Short Reviews

City, Class and Power

The Local State

The 'urban crisis', as defined by the bourgeois press and academics, became a catchword in the 1960's as a term denoting some sort of causality between the 'environment' of cities (density of population, poor housing, lack of community services, etc.) and the ghetto uprisings and proliferation of community action groups. Partly because these community action groups have dealt with consumption-oriented issues (housing, transportation, day care facilities, etc.) and not directly with 'work' issues of the factory and production, and partly because the 'urban crisis' has been couched in environmental terms and not as a consequence of contradictions in capitalist relations of production, community organizing has been largely ignored by Marxists and the field left to liberals and reformers. The 1970's have seen a great deal of work in radical urban economics, politics and sociology, which has attempted to place the 'urban crisis' in a framework of class conflict and the evolution of capitalist production. The two books reviewed here are recent contributions to this line of research. City, Class and Power by Manuel Castells is a product of the French school of radical urban sociology which received much of its impetus from the events of May-June 1968. The Local State by Cynthia Cockburn is a result of British research. Both books develop theories of collective consumption to account for the rise in community action and the 'urban problematic', though the resulting prescriptions for action differ somewhat. I will discuss each book in turn and conclude with some implications for Marxist organizing.

City, Class and Power

The propagation of the ideology of the 'urban environment' has clearly been advantageous for the ruling classes in attacking and quieting social unrest in the cities. This ideology advances the idea that technological progress leads to urban concentration which, in turn, results in 'a derangement of human nature' (due to city living). Castells points to the practical uses of this ideology: (i) social problems become the result of technology and urban concentration, not the social organization of classes; (ii) thus organizing on a class basis is discouraged—social problems are 'problems of cities and effect everybody'—therefore this ideology tries 'to naturalize' the urban contradictions, welding the ensemble of classes and social agents into a single army of Boy Scouts unified by the high purpose of the preservation of the species." (p. 35); and (iii) "... solution to the conflicts and contradictions implied become technical, not political. Planning (rational, neutral and scientific) should replace social and political debate..." (p. 6)

In order to overcome the above ideology the nature and source of class conflict in modern capitalist society (especially the cities) must be explored. Historically the labor/capital theory has been transformed from being merely a site of production into a unit of consumption. This consumption is collective, i.e., socialized, and serves the purpose of reproducing the labor force for capital. As capital investment concentrated more and more housing, transportation, etc., more facilities for collective consumption have been required to service the labor force. These investments in collective consumption are vital to the operation of modern, large-scale capital enterprises, yet have proven both unprofitable and beyond the ability of individual capitalists to provide, necessitating the intervention of the state to fund and coordinate these services. New capital investment prefers to locate where collective consumption services are concentrated (large metropolitan areas) as it is there that the indirect costs of production (housing, transporting and disciplining labor, etc.) to the separate capitalists are minimized. For the working class, the involvement of the state in the provision of collective consumption politicizes the struggles that occur in reference to that provision. Thus the city, as a unit of collective consumption, is integral to capitalist production as a whole. In this manner struggle over issues of collective consumption, expressed as residents/tenants associations, transportation action committees, groups opposing urban renewal, etc., can become valid expressions of the class struggle. Though not as direct nor challenging as industrial action, struggle over collective consumption represents a growing contradiction in modern capitalism:

... we are not proposing the replacement of the contradiction which defines the working class by a new principal contradiction defined in the sphere of socialized consumption; rather, it is the deepening of a secondary structural contradiction and the new historical role it can play through social movements and the processes of change that it can potentially provoke. (p. 127)

Changing class alignments and new forms of social inequality manifest themselves as a result of the deepening contradiction between socialized consumption and the requirements of private capital:

Such 'inequalities' among social groups are not entirely autonomous of the class system since the logic of the latter determines the organization of consumption, but the positions defined in the specific structure of inequality do not correspond in a one-to-one fashion to the structure of class relationships. It is in this sense that there is specific production of new effects of social inequality. (pp. 34-35)

New modes of struggle and political action are thereby created—struggle based on contradictions that have their resolution in the abolition of the capitalist mode of production:

Thus it is that the growing emergence of what are called urban social movements in advanced capitalist societies...
is a major element of the social dynamic in so far as they permit the progressive formation of an anti-capitalist alliance upon a much broader objective basis than that of the specific interests of the proletariat or than the contingent political alliances. (p.36)

Following his analysis of the capitalist city and the emerging contradictions of capitalist consumption, Castells proposes the 'democratic road to socialism' as a means to social change. Rather than summarize and synopsize his position, I shall quote extensively from Castells and reserve my criticisms until later in the review.

For a long time the Left has oscillated between social-democratic class collaboration and a Marxist-Leninist ghetto orientation to defending the workers' living conditions. A historical rupture has been in the making for several years. The articulation of new social struggles with alternative democratic politics can lead to a Left-wing electoral victory based on a programme opening the way to socialism. For such a victory to be possible and not to get bogged down in the administrative underground of the bourgeois state (I), it must not support itself on a coalition of dissatisfactions, but on the political and ideological hegemony of the socialist forces at the mass level. . . . The battle for the masses replaces the battle of the Winter Palace. (p. 60)

... once the smoke has lifted from the battles of the Winter Palace, the revolutionary project must find new ways to emancipate itself from the alternative between the political ghetto and ideological utopia. Unable to seize the state apparatus, it must then penetrate it, dissolve and transform it (my emphasis-DP). . . . Such a strategy means that the political Left must enlarge its mass support and go beyond its traditional hold in the working-class movement . . . . Within this new perspective, urban movements are those which most unify the interests of various classes and strata against the dominant structural logic, and which lead them to confront a state apparatus which has become the principal manager of collective goods. (pp. 150-151)

In a nutshell: Castells sees the role of collective consumption as being vital to capitalist production and capitalist relations of production. The creation of new contradictions vis à vis collective consumption allows the mobilization of 'the popular classes', not just the proletariat, against the hegemony of the bourgeoisie—in the form of the bourgeois state. This mobilization, in turn, sets the framework for the 'democratic road to socialism'.

The Local State

Cockburn, like Castells, bases her analysis of the capitalist state on the necessity of an agent to manage the affairs of collective consumption on behalf of the bourgeoisie in order to reproduce the mode of production: "The state's primary role is continually to reproduce the conditions within which capitalist accumulation can take place." (p. 51) In order to insure this—to continue its role as an executive committee for the bourgeoisie—the state must manage not only the actual items of collective consumption themselves (housing policy, urban renewal, welfare programs), but also the class conflict engendered by that management. To do this the state does not rely as much on repression as on modern management techniques—

techniques that were developed by modern industry in mediating both internal and external conflicts:

Whereas the firm tries to reduce market uncertainty by controlling demand, by intelligent advertising and judicious product-design, the state uses participatory democracy and 'the community approach'. The applications may be different but the causes are similar and so are the means: both are phases of corporate decision-making. (pp. 97-98)

Building on systems theory, Cockburn outlines the managerial ability of the modern capitalist state. Rather than outright repression, the state seeks to incorporate the protest (both actual and potential) of the working class. In doing so information flows—'citizen participation', 'participatory democracy', etc.—are encouraged between the state and the working class, between managers and managed:

The state, like a corporation, looks for ways of 'influencing the environment so that its own present or future behavior is more efficient'. One of the ways is to incorporate bits of the environment into the system, by increasing the information flows and other practical links between the two. It is by integrating the local population into predictable 'families' and 'community groups' and by setting up 'joint committees' between itself and them that the state can develop the level of information flow that amounts to 'governance'. In this it is little different from the corporation and its customers. It is in this light that we should look at government proposals for 'participation' and 'community development'! (pp. 100-101)

The incorporation of community groups within the management structure of the state becomes a two-edged sword for the bourgeois hegemony rather than a mechanism of iron-clad control. Though the danger of placation of working class groups by the state is high, the potential of disruption remains, especially when the incorporated groups do not follow the 'rules' of corporate management. And this potential disruption can be all the more detrimental to the state due to the working class being tightly knit within the management network:

It is a corrective to the idea that the state's offer of participation and community development are gains in themselves for the working class. Rather, they are what the working class can make them. They lead class struggle one step onward and bring new dangers and new opportunities. (p. 103)

Cockburn illustrates these concepts very well with a case study of Lambeth, an inner-London borough. In the early 1970s there were ten Neighborhood Councils (NCs) initiated by Lambeth Borough Council. Each NC was composed of community groups and representatives from specific working class neighborhoods within Lambeth. The NC scheme would, it was hoped, demonstrate the concern and willingness of the borough council in dealing with citizens' problems at the level of everyday life. In doing so a corporate management structure was created, and the myth of a responsive, benevolent 'local state' perpetuated.

While a majority of the NCs in Lambeth became, in fact, enmeshed into the corporate management structure of the borough council, the case of Angell NC demonstrates the focal position of incorporated community groups and their potential for making working class gains. Angell NC was:
In effect, Angell NC mobilized an organizational policy that negated the attempts of the local state at incorporation while being located in a structural position where the political presence of the working class was maximized:

Angell NC turned the council's own community weapons against it. ... The Chairman of Housing (1973-74) said in an interview, "Some neighborhood councils are responsible and intelligent; some are irresponsible and unsuccessful; Angell has been a total failure." The secretary of their constituency Labour Party was less restrained: "Angell—I'd shoot the lot," he said. (p. 146)

Implications for Organizing

Both Castells and Cockburn chronicle the rise of the relative importance of collective consumption and the role of the city in relation to the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. Both recognize the possibilities, indeed the necessity, of working class struggle over such issues. Both see the intervention of the state in this arena as inherently "politicizing" the class struggle. But Castells sees the capitalist state as a mere site for new aspects of the class struggle, while Cockburn shows that the state, through the building of a corporate management structure, becomes an active integral component (one is tempted to say, perhaps not incorrectly, a participant) in the development of the class struggle.

How does the concept of 'the democratic road to socialism' fare, given the propensity of the state to encourage 'participatory democracy' and 'community involvement' as part and parcel of the development of corporate management techniques? Can working class (or 'anti-capitalist') organizations or groups "penetrate it [the state], dissolve and transform it" (Castells, op. cit.) while that same state has evolved a management structure that will penetrate, dissolve and transform working class action, fragmenting their demands and dealing with them on a very local level? Surely the working class cannot play the same game in the same way as the bourgeois state, as Cockburn has demonstrated with the study of the Lambeth NCs.

Given the corporate management structure of the state, in what way can the working class organize? The 'democratic road to socialism' is clearly inadequate, but then so too are some of the organizational forms (as opposed to principles) of classical Leninism, as Castells has suggested. The strategies and organizational forms of the communist party in Lenin's day were a response not only to czarist oppression, but, more importantly, served as a vehicle of the proletarian in a specific revolutionary period. As Lukacs has stated, "A particular form of organization, useful in particular circumstances for particular purposes, can be an actual hindrance when the conditions of struggle change." The organizations of the present-day working class must reflect the changing strategy of the structural antithesis of the working class: the bourgeois state. More of a network than a monolith (as was the case in czarist Russia), and using management techniques more often than repression, the modern state presents a situation whereby working class organization must be distinct from the state's interest and yet imbedded within the state structure—a position where the danger of co-option is high, as is the risk to the state.

The bourgeois state must be smashed, a task that cannot be accomplished by an 'anti-capitalist' alliance of reformers, but by a viable organization of working class interests. The form of this organization will be determined by actual and specific struggles with the state and the bourgeoisie, as well as the innovative application of the principles of party building that will link the various spontaneous struggles of the workers into a force capable of social revolution. It would appear that this form would be, during the current 'pre-revolutionary' period, more fluid and responsive than the rigid party structure that has dictated working class action in the past. Cockburn gives some interesting insights into the successful organization of Angell NC:

One of the causes of resentment against Angell and one of the reasons, in the eyes of its organisers, for that NC's success in mobilising action in support of working class interests was that it had evolved an internal structure that included many of the ordinary members in activity, with key roles such as secretary and chairman rotating or absent. The NC activists had learnt from the experience of other active groups in Lambeth that the council is capable of co-opting any leadership that becomes apparent, dealing with the committee at the expense of the members. (p. 155)

Don Parson


The presence of the Zionist state in the Middle East is a complex problem generally presented to the world as a conflict between two nationalisms. Like most ideological notions, this is both an illusion to and an illusion of reality. Unfortunately, the U.S. left has had difficulty in going beyond this bourgeois humanist conception of Jew vs. Arab to delve into Zionism from an historical materialist approach (e.g., note the liberalism inherent in the approach of In These Times). The arrest this past year of Uri Davis, an Israeli Jew, for anti-Zionist activity is a reminder that the issue of Zionism is far more complex than the simple national contradiction generally presented. Because of Davis's arrest and because of the paucity of competent Marxist analyses of political Zionism, this appears to be an appropriate time to bring this book to the attention of TR readers.
Few of us were born into Marxist home environments so our points of departure are generally within bourgeois problematics. Often this takes the form of moral outrage over glaring abuses within a particular social formation. For instance, the New Communist movement grew out of the anti-war movement, and the civil rights movement, and only gradually did some of us come to realize the determinant role of the class struggle. Davis's experience in Israel illustrates this pattern of growing radicalization very well:

But for us, the generation born into the state, the Jewish state of Israel was our historical point of departure. It was only after 1967 that some of us recaptured the history of Jewish colonization, that we protested against massive destruction of Palestinian-Arab villages, expropriation of urban and rural property, massive dispossession and population transfer. Israel Galili, Premier Golda Meir's top advisor [Golda's Guru], and Minister without Portfolio, responded with incredulity and arrogance when faced with demonstrations against the expulsion of 6,000 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip in the Spring of 1972. Their houses and wells had been destroyed and 10,000 acres were fenced off for the purposes of the establishment of a cluster of Jewish settlements. Israel Galili argued at this time that "Our right [is] exactly like our right on Tel-Aviv. We are colonizing Gaza exactly in the same manner in which we colonized Jaffa. Those who doubt our right on Gaza should doubt our right on Tel-Aviv as well." And when he says "right" what he has in mind is obvious: an a priori privileged position and Jewish monopolistic control over available resources. Who should know better than Israel Galili that Gaza is being colonized in the same manner as Jaffa was colonized; after all, he was one of the leading veteran architects of the original colonization effort. (pp. 14-15)

Yet recognizing injustice is a long way from understanding its basis and effectively challenging that injustice. This Davis attempts to do by explaining some of the implications of Zionism, analyzing its foundations, and making some analyses of prospects for the future.

Political Zionism in its goal of establishing a Jewish state in an already occupied land was bound to manifest certain traits and tendencies. It was first of all an imperialist outpost for world capitalism. This is illustrated by its dependence on British, then U.S. imperialism. Davis asserts that this necessarily means conquest, occupation, racism and crime.

Zionist colonialism differed in form from other imperialist phenomena in that the goal for the colonizers was not the exploitation of the natives, but dispossession of the natives. As Davis puts it:

The Zionist colonial pioneers intended anything but sharing the country equally with the native population, joining hands in common struggle against their common exploitation and oppression. Rather, they came intending to solve the Jewish problem in terms of establishing in Palestine-Eretz-Israel in an a priori privileged position and state monopoly for Jews, which necessarily meant the dispossession of the native population and its expulsion. (p. 13)

With such goals, the clash with the vast majority of Palestinians was inevitable. "Their [the Zionists, S.D.] allies could only be the big absentee feudal land owners who were thirsty for cash in order to enter into the capitalist market economy . . . ." (p. 14)

From this it is clear that one of the central features of

Zionist ideology is a racist exclusivism. Ironically, this chauvinism is also directed against traditional "diapora" Jewish life. In order to build a Jewish state, it was necessary to destroy traditional Jewish life. Furthermore, the principle of establishing a colonial settler state in the "land of promise" necessarily presupposed the notion that Jews were in a degenerate condition. As a result, Zionist leaders saw anti-Semitism as an ally. Davis quotes the writings of several prominent Zionists to substantiate this, but the remarks of Rabbi Joachim Prinz, Deputy Chairman of the World Jewish Congress, concerning the Nazi takeover in Germany is particularly illuminating:

... Its significance for us [Jews] will be stated here: The liberal option has been lost forever [liberalism] the only political way of life which Jewish assimilationism was prepared to promote has sunk away for good. How long it will survive in disparate individual countries only prophets can venture to determine. But the dispassionate, cool observer of world affairs can determine the following facts: everywhere throughout the world symptoms develop which spell doom to the cornerstone values of liberalism. Parliament and democracy are increasingly shattered. The exaggerated harmful emphasis on the value of the individual is recognized to be mistaken; the concept and reality of the nation and the people is gaining, to our happiness, more and more ground. The last and most powerful and sublime formulation of national rights and the rejection of internationalism is found in the demands of socialism that it be founded exclusively on the unique character of every nation and the special demands of every nation, namely national socialism. (p. 17)

Though Davis does not address the question, the relationship between Nazism and Zionism has been the basis for considerable charges, but little rational discussion. Zionism existed before Nazism, but it is quite clear that the Nazi Holocaust provided tremendous impetus for the mass acceptance of Zionism. This is truly a great irony, since by advocating a racist Zionist state as a defense against a recurrence of the Holocaust, the Zionists are upholding the very ideological tenet which allowed the murder of 5-6 million Jews. This is apart from the "normal" production and reproduction of racist ideology as a determined instance under the capitalist mode of production since it is a fundamental and accepted part of Zionist and Nazi ideology and extends explicitly to the juridico-political superstructure. The irony, then, is that the upholding of the principle under which Jews have been attacked and may well be attacked again, constitutes an antagonistic contradiction between Zionist ideology and its justification of protecting the Jewish people.

According to Davis, the Zionist movement and the state of Israel are based on the dominance of a visionary elite, which in turn implies class stratification. Unfortunately, he only examines the source of this in ideological and sociological terms. That is, he surveys the basic ideological and philosophical notions of the Zionist ideologues, but he does not deal effectively with the multiplicity of connections between Zionism and the developing imperialist society which gave it birth. He demonstrates empirically the dominance of certain Eastern-European Zionists and their ideology in the pre-state movement and in the state of Israel itself. The dominance of this Askenazi class implies the oppression and exploitation of Oriental Jews and the
Palestinian Arabs in Israel. The second-class status of Oriental Jews is effectively shown through the empirical data in which this book is rich. He also gives lengthy breakdowns of Histadrut and Kibbutzim corporate enterprises. The Kibbutzim are often regarded as socialist collectives in an otherwise capitalist society. Davis points to the utopian socialist ideology in the kibbutz, but goes on to point out the military function and, more importantly, the fact that kibbutzim are in reality management collectives with most of the production coming from wage labor and donated labor.

In 1961, South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd pointed out that "... Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state." (quoted in Alexander Hepple, Verwoerd, p. 228) Though Dr. Verwoerd and others have pointed to basic similarities between the two states, Davis correctly maintains that this similarity is not total. Apartheid in Israel is limited to the Jewish National Fund, Kibbutzim, the Israeli Nationality Law and the Law of Return. This is not an inconsiderable structure, however, since, for example, the JNF owns over 90% of the land in Israel, has important legal status and leases land to Jews only. Too, one must bear in mind that these are only the legal expressions of a much more widespread social practice.

This does not exhaust the similarities between Israel and South Africa. Another factor is their similar roles as "imperialist watchdog." For Israel, this position is determined in part by its relationship with the United States. From 1948-68, Israel had an import surplus of $7.5 billion, of which only 30% came to Israel under conditions calling for return of dividends, interest, or capital. In large part, this came from private donations, which the U.S. Treasury allowed as "private charitable donations." In this and other ways, Israel is dependent on the U.S. for survival. This will not change, regardless of any change in government. Only a complete restructuring of Israeli society can change this dependence and destroy Zionist allegiance to Israel and thus its position in the world capitalist system. But the immediate future is not bright. The author asserts that the Israeli masses are firm supporters of Zionism, since they are well aware that their present living standards depend on the position of Zionism as an imperialist outpost in the Middle East.

In addition to the class struggle and the national contradictions between Palestinian Jews and Arabs, the contradiction between the Ashkenazi and Oriental Jews is an important factor in Israel and the Palestinian revolution. But for this contradiction to assume its real importance in a positive way would involve some important changes in the strategy of the Palestinian resistance. According to the author, there must be a clear affirmation of the goal of a "socialist, multinational, secular and democratic Palestine," and Palestinian nationalists must be defined in broad terms. Davis suggests the following:

Any person who (1) lives in Palestine at the date of the establishment of the new regime, and/or (2) holds an Israeli passport and/or (3) is a descendant of any person who was either born or lived in Palestine in the period beginning with the first Zionist Congress (1897) until the establishment of the new regime, is a Palestinian national. (p.121)

The PLO tactics at present affect Oriental Jews the most. If specifically capitalist targets were selected and a consistent ideological offensive were carried out, then the possibility for convincing Oriental Jews that the Palestinian revolution offers them something other than refugee status would greatly increase. Davis argues that this could at least reduce the willingness of Oriental Jewish Israeli citizens to defend the Zionist state.

But these are only examples of elements in what must be a major strategic reorientation. I would suggest that such a major reorientation presupposes a continuous and difficult scientific labor: e.g., an Israeli and Palestinian class analysis (including an analysis of the national and cultural contradictions within each class) is only one of the numerous areas which must be dealt with in order to identify accurately revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces, and in order to develop a sound strategy for mobilizing the revolutionary forces.

This book is an extremely useful glimpse into the nature...
of the state of Israel. It does give important insights into
the class structure. However, it tends to describe rather
than explain the ruling class, and the working classes are
virtually ignored in a manner reminiscent of the student
movement in the U.S. in the late 1960’s. The dominant
contradiction in this part of the Middle East may be national at this
time, yet the determinate contradiction is the class struggle. For
instance, the nature of the Egyptian struggle against
Zionism and, more specifically “Sadat’s sellout,” is
determined primarily by the internal class struggle. Also, the
line and program of the PLO are determined by the petty
bourgeois leadership and the struggle of different class
forces. To adequately analyze Zionism and the struggle
against it, an understanding of the class forces involved is
necessary. Davis makes a useful contribution in the
direction, but it is incomplete, particularly in dealing with
the most consistently revolutionary class.

Stewart Dubois

1 Histadrut was established in 1920 as the General Federation of
Hebrew Workers in Eretz, Israel. Its name was changed in 1966 to
the General Federation of Workers in Eretz, Israel, when it was
decided to accept Arab workers as members. Histadrut is an
economic empire controlling much of the country’s holding
corporations, banks, industrial concerns and agro-industries. It is
an industrial giant which, among others, has a department for
labor unions. (Davis, p. 142)
(continued from page 11)

15Boudin, pp. 152-53.
18Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 24, p. 43.
20On this point see Bettelheim’s *Class Struggles in the USSR*.
22J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (FLPH, 1940), p. 608. Later on Stalin was to liquidate the contradiction between production forces and relations entirely. See his comments on how “relations of production must necessarily conform with the character of the productive forces” in *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1952).
23Ibid., p. 613.
27Ibid., p. 15.
28Ibid., p. 46.
29Quoted in *For Marx*, p. 105.
31Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, p. 46.

STATE AND REVOLUTION
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