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Dilemmas of Antisystemic Movements*

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OPPPOSITION to oppression is coterminous with the existence of hierarchical social systems. Opposition is permanent, but for the most part latent. The oppressed are too weak—politically, economically, and ideologically—to manifest their opposition constantly. However, as we know, when oppression becomes particularly acute, or expectations particularly deceived, or the power of the ruling stratum falters, people have risen up in an almost spontaneous manner to cry halt. This has taken the form of revolts, of riots, of flight.

The multiple forms of human rebellion have for the most part been only partially efficacious at best. Sometimes they have forced the oppressors to reduce the pressure or the exploitation. But sometimes they have failed utterly to do so. However, one continuing sociological characteristic of these rebellions of the oppressed has been their “spontaneous,” short-term character. They have come and they have gone, having such effect as they did. When the next such rebellion came, it normally had little explicit relationship with the previous one. Indeed, this has been one of the great strengths of the world’s ruling strata throughout history—the noncontinuity of rebellion.

In the early history of the capitalist world-economy, the situation remained more or less the same as it had always been in this regard. Rebellions were many, scattered, discrete, momentary, and only partially efficacious at best. One of the contradictions, however, of capitalism as a system is that the very integrating tendencies that have been one of its defining

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characteristics have had an impact on the form of antisystemic activity.

Somewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century—1848 is as good a symbolic date as any—there came to be a sociological innovation of profound significance for the politics of the capitalist world-economy. Groups of persons involved in antisystemic activity began to create a new institution: the continuing organization with members, officers, and specific political objectives (both long-run and short-term).

Such organized antisystemic movements had never existed before. One might argue that various religious sects had performed analogous roles with an analogous organization, but the long-run objectives of the religious sects were by definition otherworldly. The antisystemic organizations that came into existence in the nineteenth century were preeminently political, not religious—that is, they focused on the structures of “this world.”

Social Movements and National Movements

In the course of the nineteenth century, two principal varieties of antisystemic movements emerged—what came to be called respectively the “social movement” and the “national movement.” The major difference between them lay in their definition of the problem. The social movement defined the oppression as that of employers over wage earners, the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. The ideals of the French Revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity—could be realized, they felt, by replacing capitalism with socialism. The national movement on the other hand defined the oppression as that of one ethnonational group over another. The ideals could be realized by giving the oppressed group equal juridical status with the oppressing group by the creation of parallel (and usually separate) structures.

There has been a long discussion, within the movements and among scholars, about the differences between these two kinds of movements. No doubt they have differed both in their definitions of the problem and in the social bases of their support. In many places and at many times, the two varieties of movements felt they were in direct competition with each other for the loyalty of populations. Less frequently in the nineteenth century, but sometimes, the two varieties of movements found enough tactical congruence to work together politically.

The traditional emphasis on the differences of the two varieties of movements has distracted our attention from some fundamental similarities. Both kinds of movements, after considerable internal debate, created formal organizations. As such, these organizations had to evolve a basic strategy to transform their immediate world in the direction in which they wished it to go. In both cases, the analysis was identical. The key political structure of the modern world they each saw to be the state. If these movements were to change anything, they had to control a state apparatus, which pragmatically meant “their” state apparatus. Consequently, the primary objective had to be the obtaining of state power.

For the social movement, this meant that, despite the internationalism of their ideology—“workers of the world, unite!”—the organizations they created had to be national in structure. And the objective of these organizations had to be the coming to power of the movement *in that state*. Similarly, for the national movement, the objective came to be state power in a particular state. To be sure, the jurisdiction of this state was by definition what the national movement was about. Sometimes such a movement sought the creation of an entirely new state, either by secession or by merger, but in other cases this “new state” might have already existed in the form of a colonial or a regional administrative entity.

The fact that the two varieties of movements defined the

same strategic objective accounts for their sense of rivalry with each other, particularly when a workers' movement sought to obtain power in an entity out of which a given national movement was seeking to detach a zone in order to create a new state.

The parallel objectives—obtaining state power—led to a parallel internal debate on the mode of obtaining state power, which might be defined in polar terms as the legal path of political persuasion versus the illegal path of insurrectionary force. This has often been called reform versus revolution, but these two terms have become so overlaid with polemic and confusion that today they obscure more than they aid analysis.

In the case of the social movement, it should be noted, this internal debate culminated in the period between the First and Second World Wars in the existence of two rival and fiercely competitive Internationals, the Second and the Third, also known as the conflict between Social Democrats and Communists. Though both the Second and Third Internationals asserted that they had the same objective of socialism, that they were movements based in the working class and on the left, and even (at least for a while) that they assumed the same Marxist heritage, they rapidly became vehemently opposed one to the other, to the point that their subsequent occasional political convergences (the “popular fronts”) have seemed at best tactical and momentary. In some sense, this has remained true right up to the present.

If one looks at the geography of the movements, one quickly notices a historic correlation. Social-democratic movements have become politically strong and have “come to power” (by electoral means, to be sure, and then in alternation with more conservative parties) almost only in the core states of the world-economy, but in virtually all of them.

Communist parties, by contrast, have become politically strong primarily in a certain range of semiperipheral and peripheral zones, and have come to power (sometimes by insurrection, but sometimes as a result of military occupation

by the USSR) only in these zones. The only Western countries in which Communist parties have been relatively strong for a long period of time are France, Italy, and Spain, and it should be noted that Italy and Spain might well be considered semiperipheral. In any case, the parties in these three states have long since shed any insurrectionary inclinations.

We are therefore in the 1980s faced with the following political history of the modern world. Social-democratic parties have in fact achieved their primary political objective, coming to power in a relatively large number of core states. Communist parties have in fact come to power in a significant number of semiperipheral and peripheral countries—concentrated geographically in a band that runs from Eastern Europe to East and Southeast Asia. And in the rest of the world, in many of the countries, nationalist—sometimes even “radical nationalist” or “national liberation”—movements have come to power. In short, seen from the vantage point of 1848, the success of the antisystemic movements has been very impressive indeed.

The Unfulfilled Revolution

How are we to appreciate the consequences? In gross terms, we can see two consequences that have moved in very different directions. On the one hand, these movements, taken collectively as a sort of “family” of movements, have become an increasingly consequential element in the politics of the world-system and have built upon their achievements. Later movements have profited from the successes of earlier movements by moral encouragement, example, lessons in political tactics, and direct assistance. Many concessions have been wrested from the world’s ruling strata.

On the other hand, the coming to state power of all these movements has resulted in a very widespread sense of unful-

filled revolution. The questions have run like this. Have social-democratic parties achieved anything more than some redistribution to what are in fact “middle” strata located in core countries? Have Communist parties achieved anything more than some economic development for their countries? And even then, how much? And furthermore, has this not been primarily to benefit the so-called new class of a bureaucratic elite? Have nationalist movements achieved anything more than allowing the so-called comprador class a slightly larger slice of the world pie?

These are perhaps not the questions that ought to be asked, or the manner in which the issues should be posed. But in fact these are the questions that have been asked, and very widely. There is little doubt that the resulting skepticism has made deep inroads in the ranks of potential and even active supporters of the world’s antisystemic movements. As this skepticism began to take hold, there were a number of ways in which it began to express itself in ideological and organizational terms.

The period after the Second World War was a period of great success for the historic antisystemic movements. Social democracy became firmly ensconced in the West. It is less that the social-democratic parties came to be seen as one of the alternating groups which could legitimately govern than that the main program of the social democrats, the welfare state, came to be accepted even by the conservative parties, if no doubt begrudgingly. After all, even Richard Nixon said: “We are all Keynesians now.” Communist parties, of course, came to power in a whole series of states. And the post-1945 period saw one long process of decolonization, punctuated by some dramatic, politically important armed struggles, such as Vietnam, Algeria, and Nicaragua.

Nonetheless, by the 1960s, and even more by the 1970s, there began to occur a “break with the past” with the rise of a new kind of antisystemic movement (or movements within the movements) in world-regional locales as diverse as North

America, Japan, Europe, China, and Mexico. The student, Black, and antiwar movements in the United States, the student movements in Japan and Mexico, the labor and student movements in Europe, and the Cultural Revolution in China, and as of the 1970s the women's movements did not have identical roots or even common effects. Each one was located in political and economic processes shaped by the particular and different histories and by the different positions in the world-system of the locales in which they arose and worked themselves out. Yet, by world-historical standards, they occurred in the same period and, moreover, they shared some common ideological themes that clearly set them apart from earlier varieties of antisystemic movements.

Their almost simultaneous occurrence can largely be traced to the fact that the movements of the late 1960s were precipitated by a common catalyst: the escalation of the anti-imperialist war in Vietnam. This escalation posed an immediate threat to the established patterns of life and to the very lives not only of the Vietnamese but of American youth as well, and the war posed a clear threat to the security of the Chinese people. As for European youth and workers, while no immediate threat was posed to their lives and security, the indirect effects of the escalation (world monetary crisis, intensification of market competition, etc.) and the ideological spill-overs from the movements in the United States, from the Cultural Revolution in China, and from the struggle of the Vietnamese people soon provided enough reasons and rationalizations for rebellion.

Taken together, all these movements and their Vietnamese epicenter were important in disclosing a basic asymmetry in the power of systemic and antisystemic forces on a world scale. The asymmetry was most dramatically exemplified on the battlefields themselves. Following the precedent of the Chinese war of national liberation, the Vietnamese showed how a national liberation movement could, by shifting the confrontation with conventional armies onto nonconventional

terrains (as in guerrilla warfare), erode and eventually disintegrate the social, political, and military position of cumbersome imperial forces. From this point of view, the other movements (particularly the U.S. antiwar movement) were part and parcel of this asymmetrical relation: to different degrees and in different ways, they showed how the shift of the confrontation between systemic and antisystemic forces onto nonconventional terrain was strengthening the latter and hampering/paralyzing the former.

The outcome and implications of the combined and uneven development of the antisystemic movements of the 1960s and 1970s must be assessed at different levels. Locally, the Vietnam war had a very "conventional" outcome: the coming to state power of a "classical" antisystemic movement, and the subsequent strengthening of the bureaucratic structure of this state. Assessed from this angle, at the national level the outcome of the Vietnamese national liberation movement did not differ significantly from the earlier kinds of antisystemic movements (national and social). Globally, however, the Vietnam war was a turning point in disclosing the limits of military actions in coercing the periphery into a hierarchical world order.

These limits and their recognition were the outcome not only of the confrontation on the battlefields but also, and possibly more so, of the movements unleashed elsewhere in the world-system. It was the nature of these other movements that most clearly marked a departure from, and a counterposition to, earlier patterns of antisystemic movements. To varying degrees, the Cultural Revolution in China, the student movements in the West, Japan, and Mexico, and the "autonomist" workers' movements in Europe took as one of their themes the limits and dangers of the establishment and consolidation of bureaucratic structures by the movements themselves, and this was new.

The Cultural Revolution was largely directed against the bureaucratic power of the Communist party and, whatever its

failures from other points of view, its main achievement has been precisely to have prevented, or at least slowed down, the consolidation of party bureaucratic power in China. The student and youth movements that cropped up in the most diverse contexts were generally directed not only against the various bureaucratic powers that tried to curb and repress them (states, universities, parties, etc.) but also against all attempts to channel them toward the formation of new, and the strengthening of old, bureaucratic organizations. Although the new workers' movements generally ended up by strengthening bureaucratic organizations (mostly unions), nonetheless the protagonists of these "new" movements showed an unprecedented awareness of the fact that bureaucratic organizations such as unions were bound to develop interests of their own that might differ in important respects from those of the workers they claimed to represent. What this meant, concretely, was that the instrumental attitude of unions and parties vis-à-vis the movement was matched and countered to an unprecedented extent by an instrumental attitude on the part of the movement vis-à-vis unions and parties.

The antibureaucratic thrust of the movements of the 1960s and early 1970s can be traced to three main tendencies: the tremendous widening and deepening of the power of bureaucratic organizations as a result of the previous wave of anti-systemic movements; the decreasing capabilities of such organizations to fulfill the expectations on which their emergence and expansion had been based; and the increasing efficacy of direct forms of action, that is, forms unmediated by bureaucratic organizations. On the first two tendencies, nothing needs to be added to what has already been said concerning the successes and limits of the earlier movements, except to point out that the reactivation of market competition under U.S. hegemony since the Second World War had further tightened the world-economy constraints within which states acted.

As for the increasing efficacy of direct forms of action, the

tendency concerns mainly the labor movement and was rooted in the joint impact of two key trends of the world-economy: the trend toward an increasing commodification of labor power and the trend toward increasing division of labor and mechanization. In the previous stage, labor movements came to rely on permanent bureaucratic organizations aiming at the seizure/control of state power for two main reasons. First, these labor movements were largely at the beginning the expression of artisans and craft workers who had been or were about to be proletarianized but whose bargaining power vis-à-vis employers still depended on their craft skills. As a consequence, these workers had an overwhelming interest in restricting the supply of and expanding the demand for, their skills. This, in turn, required trade-union organizations oriented to the preservation of craft work roles in the labor process, on the one hand, and to the control over the acquisition of craft skills, on the other. Like all organizations that attempt to reproduce “artificially” (i.e., in opposition to historical tendencies) a scarcity that affords monopolistic quasi-rents, these craft or craft-oriented unions ultimately depended for their success on the ability to use state power to restrain employers from profiting from the operations of the market. The artificial (i.e., nonmarket) restraints were twofold: state rules about workers’ pay and conditions; state legitimation of unionization and collective bargaining.

The second and more important reason for the previous reliance of labor movements on permanent bureaucratic organizations aiming at state power was related to the question of alliances and hegemony. In most national locales, the struggle between labor and capital took place in a context characterized by the existence of large strata of peasants and middle classes which could be mobilized politically to support antilabor state policies and economically to enhance competition within the ranks of labor. Under these circumstances labor could obtain long-term victories only by neutralizing or winning over to its side significant fractions of these strata. And

this could not be achieved through spontaneous and direct action, which often had the effect of alienating the strata in question. Rather, it required a political platform that would appeal to peasants and middle strata and an organization that would elaborate and propagandize that platform.

By the 1960s, radical changes had occurred from both points of view in core regions and in many semiperipheral countries. The great advances in the technical division of labor and in mechanization of the interwar and postwar years had destroyed or peripheralized in the labor process the craft skills on which labor's organized power had previously rested. At the same time, these same advances had endowed labor with a new power: the power to inflict large losses on capital by disrupting a highly integrated and mechanized labor process. In exercising this power, labor was far less dependent on an organization external to the workplace (as trade unions generally were) since what really mattered was the capacity to exploit the interdependencies and networks created by capital itself in the workplace.

Moreover, the increased commodification of labor had depleted the locally available strata of peasants that could be effectively and competitively mobilized to undermine the political and economic power of labor. As for the middle strata, the unprecedented spread and radicalism of the student movements were symptoms of the deepening commodification of the labor power of these strata and of the greater difficulties of mobilizing them against the labor movement. (This process was reflected in a large literature of the 1960s on the "new working class.") It follows that the problem of alliances and hegemony was less central than in the past and that, as a consequence, labor's dependence on permanent bureaucratic organizations for the success of its struggles was further reduced.

As we have seen, for many persons the conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that the antisystemic movements have "failed" or, even worse, were "co-opted." The change

from “capitalist state” to “socialist state,” for many who think in these terms, has not had the transforming effects on world history—the reconstituting of trajectories of growth—that they had believed it would have. And the change from colony to state, whether by revolution or by negotiation, has lacked not only the world-historical effects but also, in most instances, even the internal redistribution of well-being so prominent in the programs of these movements. Social democracy has succeeded no better. Everywhere it finds its occupancy of state power merely a mediating presence—one constrained by the processes of accumulation on a world scale and the twin requirements of governments: burying the dead and caring for the wounded, whether people or property. To the chagrin of some, the applause of others, the one coordinated effort toward a world revolution, the Comintern/Cominform, collapsed completely under the disintegrating weight of continuing state-formation at all locations of its operations—its historical center, its loci of subsequent success, its other national arenas of strength, its points of marginal presence. Without exception, all current Communist parties are concerned first with domestic conditions and only secondarily if at all with world revolution.

The Transformed Historical Ground

We, on the other hand, contend, as we said, that from the vantage point of 1848 the success of the antisystemic movements has been very impressive indeed. Moreover, that success does not dim in the least when viewed from the vantage point of today. Rather the opposite. For without such an appreciation, one cannot understand where the nonconventional terrain opened up by the most recent forms of antisystemic movement has come from historically and where therefore the movements seem likely to go in the historical future.

At the same time, however, the antisystemic movements are

of course not the only agencies to have altered the ground on and through which current and future movements must continually form and operate. Those they would destroy, the organizing agencies of the accumulation process, have also been at work, owing partly to an "inner logic," partly to the very successes of the movements and hence to the continually transformed historical ground which that "logic" has as its field of operation and contradiction. Above all, the ongoing structural transformation of the capitalist world-economy has in effect opened up the locations in its overall operation where the process of class struggle is proving formative of the sides in conflict and polarizing in the relations so formed.

In the course of the twentieth century, indeed defining it, a massive sea change has been occurring in the social relations of accumulation. In a sentence, the relational networks forming the trunk lines of the circuits of capital have been so structurally transformed that the very workings of the accumulation process appear as historically altered. It is this ongoing transformation that has continually remade the relational conditions of both the organizing agencies of accumulation (by definition) and those in fundamental struggle with them, the antisystemic movements, and so have continually remade as well the relational character of that struggle itself and hence the nature of the movements defined by it. To retrace the steps: the life cycles of the various movements have been a part of and have helped to form the structural shift; hence the relational struggles defining the movements as anti-systemic; hence the movements themselves and the trajectories that make them antisystemic. We depict the ongoing transformation here by outlining three of its faces in the form of structural trends.

In one guise the transformation appears as simultaneously an increasing "stateness" of the world's peoples (the number of "sovereign states" having more than tripled during the twentieth century) and an increasingly dense organization of the interstate system. Today virtually the whole of the globe's

nearby 5 billion people are politically partitioned into the subject populations of the 160 or so states of an interstate system which contains a large number of formal interstate organizations. This might be called the widening of stateness. The deepening of stateness is another matter. Here essentially we have in mind the growing "strength" of state agencies vis-à-vis local bodies (within or intersecting with the state's jurisdiction). Measures of this are of many sorts, from the voluminous expansion of laws and of agencies to enforce them, through central-government taxes as growing proportions of measured domestic or national product, to the structural expansion of kinds of state agencies, the geographical spread of their locations of operation, and the growing proportion of the labor force their employees form. Moreover, like international airports around the world, and for analogous if deeper reasons, the organizational form of stateness (the complex array of hierarchies forming the apparatus of administration) has everywhere virtually the same anatomy, the differences from place to place being on the order of variations on a theme. They are variations that no doubt matter a great deal to the subjects of state power, but, world historically, they are nonetheless only variations and not qualitative departures in form.

One final point should perhaps be noted here. Much has been made of the extent to which, following the accessions to power of social and/or national antisystemic movements, a marked increase in the structural "centralization" of the state has occurred, that is, a marked increase in what we're calling here the deepening of stateness. And, examining the trends in state formation within the jurisdictions severally, one at a time, one does see that. However, watching the overall trend in state formation in the modern world as a singular historical system, over the course of the twentieth century, one would be hard put to attribute the overall trend to any such "internal" processes or, for that matter, even to the interrelated successes of the particular social and national movements construed col-

lectively as but particular emanations of a singular complex historical process of the modern world-system. For even in locations where, seen in that way, the world-historical process has been manifestly weakest (the movements least apparently successful), the structural trend in state formation is no less apparent than elsewhere.

Of even more importance here, in some ways, is the still far greater growth in the density of the interstate system. Just using the simplest of assumptions, and reasoning purely formally from the fourfold increase in the number of states, there is a sixteenfold increase in their relations with one another. But that of course barely scratches the surface. The kinds of specialized relations among the states of the interstate system have expanded nearly as much as the kinds of internal state agencies. Added to this are over a dozen specialized United Nations agencies (in each of which most states are related as members) and a very large number of regional international organizations (such as OECD, OPEC, ASEAN, COMECON, NATO, OAU, etc.). If one goes beyond the existence of the voluminous set of interstate relations to the frequency with which they're activated, via meetings, postal mail, cable, telephone, and now, increasingly, electronic mail, the density of the interstate system's relational network today is probably several times greater than the comparable density of the official intrastate relational network of the most advanced and centrally administered country of a century ago (say France).

One result is an enmeshing within each state's operations of the "internal" and "external" relational webs and processes to such an extent that the distinction itself, except perhaps for border crossings of people and goods, begins to lose substantive force (in contradiction to its nominal force, which is increased with every treaty signed, every package assessed duty by customs, every postage stamp issued). Hence, to a degree and extent never envisioned by the successful social and national movements when they eventually gained state power,

both what a state's agencies administer internally and how they do so is increasingly determined, to use a Weber pairing, not autonomously (as befits sovereignty) but heteronomously (as befits what?).

A second result, and one of no less importance to our subject—the current and future terrain on, through, and against which present and future antisystemic movements are and will be operating—is the degree to which virtually all interrelations, among peoples in different state jurisdictions, have become dimensions of their respective states' relations with one another. This is not just a matter of travelers obtaining passports and visas and passing through emigration and immigration authorities, or of packages having to be sent with export and import permits and be duly processed, etc. These interstate procedures, which daily reannounce the borders of the respective jurisdictions of each constituent state, are but mediations of the movement of people, goods, and capital, and have been practiced for a rather long time.

The “openness” or “closure” of a state's borders to such movements, however, we note parenthetically in passing, has always been less a matter of that state's policies “toward the world” than of its location in the hierarchical ordering inherent in the capitalist world-economy's interstate system, a location determined not merely by academicians but by demonstrated or creditable relational strengths, practical conditions effected by ruling classes. Rather it is a matter of the interstate system's appropriating all manner of direct and circuitous relations among people of different countries (state jurisdictions)—whether religious, scientific, commercial, artistic, financial, linguistic, civilizational, educational, literary, productive, problem-focused, historical, philosophical, *ad infinitum*—such that they all become, at the very least, mediated, more often actually organized, by the counterpart agencies of different states through their established or newly formed relations with one another. The effect is to subordinate the interrelations among the world's peoples not to *raisons*

d'état, a practice with which all of us are all too familiar, but to *raisons du système d'états*, a practice with which most of us are all too unfamiliar.

There is, we should briefly note, a set of consequential historical contradictions being formed through this recreation of all varieties of social relations into networks within either inter- or intrastate frameworks. Many kinds of communities—in the sense of communities of believers/practitioners—form in a way “worlds” of their own in relation to, in distinction from, and often in conflict with all others, that is, those who are not of their community, who are nonbelievers/practitioners, hence nonmembers. These are often large, encompassing worlds: the Islamic world; the scientific world; the African world (or, in the United States today, the Black world); the women’s world; the workers’ or proletarian world; and so forth. It is far from evident that such communities of consciousness can even persist, much less grow, within the structurally developing inter- and intrastate framework. The kind of contradiction noted here marks even more so the popular peace and environmental movements, but that is because they are perforce, in today’s world, state-oriented, whereas the communities of consciousness we have in mind elaborate themselves independently of stateness (hence, however, in contradiction to it and to interstate-ness rather than through them).

Division of Labor, Centralization of Capital

We have dwelt at length on but one face of the ongoing structural transformation of the capitalist world-economy, that seen through a focus on the plane of the interstate system and its constituent units, the states and their relations with one another. We have done so for two reasons. One is the seemingly enduring disposition, on the part of historical social scientists, to carry forward—all evidence to the contrary

notwithstanding—the liberal ideological distinction between “state” and “economy,” or “state” and “market” in some versions, as if these were fundamental theoretical categories. The other is the equally prevalent, although apparently less impermeable, disposition to imagine—again, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding—that the capitalist world-economy has evolved rather as an onion grows, from a core of small and local beginnings through successively larger rings until the outer peripheral skin is formed, all in virtue of the self-expansion of, in this view, capital through its increasing subordination of labor.

We turn now to much briefer observations on two other faces of the transformation. A second face is in the organization and the structuring of another plane of the capitalist world-economy’s operation, the axial division of labor. This is the complex of interrelated production/transportation processes that is so ordered that the surplus value created in the course of production and transportation is, historically, disproportionately appropriated at the organizing centers of the multiple and more or less lengthy chains or networks of dependent production processes. The relational patterns this ordering entails are thereby reproduced and, for still additional reasons, their reproduction has cyclically deepened the differences in productive capacity between the organizing center or core portions of the axial division of labor and its increasingly peripheralized portions. In the twentieth century, the underlying transformation has effected some truly massive alterations in the constituent relations of the complex core-periphery axis and hence in the mapping of their respective global zones, the results of which—generally rendered as if the result of state policies—are broadly known. Of more immediate interest is the extraordinary growth in recent decades of a long-standing agency of the organizing center or core of the socialization of production, hence of labor, on a world scale, namely, what is currently called the multinational or transnational firm. In a sentence, many relations among mate-

rially dependent production processes that had been exchange relations, or if newly formed could have been under other conditions (and so of, or potentially of, market-organized networks of commodity flows), became transformed into (or, if new, formed as) intrafirm relations. The elemental arrangement—centralizations of capital, as firms, entrepreneurially organizing geographically extensive and technically complex (for the time) chains of related production operations—is hardly new. It was, after all, what distinguished the chartered merchant (sic!) companies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from other capitalized operations. But in recent decades this “elemental arrangement” of the capitalist world-economy has been increasingly constituted on a scale, in a form, of both organization and production that is historically original. The transnational corporations’ reconstruction of the world-scale division and integration of labor processes fundamentally alters the historical possibilities of what still are referred to, and not yet even nostalgically, as “national economies.”

A third face of the ongoing structural transformation we are sketchily addressing here shows itself, so to speak, in the massive centralization of capital of the postwar decades. Slowly, haltingly, but more and more definitely, the central agency of capitalist accumulation on a world scale, a world ruling class in formation, is *organizing* a relational structure for continually resolving the massive contradictions increasingly apparent between the transnational corporations’ control over, and hence responsibility for, the interrelations *among* productive processes and the multiple states’ control over, and hence responsibility for, the labor forces these production processes engage, more or less sporadically.

This structure being organized is basically a sort of replacement, at a “higher level” of course, for the late lamented colonial empires, whose demise the national movements sought and the new hegemonic power, the United States, required. Through those arrangements, and such cousins of

them as the Chinese concessions and the Turkish capitulations, the axial division of labor had been furthered and, subject to the very system's structural cycles, assured. The twentieth century's thirty-years war (1914–45), insofar as it was about those arrangements, resolved the question of hegemonic power (a United States vs. Germany fight, it was then understood) but left for invention the means of its exercise and, with that, the perpetuation of both the axial division of labor and the necessary multiple sovereignties, through which the interstate system and hence the relations of hegemony operated.

The invention was a long time in coming and seems to have emerged fully only after, as we said earlier, the narrowness of the limits of great-power military force had finally been established by the Vietnamese for all to see. Crudely put, what seems to have been going on, by way of a structural replacement of the colonial empires, has been the simultaneous growth in massive centralizations of capital *and* a sort of deconcentration of capital (called deindustrialization in present core areas of the axial division of labor). The massive centralization has as its agencies quite small *ad hoc* steering committees of consortia, each composed of several hundred banks, working in close relations both with central banks and with international agencies, notably the IBRD, the IMF, and the BIS. The centralization here is at the money point in the circuit of capital, and the borrowers are not directly capitalist entrepreneurs but are instead states, which in turn use the more or less encumbered credits to work with transnationals, operating with undistributed surpluses, in various "development" projects, which, as they are realized materially, amount to what's called by some "Third World industrialization" and results in precisely the "deindustrialization" of heretofore core areas.

This face of the transformation does suggest reconsidering the theoretically presumed concatenation of centralization and concentration of capital. But even more it suggests reconcep-

tualizing the *fundamental* nature of the accumulation process as it's framed through the idea of the circuits of capital. For when the indebted *states* run into trouble, one of the agencies of this arrangement, the IMF, steps forward with austerity plans, the gist and substance of which amount to lowering the costs, now internationally reckoned, of the daily and generational reproduction of the labor forces of (within?) each of the countries.

The arrangement is not *per se* historically new—one thinks of the Turkish capitulations, for example—but it is far more massive and, as a structural array of processes of the world-system, far more frequent in occurrence and far more telling in its implications for the structuring of the accumulation process as such.

Together these three facets of the ongoing structural transformation of the modern world-system, all of which reveal, to a greater or lesser extent, the structural surround of the state power seized or occupied by antisystemic movements in the course of the twentieth century, and indicate the degree and kind of reconstitution of terrain with which present and future movements of a like sort have to contend. They indicate as well—though this is not here a central concern of ours—the anachronism of the contents we give to the concepts with which we commonly work. The dilemmas of the antisystemic movements are thus in some measure the unintended product of a sort of false consciousness on the part, not of toadies nor even of hairsplitters, but of the most engaged of the intelligentsia.

There remains a matter to end on here—to raise as a sort of coda—for nothing before has directly prefigured it. This is the ongoing transformation of communications networks. The *Communist Manifesto* observes: “And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years.” It is now nearly a century and a half since that was written. That sentence has lost none

of its force. But it must be understood contemporarily. In the United States, in the 1960s, what effected the interrelation of the 150 or so Black demonstrations and the even more numerous public forms of the antiwar movement was television, which is why the commanding officer of the Grenada operation (Grenada: less than half the size in territory and people of an upstate New York county) correctly, from the U.S. government's point of view, decreed there was to be no accompanying news coverage of the invasion. The kind of concern flagged in the *Manifesto*, the material means of unity among those geographically separate, remains central. The means themselves, and the very form of their materiality, have been fundamentally transformed. More and more antisystemic movements will find their own cohesion and coherence forged and destroyed by the newest of the means of mediating social relations.

Where then are we? We are massively, seriously in the urgent need of reconstructing the strategy, perhaps the ideology, perhaps the organizational structure of the family of world antisystemic movements, if we are to cope effectively with the real dilemmas before which we are placed, as the "stateness" of states and the "capitalist" nature of capitalism grow at an incredible pace. We know this creates objective contradictions for the system as such and for the managers of the status quo. But it creates dilemmas for the antisystemic movements almost as grave. Thus we cannot count on the "automaticity" of progress; thus we cannot abandon critical analysis of our real historical alternatives.

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