

## CRISIS THEORY

Santiago Carrillo, *Eurocommunism and the State*, Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1978.

The revival of serious Marxist interest in the state flows from the perceived inadequacies of an inherited political theory which is no longer capable of charting a relevant socialist practise. At the theoretical level it has become apparent that the role and nature of the democratic capitalist state cannot be understood in terms of the instrumental reductionism of the classical tradition. The working class is no longer external to the democratic polity; it now has a significant presence within, and impact upon, the political structures which contingently secure not only the continued accumulation and reproduction of capital, but also the legitimation of class society. As Carrillo maintains, the state remains capitalist by virtue of its structural subordination to the dictates of a capitalist economy and the close inter-penetration of some of its branches with the dominant class. Even so, its heightened economic role within monopoly capitalism stands in contradiction to the democratic foundations of "a state of all the people". Self-contradictory forms of intervention and cleavages between state institutions therefore derive from a "state monopoly capitalist" political economy which must increasingly recognize, mediate and incorporate subordinate class interests.

Carrillo's analysis attempts to reformulate European communist strategy in light of these considerations. It is argued that the privileged position of monopoly capital within the state can be effectively challenged by the working class and its allies, who will ultimately win political hegemony through the use and defence of democratic political structures. There is no radical rupture or discontinuity between the capitalist and the socialist state. Democracy permits the working class and its parties to cement alliances with all "democratic forces" on the basis of a socialist transformation, to struggle for ideological and political hegemony both inside and outside the state, to increasingly isolate and detach the dominant fraction of the ruling-class from its social supports, and to ultimately construct a genuinely democratic political economy. Power flows from one class to another by degrees as the democratic state sheds its capitalist integument.

All of this is reminiscent of social-democracy; Carrillo is not afraid to discard the eternal verities of Marxism-Leninism. His analysis is recognizably Marxist in inspiration, although it stands at the right pole of the Eurocommunist continuum. He continuously underscores the class character of the existing state, the structural and class obstacles faced by communists in Spain and the difficulties imposed by the context of global imperialism. The transition to socialism is grasped as one of class struggle which is not reducible to electoral politics. The complex picture drawn is of a combination of different levels of struggle — economic and ideological no less than political — whereby the subordinate classes progressively appropriate both state and society. Less prone to talk of "ruptures" and "decisive breaks" than left Eurocommunists such as Poulantzas and more willing to stress the possibilities and continuities afforded

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by democracy, Carrillo's work stands as an important contribution to the search for a democratic Marxism.

The central weakness of the analysis is its grounding within an immanent critique of Stalinism. While Carrillo rightly denounces such "errors" as the substitution of party for class rule and the undervaluation of democracy with genuine conviction and passion, the critique is ultimately partial and self-serving because it fails to make any reference to the theory and history of the non-communist left. Eurocommunists were hardly the first to advance a socialist critique of Stalinism and it is notable that Carrillo feels no need to delve into the fratricidal history of the Spanish left. The P.O.U.M. were, after all, Marxists who died for their opposition to Comintern orthodoxy on the streets of Republican Barcelona, while other socialist currents in Spain have long advocated forms of democratic socialism.

The neglect of social-democracy is a more significant lacuna because the history of this other product of the great schism within classical Marxism is surely germane to a consideration of the prospects for a democratic socialism. The degeneration of revolutionary socialism into the nightmare of orthodox state communism certainly commends democracy to us, but the alternative trajectory of social-democracy suggests a lesson of equal significance. Given the real constraints of winning and exercising governmental power within bourgeois democracies, it is at best a partial truth that social democrats have never been "real" socialists: democratic means in and of themselves partially determine the nature of ultimate objectives. Thus Labour in Britain abandoned socialism in favour of incremental reforms and a "managed" capitalism precisely because it accepted and accommodated itself to certain definite limits inscribed within the structures and practices of bourgeois democratic states. There is little in Carrillo's analysis to suggest that Eurocommunists face problems of a qualitatively different order. Any potential communist government would have to make a choice between "responsibility" in managing the sharpening crises of advanced capitalism (consequently attacking at least the immediate interests of the working-class) or advancing a decisive socialist alternative. The former path can only ultimately weaken the left — socialism is not a day closer if a communist government imposes the burden of austerity. The latter route must presuppose the hostility of capital, a high degree of political polarisation, intensified economic crisis, and the possibility of foreign intervention.

Revolutionaries would maintain that there are decisive moments of crisis in history when the question of state power is sharply posed and, of necessity, abruptly resolved. While this may not be true under all circumstances, it is certainly arguable that the adherence of socialists to democratic political practices, as defined within the existing state system, contributed in no small way to the historical defeats of democracy in Germany, Italy and Chile. Certainly, an adequate theorisation of democratic socialism demands close attention to the achievements and limitations of social democracy. There may be no easy or abstract syntheses of democracy and socialism, but Carrillo tends to

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discount the validity of insights to be drawn from both Lenin and Berstein by understressing the strength and solidity of the state and its manifest ability to either repress or incorporate those who would go beyond incremental change.

If one lesson can be drawn from the question of reform and revolution as opposed strategies of overcoming crises, it is that until now both have ultimately strengthened the domination of the state over society. Eurocommunism offers a way beyond this impasse by stressing the irreducibility of socialist politics to the electoral arena alone. Meanwhile, the path to a genuinely democratic socialism remains uncharted.

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Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York: Basic Books, 1978.

This book is a lament for another nation: a decaying "post-industrial" America. According to Bell's previous prognoses, this "post-industrial" society was supposed to have been the child of an unplanned change in the direction of contemporary society, a product of the more or less smooth working out of the logic of socio-economic organization and knowledge. The pre-eminence of this new social formation was to be insured by the strengths of its "social structure" — its economy, technology, and superior occupational system. Post-industrialism was to feature an expanded service economy, and was to be ruled by a professional and technical class obsessed with creating a new "intellectual technology". The "axial principle" of this society was to be "theoretical knowledge", the divine source of innovation and public policy formation for a smoothly functioning society. In this vision, Bell was at one with Brzezinski's wondrous technetronic scenario: a world shaped culturally, psychologically, and politically by the revolutionary impact of communications technology and electronics. Not only America, but the whole of Western society was seen to be in the midst of a vast historical change. Old property relations, existing elitist power structures, and ascetic bourgeois culture were all being swept away. The key vision of *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* is no different from that of his *End of Ideology* — the wonderful dream of the exhaustion of old political passions and the rise and triumph of predictable and reliable technical decision making.