circumstance. And under the ice of this traditional nation-first solidarity, real tradition has been put in reverse. The point of the old, secular social strategy was concession to mounting pressures from below: there was always something to concede, and some reason for the lower classes to retain faith in the British firmament. Sacrifices were made for later gains that came from empire and warfare—but which really did come, until well after the last world war. Under the Social Contract, sacrifices and falling standards are being accepted in exchange for rewards that now hinge (when one discounts the escapism of North Sea oil) genuinely on the capacity of the British state to reform its own society—upon the enactment of the long-awaited, incessantly heralded 'British economic miracle' putting the country back on a level with its old rivals in Europe.

If (one should say 'when') this does not take place, a massive reaction is bound to occur and shake even the very strong structure of English hegemony. Even English patience is not endless. Were it to happen in conjunction with a further phase of the external crisis—accompanied by a currency collapse, for example—then not even the beleaguered optimists of the Establishment would imagine the political system going on as usual. The very least they foresee is the conventional British twentieth-century formula for crisis, a 'National Government' of emergency.[37]

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[37] 'National' or coalition governments, in the sense of 'emergency régimes' where the state faces a crisis, account for twenty-one years of this century's political history in Britain: 1915–22, 1931–45. The corresponding figures for party rule are: Conservatives, twenty-eight years; Labour Party, eighteen years; Liberal Party, nine years (*British Political Facts, 1900–1968*, London 1969, by D. Butler and J. Freeman). It is the normal formula of retrenchment, and will undoubtedly be employed again when the situation becomes critical

But in any case, to these two menacing forces has now been added a third—a third force which, though less powerful and significant than the others, is likely none the less to function as the precipitant of the conflict. The underlying dynamic of class alliance has altered; but so have the rules of the political system itself. The one has been forced by Britain's shrinking economic stature and relations; the other by peripheral nationalism—that is, by a different kind of opposition to the same declining world and philosophy. Different aspects and modes of this opposition are described in some of the essays in *The Break-up of Britain*. But in the context of British state-history what counts most is the common element they display: however varied in background and aims, these situations of breakdown and gathering nationalism fall outside the characteristic contours of English constitutionalism. They are not the kind of problem it was slowly formed to deal with, and they will resist or destroy the typical remedies which it inspires. In summary, almost emblematic form, one might say: London government invents habitual class remedies to nationalist ailments. Its instinct is to concede, when sufficiently prodded, then consolidate tradition on the new, slightly different balance of forces that results. Although notoriously effective on the front of class struggle and negotiation, the strategy has no real application to national questions. The philosophy and practice of conservative empiricism presupposes a stable, consensual framework; the new nationalisms challenge that framework itself. British constitutionalism makes an arcane mystique of power, removing it from the arena of normal confrontation and enshrining it as a Grail-like 'sovereignty'; but nationalism *is* about power, in a quite straightforward sense. It is a demand for the Grail, or at least a bit of it (this is, of course, a demand for the impossible, in English ideological tradition).

This pattern has been followed to the letter in the development of intra-British conflict so far. When Welsh and Scottish nationalism began to advance politically in the 1960s, London government from the outset assumed that these developments would have to be adapted to, and nullified, in the habitual way. It noticed that the demands were different in Wales and Scotland, as were the relative strengths of the nationalist parties. So of course different concessions would be in order in each region. A Royal Commission was appointed to work out how this should be done, in the customary hope that the problem would have solved itself

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enough. More important than the time-span of emergency régimes is their pivotal role in state history: the genuinely massive adaptations and changes of balance have taken place in war-time—when the impact of external forces became literally irresistible—and under 'non-party' tutelage. The collapse of the Liberal Party, the crystallization of Labourism, the emancipation of women, the Welfare State, liquor licensing hours, widespread sale of contraceptives, trade-union 'partnership' in the state, juvenile delinquency—very many of the big turning-points and most recognizable traits of modern British life were products of war-time. Warfare provided a forced rupture in the normally stifling continuum of the state Establishment—in effect, a partial, controlled social revolution which gave the system a new lease of life on each occasion (but above all after 1945). This thesis is conveyed in Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, London 1965, and *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change 1900–1967*, London 1968. On the Second World War, Angus Calder's *The People's War*, London 1968, argues cogently for an interpretation of the War as an abortive, ultimately betrayed, social revolution. The congruence of the thesis with the general emphasis on external relations put forward here is obvious.

by the time this body's deliberations were finished. When completed, its recommendations were greeted with universal derision and cynicism.[38]

The derision vanished with the new election results of 1974. The new Labour government hastily produced legislation embodying some of the Commission's ideas, which became the 'Scotland and Wales Bill' of December 1976.[39] Now that the problems were not going to disappear spontaneously, concessionary tactics would have to be employed. With limited degrees of self-government in domestic matters (extremely limited in the case of Wales), it was believed that the regions would soon relapse into their traditional subordination. Are they not full of basically loyal folk who may have a few grievances but know that Britain is best? Once reasonable note is regally taken of their grudges, surely they will fall into line again, acknowledging their limited yet honoured place in the greater scheme of things? A great deal of fulsome rhetoric of 1960s vintage went into the deal: the legislation was titled 'Our Changing Democracy' and sanctified by speeches on bringing government 'closer to the people', combating impersonal centralism, etc. When set in the historical perspectives of English élitism, this was indecorous to say the least of it: few have seen it as anything but an ideological façade. Like the Local Government reforms which had preceded devolution, the changes were at heart ways of preserving the old state—minor alterations to conserve the antique essence of English hegemony.

There was no real belief in a new partnership of peoples. And in fact, such a partnership—in other words, genuine 'transfer of power' from the old state—was never conceivable without the most radical reform of the centre itself. To give effective power away meant examining, and changing, the basis of power itself: the Constitution, the myth-source of

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[38] The *Royal Commission on the Constitution, 1969–1973*, London 1973, Cmnd. 5460, two vols, chaired (latterly) by Lord Kilbrandon. The general reaction of parliament and metropolitan opinion to its appearance in October 1973 leaves one in no doubt that the whole thing would have been consigned to the dungeons as a lost cause, had the Nationalists not made their dramatic electoral break-through only a few months later. The lost cause then speedily turned into the dominant theme of parliamentary existence, as it was seen that the future of the political order itself was at stake. Among the neglected but entertaining sections of the Report are those on the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, tiny territories that cast a minor yet revealing light on the vaster fabric they (somewhat vaguely) belong to: 'Unique miniature states with wide powers of self-government', as the Commissioners recorded, 'not capable of description by any of the usual categories of political science . . . full of anomalies, peculiarities and anachronisms, which even those who work the system find it hard to define precisely. We do not doubt that more logical and orderly races would have swept all these away long ago . . .' p. 410, p. 441. Not having made enough nuisance of themselves, these authentic feudal relics have been left in peace: 'We have not approached the Islands in any spirit of reforming zeal', confessed the Commission, 'Indeed, if only the constitutional relationships between the United Kingdom and the Islands could remain as they have been in recent years . . . everybody would be happy, and our task would disappear.'

[39] The progress of 'devolution' from universal contempt to a critical issue of state is best epitomized in Hegel's reflections on the Great Reform Bill of 1832. Reluctantly, it was conceded that—'The right way to pursue improvement is not by the moral route of using ideas, admonitions, associations of isolated individuals, in order to counteract the system of corruption and avoid being indebted to it, but by the alteration of institutions. The common prejudice of inertia, namely to cling always to the old faith in the excellence of an institution, even if the present state of affairs derived from it is altogether corrupt, has thus at last caved in . . .', *Hegel's Political Writings*, 'The English Reform Bill', op. cit., p. 298.

sovereignty, and all that it depends upon. The whole British political system had to be altered. There has been no serious question of doing this, for the sake of the Scots, the Welsh and the Ulstermen. The only political party which advocates it is the one permanently removed from power, the Liberal Party.[40] Unable to contemplate radical reform of the centre (since its whole modern history has been built on avoiding it), London government has blundered empirically into the usual tactic of graduated response. One commentary after another has explored the self-contradictory nature of the proposals, their liability to generate conflict and escalation of nationalist sentiment and demands.[41] These criticisms have had little effect on the policy. At the time of writing it may still be obstructed or dropped altogether, because of the vicissitudes of economic crisis and UK politics; there is small chance of its being amended into a workable form of federalism.

The Slow Landslide

The foregoing analysis has tried, in all too summary a fashion, to isolate some of the elements of fatality in Great Britain's current crisis. It has

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[40] The Kilbrandon Commission formulated the view of federalism which has become standard in the debates on devolution: 'As far as we are aware no advocate of federalism in the United Kingdom has succeeded in producing a federal scheme satisfactorily tailored to fit the circumstances of England. A federation consisting of four units—England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—would be so unbalanced as to be unworkable. It would be dominated by the overwhelming political importance and wealth of England. The English Parliament would rival the United Kingdom federal Parliament; and in the federal Parliament itself, the representation of England could hardly be scaled down in such a way as to enable it to be out-voted by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, together representing less than one-fifth of the population. A United Kingdom federation of the four countries . . . is therefore not a realistic proposition.' *Royal Commission*, op. cit., para. 531, p. 159. The most persuasive version of the Liberal Party's argument for a federal Britain is Jenny Chapman's *Scottish Self-Government* (Scottish Liberal Party, 1976).

[41] But no commentary has done so more devastatingly than the main parliamentary debate on devolution itself, during the four days of the Scotland and Wales Bill's Second Reading, Monday–Thursday 13–16 December 1976 (Hansard *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 922, Nos. 14–17). The student is advised to begin at the end, with the speech of the Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, Michael Foot. This poem of embattled Constitutionalism begins: 'The central issue was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Walton (and numerous other hon. Friends and Members) . . . They expressed their genuine belief that there was a danger of the Bill's undermining and destroying the unity of the United Kingdom. That is the central feature of the debate . . . My reply is that there are many other hon. Members on both sides of the House who support the Bill precisely because they believe it is the best way to strengthen and sustain the unity of the United Kingdom . . .' Pursuing his theme of mystic unity, the Lord President underlined the point with ever greater emphasis: the whole structure of the measure upholds, even enhances the Sovereign Supremacy of Parliament: 'The fundamental explanation for the way we have devised the Bill is that we want to ensure that this House retains its supremacy . . .' so that, in the event of conflict among the nations, 'We sustain the proposition that the House of Commons . . . and the decisions of Parliament must be respected. That is the way in which we say these matters must be settled. Because we set up other Assemblies with specified powers, rights and duties *does not mean that the House of Commons need not retain its full power to deal with these matters in the future . . .*' (my emphasis). Not only is federalism out of the question; the unitary state will remain as mythically One as all past apologists have depicted it. A Scottish National Party MP, Gordon Wilson, objected to this ghost of Absolutism being conjured up once more: was it not the case that in some countries, Scotland for example, the people were held to be sovereign, rather than Parliament (more precisely, the Crown in Parliament)? This was, again, the far from 'technical' point referred to by McKenzie and Silver (see note 27, above). But, of course, it was not even noticed in the context of Foot's Westminster fustian.

discovered these, above all, in the historical structure of the British state. As far as 'devolution' is concerned, these are the only sort of reforms which such a state *can* enact, while remaining bound by its distinctive historical identity. That identity was the product of extraordinarily successful earlier adaptation. Although a development oddity belonging to the era of transition from absolutism to capitalist modernity, its anomalous character was first crystallized and then protected by priority. As the road-making state into modern times, it inevitably retained much from the medieval territory it left behind: a cluster of deep-laid archaisms still central to English society and the British state. Yet the same developmental position encouraged the secular retention of these traits, and a constant return to them as the special mystique of the British Constitution and way of life. Once the road system had been built up, for other peoples as well as the English, the latter were never compelled to reform themselves along the lines which the English revolutions had made possible. They had acquired such great advantages from leading the way—above all in the shape of empire—that for over two centuries it was easier to consolidate or re-exploit this primary role than to break with it.

In terms of modern developmental time, this has been a very long era. During it, English society has become thoroughly habituated to the conservative re-exploitation of good fortune; and for most of the period the leaner, marginal countries around England were associated with the act. They too received something of the impress of the curious English class system, and were deeply affected by the traditions of patrician liberalism. They also were for long integrated into its peculiar success story, in a way quite different from most other minor nationalities, and only possible in these singular developmental conditions. At bottom, this freer, less painful, less regimented form of assimilation was simply a function of the unique imperialism England established in the wider world, and of the state-form which corresponded to it internally.[42]

The critique of that form is still at an elementary stage. This is partly a result of the mystifications referred to earlier; but also partly because of the general tardiness with which the study of comparative development has arisen. I suggested in 'The Modern Janus' that the whole question of nationalism has remained enigmatic for the same reason. Both the general principles of the nation-state and the particular examples of

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[42] This is related to the criticism which must be made of what is in many respects the best, most comprehensive attempt at an overall analysis of British development and its impact on the smaller nations: Michael Hechter's *Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development 1536–1966*, London 1975. His account is conducted essentially in terms of over-abstract models of development: the orthodox evolutionary and diffusionist model (which foresaw the gradual elimination of peripheral nationalism) is replaced by the 'internal colonialist' one emphasizing the factors of uneven development, discrimination, etc., present even in the oldest West European states. Although enlightening, the application of the theory to Britain is insufficiently historical, and misses too many of the specifics. It omits the key question of the character of the unitary UK state, and has too narrow a view of the significance of imperialism for the whole British order. The differentia of this variety of 'internal colonialism' was that—like the state itself—it was a pre-modern (Absolutist or transitional) form of assimilation, which survived and acquired new vitality through successful external depredations—thus enabling real integrative tendencies to outweigh those of 'uneven development' for a prolonged period. Nonetheless, a discussion founded upon Hechter's analysis would probably be more useful than any other in the future (he himself conceded that 'the models employed here are painfully preliminary', p. 6).

these principles at work, in fact, can only be properly discerned in this relatively new developmental perspective. Although formulated originally to explain backwardness, it has turned out to be the intellectual framework most appropriate for understanding the 'advanced' states as well: in this case, the original schoolmaster of the process, long left behind by his first disciples and overtaken by others every year now, yet congenitally unable to renounce the habits of primacy.

Many elements have been quite left out of even this bare outline. The nature and ambiguous function of the English Common Law system, for example, as both guarantor of individual liberty and central buttress of social conservatism. In both senses, the mystique of law extends and supports those aspects of the constitution and legal system mentioned previously. Or the particular importance of modern religious developments in England: as in other contemporary democracies, these have certainly contributed powerfully to the actual substance of the political order, especially on its left-wing side. Both Liberalism and Labourism are structurally indebted to the long-drawn-out English Reformation which extended from late Tudor times until Victorian Nonconformity.[43] Or the undoubted significance of emigration, continuous yet hard to quantify in its effects, as the perennial safety valve of society's restless and unstable fraction. In this basic human sense, 'empire' was anything but an abstraction to many generations of British workers and their families.

However, in spite of these and other omissions, I hope a sufficient idea of this strange, declining social world has emerged. It has always been too easy, at least in modern times, to either praise or condemn the Anglo-British state. On the one hand, its historical role and past grandeur impose themselves on most observers. During the Cold War in particular Britain's faltering economy was compensated for by a renewed cult of ancient Constitutional Liberty and wise pragmatism: an especially holy wayside shrine of the Free World. On the other hand, since the end of the last century nobody who has looked at all critically at the economy or the

[43] Stein Rokkan's study, 'Nation-building, Cleavage Formation and the Structuring of Mass Politics', in *Citizens, Elections, Parties: approaches to the comparative study of Processes of Development*, Oslo 1970, gives an interesting comparative view of the persisting significance of religion in the structure of modern party politics; see especially pp. 101–7. This significance is substantially different in all four British nations, and still constitutes one of the deepest agencies of diversity at work: Catholicism and militant Protestant anti-Catholicism in Ireland; Radical Nonconformity in Wales; and Calvinism in Scotland. In England itself, debate on this question has always rightly focused on the famous Halévy thesis: among recent discussions, see particularly Bernard Semmel's edition of Halévy's *The Birth of Methodism in England*, London 1971, and the same writer's *The Methodist Revolution*, London 1974. The latter attempts to relate the theme to the character of Anglo-British nationalism, pointing out how: 'having long abandoned their seventeenth-century revolutionary inheritance, the sects, implicitly following the logic and in part the rhetoric of Cromwellian policy, could see a liberal, Protestant Britain as an elect nation with a divine mission. This was a view which . . . Methodism came to share' (pp. 172–8). In terms of the 'second revolution' argument outlined above, Methodism is perhaps more plausibly interpreted as a surrogate, merely 'cultural' revolution, whose intensity and effects were intensified by the failure of revolution at the state level—rather than as a spiritual barrier to revolution as such. Implicitly following the rhetoric of a lost revolutionary inheritance, without its reality, such 'cultural revolutions' end as reinforcements of the existing state-form. In both England and China they have also served as partial mechanisms of adjustment to industrial or urban existence.

class-structure has been able to avoid sarcasm, often tending towards despair. Incurious worship and flagellation (including self-flagellation): it has always been hard to steer any sort of critical course beyond these poles, and yet keep the whole object in view. If critique is becoming more possible, it is probably because the object itself has at last decayed to the point of disintegration. The different Britain now being born may be better able to consider its ancestor dispassionately. The new fragmentation may also bring more space and distance into the British world, mental as well as regional and political. If so, it will become easier to weigh up the old contradictions and form a more balanced, overall estimate of the state's decline. The factors of grandeur and of misery are bound together, in the peculiar dialectic and tempo of Great Britain's fall from empire.

That kind of imperial greatness led inexorably to this kind of inert, custom-ridden, self-deluding misery. In its fall as in its origins, this empire differs from the others. It revolved around a remarkably non-regimented society, civilian in its direction and peaceful in its politics, and informed by a high degree of responsible self-activity. But the absence of bureaucracy was always the presence of an extensive, able, co-optive patriciate: rule from above was stronger, for being informal and personally mediated, not weaker. Peace was paid for by democracy—that is, in terms of the loss of any aggressive egalitarian spirit, in terms of 'knowing one's place' and quietism towards the state. The civility was tied to this permanent malady of class, in a unity essentially archaic in nature, whatever its gestures towards modernity. 'Responsibility', that liberal glory of the English state, was never separable from the huge, passive irresponsibility underneath. It depended on and fostered this working-class apathy, the particular social inertia of England. For its part—with the same long-term inevitability—Labourism merely occupied the terrain of this passivity, camping on it like a new set of well-meaning landlords.

A specific form of containment of capitalism, and an accompanying anti-capitalist spirit, were notable merits of the old order. They too made for a kind of peace, and for a muddled, backward-looking social consensus. Perhaps there are some elements of Arcady in all social formations, premonitions of a future ideal mixed up with the usual nostalgia for lost worlds. In modern England this has always been obvious, and operative in the state. Too many people have been unable for too long to free themselves from the ghost of social harmony these conditions created—unable therefore to withdraw belief from the evolutionary myth which sees the authentic harmony of socialism one day emerging from that ghost. Yet in reality the anti-capitalist consensus has been the slow death of the old system: it gave it longevity, with some help from the Labour Party, but only to render senility and ultimate collapse more certain. In studying this strange slow-motion landslide, one begins to see the answer to the two questions posed earlier: why has the decline lasted so long, without catastrophe?—and, why does its final disintegration seem to be taking the form of nationalist revolt, rather than social revolution?

The very archaism of the Anglo-British state—its failure to modernize and its slow competitive death—was connected to a remarkable social

strength. Its 'backwardness', epitomized in industrial retreat and stagnation, and the chronic failure of government economic policy, was inseparable from its particular kind of peaceful stability, from its civil relaxation of customs, its sloth, even its non-malicious music-hall humour. The Siamese twins of anachronism and social cohesion belonged to each other. It was never in reality feasible to infuse the American or West German virtues into them without the effective destruction of this unique body politic. In English mythology, the uniqueness is ascribed to a mixture of racial magic and 'long experience'. In fact, it should be ascribed to empire. In a sense quite distinct from the habitual icons of imperialism—militarism, uniformed sadism, cults of violence, etc.—this was (as should surely be expected) the most profoundly and unalterably imperialist of societies. Of all the great states, the British was the most inwardly modelled and conditioned by prolonged external depradations, and the most dependent on fortunate external relations. From the time of its Indian conquests to that of its cringing dependence on the United States, its power was the internal translation of these fortunes. An incorrigibly overseas-oriented capitalism removed much of the need for internal reformation and dynamism; but the absence of this pressure was the ideal ground for maintaining and extending the patriciate, and for imposing a conservative straitjacket on the working class. Time and success were the conditions for this slow, anomalous growth; but these were what the British state had, because of its prolonged priority of development. Hierarchy and deference became the inner face of its outward adventure. Alone among the modern imperialisms, it evolved some of the semblance of an ancient empire, with its mandarinate and its placid urban peasantry.

The contrast between Britain and the more brittle imperial systems that were convulsed by losing their colonies does not lie—as often thought—in the former's less great dependence on empire, or in its ruling class's more civilized deportment. Externally, it rested upon the far greater success of British empire, a system so extensive and so deeply enracinated that it could survive the end of formal colonization. Internally, it lay in the superior strength and cohesion of British class society, proof against shocks fatal elsewhere. No other nation was so dependent on imperialism, or had got more out of it; but also, no other nation had made so much of that accumulated riches, socially speaking, in the shape of a contemporary tribal state of such formidable complacency and endurance. This archaically based security, in turn, made possible the elements of liberalism in the élite's policy—both at home and abroad.

Slow decline has been the joint product of inner social strength and altering external relations. The former has failed bit by bit, in the successive spirals of the inevitable 'economic crisis' and futile governmental tactics to reverse the trend; the latter have changed less abruptly, and on the whole less unfavourably, than is now remembered in a climate of generalized economic gloom. After the 1939–46 war, Britain was still within its long victorious cycle, although nearing the end. It would still enjoy another brief phase of relative advance and prosperity, in the 1950s, before the European and Japanese economies had reasserted themselves. Even then, American hegemony continued to furnish an important surrogate external force-field, both economically and

politically. I have already mentioned the EEC and North Sea Oil as further extrapolations of this quest for imperial substitutes.

The actual degeneration has been slower than most ideological pictures of it; it is also, of course, different in nature from them. In Great Britain itself Doom has been cried every Monday morning for many generations, following an ancient patrician principle that such announcements instil courage in the masses, and help to exorcise the real peril (whatever that may be). Like internal secrecy, this form of magic appears natural to English-style hegemony. Outside commentators naturally find it difficult to avoid an apocalyptic path influenced by these largely ritual warnings and exhortations. But actually, no one can predict the conjunction of external and internal circumstances that may one day cause the collapse of this resistant state. It might survive the present world recession with at least its main social structures intact.

It is, of course, the character of these dominant structures which leads to the answer to the second question, why peripheral bourgeois nationalism has today become the grave-digger rather than the intelligentsia or proletariat. The smaller nationalities have lost faith in the old state long before its social opposition. More rapidly and decisively than either the mainstream English intellectuals or the English working class, they have acknowledged the only genuinely predictable verity of British state-history: under *this* socio-political system, no conceivable government can reverse the trend, or fight successfully out of the *impasse* left by an empire at the end of its tether. The reinforced archaic solidarity of metropolitan society has numbed awareness of this truth in England. So it has sunk in to the periphery more readily—that is, into societies which, in spite of their modern political subservience, still retain an alternative historical reality and a potentially different vision of things. This is the wider context that ought to form the foundation for any political judgement on Britain's new nationalisms. It is insufficient to judge them in terms of their own self-consciousness and ideology, or—the commoner case—quite abstractly in terms of an idealized internationalism versus a supposed 'Balkanization' of Britain.

Against Internationalism?

Politically speaking, the key to these neo-nationalist renaissances lies in the slow foundering of the British state, not in the Celtic bloodstream. This is not to deny the significance of ethnic and linguistic factors—the things usually evoked in accusations of 'narrow nationalism', above all in the Welsh example. However, in the Scottish case these are relatively unimportant: this is overwhelmingly a politically-oriented separatism, rather exaggeratedly concerned with problems of state and power, and frequently indifferent to the themes of race and cultural ancestry. Yet it incontestably leads the way, and currently dominates the devolutionary attack on the British system. Before long (and depending partly on the fate of the declining Spanish state) it may figure as the most prominent and successful new-nationalist movement in Western Europe.

A more general theoretical argument lies behind this apparent paradox. In the general analysis of nationalism presented in *The Break-up of Britain*,

it is suggested that in any case those ethnic-linguistic features so prominent in the ideologies of nationalism have always been secondary to the material factors of uneven development. The undoubted weight of nationalist ideology in modern history is owed, none the less, to a chronically recurrent dilemma of socio-economic development—a dilemma so far quite inseparable from the actual capitalist nature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This material contradiction of uneven development has itself assumed many forms; so have the compensatory ideologies which it has invariably generated. Yet it remains true that the notoriously subjective or 'irrational' elements in nationalism are always functionally subordinate to an economic reality, *provided one takes a wide enough developmental context*. This usually means looking beyond the particular state or variety of nationalism one is interested in (and often it means taking continental, or even world history into account). It means, therefore, looking far beyond the sort of ideas about nationalism normally entertained by nationalists themselves, and also by the most passionate opponents of nationalism.

In the case of the British Isles, the factors of internal uneven development are clear. They were of course clear in the older example of southern Irish nationalism; but essentially the same kind of dilemma, 'under-development' and ethnic-linguistic exclusion, has continued in north and west Wales, and furnished the basis for the more politicized and state-oriented nationalism of the present-day *Plaid Cymru*. In Scotland, a similar but much less important form of under-development has persisted in the Highland area: it still contributes something to the character of Scottish nationalism, and will not be without significance to a future Scottish state. But what has decisively changed the Scottish situation is a different variety of uneven development altogether. The factors operative there are closer to those observable in Catalonia or the Spanish Basque region: a tendential relative 'over-development'. Obviously linked to the discovery and exploitation of North Sea oil, this new awareness has proved particularly effective in the face of the English decline and political immiseration discussed above. It has awakened the Scottish bourgeoisie to new consciousness of its historic separateness, and fostered a frank, restless discontent with the expiring British world.

These differing patterns of uneven development do not suffice in themselves to explain the basis of neo-nationalism, however. The material basis is completed by recognition of the decisive effect exercised *by the uneven development of Great Britain as a whole* upon these, its constituent parts. This is, of course, the very theme I have been studying, from the angle of the British state. From the angle of the constituent nations—and this has come to be true even of Northern Ireland—it means that their own contemporary development, and the particular problems they confront in it, have become both entrapped and amplified by this larger drama of developmental failure. The latter's reverberations fuse with the more strictly nationalist initiative and energy now functioning in the British periphery. Both together widen the fissures making for a break-up of the British state.

This wider context furnishes a better basis for estimating the place of peripheral British separatism in history. A better foundation, hence, for

pronouncement on their political significance. The larger story is that of the fall of one of history's great states, and of the tenacious, conservative resistance of its English heartland to this fate. Within the more general process, the disruptive trends of the periphery emerge as both effect and cause; products of an incipient shipwreck, they also function—often unwittingly—as contributors to the disaster itself, hastening a now foreseeable end. Consequently, judgement of their role hinges upon one's view of the dying state itself. If one does not recognize that it is moribund, like most of the English left, then naturally Scottish and Welsh nationalism will appear as destructive forces—as a basically irrational turning back towards forgotten centuries, as involution at the expense of progress. Whether conservative or socialist, belief in a continuing unitary state of the British Isles entails viewing these movements as a threat—whether the menace is to be countered by 'devolution', or eventually by other means. Of course, a good deal of the opposition to peripheral self-government is not even as articulate as this, and has no definite idea of the British state at all: it simply takes it for granted, with or without its more feudal ornaments. But the upshot is the same, politically.

On the other hand, if one perceives the United Kingdom as an *ancien régime* with no particular title to survival or endless allegiance, then the breakaway movements may appear in a different light. The phrase 'We must preserve the unity of the United Kingdom' is currently intoned like a litany by most leaders of British public life. Its magic properties are obviously derived from the cults of Constitution and Sovereignty. Merely to refuse this sacrament allows the observer to begin, at least, to acknowledge some positive side in the cause of the smaller nations. While, of course, the view put forward in *The Break-up of Britain* that the all-British régime is an increasingly contradictory and hopeless anachronism entails another shift in judgement. Countries struggling to free themselves from a sinking paddle-wheel state have, on the face of it, much justification for their stance. As the ancient device goes further down, this justification will increase, in their own eyes and those of the outside world. If at any point the collapsing metropolis attempts to quell their rise by force or constitutional chicanery, it will become absolute.

The logic of the anti-nationalists is most often obfuscated by another idea, which one might describe as the concept of the viable larger unit. New small-nationality movements tend in this somewhat abstract light to be condemned for opting out of an already achieved and workable progress on some larger scale: lapses into pettiness, self-condemned by a broader common sense. The notion surfaces to some degree in the commonplace of the devolution debate: 'You could never manage on your own'; 'Surely we're better all together, in one big unit?'; 'It's just putting the clock back'; 'It's irrelevant to people's real problems'—and so on. From a metropolitan angle of vision, these bluff platitudes carry a lot of conviction. Any opponent of them seems to define himself as some kind of dark fanatic.

The mistake in this attitude does not lie in its assertion that bigger units of social organization are good, or necessary, or inevitable. A tendency towards larger-scale organization and international integration has

indeed accompanied the growth of nationalism and the proliferation of new national states, throughout modern times. This is certain to go on. Scarcely anyone believes that this dialectic will cease, or that the historical clock can be 'put back' in this sense. Certainly very few of Europe's new nationalists think anything of the kind. The crucial point is the quite characteristic elision in the metropolitan world-view. What it invariably does is to identify the existing larger state-form with his historical necessity. Yet what neo-nationalism challenges is not the general necessity as such, but the spurious identification hung on to it. In their own day, the Napoleonic Empire, the Hapsburg Empire, Tsardom, Hitler's New Europe and the old British Empire were 'justified' by precisely similar arguments; and in certain of these cases the 'internationalist' defence was put forward by manifestly sincere, progressive thinkers—sometimes by socialists, and Marxists. It requires little counter-argument, surely, to point out that not all 'larger units' are equivalent, or equally 'viable', or represent progress. Thus—to make the roughest classification—one finds on the one hand workable federations or confederations of states, or communities, associations like the Nordic Union, the Andean Pact, the European Community, or the United Nations Organization; on the other, an assortment of multi-national units imposed by heredity or conquest, most of which mercifully vanished in one or other of the world wars and the remainder during the anti-colonial movement after 1946.

To which category does the existing Great-British state belong? Clearly, defenders of the British union locate it unthinkingly in the former camp, as a modern, reasonable sort of wider integration. In fact, an in-depth historical analysis shows that, while not directly comparable to the most notorious relics of the twentieth century, like the Hapsburg, Tsarist or Prussian-German states, *it retains something in common with them*. This derives from the features we have examined. Although not, of course, an absolutist state, the Anglo-British system remains a product of the general transition from absolutism to modern constitutionalism: it led the way out of the former, but never genuinely arrived at the latter. Furthermore, the peculiar hybrid nature impressed by this unique experience was confirmed by its later imperialist success. Possibly only the most successful and long-lived of modern empires *could* have preserved such an anomaly, and kept it in working order until the 1970s. Hence, both in its origination and in its surprising longevity, the British state belongs to the first category rather than the second. It is a basically indefensible and unadaptable relic, not a modern state-form. In its prolonged, empirical survival it has, of course, gathered many of the latter's aspects and appearances; but this must be distinguished from authentic transmutation, via a second political revolution. No less evidently and profoundly, the modern history of the British state is about the absence of such a change: although in one sense a question of comparative structural analysis, this recessive character is also written openly upon the institutions, rituals and self-advertisement of the system, in ideological terms.

If this is the case, then what is the situation of the British state in the (admittedly) necessary world of new, wider international units and co-operation? Far from belonging there as of right, the existing United

Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland *is not even a possible candidate* in the field. It is not important here to speculate upon how long the International Monetary Fund and the other capitalist states will go on providing for the UK's old age. But it is certainly significant that, in this company, the only useful kind of speculation has assumed a geriatric odour: a motorized wheelchair and a decent funeral seem to have become the actual horizons of the 1980s, without design or conscious consent.

Other new-nationalist movements have other dilemmas to deal with, of a broadly analogous kind. It is interesting—but too much of a digression at this point—to ask what kinds of reproach they address to (e.g.) the Fifth French Republic, the states of Spain and Italy, or the Federal Government of Canada. Over-easy generalization has dogged the theory of neo-nationalism, and erected an over-abstract defence against metropolitan sermons on Progress and Commonsense. There are undoubtedly different kinds of state failure or inadaptation at work, different grudges and demands, and (presumably) quite different solutions in order. It should be the task of independence movements in these various countries to work out an analogous critique of the dominant state. It may be that these critiques have a common element to them, though I believe that it is not yet clear what this is. Perhaps (to quote the most frequent suggestion) the post-Second World War development of the capitalist economy, with its US-centred multinationals and internationalization of the forces of production, has to some extent infirmed and de-legitimized all the older sovereign states—diminishing 'independence' everywhere, therefore, but by the same token making it more plausible to demand this status, even for regions and peoples that would never previously have thought of undertaking the whole armament of nation-state existence.

But even if this is so, such very general economic causes will work to discover widely differing problems and dilemmas. And none of these is likely to resemble the British case very significantly: here, neo-capitalist uneven development has finally exposed the most genuinely anachronistic state of the economically-developed world to the light, an archaic palimpsest covering the entire period from Newton's theories to the thermonuclear bomb, and conserved (above all) by empire and successful warfare. Acceptance of *this* entity as the 'viable larger unit' of British-Isles development strains credulity to the uttermost. Like other social fossils before it, it struggles to survive by utilizing the counter-law of combined development, and importing remedies: the 'white hot' technological revolution, French planning and 'technocracy', non-élitist higher education (as in the Polytechnics), even West German workers' representation (as in the proposals of the Bullock Commission). In reality, that law works the other way, and merely generates grotesque failures (as in the British 1960s) or partial successes which underscore the system's futility, and make plainer the need for a radical change.

As we have seen, doom has been cried too often about the UK, too stridently and (above all) in too foreshortened a fashion. None the less, doom of a sort is genuinely inscribed in this historical pattern. Sufficiently—at any rate—to wholly discredit the easy metropolitan assumption that it, or something like it, should be defended against

nationalist wreckers. Viable larger units of social organization ought to be defended against 'narrow nationalism', or an ethnic parochialism indulged in for its own sake. But defence is only possible when they actually *are* 'viable': which really means, when they are the most modern, democratic, and decentralizable form of organization that current development permits—when, therefore, they are capable of progressive accommodation to the tensions of uneven development, and of contributing positively to new international relations and the foundation of socialist society.

The point is of course underlined farther by consideration of the present character of the British independence movements. Preachers of UK unity at all costs imagine latent fascisms, and seize on every scrap of patriotic or anti-British utterance as evidence of this. In reality, the Welsh national party is without doubt the least parochial or 'narrow nationalist' mass movement in British politics. Strongly influenced in earlier times by a sentimental, medievalist universalism, it is if anything rather exaggeratedly attached to European examples and ideas, and has consistently perceived 'nationalism' as a largely cultural escape route from the peculiar isolation of Wales. The Scottish National Party has a very different historical basis. But its recent successful development has carried it too towards a far more catholic and outward-looking position. It advances the concept of an Association of British States as the successor to the United Kingdom, to preserve what is indeed functional or 'viable' in the union: negotiated agreements among the constituent parts would separate this out from the reactionary and fetishized London slogan of 'essential unity'. For its part the more recently-founded Scottish Labour Party has from the outset linked the cause of self-government to that of membership of the European Community—seeing in the latter, obviously, a preferable wider unit of organization from a point of view at once nationalist and socialist.

More generally, the question of the Common Market emphasizes still more cruelly the absurdities in any unreflecting defence of the UK *ancien régime.* It is only a year or so since the British state at last reconciled itself to membership of that particular larger unit. And the debate surrounding the event demonstrated that 'nationalism' in the familiar disparaging sense is by no means confined to the smaller nations. 'Narrowness' has nothing whatever to do with size. There is a narrow US, Soviet and Chinese nationalism, as well as a Welsh or Scottish one. The difference tends to be that the greater nations remain grandly unaware of their narrowness, because their size, their culture, or their imagined centrality makes them identify with Humanity or Progress *tout court*. Great British chauvinism belongs to this camp. But it does so—of course—with diminishing reason and increasing delusion. The whole bias of the British imperialist state has led the English people to feel themselves as something naturally bigger, more open and more important than just another nation-state. In reality, this museum-piece has dragged them from empire to something less than a modern nation-state, without letting them become one; the missionary expansiveness has turned into the narrowest, most dim-witted of nationalisms. This is what was deployed (especially by the Labour Party and other sectors of the Left) in the futile attempt to 'keep Britain independent' between 1971 and 1975.

The vulgar hysteria and patriotic kitsch of *that* 'independence movement' easily eclipsed anything tried in Scotland or Wales.

Metropolitans have often accused those who (like myself) both supported entry to the European Community *and* self-government for smaller nations. There is no contradiction in this. None, that is, unless one thinks that the Community and the old British state are equivalently healthy and acceptable 'larger units'—so that it must be illogical to accept the one and reject the other. In fact, there is no common measure between them. In one of the essays in *The Break-up of Britain*, the reader will find a rather pessimistic analysis of the EEC's development. But whatever the shortcomings and contradictions of the new Europe, it is still a modern, voluntary, genuinely multi-national organization, capable of farther progress and influence. By contrast, the United Kingdom long ago ceased to be a multi-national entity in any ennobling or forward-looking sense: the nerve of its larger unity passed away with empire, and should not be mourned or resuscitated for that reason. The problem of preserving positive elements left by that union—civil and personal closeness, individual liberties, forms of civilized association—is a genuine one, of which nationalists are conscious.

As things stand, the formula most likely to damage these relations permanently is exactly that which the paladins of UK unity at all costs have chosen. This is because another field of forces altogether lies behind their cause, concealed from them by the peculiar missionary nostalgia and phoney *grandeur* of Britishism. Most of *The Break-up of Britain* is about the British periphery, or about the theoretical context of nationalism; all too little of it is on England, the heartland. Yet this is certainly where the longer-term political direction of the British Isles will be settled. The paralytic decline of the old state has given a temporary ascendancy to Scotland and other peripheric problems. Beyond this moment, it is bound to be the post-imperial crisis of the English people itself which takes over—the crisis so long delayed by the combination of inner resilience and outward fortune we have discussed.

However, this social crisis is rendered enigmatic by the cryptic nature of English nationalism. A peculiar repression and truncation of Englishness was inseparable from the structure of British imperialism, and this is one explanation of the salience of racism in recent English politics. The growth of a far Right axed on questions of race and immigration is in fact a comment on the absence of a normal nationalist sentiment, rather than an expression of nationalism: this Mr Hyde represents a congruent riposte to the specific character of the Dr Jekyll state outlined above—to the tradition of gentlemanly authority and liberal compromise. It is less surprising than one would think at first sight that such an antithetical phenomenon should have acquired a degree of leverage over the state power (in the 1960s), and a remarkable prominence in terms of public debate and intellectual apprehension.

The longer the *ancien régime* endures, the more defined and worrying this trend is likely to become. On the analysis presented here, it corresponds to an underlying reality—not mere aberration, or a transient mood of intolerance. The fall of the old system must force a kind of national re-

definition upon all the British peoples. This process is most important, but also most difficult, for the English metropolis where all the main roots of the British state are located. There, the very strength of those bases means that is far harder for system-directed resentment and loss of allegiance to find tolerable expression: the growing exacerbation is forced into an exaggerated antithesis to the state as such. Among the younger intelligentsia this has assumed the progressive shape of Marxism (albeit sectarian Marxism); but among the masses—separated from the intellectuals by the specific abyss of English class—it has too often taken the form of racist populism. As a matter of fact, the particular breadth and vaguery of residual all-British consciousness decays more readily into racialism than into a defined, territorially restricted nationalism. Once divorced from the powerful liberalism-from-above that previously regulated it, it displays obvious affinities with the old fantasies of the white man's blood and genetic aptitude for civilization.

Hence, it is not mere alarmism to suggest that the persistence of the British régime fosters the most regressive possible side of an eventual English nationalism. Those who defend it *à l'outrance* against the supposed petty patriotism of Scotland and Wales do so in honour of its liberalism and past achievements, hoping these can somehow be saved and perpetuated; they ignore the limitations and central defects tied structurally to these traits, defects which are becoming disastrous as the external situation of the state deteriorates. The latter process is irrevocable. So is the emergence of a new English national awareness, as drastic reform (or even political revolution) is forced by the decline. The more it is delayed, the more certain this awareness is to be inflected to the right, and captured by the forces feeding off the wounds and failures of decline.

There exists in modern history no example of a national state afflicted with this kind of decline and traumatic loss of power and prestige which did *not*, sooner or later, undergo a strong reaction against it.[44] In this sense, England has not yet undergone its own version of Gaullism: the prophet of this kind of conservative-nationalist resurgence, Powell, has been so far rendered impotent by the cohesion of the régime, which gave insufficient purchase for such 'outside' opposition to the system as such. Will this go on being true, as Britain lurches still farther downwards on the road of relative under-development? Nothing is pre-determined as regards the political nature of the break and one may, of course, argue that it could be radical or left-nationalist in outlook, rather than reactionary. But it is hard to overlook the fact that the very conditions of degeneration and all-British impotence are themselves 'determining' events in one way rather than the other. Another brief era of ephemeral 'recovery', another plateau of 'stabilization' on the secular path of British decline, and these forces may well become even stronger.

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[44] The obvious exceptions in post-Second World War terms are Germany and Italy (although previously they were leading exemplifications of the rule). On the other hand, it can be maintained that in these cases the reverses were so absolute, and the externally-imposed constitutions so successful, that (above all in Germany) there was total interruption of the continuity which such national reactions depend upon. In a more than rhetorical sense, 'new nations' intervened in both cases.

There is a final interesting implication attached to this prospect. The sharpest 'internationalist' opponents of fringe nationalism in the current debate—like Eric Heffer in England, Leo Abse and Neil Kinnock in Wales, or Norman and Janey Buchan in Scotland—perceive a Britain 'Balkanized' into ethnic struggle and mutual hatreds by the agency of movements like the SNP or *Plaid Cymru*. There is an element of justified alarm in their vision, which should be taken seriously. But their idea of the machinery by which such conditions could come about is revealingly mistaken. As far as England is concerned, all they see is a rather justifiable 'backlash' against peripheral extremism: in reality, that 'backlash' is the frustrated political potency of the English people, and the dominant force in the British Isles—a force which did not wait on the rise of separatism to take on retrograde and alarming forms. One must distinguish between the movements precipitating the break-up at this moment (which are led by the nationalists) and the deeper causes at work, which have little to do with Scotland and Wales, and everything to do with the long-term, irreversible degeneration of the Anglo-British state. It is these, and these alone, which could in the long run provoke the kind of generalized feuding and resentment such critics fear.

It is, of course, perfectly true that the minor nationalities of Britain might be forced into a wave of regressive 'narrow nationalism'. This possibility is inseparable from any form of nationalism (the causes of the connection lie in the very nature of the uneven-development dilemma underlying nationalism). And this is the grain of truth in the internationalists' alarm. Yet their misconception of the state and their unwillingness to focus upon the specifics of the English situation bring a false perspective to that alarm. Regression is never far away, in the ambiguous reality of any nationalist movement. But a definite triggering mechanism is required, none the less, to compel it into that pattern—to make the recessive trends finally outweigh or cancel its liberating, progressive potential. These critics ignore what that mechanism is virtually certain to be, in British conditions. By ignoring it, they encourage its development. In their panicky defence of the old state and Westminster's sovereignty, they help preserve those very things which are the root-cause of their nightmare: the hopelessly decaying institutions of a lost imperialist state.

The Marxist Argument

The new debate about nationalism in the British Isles recalls some old ones. The most important of these is the mainly pre-1914 argument among Marxists, which resulted in the most influential single theory of political nationalism and indirectly determined nationality policies over a large part of today's world.[45] To a great extent that dispute still shapes the Marxist left's views of nationalism. Although it was complicated, the significant opposition most relevant to the new case lay between the positions of Rosa Luxemburg and those of Lenin. In this sector of the Left, the period of the Second International was dominated by expectations of imminent social revolution. The general conviction was that upheaval would come fairly soon, and in the most advanced capitalist

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[45] J. Stalin, 'Marxism and the National Question', in *Works*, vol. 2, 1907–13, Moscow 1953. There is unfortunately no critical edition of this very important text.

countries. When it arrived, it would rapidly become international in character: although born in one nation, its example would be irresistible elsewhere, and in this diffusion the international solidarity of the proletariat would become a proven reality. Hence, the basic task of revolutionary movements lay in preparing the way for this process.

But this formula left one major uncertainty. The era that culminated in 1914 was not only marked by developing class struggle and the growth of organized socialism; it was equally one of maturing national struggles, both in Europe and outside it. Inside Europe, the remaining multi-national states like Austria-Hungary and Tsarist Russia experienced growing strains from their dissident nationalities, and the Ottoman Empire came near its end. In the other continents, alert observers perceived the beginnings of a general, predominantly nationalist revolution against the newer European imperialisms. Nearly all these movements of national liberation took place in relatively backward areas (though with notable exceptions like Bohemia and Catalonia).

How were these two sorts of revolt related to one another? This was the key problem. On one hand, thinkers like Rosa Luxemburg took the view that nationalist struggles ought to be allotted a distinctly secondary place. This was the case above all where the two threatened in any way to come into conflict with one another. Where this did not happen (straightforward anti-colonialist wars were the obvious example) there was no dilemma, and it could be conceded that nationalism had still a positive function. But wherever (as in her native Poland) it seemed that workers or intellectuals might have to make a choice between a national struggle and a class struggle, the former should *never* be given priority. Thus, given the situation of the Poles, 'integrated' into the Tsarist domain but occupying a sensitive buffer position vis-à-vis Germany (perceived at that time by most Marxists as a centre of the coming revolution), it was their duty to renounce 'narrowly nationalist' aspirations. In similar European situations, the national struggle was a distraction, if not a positively hostile barrier, to what really mattered: the imminent break-through of the class struggle. It mattered relatively little just where the latter happened. Its non-national values and impetus would quickly render the whole realm of nationalist preoccupations anachronistic in any case.[46]

Luxemburgist anti-nationalism was criticized and qualified by Lenin, in a series of writings on the issue.[47] Even in Europe, even much closer to the

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[46] The best introduction to Luxemburg's views is Appendix 2, 'The National Question', of Peter Nettl's *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 2, London 1966. Her main assumption was that '. . . national and Socialist aspirations were incompatible and that a commitment to national self-determination by Socialist parties must subordinate those parties to bourgeois nationalism instead of opposing one to the other. A programme of national self-determination thus became the first of Rosa Luxemburg's many indices of an opportunism which tied Socialism to the chariot of the class enemy . . .' (p. 845). The text Nettl refers to as her principal statement, *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, August 1908, No. 6, 'The question of nationality and autonomy', has only recently been translated from Polish to English, in Horace B. Davis (ed.), *The National Question: selected writings by Rosa Luxemburg*, New York 1977.

[47] Collected together in, e.g., *National Liberation, Socialism and Imperialism: selected writings*, New York 1968. Most of Lenin's articles and speeches on the question can be found in vols. 20, 21 and 22 of the *Collected Works* (December 1913–July 1916). I am grateful to Yuri

scene of metropolitan revolution, he argued that the nationalist revolts had a more positive meaning. The social forces and passions they harnessed were too great to be genuinely 'renounced'; and in any case they worked to unseat the old dynasties, and so foster conditions generally favourable to social revolution. The break-up of these old states was a necessary (though admittedly far from a sufficient) condition of the kind of change Marxists were working towards. In this pragmatic spirit the nationalism of liberation struggles ought to be encouraged, at least up to the moment of their seizure of state power. After that it would, of course, become the task of the revolutionaries to disassociate themselves from the nationalists: national liberation would then turn into 'bourgeois nationalism', a force hostile to the broader revolutionary cause.

Both these stances were infirmed by what actually happened after 1914. The decisive non-event was the 'advanced' social revolution, which had been the common assumption of the whole argument. Revolutionary failure rendered Luxemburg's position an abstract one: defiant moral grandeur, in perpetual rebuke of a fallen world. There had been no room for the ambiguous and yet central phenomenon of nationalism in her heroic world-view. Nothing existed between socialism and barbarism; and the latter appeared to have won, as the European working classes drowned in their various 'anachronisms'.

Leninism was less starkly refuted by the evidence of events. However, their development implied that his more pragmatic attitude to the problem became permanent. It was no longer a provisional, tactical formulation holding good only until revolution came. There was nothing but pragmatism, for generations: the provisional became ever-lasting, as capitalism continued to endure and develop, and uneven development and nationalism prospered along with it. The Central and East European national movements attained their goals, but the result was a generation of mainly authoritarian régimes linked to a resurgence of conservatism, or fascism, in Western Europe. The anti-colonial struggles also won, but over a far longer period of time than was imagined. Their political consequences were equally ambiguous: unaccompanied by revolution in the metropolis, such newly independent nations were formed as the 'under-developed' sector of a still capitalist world—exposed, therefore, to forms of exploitation and to developmental dilemmas which long outlived uniformed imperialism. In 'The Modern Janus', national liberation and statehood was depicted as a doorway, like the gate over which the Roman god Janus gazed into both past and future. In reality, this threshold of modernity has been a prolonged, dark passage for most of the world, and has occupied most of the twentieth century.

Already made problematic by the post-1914 course of history, Lenin's pragmatism was then fossilized by post-1917 history. He himself went on wrestling with the question until his death. With splendid, agonized clarity he had perceived that it was far from any satisfactory resolution even within the territory won by the revolution, and that the latter could

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Boshyk for letting me see his unpublished paper 'Lenin and the National Question in Russia: 1913 to February 1917', part of his work on the history of Ukrainian nationalism.

easily fall victim to a renascent Great-Russian nationalism.[48] Locked in one under-developed area dominated by one nationality, the revolution could not help itself becoming joined to a 'narrow nationalism'. In the past, other revolutionary nations had harnessed universalizing, missionary ideologies to their national interests: England had done so with Protestantism, and France with the Enlightenment. Now the Russians employed Marxism in the same way, as a legitimizing creed of state. And as part of this process the Leninist view of the national question was hypostatized, and treated as a largely ritual formula for consecrating judgements convenient to Moscow.

Unfortunately, it was a position that lent itself in some ways to this exploitation. Its virtue had lain in its 'realism', in its cautious recognition that nationalism was a double-faced phenomenon central to revolutionary strategy. In the actual dynamics of its era, before the 1914–18 deluge, this was doubly positive: as practical tactics, and as the basis for a theoretical development of Marxist ideas on nationalism. But the post-1918 deformations of communism emptied it of all real content, on both counts. All that remained was a double-faced position, the ambiguity of the formulae without their inquiring, restless tension: polemic mummified into priestly cant. None the less, it is not impossible to separate out the original impulse from the accretions of mechanical dogma. In my view an emended version of Lenin's old conception is the only satisfactory position that Marxists can adopt towards the problem of neo-nationalism, in the British Isles or elsewhere. Neither Austro-Marxism nor Luxemburgism offer this possibility.[49]

What are the emendations required by this exercise? They are of two kinds, both essential to any intelligible re-employment of these philosophies of sixty years ago. The first concerns the nature of those states and multi-national societies (including the Soviet Union) where revived nationalism is, or is likely to become, a key issue. The second concerns the general theoretical level—that is, Marxist concepts of nationalism's place in historical development, the theoretical reformulation towards which Lenin's ideas pointed, but which never took place. Advance on these fronts, of course, precludes the sort of ghostly archaeology and hushed citation of texts normally associated with Leninism.

The old argument took place in a context of indubitably archaic state

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[48] For the part played by national questions in Lenin's last days, see especially chapters 4 and 5 of Moshe Lewin's *Lenin's Last Struggle*, London 1969.

[49] The Austro-Marxist theory, crucial to the whole pre-1914 debate, conceived of a solution to the question by distinguishing between autonomy in 'cultural' areas (language, education, etc.) and inter-dependence in the field of economic relations and external affairs. A useful collection of the Austro-Marxist material (largely untranslated) can be found in G. Haupt, M. Löwy, C. Weill, *Les marxistes et la question nationale 1848–1914*, Paris 1974: see 'Anthologie', sections IV, V, VI, on the Brünn Programme, Renner and Bauer. The basic criticism made of their position was always that it was simply unrealistic to posit such a distinction: 'cultural' matters of the sort dear to nationalists are in fact intertwined with economic issues, and no effective 'autonomy' can be confined to the former area alone (except in the ideal, somewhat god-like state conditions which the traditions of the Hapsburg Empire encouraged social-democrats to believe in).

forms: the surviving absolutisms of Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, it could be acknowledged without too great difficulty (as Lenin did) that merely nationalist revolt against these entities had a strongly positive side to it. As we saw, this acknowledgement rested upon a second assumption. There was another category of 'modern' capitalist states, against whom only socialist revolution was justifiable, or indeed conceivable. They were the crux of the future revolutionary process, and as such played a part in the justification of pre-socialist revolution elsewhere. These categories have ceased to apply in contemporary terms. The world of dynastic empires disappeared in war and revolution; while the second category of relatively 'modern' (or at least non-feudal) capitalist and non-capitalist states has expanded, altered and ramified in a way that makes simplified overall judgement about it impossible. The failure of the social revolution ensured this. It meant that capitalist state-forms would go on proliferating and evolving internally; and also that socialism, confined to relative backwardness and isolation, would develop its own highly ambiguous forms of state-life in a still nationalist universe. Nothing of this was foreseeable in 1913. It follows that any attempt to recuperate the sense of the political judgements made then can only be in a renewed and much more complex perspective—one that admits, above all, the receding horizon of the socialist revolution and the permanent difference which this has made. It is still possible to do this. There is still a distinction to be made on the left between nationalist and socialist revolutions, and an inter-relationship and order of priorities to be recognized—but how much more nuanced and analytically demanding the judgement has now become!

For example, is the French state of the Fifth Republic still identifiable with those Jacobin 'colours of France' which have impassioned one generation after another of radicals, ever since the Great Revolution? Did the events of May 1968 demonstrate this continuity—or the very contrary, a situation in which the best traditions of *la Grande Nation* had succumbed to an ineradicably conservative, centralized machine capable only of great-nation posturing and oppression? One's view of the significance of Breton or Occitan nationalism, of the place of the French Basques or the Alsatians, is partly dependent on this judgement. Is the United States of President Nixon and the Vietnamese war still in essence the democratic state of President Lincoln, which Marx defended against the secessionist nationalism of the Confederacy? Can Federal Canada be upheld, ultimately, against the nationalism of Quebec? In Yugoslavia a revolutionary socialist state has defended the most original multi-national régime in the world for a quarter of a century—yet there are still unsolved, and apparently growing, difficulties which cannot be merely dismissed as relics or temporary relapses. In the Soviet Union the same problem is posed much more acutely. Is the new national unrest and agitation against a 'socialist state' explicable and justifiable in the same terms as under the Romanovs or the Hapsburgs? The list is endless. As endless (one is almost tempted to say) as the reality of the world where the metropolitan revolution is so delayed. The point of presenting it here is not to make principled judgements impossible. It is only to suggest that they are more difficult, more relative, and finer than the prevailing Marxist or *Marxisant* slogans allow. It is the element of caution and relativity in Lenin's old position that ought to have been developed, as

revolution receded or went wrong; instead, it was the element of dogmatism which triumphed, a sectarian icon extracted from its historical context.

Understanding of the state—both the particular state and the inter-state order—is one prerequisite. But this factor of autonomous political judgement implies the second amendation I mentioned above. The point here is (as the case of Great Britain demonstrates most graphically) that the analysis of the state's meaning and function itself depends upon an accompanying view of the inter-state order. States are formed by that order, not only (or even primarily) by an inner dynamic of classes, or a 'national economy' perceived as a separate entity. Consequently, one's general conception of modern historical development is called into play: the overall nature of capitalism's uneven development, which alone can provide an explanation of contemporary state-formations and so of the problematic of secession or resurgent nationality. This means that the very essence of the Marxist world-view is called into play. But, of course, the entire aim of dogmatism is to avoid that: it is to cultivate the pretence that the world where the revolution has not gone according to plan is the same as . . . the original, imagined, heroic world where it *will* go by the plan, because it must. In short, these 'amendations' are actually demands for the growth of Marxist thought. The first in an area where it has proved congenitally weak: the analysis of political structures and the state, above all the bourgeois-democratic state. This weakness underlies, and partly accounts for, Marxism's more notorious inability to come to terms with modern nationalism. The second demands revision in area where Marxism is basically strong, the general framework of historical development—but where, nevertheless, orthodoxy largely paralysed creative revision until the great growth in development studies of recent years.

As to the British case, I suggest that analysis shows the definitively moribund character of this particular state, the reasons for its longevity and the (closely affiliated) causes of the difficulty of social or political revolution within its heartland. This is simply one chapter in the history of the missing metropolitan revolution. It happens to be about an especially anomalous state-history, and may have small bearing on the other chapters due on other countries. But as far as it goes, it seems to demonstrate the case for the separation of the smaller countries. In relation to *this* specific 'metropolis' (or ex-metropolis), and as long as it endures on its old constitutional tracks, they have good reason to want out, and good cause for claiming that their exit is a progressive action—a step forward not only for their own peoples, but for England and the wider state-order as well.

Lenin argued that nationalist upheavals could contribute to socialist revolution where it counted, in the great centres. With appropriate modifications, one can surely make roughly the same case here. The fact is that neo-nationalism *has* become the grave-digger of the old state in Britain, and as such the principal factor making for a political revolution of some sort—in England as well as the small countries. Yet, because this process assumed an unexpected form, many on the metropolitan left solemnly write it down as betrayal of the revolution. Forces capable of

unhinging the state finally appear, out of the endless-seeming mists of British-Constitutionalism; not to be greeted as harbingers of a new time, however. Instead, they are told to mind their own business.

I referred previously to those on the socialist left who still believe in the Constitution, and their consternation is natural enough. But the Marxist left which totally spurns Westminster and (on paper at least) wants nothing more than its overthrow, also criticizes the separatists. Their reason is that proletarian socialism is supposed to be the grave-digger, and no one else will do. So they tell the nationalists to drop their shovels and put up with the pathetic limits of 'devolution': the revolution will solve their problems along with the others. Meanwhile they should wait until the time is ripe—i.e. the time for socialism—taking a firm grip on their petty-bourgeois, backward-looking impulses. The essential unity of the UK must be maintained till the working classes of all Britain are ready.

The fact is that the new nationalisms of the British Isles represent a detour on the way to revolution, and one which is now generally familiar in terms of twentieth-century history. It is 'unexpected' only in terms of the rigid anticipation of an imminent social revolution about to break through and lead the way. The crux of Lenin's view was that nationalism could constitute a detour in some degree valid—contributing to the political conditions and general climate favourable to the breakthrough, undermining conservatism and the inertia of old régimes. Why should this not be true in the British case also? If the social revolution is on the agenda of the heartland at all, then it will be enormously advanced by the disintegration of the state. It cannot fail to be, as the old party system becomes unworkable through the detachment of Scotland and Wales, as the Constitution itself fails and has to be reformed more or less radically, in circumstances of political flux and innovation not known since the earlier nineteenth century.

If it is not on the metropolitan agenda, then the problem is different. Different, but scarcely unfamiliar: as we saw, the dominant truth in any reconsideration of the older Marxist conceptions is the non-arrival of the metropolitan revolution—whether this be due to 'delay' or a deeper impossibility, whether it implies more patience or a drastic critique of the world view itself. We have looked at some of the causes of slow change and blocked reform in the UK state. But at a certain point clearly this analysis leads into the larger scene: notwithstanding all its many 'peculiarities', it is hardly surprising that Britain has not yet done what nobody has done anywhere in the industrialized world, conduct a successful social revolution.

Should *this* still be the case, then neo-nationalism needs no farther justification at all. Escape from the final stages of a shipwreck is its own justification. If a progressive 'second revolution' still does not take place in England, then a conservative counter-revolution will; and in that case the movements towards Scottish, Welsh, and even Ulster independence will acquire added progressive impetus and lustre, as relatively left-wing causes saving themselves from central reaction. One can readily imagine the sudden sectarian rediscovery of Celtic political virtues under those conditions.

At the moment, the prevailing nostrum is inevitable general approval of 'the right of national self-determination' (not even the Scots or Welsh can be exempted from this, although it has been argued the Ulstermen are) combined with Lenin's supposedly sage qualification that 'we do not in all cases advocate the exercise of that right'.[50] Advocacy depends upon the influence which the nationalism in question is imagined to exert upon the general course of revolutionary politics. As far as the above analysis goes, it will be obvious how that influence is estimated. Obvious, too, the nature of the resulting dilemma. Should there be the possibility of a radical, left-directed break-through at the centre, in which the English people finally shakes off the old hierarchical burden of the British state-system, then the nationalist upheavals will assist them—even though the path should be a tormented one, with a higher degree of intra-British political antagonism and misunderstanding. And in that eventuality, the question would then arise of building up a new, fairer, more federal British order: not the dingy, fearful compromise of 'devolution' but a modern, European multi-national state. Should this possibility not exist, then what the small British (and other) nationalities are facing is another prolonged era of capitalist uneven development, stretching into the next century. It is certain that at some point in this period the British régime will finally founder, and very likely that this will be accompanied by a new, indigenous variety of conservative reaction. Who, in that case, can deny them effective self-determination, not as a moral piety but as an urgently necessary, practical step?

[50] The most often-quoted passage in this connection occurs in 'The Right of Nations to Self-determination', Feb.–May 1914 (*Collected Works*, vol. 20): 'To accuse those who support freedom of self-determination, i.e. freedom to secede, of encouraging separatism, is as foolish and hypocritical as accusing those who advocate freedom of divorce of encouraging the destruction of family ties . . .' (p. 422). Whether one advocates divorce or not in any concrete case depends upon one's judgement of the 'family ties' already existing, and especially of the *paterfamilias*. Should the case be hopeless, and the foreseeable prospect of amelioration dim, then it is correct to move on from affirmation of the 'right to self-determination' to encouragement of actual separation. In that movement (in Nettl's words) the 'autonomous role of the proletariat' implies 'alliances with all elements who historically have to move forward (in a revolutionary sense) before they move back' (op. cit., vol. 2, p. 851).