

Doctrine of the Body Possessed by the Devil

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It is vital to be quite clear about the question of state capitalism in order to reset the compasses that have lost their bearings.^[1]

We have managed to gather many contributions to this question from the range of traditional concepts of the marxist school that show that state capitalism is not only the latest aspect of the bourgeois world, but that its forms, even complete ones, are very old and correspond with the very emergence of the capitalist type of production. They served as the main factors in primitive accumulation and long preceded the fictitious and conventional environment of *private enterprise*, of *free initiative* and other fine things which are found far more in the field of apology than in the real world.

As we have already said, there are many groups in the camp of the left communist anti-stalinists who do not see things in this way. We say to them, on the basis of earlier texts, for example: "Wherever it may be, wherever there is the economic form of the market, capitalism is a *social* force. It is a *class* force. And it has the *political* state at its disposal."^[2]

And let us add the formula which, for us, expresses very well the most recent aspects of the world economy: "State capitalism is not a subjugation of capitalism to the state, but a firmer subjugation of the state to capital."

These groups, however, find the terms of the first thesis were: "correct until 1900, the epoch of the opening of imperialist expansion and, as such, remain up to date, but are incomplete when the evolution of capitalism gave to the state the function of taking over the final moments of such an evolution from private initiative."

And they continue by saying that we will be late-comers in the world of economic "culture" if we fail to understand that where this thesis fails to fit in with history, it ceases to be marxist, and if we do not request the addition of the study of the *state economy* to Marx's analysis, taking this from texts written by the *powerful personality* of the economist Kaiser.^[3] A bad habit! A text which seeks to establish given relations between things and facts is checked against things and facts and not against the signature on the book, which is based on the more or less powerful or powerless personality of the author.

Personalities? Stick them up your Kaiser as far as we are concerned! And if in 1950 the idol of private enterprise is corroded, we well know that Sir Karl reduced this to minute fragments a good century ago: you see we know this because we are stubborn late-comers, lazy in reading the latest books...

In Marxism, the concept of private initiative does not *exist*: look down at the compass dial, not up to heaven like the person who hears paradoxes (paradox — something which common sense says is incorrect when it is very much correct).

We have said in thousands of speeches of propaganda that the socialist programme is for the *abolition of private property* of the means of production, which is borne out by Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and Lenin on Marx. We said property and not private economy. The precapitalist economy was private, or individual. Property is a term which does not indicate a purely economic relationship, but also a legal one and brings into discussion not just the productive forces, but also the relations of production. Private property means private right sanctified by bourgeois legal codes: it brings us to the state and to power, a matter of force and violence in the hands of a class. Our old and valid formula means nothing if it does not already contain the concept that in order to overcome the capitalist economy, the juridical and state structure corresponding to it must also be overcome.

These basic concepts should suffice to reject the insidious content of the following thesis: the social programme is enacted when individual property becomes state property, when the factory is nationalised.

Let us be quite clear, the groups with which we are in dispute do not state that state capitalism is already socialism, but fall into saying that it is a third and new form between *private* capitalism and socialism. They say in fact that there are two distinct periods: that in which "the state has more of the older policing function than that of involvement in the economy", and that in which "it gives the maximum power to the exercise of force specifically to protect the economy centralised in it". We say that in these two formulae, which are more or less faithfully reproduced, and even more so the two historical periods, that capitalism is the same, the ruling class is the same, and the historical state is the same. The economy is the entire social field in which production and distribution occur and includes the men participating in this: the state is a specific organisation acting in the social field, and the state in the capitalist period has always had the function of policeman and protector of the interests of a class and a type of production corresponding historically with this class. The state concentrating the economy within itself is an incongruous formula. For marxism, the state is always present in the economy — its power and legal violence are economic factors from first to last. One can best explain it this way: in certain cases, the state, with its administration, assumes the management of industrial concerns; and if it assumes the management of all of them, then it will have centralised the management of the concerns, but not of the economy.

Especially so long as distribution takes place with money prices (that these are fixed officially does not matter) the state is a firm among firms, a contractor among contractors; all the worse in that it considers as *firms* each of its national enterprises, as with the Labourites, Churchillians and Stalinists. Getting away from this situation is not a question of administrative measures, but a problem of revolutionary force, of class war.

The problem is posed better in an interesting bulletin published by the comrades of the “*Groupe français de la gauche communiste internationale*”[4] of which — with great pleasure — we do not know the names and personalities. Sensible questions are asked on the problem which deserve further development, and the problem is posed in contrast to the vision of the noted Chaulieu group, which is influenced by the theory of “decadence” and of the transition from capitalism to *barbarism* which inspires in them, however, the same horror as that of the “bureaucratic” regimes. A theory in which one does not know what on earth the compasses are indicating until they prattle about marxism. There are elements in the internal bulletin of our movement[5] on the *decadence* of capitalism where we deal with the false theory of the descending curve. Without any haughtiness scientifically speaking, it is only foolishness to tell a story which reads: Oh capitalism, grab us, swindle us, reduce us to a worn out old dog not worth a kick in the ribs, we will quickly recover — all this just means that you are decaying. Just imagine that it is decaying...

As for *barbarism*, it is the opposite of civilisation and so of bureaucracy. Our barbarian ancestors, lucky them, did not have organisational apparatuses based (old Engels!) on two elements — a defined ruling class and a defined territory. There was the clan, the tribe, but still not the *civitas*. *Civitas* means city and also state. Civilisation is the opposite of barbarism and means state organisation, therefore necessarily bureaucracy. More state means more civilisation means more bureaucracy, while class civilisations follow one upon the other. This is what marxism says. It is not the return to barbarism, but the start of *supercivilisation*, which is duping us everywhere, that the monsters of contemporary state super-organisations dominate. But let us leave the members of *Socialisme ou barbarie* to their existential crisis. The bulletin we quoted refutes them in an article with the correct title: *Deux ans de bavardage*: Two years of chattering — No chattering here, please note!

Let us come to the balanced formula with which the French comrades formulated the question — *the definition of the ruling class of the state capitalist countries, the exactitude or insufficiency of the definition: capitalism heir to the liberal revolutions*.

The conclusion presented by this group is correct: stop presenting the bureaucracy as an autonomous class, perfidiously warmed-up within the proletariat, and instead consider it as a huge apparatus linked to a given historical situation in the world-wide evolution of capitalism. Here we are on the right track. The bureaucracy, which all class societies have known, is not a class, it is not a productive force, it is one of the “forms” of production appropriate to a given cycle of class rule. In certain historical phases it appears to be the protagonist on the stage — we too were about to say in the phase of decadence — they are in fact pre-revolutionary phases and those of maximum expansion. Why call the society ready for the *midwife of the revolution*, the obstetrician who will give birth to the new society, decadent? The pregnant woman is not decadent, but the sterile one is. Chaulieu sees the inflated belly of capitalist society and mistakes the inadequate skill of the obstetrician confronted with the swollen uterus with the imaginary infertility of the pregnant woman. They accuse the Kremlin bureaucracy of giving us a still-born socialism due to their abuse of power, while the fault lies in not having taken up the forceps of the revolution to open up the belly of Europe-America, driven by flourishing capital accumulation, and having made a useless effort on an infertile womb. And perhaps only on an infertile womb, inverting the battle for grain with the battle for seed.[6]

Let us go on to the purely marxist-economic point after this brief clarification. The statement “capitalism heir to the liberal revolutions”, which correctly made the central point, contains the precise historical thesis: capitalism has a cycle, a single class course, from the bourgeois to the proletarian revolution, and it cannot be split into several cycles without renouncing revolutionary marxism. But, it must be said, as it is said a little further on, capitalism appeared from the *bourgeois* (not *liberal*) revolutions or, better still, “anti-feudal” revolutions. In fact liberalism became the goal and motive of these revolutions, their general idea, only through bourgeois apologetics. Marx rejected this and for him the historical goal of these revolutions is the destruction of the obstacles to the domination of the capitalist class.

Only in that sense is the abbreviated formulation correct. It is quite clear: capital can easily get rid of liberalism without changing its nature. And this is also clear: the direction of the *degeneration*, the degeneration of the revolution in Russia does not pass from the revolution for communism to the revolution for a *developed kind* of capitalism, but to a *pure* capitalist revolution. It runs in parallel with world-wide capitalist domination which, by successive steps, eliminates old feudal and Asiatic forms in various zones. While the historical situation in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries caused the capitalist revolution to take liberal forms, in the twentieth century it must have totalitarian and bureaucratic ones.

The difference is not due to basic qualitative variations of capitalism, but to the huge diversity in quantitative development, as with the intensity in each metropole, and the diffusion over the planet’s surface.

The fact that capitalism decreasingly adopts for its conservation, just as for its development and enlargement, liberal chit-chat and ever increasingly uses police methods and bureaucratic suffocation, when the historical line is clearly seen, does not cause the slightest hesitation over the certainty that the same means must serve in the proletarian revolution. It will make use of this violence,

power, state and bureaucracy, *despotism* as the Manifesto called it with a yet more dreadful term 103 years ago. Then it will know how to get rid of all of them.

The surgeon does not put down the blood stained lancet before the new life has emerged and has drawn its first breath, the hymn to life.

Yesterday

Does not the basic form of capitalism disappear with the disappearance of the private individuals who, as owners of factories, organise production? This is the objection in the economic field which attracts many people's attention.

"The capitalist" is named a hundred times by Marx. Besides, the word "capital" comes from the word *caput*, meaning head, and so traditionally capital is any wealth linked, intestate, to any singular titular person. *However*, the thesis to which we have dedicated expositions for a long time doesn't contain anything new, but only explains, remaining true, that the marxist analysis of capitalism does not consider as vital the element of the *person* of the factory owner.

Quotations from Marx would be innumerable: let us then conclude with just one.

Let us take the so called "classic" capitalism of the "free" factory. Marx always put these in quotation marks, they in fact characterise the bourgeois school he fought and destroyed with his economic concepts — this is the point that is always forgotten.

One naturally supposes that Mr. X, the first capitalist to appear, had a sum of money to hand. Good. Entire sections of Marx's work reply with the question: how come? The replies vary: theft, robbery, usury, black marketeering or, as we have seen more than a few times, royal charter or law of the land.

So X, instead of stashing his gold coins in a sack, so as to run his fingers through them every night, acts as a citizen imbued with liberal and humanitarian social ideals. He nobly faces the risks and circulates his capital.

So, first element accumulated money.

Second element, acquisition of raw materials, the classic raw cotton bales, of so many little chapters and paragraphs.

Third element, acquisition of the works where he sets up plant and looms to spin and weave.

Fourth element, technical organisation and management. The classic capitalist looks after this himself. He has studied, gone on trips and journeys and has thought out new systems to work the bales and, by producing thread in quantity, cuts costs. He will dress cheaply yesterday's urchins and even the blacks of Central Africa who were used to going about naked.

Fifth element, the workers at the looms. They do not have to bring an ounce of raw cotton or a single spare spool — that happened in the semi-barbaric times of individual production. But at the same time there will be trouble if they remove a single thread of cotton to patch their trousers. They are rewarded with a just equivalent for their labour time.^[7]

Through the combination of these elements, one achieves the one that is the motive and the reason for the whole process: the mass of yarn or textiles. The essential fact is that only the capitalist can take this to market and the financial return is his and his alone.

Always the same old story. Yes, you know the little sum — the cost of the raw cotton, something for the wear and tear on plant and machinery, the workers wages. Receipts: the price of the product sold. This is greater than the sum of the costs and the difference constitutes the profit margin of the factory.

It matters little that the capitalist does what he likes with the money he gets back — he could do that with his original cash already without manufacturing anything. The important fact is that after restocking in everything to the level of his original investment, he still has a mass of money on hand. He could consume it himself, certainly. But *socially* he *cannot*, and something forces him to in large part invest it, to translate it into capital again.

Marx says that the life cycle of capital consists only in its movement as value perpetually set in motion so as to multiply itself. The desire of the person of the capitalist is not required in this, nor would he be able to impede it. Economic determinism not only obliges the worker to sell his labour time, but similarly the capitalist to invest and accumulate. Our criticism of liberalism does not consist in saying there is a free class and a slave class. There is an exploited one and a profiteering one, but they are both tied to the laws of the historical capitalist mode of production.

The process is therefore not within the factory, but is social and can only be understood as such. Already in Marx there is the hypothesis of the separation of the various elements from the person of the capitalist entrepreneur, which is substituted with a share participation in the profit margin of the productive enterprise. Firstly, the money can be got from a lender, a bank, who receives periodic interest. Secondly, in such a case the materials acquired with that money are not really the property of the entrepreneur, but of the financier. Thirdly, in England the owner of a building, house or factory may not be the owner of the land on which it stands: thus houses and factories can be rented. Nothing prohibits the same for looms and other machinery and tools. Fourth

element, the entrepreneur may lack technical and administrative managerial capacities, he hires engineers and accountants. Fifth element, workers' wages — evidently their payment too is made from loans from the financier.

The strict function of the entrepreneur is reduced to that of having seen that there is a market demand for a certain mass of products which have a sale price above the total cost of the preceding elements. Here the capitalist class is restricted to the entrepreneurial class, which is a social and political force, and the principal basis of the bourgeois state. But the strata of entrepreneurs does not coincide with that of money, land, housing and factory owners and commodity suppliers.

There are two basic forms and points required to recognise capitalism. One is that the right of the productive enterprise to dispose of the products and the sales proceeds (controlled prices or requisitions of commodities do not impair the right to such proceeds) is unimpaired and unimpaired. What guards this central right in contemporary society is from the outset a *class monopoly*, it is a structure of power, and the state, the judiciary and police punish whoever breaks this norm. Such is the condition for enterprise production. The other point is that the social classes are not isolated one from another. There are no longer, historically speaking, castes or orders. Belonging to the landed aristocracy was something that lasted more than one lifespan, as the title was handed down through the generations. Ownership of buildings or large finances lasts on average at least a lifespan. The "average period of personal membership of a given individual to the ruling class" tends to become even shorter. For this reason we are concerned about the extremely developed form of *capital*, not the *capitalist*. This director does not need fixed people. It finds and recruits them wherever it wants and changes them in ever more mind bending shifts.

Today

Here we cannot demonstrate that Lenin's "parasitic capitalism" does not mean that power lies more in the hands of the financial capitalists than in those of the industrial capitalists. Capitalism could not spread and expand without growing more complicated and progressively separating into the various elements which enter into the competition for speculative gain: finance, technology, equipment, administration. The tendency is for the largest margin and social control to slip from the grasp of positive and active elements to become concentrated in the hands of speculators and business banditry.

We shall therefore fly from Marx to... Don Sturzo.

This latter, with his habitual prudence, took in hand the INA scandal[8]. What he said is interesting: "I cannot say what happened during fascism because I was in America, but where these things are the order of the day, many others may come to light!" We can be sure of it. The capitalist parasitism of contemporary Italy beats that of Mussolini, and both remain child's play in comparison with wheeler-dealer US business.

INA had huge finances because it collected all the workers' social security contributions, like other similar state institutions with their well known initials. It pays slowly so its safes are stuffed with ready cash. It therefore has the right (since it has no head, no body and no soul — it is for good reason that we are in the civilisation of *habeus corpus*) not to let such wealth lie idle, so it employs and invests it. What good luck for the modern entrepreneur! He is the capitalist without capital, just as dialectically modern capital is capital without the boss, acephalous.

The bad business, the clever Sicilian priest says (those in the gallery yearn soon to make an exaggerated oration at his funeral) was the formation of too many *front companies* under the INA.

What the hell are front companies? Some types, versed in business who have luxurious offices and have crept into the economic and political outer offices, who do not have a penny or registered stock or buildings to their names, (they do not even rent houses, but live in big hotels, they know Vanoni[9] backwards, but Vanoni does not know them[10]) "plan" a given deal and register a company with the plan as its sole asset. INA, or some similar body, will give it the money and if some "special law" is required, let us say for raising cocks in old army bases, a problem is hastily brought to the attention of national leaders, especially by a forceful speech on government ineptitude by one of the opposition MPs, which solves all.

In fact, once the common impresario went to the bank to borrow money to use in the business planned. The bank replied: good, here it is, where are your securities? Out with your property and other titles... But a state-run organisation does not have these trifling needs: the *national good* is enough for it to pull out the cash. The rest of the tale tells itself. If the old impresario with his plan and production project created not cocks but cock-ups, he was finished — he did not get his money back and he exited from the boss class humiliated.

Our *front company* with its brilliant general staff does not live in this fear: if it produces cocks, they are sold to poultry farmers for a good price, money is earned. If, supposing it does not produce cocks or no one wants cocks, no matter — hand-outs, indemnities and profit shares have all been cashed in and INA pays for the mistaken cock farm plan.

We have explained what state capitalism (or the *economy centralised in the state*) means by this small and banal example. It should be said that INA's loss is shared by all the poor unfortunates who pay into its coffers another cut of their daily wages.

State capitalism is finance concentrated in the state at the disposal of passing wheeler-dealers of enterprise initiative. Never has free enterprise been so free as when the profit remained but the loss risk has been removed and transferred to the community.

The state alone can print as much money as it wants and can deal with the forger. The progressive expropriation of small owners and capitalist concentration in successive historical forms is based on this initial principal of force. We have with reason repeatedly stated that no economy in which firms present accounts and exchange is carried out in money, can avoid such laws.

The power of the state is therefore based on the convergent interests of these profiteers benefiting from speculative plans of firms and from their web of deep-seated international relations.

How can these states not lend capital to those gangs which never settle their debts with the state except by forcing the exploited classes to pay up? There is the proof that these “capitalising” states are in chronic debt to the bourgeois class, or if you want fresh proof, it lies in the fact that they are obliged to borrow, taking back their money and paying interest on it.

The socialist administration of a “centralised economy” would not provide outside takings to any “plan” just as it would not pay interest. Besides, it would not deal in money.

Capital is only *concentrated* in the state for the convenience of surplus-value and profit manoeuvring. It remains “available to all” or available to the components of the entrepreneurial class — no longer simply production entrepreneurs, but openly business entrepreneurs — they no longer produce commodities, but, Marx has already said, they produce surplus value.

The capitalist as person no longer serves in this — capital lives without him but with its same function multiplied 100 fold. The human subject has become useless. A class without members to compose it? The state not at the service of a social group, but an impalpable force, the work of the Holy Ghost or of the Devil? Here is Sir Charles’s irony. We offer the promised quotation: “By turning his money into commodities which serve as the building materials for a new product, and as factors in the labour process, by incorporating living labour into their lifeless objectivity, the capitalist simultaneously transforms value, i.e. past labour in its objectified and lifeless form, into capital, value which can perform its own valorisation process, an animated monster which begins to ‘work’, ‘as if possessed by the devil’.”^[11]

Capital must be seized by the horns.

Footnotes

[1] Cf. *Bussole impazzite* (compasses struck with madness).

[2] *Proprieta’ e capitale* (Iskra, Milan, 1980) p. 130.

[3] Henry Kaiser proposed “social” capitalism with workers sharing the profits.

[4] A bulletin issued in September 1951 by the group that later became the French section of the International Communist Party. Chaulieu = Castoriadis, a founder of the group *Socialisme ou barbarie*.

[5] “Il rovesciamento della prassi” now in *Partito e classe* (Milan, 1972) pp. 120-1, 130. “This theory (of the descending curve) comes from gradualist reformism: there are no drops, shaking or leaps.” (Point 4)

[6] Reference to the Stalin-Khrushchev attempt to increase corn yields.

[7] Publishers Note — Bordiga’s use of the term “labour time” is perhaps a slip of the pen. Basic for Marx is that despite the appearance that workers are paid for their labour or labour time, they actually sell and receive payment for their labour power — their capacity to labour. The value of this labour power is its cost of reproduction: “the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner.” (*Capital* Vol. I, p 274) While the wage form gives the appearance that all a worker’s labour is paid for, for Marx part of workers’ labour time reproduces the value of their labour power and is thus “paid” — and the rest of it is surplus to this and thus is “unpaid”. (See *Capital* Vol. I, chapters 6 & 7)

[8] Don Sturzo: former priest, leader of the catholic right in the Christian Democrats, opposed to corruption in the party and the state. INA (*Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni*) launched in 1912 to become the state monopoly, liberal opposition led to it being made into a state body but maintaining “greater autonomy and a more strikingly private type of internal structure than state bodies” (Candeloro *Storia dell’ Italia moderna*, Milan, 1974, Vol. VII, p. 307). It could therefore operate in the way described in the text.

[9] Publisher’s Note — Vanoni was the Italian Minister of Finance of the day.

[10] Cf. footnote 8 above.

[11] *Capital* Vol. I, p. 302. The final quotation from Goethe’s Faust, is more correctly translated as “as if its body were by love possessed”.