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THE SOCIOLOGY OF INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

Money Labour and Class in The Capitalist Mode of Production

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD.

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ABSTRACT

It is argued that most approaches to industrial democracy use a model of capitalism based on the commodity status of labour. This gives rise to 'leap and logic' analyses of modes of production and changes between them which fall foul of the 'paradox of mode of production'. The labour process and value theory debates are used to illustrate this. An alternative reading of Marx's theory of value is proposed which gives a less determinist analysis of capitalist mode of production in terms of the development of the money form. The implications of this for conceptions of class and the rationality of production relations in capitalism are investigated and conclusions offered about how industrial democracy strategies might be evaluated.

"When I hear someone announce that he intends "to apply Marxism" to a problem, I cannot help calling up a mental picture of a Victorian headmaster with a cane."

E.P. Thompson.

CHAPTER ONEINTRODUCTION : CAPITALISM & THE COMMODITY STATUS OF LABOUR

"Labour power, therefore, is a commodity neither more nor less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scales."

(Marx, Wage Labour and Capital)

### 1.1 Two Problems with sociology of the workplace : reversibility and qualification

While doing empirical research on industrial democracy in private industry I became increasingly dissatisfied with two features of the theories available to analyse control and power at the workplace.

The first feature was that of 'reversibility'. It seemed that virtually any proposition advanced could be plausibly reversed. For example some arguments assume that hierarchy and efficiency go together ('it's management's job to manage') others that they are incompatible (industrial democracy boosts productivity.) There are arguments that modern capitalism is characterised by a decline in hierarchy and the rise of qualifications to the powers of capital. An example is the concept of 'management by agreement' in British industrial relations.<sup>(1)</sup> It conveys the notion that whereas previously, management could rely on coercion and 'the stick' to secure compliance with its orders, it must now embrace consent and 'the carrot'. At one level the concept is intuitively attractive and grasps the main direction of change: transportation and the gibbet have been replaced by industrial tribunals as the basis of state intervention in industrial relations for example. Personal autocracy and despotism (whether at the level of director or of foreman) have been superseded by protective legislation, negotiations and grievance procedures.

But if more precise questions are addressed to the concept it can be seen that it provides only an outline of the development. Thus we have very little idea of the empirical dimensions of the contemporary 'frontier of control' in different industries and the changes it undergoes. Unionised workforces with sophisticated plant or company level steward organisations may be able to offer a variety of resistances to managerial authority and wield considerable influence over its behaviour, but just how much influence is difficult to say. The basis and scope of their 'countervailing power' is difficult to grasp.<sup>(2)</sup> 'Agreement' may be reluctant, or simply represent a grudging recognition of a balance of forces that is in no way accorded legitimacy. Is the stick no longer used because the carrot is just as effective and ultimately achieves the

same results? And is the 'stick' such an outmoded strategy anyway? Recent events at British Leyland and Grunwick, and surveys of industrial tribunal performances suggest that management's power to hire and fire labour (from which so much else must surely flow) may now be more cumbersome or expensive to put into practice, but remains intact.<sup>(3)</sup> The recent Monetarist sponsored recession has demonstrated that worker organisation is still very dependent on the state of the labour market, although just how dependent remains to be seen.

Against this theorists of deskilling have argued that such developments are misleading epiphenomena obscuring the reality of the progressive removal of all vestiges of control over the organisation of work by labour. These are the arguments of the labour process debate and Braverman in particular.

It might be argued that any empirical failings of a concept like 'management by agreement' would result more from a lack of sufficient evidence and research than theoretical deficiencies. However, once we ask why there has been a development of management by agreement, the problems multiply. First of all there is the problem of circularity of explanation. It is usually impossible to determine cause and effect in the discussion. For example it might be asserted that the more sophisticated and expensive capital equipment used today requires a workforce that is relatively committed to maximising the potential of such technology.<sup>(4)</sup> Thus technological developments have forced an increased reliance on:

"That spirit which enables the manager to count on just the extra bit of speed when the delivery date is dangerously near. To count on care in the use of the firm's material; on honest working when the foreman is not about; on one man helping another."<sup>(5)</sup>

and in turn led to an increase in workers' power. But it might equally be argued that it was rather the increase in workers' power which forced firms to adapt to such changed circumstances by exploring more fully the greater potential contribution of such a workforce through harnessing the benefits of autonomy. We come up against yet more 'reversibil-

ity in such a form that it simply is not possible to decide by an appeal to the 'empirical' evidence. Thus to take the same example again, it has been argued that the greater masses of capital set in motion by workers today render the costs of industrial action much greater for capital (since wage costs as a proportion of total costs are proportionately less.) This is held to have increased workers' bargaining power and fostered the recognition of labour by the state,<sup>(6)</sup> and the development in most capitalist economies of 'tri-partheid' direction of economic policy. A diametrically opposed argument is advanced by Braverman (1974).<sup>4</sup> Based on Marx's arguments about the tendency of the organic composition of capital to rise (that the mass of constant capital set in motion will tend to rise) it argues that the effects of this on the labour process (deskilling and the progressively real subordination of labour in the process of production) and the labour market (growth of the industrial reserve army, and of the substituteability of labour) will be to destroy what economic basis there was to workers' power to influence capital.<sup>(7)</sup>

I deal with the issues of circularity and reversibility in much greater depth in chapter 3 below. The above example is meant simply as a preliminary indication of the inadequacies of most current theorisation of the question and the confusion to which it gives rise. It also serves to illustrate one important theme which will run through this entire thesis: that 'power' cannot be considered independently of the material process of production itself. The question of the relationship between these two factors is therefore a central question addressed by this thesis.

The example of 'reversibility' most relevant to industrial democracy is that of the characterisation of industrial democracy as either representing an 'advance' by labour on the powers of capital, or as the subtle 'incorporation' of the labour movement into capital's own aims.<sup>(8)</sup> I was unhappy either with the suggestion that it was possible to reconcile these problems by steering a compromise course between alternatives or indeed leave them unresolved as extremes between which a correct analysis must lie. I was also convinced that these disputes were not capable of resolution by confrontation with empirical evidence: for this presupposed a break between the theoretical and the empirical which I felt was illeg-

itimate in the first place. Moreover the problems usually settle on the significance to be attributed to an event whose empirical character was quite uncontroversial and not the matter of dispute.

The second feature which I wished to explore was the tendency to present arguments in terms of empirical qualifications to logical developments. An example of this is given by the post-Braverman debate on the labour process. Most of the debate has taken the form of searching out qualifications to the logic of deskilling posed by one or other empirical features of the capitalist production process. It seemed to me that to argue in this fashion begged the question of why such empirical features were used only to qualify a logic which was still held to be prior to them, rather than to question the validity of the logic itself. Thus it seemed that the logic of capital accumulation could be qualified empirically, but not empirically tested or refuted. The same went for other 'logics': for example the assumed identity of hierarchy and efficiency. These two developments went together: because the 'logics' which were the heart of the analysis were seen to a certain extent to be more deep rooted than their immediate empirical manifestation, the same empirical events could be invested with the directly contradictory significances I outlined above.<sup>(9)</sup>

## 1.2 The scope of reversability and qualification

These problems were simultaneously methodological, or theoretical, and also political and practical. Their political relevance could be seen in the way in which 'reversibility' resulted in conservative and revolutionary analysis often producing remarkably similar results. Thus the 'incorporation' approach to industrial democracy resulted in much the same conclusions about the proper role of trade unions that the more orthodox Clegg advocated.<sup>(10)</sup> Another two suggestive similarities were the dualist treatment of labour in capitalism, and arguments about the logic of deskilling itself. Thus both orthodox and Marxist accounts seemed always to divide labour into two basic types: skilled and unskilled. This distinction lies behind many different terms: Stinchcombe's 'bureaucratic' and 'craft' administration, or Friedman's responsible autonomy and direct control.<sup>(11)</sup> Braverman's argument about deskilling, and

Brighton Labour Process Group's analysis of the real subordination of labour in capitalism also seemed remarkably similar to Weber's analysis of the tendency to bureaucracy in capitalist production. 'Deskilling' and 'the rule of offices not men' seemed to describe much the same process.

This identity of theoretical and political argument is expressed most clearly in the parallels between reform and empiricism and between revolution and determinism. Nor is this parallel fortuitous: it is there because both these sets of concept are rooted in how we see the nature of history and social change. In turn I eventually reached the conclusion that the root of almost all the theoretical problems I had in trying to analyse workplace power relations was the particularly widespread way of analysing the nature of the social relations of production in capitalism. Both marxist and non-marxist seemed to define it in terms of the commodity status of labour.

How we think about the nature of history embraces a number of issues, which I want to consider together as the nature of the concept of mode of production. The ideas of revolution, determinism and a powerful role for science go together because they start out from the same idea of the nature of history. This is the idea that there is a real 'logic' to it (that is to say it is not up to the observer or scientist to place his or her own significance on the 'facts', but rather to reveal scientifically and objectively what already exists) and that this logic cannot be changed at will but can only be understood with the aid of science so that we can discover the necessity and possibility of abolishing that logic and setting up another.

The ideas of reform, empiricism and a more minor role for science start out from the idea that there is no real logic to history, but that instead the scientist must choose what significance to place on them, and that people are also free to choose how to change these facts, how to make history, in the future.<sup>(12)</sup>

In the next section I argue that both these approaches face problems, which I term the 'paradox of mode of production'. Briefly the first approach appears to allow no space for human agency, while the second gives it so much scope that science is unnecessary and history has no

possible meaning or direction of development. The issues embraced by these arguments range over how we think of history, and therefore how we consider the nature of contradiction as the mechanism of change in history. How we see class struggle and the making of history, and the relation of social science to that process, and of course, how we see social change as taking place.

These issues are not new ones, and their relevance is almost universal. They have been argued out in a number of contexts within social sciences in recent years, but with a couple of notable exceptions (Sweezy, Thompson and Clarke would be the main ones) the debates have failed to cross fertilise one another. The issue has been central in the debates conducted in Past and Present, New Left Review and History Workshop Journal about the nature of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England and the attendant issues of the nature of historiography. I think the same issue is just as central, but presented in a different but equivalent range of concepts in two other debates. The debate on the nature of the 'labour process' in capitalism following on from Braverman's work, and the debate on the nature and implications of Marx's Theory of Value. Each of these three areas of debate have had equally relevant forebears and offshoots. The debate on the transition has perhaps been the most fruitful in the sense of developing its implications beyond its immediate concerns. Thus it has made contact with 'economic' debates insofar as it has raised the question of the nature of primitive accumulation<sup>(13)</sup> and has involved academics with an economic background from the start: Sweezy and Dobb for example. It has also led most directly to contemporary political issues. In the debates within the 'old' new left and between Thompson and the 'new' new left about the nature of reform and revolution and the particular features of capitalism in Britain in the '60's, it is impossible and undesirable to separate out the issues of historiography and contemporary political practice.<sup>(14)</sup>

In turn this debate has informed discussion about the nature of social change in the contemporary world in terms of development and underdevelopment. Here again the Monthly Review connexion, and in particular Baran and Sweezy are significant.<sup>(15)</sup>

The debate around Braverman was foreshadowed by the growth of industrial sociology and a good deal of industrial relations literature which was prepared to broaden its horizons to the question of the overall pattern of social relations within which work took place. I am thinking in particular of the work of Gouldner and Bendix in the States and Brown, Burns, Lipton and later Beynon, Nichols and Hyman in Britain.<sup>16</sup> The debate around Braverman, as taken up in the pages of Capital and Class in Britain, and journals such as Monthly Review and Insurgent Sociologist in the States, has focussed precisely on Braverman's conception of capitalism as a mode of production and the extent to which Braverman reduces it to a 'logic.'<sup>(7)</sup>

Finally there is the debate over Marx's theory of value, about his method on the one hand, and its relation to (and nature of) orthodox political economy (both classical and neoclassical) on the other. This debate, has been the least ready to draw implications for other issues and questions, although it has in some senses been the most significant. Apart from the involvement of some of its figures with other debates or more immediate issues (Dobb and Sweezy again in the transition debate, Rowthorn in the debates about an A.E.S.) it is hard to find any explicit conclusions in the debate itself about its implication for wider questions. Partly this is explicable by the status of the debate: it has been largely conducted within and in response to academic economics as such, rather than any wider audience. As Banaji points out it has often been preoccupied less with an investigation of Marx's theory, than with a defense of the classical conception of political economy as whole against its subjectivist neoclassical offspring.<sup>(18)</sup> It is significant despite its insularity in this respect because its effect has been very pervasive. I think it can be plausibly argued that the general interpretation of Marx as an economist developed in this debate has underwritten work in the other areas we have considered. Braverman himself saw his book as a counterpart to, and rounding out of Baran and Sweezy's 'Monopoly Capital.' Recently Brenner has argued that the debates on the transition have been dominated by a 'Neo-Smithian' conception of Marxist economics, and it is surely significant that the most prominent of the historians involved, Thompson, has eventually chosen in his most developed reflection on theory and method to question the

relevance of Marx's economic theory in toto.

"Capital is not a work of history.....Marx never pretended when writing Capital, that he was writing the history of capitalism .....Marx was caught in a trap: the trap baited by "Political Economy."

(Thompson, 1978, p.249, 251)

### 1.3 Mode of Production and the Commodity Status of Labour

While it would have made a neater work to concentrate on one particular area, by virtue of making various acceptable assumptions, it seemed to me preferable to try to approach the totality of these debates at once, insofar as they seemed to me to be rooted in the same problem, but addressed from different perspectives. This has required me to simplify debates and arguments, ignore qualifications and caveats that original authors would correctly insist upon, and try to deal throughout with only the core propositions at stake. It is for this reason that what follows is not to be regarded as a history of ideas, or adequate account of the particulars of the debates I referred to. I wanted instead to stand back and consider what I suspected would be a more important question: why were these qualifications and caveats so important?

The central argument of this work is that almost all our investigations of modern society, are based on the assumption that it has as its core feature the commodity status of labour. I try to show the manifold effects of this assumption in terms of how it determines the way in which production is seen as social, the sort of theory of value that is produced, the account of transition from feudalism or to socialism that is offered, and of course, the nature of change possible within capitalism. Almost 'behind our backs' the concept of the commodity status of labour furnishes us with a theory of history.

In order to study this issue, and keep to the forefront the interrelation of the debates I am considering, I use the concept of a mode of production to which the next chapter is devoted. I should stress again that this does not mean that chapter 2 is my review of the "modes of production

debate." I have hardly considered that particular literature at all. Neither is chapter 3 a review of the 'value' debate, labour process debate, or ownership and control debates. Rather the whole work is an attempt to ask what lies behind these debates and ask whether or not they are arguing about the same question, and to what extent, suffer from the same problem of assuming that capitalism can be 'defined' by the commodity status of labour.

Naturally this raises the question of how I propose to solve the problem of analysing capitalism. The protest that 'grand theory' does not deal adequately with the richness of empirical reality has long been the principle at the head of the 'empiricist' tradition of British historiography, and as Simon Clarke rightly points out:

".....there is no reason for the historians to take the charge of empiricism seriously until they are offered a theory that at least has the prospect of making sense of history."

(Clarke, 1979 p. 138)

One theme I raise more than once below is that this choice is a bogus one, and that 'empiricism' is only the other side of the same methodological coin as 'Grand Theory' it disdains so much.<sup>(19)</sup> What is needed is a better theory, and I believe that a careful reading of Marx's work provides elements of it. I realise that this proposition must evoke a feeling of 'deja-vu' of the worst sort, and for the best reasons. I do not wish to argue the toss about what Marx 'really' meant and what constitutes a 'correct' reading of his work. I simply want to suggest that it is possible to interpret some of his concepts in ways which appear to solve some of the problems I am confronting. I don't propose to use Marx as an theoretical security blanket, to be clutched in the event of accusations of heresy or to cover up bad theory or poor work.

The core element of a 'better' theory is the proposition that capitalism is not rooted in labour as a commodity. I argue that it is the product of the possibility (but no more than that, it is not a question of necessity) of using labour to produce commodities and then surplus value, once the existence of exchange has developed to the point at which money develops. This totally unplanned development had the unintended

consequence that the value relations which it established came to be the end and not the means of production. I elaborate on this obscure summary in chapter 4 below.

I argue about the concept of the commodity status of labour in much greater detail in chapter three. However, it will make the structure of my argument clearer if I draw attention to some of the effects it has here, before going on to establish my case, to make the overall scope of my argument clearer.

Firstly defining capitalism in terms of commodity status of labour leads to what I will call 'leap and logic' analyses of social change. Such analyses resolve what I call the 'paradox' of mode of production by characterising history as a series of subjective leaps prepared for at the level of consciousness, between materially determinant logics. Human agency is allowed to operate in the leaps, while 'science' can analyse the logics. This results in particular approaches to social change. All the emphasis tends to be placed not on material changes and organisation (they are prevented by the 'logic' of present day society) but on consciousness and ideological changes. We end up being preoccupied with a correct theory or scientific analysis, or a correct party programme.

Secondly, defining capitalism in terms of commodity status of labour gives rise to 'workerism' or 'point of productionism'. By this I mean that because capitalism is defined in terms of the wage labour relationship there is a tendency to forget that there are other elements in capitalism, or to see these as 'secondary' questions. At its crudest this takes the form of seeing workers struggles, of whatever sorts, at the point of production as real and other struggles (for example struggles based on gender) as less real, or even as a diversion.<sup>(20)</sup> There is a two fold reduction takes place: of life to work, and of work to its wage-labour form. In contrast to this I want throughout this thesis to define work and production very widely, as Marx did in the German ideology as "the production of life in general." For example one aspect of production is how people socially produce definitions of their gender and sexual identity: how we think of maleness or femininity. This is surely just as much a part of 'production' as making automobiles for example.<sup>(21)</sup>

Thirdly defining capitalism in terms of the commodity status of labour labour both diverts attention away from the study of management, and produces assumptions about capitalism being efficient. If the labour that management uses is a commodity, then it appears that the process of management is self evident. Like any other commodity, ownership implies the right and ability to control and so it appears that we can simply assume that this is what management does. This helps explain the lack of attention to management in industrial sociology.<sup>(22)</sup> By the same token, if commoditised labour is properly controlled labour it appears that it must also be efficient labour. Weber puts this well when he argues that the decisive characteristic of wage labour is that it renders everything calculable and puts production on a rational footing.<sup>(23)</sup> This means that to define capitalism by the commodity status of labour is to define capitalism as efficient.

Fourthly, the commodity status of labour is a highly ideologically important concept. It gives rise to the idea that capitalism is inherently connected with democracy and equal rights: every person is the sovereign owner of their individual ability to labour, their own person. This is their 'natural' right restrained by no prior social obligation to use these powers in a particular way. It also gives rise to the corresponding idea of individual private morality, value freedom and the separation of is and ought.<sup>(24)</sup> Each person is free to dispose not only of their ability to labour but also their ability to think as they choose.

The concept of the commodity status of labour is ideological in another sense too. I will argue that it is 'ideology': bourgeois ideology. It has no connexion with the real organisation of labour in capitalist society at all. Its origins lie in the defence of that society by its early protagonists: the theorists of 'natural' rights. I argue through each of these points in chapters 2,3 and 4. Chapter 5 then suggests some of the possible practical applications of the points I make.

This thesis is, therefore, an analysis of the nature of capitalism that attempts to develop a scientific approach which is neither determinist, nor escapes determinism by positing empirical qualifications to the logics it proposes.

There are also two specific considerations behind it which relate to the current state of affairs in Britain, and explain why I chose to tackle the more general question, from a consideration of relations at 'the point of production,' despite my belief that the latter is often over-emphasised.

#### 1.4 Workplace social relations and British politics

The analysis of the social relations of work has a special political relevance in British society, Britain's declining economic performance has been probably the central question of British politics for the past two decades. Indeed, only by virtue of its claim to be laying the roots for future growth and prosperity, has the present government been able to abandon full employment as a policy goal, and make unemployment such a central question.

The blame for this poor performance has as often as not been laid at the feet of worker organisation; either informal or formal: unions with 'outdated' attitudes and even the machinations of the tightly knit groups of politically motivated men. If we have heard less of such comment recently it is surely because the image becomes more difficult to sustain where the level of unemployment and the state of workplace organisation has reduced resistance on the part of workforces anywhere to a minimum. Yet when it does occur the script is dusted off and enjoys an outing; witness the treatment of the 1982 rail dispute by the media and the questions raised about the 'relevance' of a craft union such as ASLEF to the 'modern' world. It seems that the eight hour day itself is now 'outmoded.'

Part of this is probably best understood as an ideological process, and best investigated as a fetishistic appearance naturally thrown up by the progress of industrial relations in capitalism. It simply seems obvious that General Motors makes motor cars while workers make mistakes and never the other way around. Successful businesses are the product of shrewd entrepreneurship, while a Freddie Laker is the victim of 'market forces.'<sup>(25)</sup> I discuss Marx's theory of commodity fetishism later. In this part I raise the question of whether fetishism is simply an 'automatic' process or whether it has to be actively

constructed. However, it would be wrong to write off this analysis of economic performance as pure false consciousness and leave it at that. There are two reasons: one general and one specific to Britain.

Firstly, the idea of management (benevolent) initiative and worker (malevolent) reaction is more than ideology: it contains a good deal of truth. Managers do decide and 'general motors' does 'make' cars in the sense that it is not up to the workforce to decide how to produce them: in some ways all that is left to them to do is make mistakes. However, this raises two questions. The fact that management initiate and control does not tell us how and why they do so. This requires analysis of the power relations at the point of production which this thesis is concerned with: what are the roots of the power to manage? In other words what is the relationship between hierarchy and efficiency? This leads to a second question. Why is it the initiation that is seen as benevolent and the reaction that is malevolent? This assumption dominates not only everyday debate on the subject, but as I hope to show pervades even radical and marxist analysis: the relationship is seen as one of worker frustration of an otherwise knowledgeable and efficient management.<sup>(26)</sup> Empirical experience, however, suggests that there are, to say the least, qualifications to this process. It can be plausibly argued that much worker reaction (especially of an informal kind) facilitates the production process in the face of management's inability to manage properly: hence the irony that a work to rule is an effective industrial relations weapon. Hence a recent survey showed that many trade unionists argue for more influence on managerial decision making in the name of efficiency, not despite it.<sup>(27)</sup>

At a more general level too, support for more freedom for management to manage, a greater freedom for it from accountability in the process of management to the state or to the workforce it employs, support for an anti-interventionist policy and 'free enterprise' has been a widespread response to economic decline, focussed and channelled by Thatcherism into a powerful political force. However, what is curious is continued support for such demands in the face of the rather spectacular inability of British management, when left to its own devices, to produce the goods! This is a truly vicious circle: economic decline calls forth ever greater demands for freedom for management (or enterprise or capital) to manage, any failure is attributed not to the dimensions of

this freedom, but to vestiges of its limitation!

Of relevance to the social scientist too, is the counterpart of managerial prerogative: business confidentiality. Despite the nation's apparent faith and trust in managerial expertise we are rarely allowed a glimpse of it in action. Management's right to manage is often unconsciously equated with its ability to do so; yet our information about 'what do bosses do' is scanty indeed. Although I shall use some empirical evidence on this in the final chapter of this work. I will be more concerned to argue why it is that this has tended to be a non question in most approaches to the study of workplace social relations, whereas I think it is a vital one. In particular I will be concerned to argue that neither managers' source of authority or expertise can be seen in technical as opposed to social or 'class' terms.

A second reason for the significance of the 'worker frustration' analysis of British economic decline is that I want, more controversially, to argue that in some important senses it contains some truth. There are good reasons for arguing that workers are perhaps better placed to resist management prerogative in Britain than in many other countries. That is to say there is both a more established and effective trade union movement, with close relations with one of the two major political parties, much domestic workplace-level organisation and also possibly a better developed consciousness of the independence of interest of labour and capital. What I shall try to demonstrate, in the final section, is that poor economic performance is caused not by this resistance itself, but by management's reaction to it. It is not management's lack of power that is a factor in low productivity, but its refusal to cede it to anyone else.

### 1.5 Class Strategy and Economic Determinism

The second consideration is that of the left's responses to this situation, both in terms of its analysis of its origins and recipes for improving it. Commodity status of labour based arguments lead inevitably to a tendency towards economic determinism and conclusions about class interests defined in terms of quantitative exploitation.

Rather than class being a relationship which has to be constructed and can be made in different ways and changed, there is a tendency to believe that 'ultimately', (in the last instance perhaps) workers realise their true class position, despite the pernicious influence of the media. After all, does not capitalism dig its own grave?

These sorts of arguments, especially rampant in the 'marxist' left have had a hard time from Margaret Thatcher. It is not difficult to detect in much marxist work produced in the long period of capitalist expansion that ended in the seventies, a hankering after crisis. Sometimes it took the form of arguing that even in expansion there really was a crisis.<sup>(28)</sup> But a 'crisis' which delivers the goods to a lot of the people a lot of the time was not a 'proper' crisis. The hankering after crisis was the product of a simple equation: crisis equals consciousness. If the workers have a dose of what capitalism's really like, the argument seemed to go, then they will see the socialist case.

We now have our crisis, and a truly reactionary administration enjoying unparalleled popularity on the basis not only of 19th century economic policy, but foreign policy too. Surely in the face of this, we must start to re-think our concept of class. No amount of sociology of betrayal, whether by the labour establishment or the 'ultra-left' can explain the relative fortunes of the two major parties.<sup>29</sup> Thatcherism speaks in a language that people understand, socialism has relied on cliches. And often the local reality of these cliches are a negative experience: bureaucracy, corruption, delay, insensitivity.

One response of the left to this crisis is to assert that it has further to go. Eventually, aided by the struggle of labour, capitalism must collapse and we can build socialism once it has done so. All this proves is the inability of some theorists to see beyond their texts to the world outside. It is clear that in the current situation any such collapse would surely yield a further lurch to the right than an era of socialist transformation.

A major response by the left has been the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES) ; growth plus industrial democracy. Because of the left's analysis of capitalism this appears to be a perfect solution:

greater wealth for all, and people's control of their own lives. I want to argue in chapter 5, as a result of the arguments about production in capitalism, that the analysis behind the A.E.S. is unrealistic. It does not grasp very significant features of people's experience and the nature of class in capitalism and therefore does not address many problems which should be its concern. It is stuck in the same economism that leaves the left so adrift and impotent at the present. It is also unrealistic because its analyses of industrial democracy are utopian, even in the emasculated forms it proposes. However, I do not want to argue that we do not need an A.E.S. What I want to suggest is that the one we have still suffers from economic determinism and a poor concept of class, rooted in the commodity status of labour way of thinking about capitalism.

I think industrial democracy is a useful starting point for analysis of the wider issue of the nature of capitalism, because it highlights two of the problems with which I am ultimately centrally concerned. The first is the characterisation of production. I will argue that one of the effects of commodity status of labour approaches to capitalism is to equate production with what goes on in the factory within a wage relationship. A consequence of this is that industrial democracy tends to get restricted to a question of workforce organisation at the point of production, and relations between those organisations (whether unions, combines, joint representation committees or soviets.) Domestic production and consumption gets left out or is relegated to a separate sphere of 'reproduction'. The second is the issue of class and determinism. There is a tendency to argue that capitalism automatically tends to frustrate industrial democracy, while at the same time it automatically creates a class of workers who have a common interest in fighting for it in the form of 'workers control'. The analysis of industrial democracy then becomes an exploration of what blockages ideological or material, have frustrated this inherent tendency. These two issues are highlighted in recent debates on the A.E.S. and industrial democracy. It assumes that workers want it so much that they will deliver productivity in return, and it ignores women. I want to show that these lacunae result from the model of capitalism used and that a better model will give us a better basis for analysing industrial democracy.

1. I mean to convey the general idea of management by a consensual as opposed to authoritarian approach, which is common to a wide range of literature, rather than the specific arguments of McCarthy and Ellis (1973)
2. The phrase is from Galbraith (1972).
3. 'Aftermath of Tribunal Reinstatement and Reengagement'. Dept of Employment Research Paper no.23
4. Among those who arguethus are Nichols and Beynon (1973)p.XIV
5. 'Human Problems of Management' anon Works Manager 1938 quoted in R. Croucher (1978) p.173
6. Kidron (1970) Chapter 1
7. Braverman (1974) passim and Ch. 17.
8. It is discussed in Cressey and MacInnes (1980)
9. Examples of such arguments over Braverman are given in Cressey and MacInnes (1980).
10. Cressey and MacInnes (1980), Clegg, (1960)
11. Stinchcombe (1959) Friedman (1977)
12. I do not wish to illustrate either of these alternatives with specific authors, as the basic model seems to me to be shared by writers who may be quite opposed in other aspects. Thus I could put Lukacs or Dobb in the first category and Weber or Popper in the second.
13. Dobb (1946), Saville (1969), Brenner (1977)
14. Anderson (1964), Thompson (1965)
15. Brenner (1977), Baran and Sweezy (1968)
16. Gouldner (1954a and b), Bendix (1956), Brown (1967), Burns and Stalker (1960), Beynon (1973), Nichols (1967), Hyman (1974 a, b)
17. See Cressey and MacInnes (1980) for references. Of special interest are three 'special' issues of Insurgent Sociologist (1978), Monthly Review (1976) and Politics and Society (1978) on Braverman.
18. Banaji (1976)
19. See also Mills (1959) Clarke also makes this point in the same article and it is the basis of Carr's critique too, Carr (1964).

20. See the plenary paper produced by CSE Sex and Class Group for CSE Conference, 1981 'Exploitation and Oppressions'.
21. In fact it is also an important part of the production of automobiles. The Fiat Panda is designed and marketed as a 'wife's' car, the Ford Capri as the macho man's.
22. There are other good reasons. Management knows better than to let itself be studied.
23. Weber, (1930) p.22: "Exact calculation - the basis of everything else - is only possible on the basis of free labour."
24. Pashukanis (1978) esp. pp. 151-165.
25. See also Melman (1975):
 

"If a car is built good, it's 'GM' this and 'GM' that, but if something goes wrong it's always the fault of the workers."
26. The most extreme Marxist formulation of this is Lukacs' statement that in capitalism the worker is a 'mere source of error.' (Lukacs 1971, p.89) But the idea is far more general: it pervades the theory of a 'real subordination of labour'.
27. Cressey et al (1981a) and (1981b)
28. For example, the search for a tendency for the rate of profit to fall.
29. See also Stuart Hall (1982)

CHAPTER TWOMODE OF PRODUCTION

"The Industrial Revolution, which commenced as description, is now invoked as an explanation." (1)

## 2.1 The concept of a mode of production and its paradoxical character

The concept of a mode of production lies behind almost all social science whether or not it is made explicit. It is important for understanding the social relations of work because the concept tries to grasp the historically particular way in which production is organised in a given society. It tries to grasp how people socially produce their way of life and therefore what potential exists in the present to change this as well as what constraints and limitations there might be. To assert the possibility of industrial democracy is a limited argument. But to be able to locate in the present social organisation of production the limits and possibilities of its future development is a very useful analysis.

This concept, therefore, brings together the ideas about the nature of history, determinism, contradiction and class struggle that I outlined in chapter one. This means that in producing an account of a mode of production, we are never just comparing descriptions (for example comparing certain characteristics of capitalist production with feudal production) but also analysing what modes of production are and how change occurs both within and between them. Thus my point about the commodity status of labour in chapter one could be put another way. I could argue that the problem with it is that it produces an analysis of capitalist mode of production that is too inflexible.

Social scientists use the concept of mode of production, even when they do not employ the term itself. Two relevant illustrations are the work of Weber and classical political economy. Weber's conception of mode of production is expressed at a general level through his use of the ideal typical classification of different types of social action as the dominant form of social regularity in given stages of society. Thus much of his work contrasts traditional society, where social action is orientated towards customary traditional stable values and based on the household as the major production unit undifferentiated from the process of leisure or consumption, and modern rational capitalist society, characterised by the separation of household and economic production, the bureaucratic organisation of production and social action oriented to the rational calculation of means and ends made possible by free

wage labour.

Classical political economy also has a concept of mode of production.<sup>(2)</sup> It contrasts artificial with natural or capitalist society. Only in the latter has the 'natural' right of private property been established, and the consequent development of economic activity occurred.

When I claim that any society has to be seen as a particular mode of production I am only developing the claim that Marx made for his concept of 'value.' He argued that the idea of the general determinants of value expresses the fact that in any society, there is a variety of different production activities which must be undertaken, and that some level of coordination or regulation is necessary between these various activities if that society is to have the potential to reproduce itself and continue these activities. (This is not to say that the reproduction is of an identical society or set of activities.) As Marx puts it:

"Every child knows, too, that the volume of products corresponding to the different needs require different and quantitatively determined amounts of the total labour of society. That this necessity.....cannot possibly be done away with by a particular form of social production but can only change the mode of its appearance, is self-evident.

(Marx and Engels, 1975, p.196)

This is to say that in any society there is a social division of labour and that there must be a social form of regulation of labour. However, this does not mean that this process of social regulation need be consciously carried out, or even immediately visible. Nor does it contain any functionalist assumption that this regulation will necessarily continue: it may well break down. Nor need it necessarily satisfy any number of criteria we might wish to give it (such as efficiency, equality, benevolence, malevolence etc). However it would be wrong to see a mode of production as the straightforward operation of laws of value relations: it must also be about the limits of their operation.

It is at this point that a conception of the fluidity and creativity of labour is necessary: it is not only a determined but also determining process. This is a contradiction which the concept of mode of production has to express. On the one hand there is a necessary element of order in the organisation of production. On the other there is an ever present process of change and development, of historical construction.

There is a constant tension between limits to the fluidity of labour and our starting point that 'men make history' and the idea of crisis, instability and innovation which this suggests.

There is thus a central problem facing the use of the concept of mode of production: the social phenomena it seeks to understand are by virtue of their social nature constantly changing. This seems a barrier to any normal 'scientific' analysis, whether in terms of a causal analysis or clarification of meaning, and yet it is precisely the nature of this constant change that our analysis is supposed to investigate! There is a paradox at the heart of the concept of mode of production: the concept is developed from the notion of the immediately social, humanly constructed, nature of production, and yet its utility lies in its ability to show the ways in which people are not free to choose or change the way they produce their lives: to analyse the constraints on this. It is because of this latter aspect that it is possible to speak in terms of 'laws of motion' of modes of production, or to have any concept of social regularities within them at all. It seems as if we are caught within a double bind that we can only meaningfully analyse social life to the extent that it is not socially constructed and therefore not changeable. We seem caught between an objective determinism of constraints on the one hand, and subjective voluntarism of human construction on the other. This paradox can be expressed another way: how can a concept of mode of production allow for change within a mode as opposed to change from one mode to another? Can it analyse constraints (and therefore obstacles to change) and still allow 'space' for change to occur? (3)

The terms of this paradox are well caught in Marx's aphorism: (1973a p. 146)

"Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted."

It appears that according to whether we emphasise the 'men make' side, or the 'conditions' side we end up with a choice between a 'determinist' theory of history, which social science can nevertheless elaborate, and a 'voluntarist' one which allows for human agency at the expense of being unable to understand it scientifically. The 'paradox' of the concept of

mode of production, therefore, embraces the two poles of the problem from which I started out: the attempt to reject determinism, without simply falling back upon empiricism: the idea that there is no necessary order to production at all.

The first dimension of the paradox of a mode of production refers then to the tension between determinism and voluntarism, or objectivism and subjectivism that the concept involves. There is a second dimension too, which is related to this first one. This refers to the basis of social science's role, and the corresponding purpose of social science. Thus if the first dimension of the paradox concerns the 'space' for social action, the second concerns the 'space' for the application of social science. The second dimension of the paradox can be stated thus: if the mode of production is a human construction, why is social science necessary to understand it?

This second dimension of the paradox is the problem of visibility. It appears possible to approach this dimension of the paradox of the mode of production in two ways. People can be considered as 'agents' of laws or economic forces which they themselves cannot see or control. This gives a role for social science, insofar as it can then show to people the previously undeciphered causes of their actions. The problem here is that whatever renders these laws visible, and capable of explaining people's actions, must also make these laws impossible to change: if they are made by people, and people can, at will, change them, then how can social science use them to explain or predict the way people must behave, or, to put it another way explain the laws of their mode of production.

The second way is to start out from the idea that rather than people being agents of laws, such laws are made by people. The problem now becomes why are the nature of such laws not clear to those who have made them in the first place. What superior insight or privileged epistemological position can science offer? If only laws which people can make and therefore change are worth analysing, why do we need a social science to do this at all?

This problem of visibility is especially important when we consider

capitalism, however. One of its features as a mode of production is the apparent absence of any visible social determination of labour and production at all. Production appears to be, and is, in a very real sense, for production's sake. In contrast to feudalism, where production appears to be the servant of political considerations, in capitalism it looks as though things are the other way around. Governments and states appear to be at the mercy of economic forces rather than sustained by them. It is clear, however, that this apparent absence of any social form of determination cannot mean that it is not there.

The novelty of capitalism in this respect has often been pointed out. For example, Braverman's whole project can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate the social character of production in capitalism as opposed to its technical and neutral appearance. But I think the real significance of this point has been lost. All the effort has gone into the demonstration that capitalism is, despite appearances, visible as a mode of production after all. A more important question has been overlooked: why is capitalism not visible as a mode of production in the first place? The emphasis has been to show that social science can analyse capitalism: why and how it can do so have been neglected questions. I return to this issue when I argue in chapter 4 that Marx's theory of commodity fetishism is the only analysis which is conscious enough of this problem to set the question and answer it. (4)

This second dimension of the paradox can also be stated in terms of the status of the concepts social science applies. If they are real why are they not universally visible? If they are not real (that is to say if they are models, or heuristic insights) how are they scientific or objective? If the categories on which we base the concept mode of production are real, we have a basis for claiming the 'objectivity' of social science, but at the expense of finding a role for it. Why cannot everyone see these categories if they are real? In turn, if we have only revealed real processes, what influence can we have on their development? How can we assert this when we have already argued that one of the distinguishing features of capitalist mode of production is its apparent invisibility as a mode of production? The problem before us is to develop an understanding of categories that do not reduce history to some logic of the development of these categories: to

erect a space both for the application of social science and practical action itself. The making of history is a human process, not merely the unfolding of some greater design. On the other hand, if we argue that our theory of mode of production is somehow separate from reality, a product of the social scientist's brain, a heuristic device which enables us to give approximate accounts of an ultimately unknowable reality, then we face the problem of relativism. How are we to render these partial and subjective accounts universally valid?

There is another aspect of this second dimension to be borne in mind. We are having to argue that our concept of mode of production comes directly from reality: it is not an idea, concept or model created by the social scientist. Yet at the same time we are arguing that our knowledge must be provisional in some way, that there must be space both for its generation and application: it is not a mere theoretical reflexion of a materially determined process.

There is a third dimension to the paradox of a mode of production which will form part of our argument. That is the question of historical and transhistorical aspects of production. Here the problem of the resolution of determinism and voluntarism takes the form of the paradox that although we start out from the idea of a mode of production being a transhistorical idea, in the sense that every conceivable society is a mode of production, the very purpose of the concept is, on the contrary, to identify the specifically historical and mutable character of any particular mode we examine. There are two parts to this problem. One is the extent of 'transhistorical' or natural or immutable elements in social production, and the other is their status or how they relate to the historical, social, mutable elements.

We can illustrate this problem by thinking of the argument that efficiency and democracy are necessarily opposed.<sup>(5)</sup> This argument is based on the idea that the opposition between these two factors is a transhistorical one, which the changeable aspects of a mode of production do not affect. The alternative to this argument is that this relationship is a purely historical one which can be changed.

This shows the problem of the relationship between transhistorical and historical elements to be just as important as arguments about their

extent. For what tends to happen is for arguments to polarise into a technological determinism emphasising transhistorical features on the one hand, or unrestricted voluntarism emphasising historical contingency on the other.

Part of the problem with the concept of mode of production stems from this. Rather than confront the problem head on it is always easier to approach the concept by attempting to separate out transhistorical and historical aspects of the nature of production and once having discussed the former in order to give a grounding for what production is, proceed to discuss the historical forms it can take. This appears to do no violence to the concept (so long as the illegitimacy of considering the transhistorical content apart from the historical form is stressed.) Moreover, this way of proceeding has an illustrious antecedent in Marx's treatment of the labour process 'independently of any specific social formation' in chapter 7 of Vol 1.<sup>(6)</sup>

In fact this causes a host of problems because it appears to split production up into separate factors which are respectively technical and social. It is too tempting then to set up causal relationships between these two elements, or to identify which aspects of production correspond to the technical or the social. The first approach leads to a choice between technological determinism (the productive forces 'base' determining the social relations 'superstructure') or a reversal of this: the utopian idea that we can create whatever technological relationships we want: there are no natural constraints on production. The second approach faces the problem that it is simply empirically impossible to do. What aspects of car assembly for instance are purely technical? There may be technical constraints on how it can be organised but these are always socially interpreted and handled. Nature is only ever appropriated through social activity. I return to this problem in Chapter 3 where I argue that the failure to resolve the paradox of the mode of production leads to answers to this question in terms of technical processes set 'within' social relations. The clearest example of such a way of arguing is Harry Braverman.

I think the issue of transhistorical and historical aspects of the mode of production help remind us what ultimately lies behind the problem of

the paradox: how far is it possible to get beyond the idea that there is historical development to an analysis of the way that such development occurs.

Before going on to consider ways of resolving the paradox, I shall briefly consider the form it takes in Marx's work and in social science more generally.

## 2.2 The Paradox in Marx's Work: science and struggle

The paradox inherent in the concept of mode of production is best expressed in the case of Marx's work, in the tension that exists between his claim to scientificity and his emphasis on class struggle.

The idea of class struggle appears to emphasise the voluntarist, subjectivist side of the paradox. It emphasises the idea that men can make history, and make it differently in the future from the way in which they made it in the past. In other words it gives priority to the idea of the fluidity and development of labour, over the idea of its determination and regulation. If we consider Marx's aphorism:

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves." (7)

it is as if the idea of class struggle emphasises the 'make' over the 'conditions.' The idea is expressed also in Marx's preamble to the Rules of the International:

"The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves."  
(8)

In contrast Marx's claim to be a 'scientific' as opposed to moral or utopian socialist appears to place emphasis on the determinist aspect of the idea of mode of production: people here appear as the product of 'conditions' rather than the authors of their future. This future itself comes to appear not as the creation of class warriors, but as the

unfolding of economic laws, of which people are merely the "träger." This view is best expressed in his introduction to Capital, where he states that:

"But individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers (Träger) of particular class relations and interests. My standpoint from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them." (9)

The two conceptions of people used by Marx (person as class-warrior, and person as Träger) seem incompatible. If people are victims of a "law-gic," how can they re-make that logic? If they become authors of their own history, their actions can no longer be reduced to logics. And if their behaviour cannot be reduced to some such logic (no matter whether the basis of that logic is their own volition or 'objective' external constraint) then how can we claim to scientifically understand, explain or predict their behaviour.

Marx's two conceptions are the two sides of our paradox of the mode of production. Insofar as we emphasise the 'conditions' aspect, the 'logic' aspect, we appear to lose our ability to see history as a human creation which is made and struggled for. Insofar as we emphasise the 'men make' aspect, we appear to lose grip of our claims to scientific understanding.

Chapter 4 of this thesis argues that a reconciliation of this paradox in Marx's work is possible. But it requires abandoning many of the ways in which Marx is usually interpreted.

### 2.3 The Paradox in Social Science: Subjectivity and Objectivity

This tension in Marx's work between people as agents and people as authors is paralleled in social science generally by the inability to reconcile determinism and voluntarism, or objectivity and subjectivity.

The paradox displays itself in the way social science conceives of people alternately as objects of study and as agents of change. That is to say, as the raw material of social science or as its consumers. Thus in order to study human behaviour at all people and their behaviour may be seen as dependent variables: effects of causes, agents of structures, followers (whether consciously or not) of laws or norms. Social science then tries to explain or understand their behaviour in terms of these causes or meanings and values. But the explanation or understanding which social science provides must have a purpose in terms of changing that behaviour, changing the way society is organised. But if such change is possible then this surely entails the possibility that these causes or meanings are not a definitive account of what must happen. In which case how 'objective' can social 'science' be? Popper has an inkling of the problem (but only an inkling and I have no sympathy for his solution) when he argues that if laws can change then change cannot be understood by such 'laws.'

I think it is useful to divide social science into two schools of thought. Those which see their methodology as based on discovering law governed relationships of cause and effect, and those which base their approach on clarifying the real meaning or 'essence' behind immediately available appearances. (These two approaches may of course be combined.)

The contradiction at the heart of social science methodology can be expressed in two ways, according to which model of science we examine. In terms of the cause effect model it takes the form: if laws cannot change, then what use can knowledge of them be? Thus on the one hand determinism, the notion that people's actions are determined according to laws (as opposed to their own subjective volition) is necessary in order to study society in terms of laws, structures, causal mechanisms in the first place. But on the other hand, voluntarism, the notion that people are responsible for their actions and can change them, (as opposed to being mere atoms of predictable behaviour patterns) is necessary in order for the results of social science to have any role to play! If social behaviour is totally determined there is no 'space' for social science or the practical application of its results. But if such behaviour is not totally determined, how can it be reliably explained?

In terms of the essence-appearance model of social science the contradiction takes the form: if the meaning or significance of social action is not immediately understandable, then by what special means does it become visible to social science? What is visible to the social scientist is surely understandable to people in general. To the extent that social science appears able to tell people how they make history there is no clear reason why it should have to.

For the essence-appearance approach the aim of science must be the clarification of meaning and significance of social action or constraints on that action (e.g. systems of norms, institutions, property relationships.) It must, therefore, start out from what we earlier referred to as the visibility of a mode of production beyond its immediate appearance at the level of personal experience. It seeks to clarify meanings which for some reason have become obscure or distorted.

Such approaches start out from a subjectivist perspective, insofar as the object of study is the interaction between different interpretations or attribution of significance to social processes. They are usually anti-positivist in the sense that the possibility of studying meaning and significance is seen as the special feature of the social as opposed to natural sciences. Man can investigate social life and understand it in a way he cannot understand natural processes because he has made the former but not the latter. (10)

The problem which arises here is that of relativism and choosing between different available meanings or 'values.' Either we have to be able to produce criteria which defines one particular approach as superior to the others and, therefore, 'objective' as opposed to subjective unclarified meaning. Or we have to abandon objectivity as a meaningful aim in social science, and produce an alternative concept of its claim to scientificity. This second approach usually solves the problem of relativism by relegating social science to a procedure for providing heuristic insights which cannot claim universal validity, but have to be seen as, at least in part, a product of the social scientist's own concerns and outlook. This starts from the problem of visibility, and offers only the possibility of a partial solution to it. The superiority of a social scientific vision can come only from its internal procedures for producing knowledge. One example of such an

approach is that of Weber. I return to the issue of historicism in the next section.

The alternative to admitting a relativist approach is to argue there exists some common basis to the subjective values under study. Thus Parsons relies on an assumption of normative consensus to hold his system together. Vico solved relativism by making human beings the common possessors of Reason as transmitted to them from God. For Dilthey and the hermeneutic approach generally, the Geisteswissenschaften were possible because they were "all founded in lived experience, in the expression of these experiences, in the understanding of these experiences." (11) The Hermeneutic approach is rather different in that it tends to see objectivity as something which can be approached, rather than guaranteed from the outset. The problem with this approach is that while it suggests the possibility of an escape from relativism, by suggesting that connexions exist between fact and value, this solution begs the question of why there would, therefore, be any problem for social science to solve in the first place. It is unclear, if we all belong to a common human tradition, or are all possessed of God ordained Reason, or do belong to a real normative consensus, why we would need social science to understand anything in the first place. In other words if a 'Hermeneutic circle' is said to exist, it is unclear why it should operate in a virtuous rather than a vicious fashion.

#### 2.4 Anti-Determinist attempts to resolve the paradox

Attempts to escape the paradox of a mode of production can be divided into two categories. The first tends to the voluntarist side of the paradox and leads to empiricist or relativist formulations. The second tends to the 'determinist' side and gives rise to 'leap and logic' concepts of mode of production. (12) Because I am concentrating on Marxist accounts and debates the second of these two approaches is my major concern. Here I want to make a few points about the first.

Approaches in this group avoid the determinist side of the paradox by

arguing that 'laws' can not be said to exist in reality but only as an approximation to reality modelled by the social scientist. As such accounts of society produced by the social scientist (insofar as they go beyond the collection of facts without any attempt to claim 'relevance' for them, or propose a theory of how they relate together or have significance or meaning) are only partial and relative. They are a function of the scientist's own choice of starting point or model. They may be useful choices or illuminating insights, but insofar as they relate to practical action or application of the results they must have the character of manifestos rather than scientific analyses. One example of such approaches in the study of industrial democracy is to provide an ideal typical definition of industrial democracy, and then proceed to investigate the extent of such developments, and the factors fostering or frustrating them. An example of such an approach is given in the work of Poole who starts out by defining industrial democracy as:

"practices designed to extend the control of workers over decisions within their places of employment."  
(13)

The problem of such a definition is two-fold. It still leaves us with the problems of deciding which practices do in fact achieve such an end result and how we would ascertain that such a result had occurred. But secondly and more seriously it begs the question of whether or not practices designed to minimise or forestall such control might also be a significant factor in industrial democracy? We are likely to end up either confirming the thesis contained in our apriori definition, or simply presenting a classification of various social relations in enterprises without any explanatory power. Thus when Poole argues:

"it is our view that the attainment of participation and control is consequent upon the growth of workers latent power."

it appears as a product of his earlier decision to treat:

"participation as a dependent rather than independent variable."

(14)

for he nowhere appears to offer evidence that would refute the reversal

of his thesis: that the growth of latent power was itself dependent on workers developing control functions. And because Poole has defined out the possibility, he does not adequately investigate the thesis (advanced by Ramsay among others) that participation strategies have historically been used to preempt the possible growth of workers latent power.<sup>(15)</sup> In general starting out from a definition of industrial democracy seems all too often to degenerate into a case of an author comparing the empirical performance of real life schemes with his or her own preferred recipe for industrial democracy.

A second approach which merits consideration, is to start out from actors own definitions of industrial democracy and participation rather than impose the author's own concepts. But such an approach would be fraught with difficulty because participants' definitions and objectives vary so much. Nor is this just a question of a range of attitudes. Recent research revealed that trade unionists and managers' views on the subject tended not only to be different but mutually incompatible: what was a criteria of success for one group was a confirmation of failure for the other.<sup>(16)</sup> Nor is this surprising, for the terms of the argument tends to revert to those we have just discussed about democracy and efficiency. Thus we find the Institute of Directors arguing that 'market forces' are the best means of promoting industrial democracy. Those same market forces which more radical advocates of workers control argue must be transcended before industrial democracy can become a real possibility. Nor is the Institute's proposition as absurd as it at first sight appears. If we think that the issues of industrial democracy are in effect issues of the political economy of the enterprise and what has been called 'the form of determination of labour'<sup>(17)</sup> in capitalist society, then the institute is simply arguing that property ownership needs no social qualification on its powers.

In chapters three and four of this work I consider the issue of industrial democracy in terms of the organisation of labour in capitalist production. It might be thought that this choice of starting point was simply because of its fruitful character, or its ability to focus on exploitation and issues of class. If we accept this then we must also accept that our analyses of industrial democracy while relevant, will ultimately be a function of our decision to start with the concept of labour in the first place. We will be open to the charge that any

analyses of exploitation or inequalities of wealth and power in the production process, any theories (such as a labour theory of value for example) will really be a product of our starting point. We would have to agree with Tugan-Baronovsky that if "horses could speak there would be a horse theory of value." (18)

One problem that we would face is why 'labour' should be taken as the basis of our model. It would have no advantage, for example, over the concept of 'utility' developed by the post Ricardian subjectivist economists. The latter is also a purely social concept and indeed appears to offer intrinsic advantages to that of labour: it avoids having to decide just what social activity comes under the rubric 'labour' and 'production', as opposed to consumption. (Is language labour? Are 'non' producers who 'consume' the 'surplus' product not involved in any way in production? For example is the practising of religion to be considered as a labour process, and by virtue of that fact are priests to be counted as direct producers or consumers of a surplus product?) These issues are close to the heart of questions of industrial democracy and workers control. One could think of the problem in the following terms: are not managers by virtue of the fact of their technical role in the production process as much workers as those they "employ"?

It seems as though we might determine this question according to the definition of 'mode' we choose. A particular form of change would be emphasised by using it as the defining characteristic of a mode. This could be done more or less sensibly. We might choose to make the widespread existence of free wage labour the defining characteristic of a mode we will call capitalism. (19) However it is not immediately clear why this would be superior to using other, less obvious characteristics: why not a 'motor car' mode of production, or an 'oil' mode of production in that the widespread use of each of these things has undoubtedly greatly affected the way we live.

The issues could be grouped together as the question of relativism. There is a corresponding problem of empiricism in this treatment of the paradox. It becomes unclear why any concept of a mode of production is necessary at all. There are two possible ways in which such an approach can develop. One, best represented by the empiricist tradition

in British historiography, is to argue that in order to avoid the problems of determinism, the search for 'laws' ought really to be abandoned altogether. In other words, while the study of history might provide useful examples, or illustrative material for contemporary actors to ponder before choosing their course of action, it does not directly provide lessons. Put in the language of modes of production, this position asserts that we cannot know the nature of constraints and possibilities on the development of production, only aspects of such constraints and possibilities which have been observed in the past. The present provides no clue to the future because it may develop in any way: there is no possibility of discovering a 'logic' in it.

The main criticism of such an approach, proposed at length by E.H. Carr (1964) and echoed by Clarke (1979) is that any process of identification or selection of facts produces either an implicit or explicit analyses of their significance or logic. The 'empirical' must always be ordered by some sort of 'theory' before it can be presented.<sup>(20)</sup> Such a criticism leads us back to the set of arguments about relativism which I made above.

The other 'empiricist' argument is that laws can indeed be discovered empirically, but that our knowledge of them is always provisional, and that, to be scientific, they must be universally applicable or trans-historical. This is the positivist case,<sup>(21)</sup> best represented by Popper:

"It is an important postulate of scientific method that we should search for laws with an unlimited realm of validity. If we were to admit laws that were themselves subject to change, change could never be explained by Laws. It would be the admission that change is simply miraculous."

(22)

This position also ends up by rejecting the concept of a mode of production, because it argues that laws must all be transhistorical: there can, therefore, never be different modes of production. Popper's theory of universal laws carries another implication. These laws themselves are personal, private, hypotheses, which reveal 'knowledge' whose scientificity consists of their instrumentality. Knowledge is

never real or truthful: this is simply an illusion. The criterion of its scientificity is only its utility and its falsifiability. Corresponding to this empiricist model of science is a voluntarist model of practical action and social change or historical development. Just as we may privately produce different hypotheses, we may experiment with changing whatever aspect of social relations we choose and monitor the results: "piecemeal social engineering."

At first sight this seems to be a matter of the reformist political practice which must go along with rejection of the concept of mode of production. But it is worse than this. Firstly, there is no logical explanation in Popper's schema why change ought to be "piecemeal". Surely our experiments, or hypothesis can just as logically be grandiose and revolutionary in their scale.<sup>(23)</sup> Popper's reformism is, therefore, a straightforward ideological bias imported from his own political preferences. Secondly, the argument that social engineering is parallel to hypothesis generation is an empiricist proposition which in practice contains a theoretical assumption: it assumes that there is no constraint on the ability to engineer stemming from the way social relations are presently constituted. The denial of a logic in the facts turns into the positive assertion of the possibility of whatever reform might be chosen.

Thirdly social engineering has a still more disagreeable aspect, explained by the theory's roots in natural scientific activity. Matter as the object of control is replaced by people. They become the object of the social engineers' programmes, rather than the authors of their own future. Just as the space for social science to operate is confined to private hypothesis generation, the space for practical action is confined to the social engineer's plans. Behind Popper's apparent liberalism lurks the monolith of state power.<sup>(24)</sup>

## 2.5 "Leap and Logic" approaches to the paradox of a mode of production

By 'leap and logic' analyses in social science I mean those which attempt to deal with the paradox by splitting its determinist and vol-

untarist aspects into voluntarist 'leaps' between determinist, 'logic' accounts of different modes of production. I think that very many contemporary treatments of Marx fall into 'leap and logic' presentations of his work. One of the reasons for this is that the argument that the capitalist mode of production is defined by the commodity status of labour gives rise to 'leap and logic' analyses.

A 'leap and logic' approach recognises the existence of constraints on people's ability to change society by seeing the mode of production as defined by 'laws' or a 'logic' which explains how people must act. It recognises their ability to challenge these constraints by posing the possibility of 'leaps' between these logics. It tends to produce a view of history as leaps between differed modes of production which are themselves explained or understood in terms of the operation of a logic. The concept of 'leap' allows for the 'voluntarist' side, the recognition of change, whereas the concept of 'logic' allows for the 'determinist' side, the ability to explain regularities.

The concept of a logic is the necessary consequence of the idea of a 'leap' and vice versa. If we start with a model of a mode of production in terms of the logic of its operation then this is so rigid that the only concept of real transformation we have is that of a 'leap' to another mode, no matter how many qualifications we might heap on either side of this break. Conversely if we have a notion of social change in terms of 'leaps', then all we have left for study, is the question of how intervening 'logics' arise from and prepare for these 'leaps' themselves.

The recognition that there exists the possibility of different 'logics' is a step forward. But it fails to provide us with an adequate concept of history if we simply face a choice between either admitting the possibility but defining as illegitimate a theory of how different logics develop from one another or reducing this process to a prior (once again ahistorical) logic of the development of logics. This is just another way of stating the choice between empiricism and determinism. There has been a tendency within social science simply to see Marx as a determinist theorist (usually a technological one.) Resolution of the 'tension' we outlined above, is achieved by reduction of the subjectivist side to the determinist one. Consciousness and class action

is seen as 'scientific' insofar as it 'fits' the material progress of the conditions allowing it to take effect. So, for example, Marx's socialism is seen to claim to be scientific because it sees socialism as a result of the progress of productive forces brought about by capitalism on the one hand and their contradiction with the property relations in which they are enmeshed on the other. His antipathy to Utopianism appears to be a rejection of the 'voluntarist' side of the paradox.

Reducing the history of social relations of production to a set of global leaps between what must be rigidly defined logics obviously faces the problem of how to cope with the phenomenon of change within as opposed to 'leaps' between modes. But in terms of the way the logic of a mode of production gets defined in the first place it becomes difficult to see how we could admit of any change in the logic itself (for that would surely be a question of a leap to an alternative logic) It becomes a problem to see how a coherent concept of mode of production can be retained while still seeking some change within a mode as possible, yet this must obviously be done in order to preserve any similarity with real history. We can not seriously argue, for example, that an identical 'logic' governs 17th century Britain and 20th century America.

One answer to this question, which has at once both theoretical and political dimensions, is that in fact real changes do not occur within a given mode of production. While such changes may occur (obviously history does not come to a standstill) they take place within the logic of the mode of production (its essential character) and exist really only at the level of appearances. Real change only takes place it is thus argued, when contradictions within the mode of production mount to the extent that a leap to an entirely new mode of production is possible. The political counterpart of this is that the only real solution to problems in a given mode is the revolutionary establishment of a new one while 'reforms' within a mode are necessarily incorporated into its logic.

Another, similar answer to this question, has been to assert that because changes do occur, and the differentiation between changes

within and between modes is illegitimate, it makes sense to drop the idea of a mode of production in the first place, as no society will correspond to its logic for long. The political counterpart of this is that the concept of a revolutionary break is challenged (what would a 'revolution' consist of it is argued - if it is not just another reform?) and the need to search for any 'essential' characteristics or logic to society beyond its immediate appearance is abandoned.

It can be recognised that these two answers lie behind the two approaches of 'incorporation' and 'advance' which I referred to earlier. This returns us to the question of reform and revolution and its relationship to theory and methodology. On one side the ability to distinguish between the two appears central to the concept mode of production. Nor is it in any way adequate to pose the issue as one of scale or magnitude: the idea that lots of reforms add up to a revolution. On the other side to pose a distinct break between the two threatens to split strategy into immediate ends and long term aims with no necessary connexion between the two. For those approaches which abandon the concept of a mode of production there is no ultimate conflict between the short and long terms, means and ends, practicabilities and principles: there is simply a process of advance or retreat according to the direction of changes. For 'leap' approaches on the other hand, since short term changes or gains cannot address the essential nature of the working out of the real contradictions at the heart of the mode of production these are seen as irrelevant to, or even opposed to, longer term revolutionary aims. They may dissipate and direct a movement's attention from the 'real' aims. Hence the labour movement and its 'bureaucracy' in capitalism might in this perspective be viewed as the 'labour lieutenants of capital.'

Thus we tend to be presented with an unacceptable choice between reform and revolution. For example we can view 'reformist' wage struggles as 'real' only if we abandon the idea that there is anything of greater significance in the relations between labour and capital than their terms of exchange!

This problem can also usefully be viewed from the concept of 'contradiction' in the development of modes of production, a concept to which

we will return. The notion of contradiction can be seen as the identification of points of tension or historical flux within society which may be resolved in different ways and whose resolution constitutes the development of modes of production. The concept of contradiction which inevitably dominates leap and logic theories is what I want to call 'correspondence and dislocation.'<sup>(25)</sup> By this I want to express the way in which contradictions in the mode of production in leap and logic theories are only possible at a global level and expressed in terms of a unity of opposites. In order to express the determinist side of the paradox these opposites are seen to be in correspondence with each other, and themselves constitute the logic of the mode of production under investigation. Thus if we take the relationship between labour and capital, it is argued that given the logic of the capitalist mode of production labour must always correspond to the requirements of capital, must inevitably become really subordinated to it, and ultimately exist as merely its variable aspect. Or we could take the relationship between the forces and relations of production. Given modes of production can be characterised by the correspondence of the relations to a specific level of development of the productive forces, to recall Marx's oft quoted statement:

"The handmill gives you society with the Feudal lord;  
the steammill, the society with the industrial capitalist."

(26)

In order to express the subjective aspect of the paradox and the idea of construction, of development, then these opposites are seen to be in dislocation, out of correspondence, and forcing a resolution in terms of a break in the logic and a leap to a new relationship of correspondence. Thus labour and capital are seen as locked in a struggle whose only possible resolution (leaving aside mutual ruination) is the abolition of capital and of class society itself. Similarly, the tension between the forces and relations of production are seen as leading inexorably to a rupture in the logic as the progressive development of the forces of production burst the fetters imposed by capitalist relations of private appropriation.

At first sight it might appear that the antimony correspondence and dislocation is simply a reflexion of the antinomy logic and leap,

the one expressing the relationship within a mode of production and the other the leap between them, just as each side of the antinomy leap and logic expresses the two sides of the paradox of mode of production. But if we are to explain history at all then this cannot be the case: for how do relations of correspondence change into those of dislocation. Rather than expressing the paradox, the correspondence and dislocation concept of contradiction in leap and logic theories reveal the inability to resolve it. What happens is that the two factors are seen as an unfathomable unity of opposites, simultaneously in correspondence and dislocation with each other. Labour is seen as both totally subordinate to and utterly opposed to capital. The forces and relations of production are both necessarily in correspondence with each other, as a definite stage of development of social production and in mutual antagonism, pulling towards historical change.

This is less surprising than it at first sight appears when we consider that what this expresses is leap and logic theory's inability to resolve the paradox: its ability on the one hand to assert that there is history and historical development and its inability on the other to analyse how it actually takes place. All social life, and analysis of it, reduces itself to this one contradiction which is only capable of a universal and theoretical exposition: no empirical account is readable from it. In chapter 3 I explore this in greater detail with respect to the analysis of the labour process in capitalism, because the concept of commodity status of labour embodies precisely this form of understanding of contradiction.

## 2.6 The production of Social Science

There is a second way in which theoretical disputes raise directly practical questions and are inseparable from them. Not only does the content of social science analysis suggest one or other practical course of action, but the form of analysis yielded by 'science' must do so too. This is because the status of its analyses must contain assumptions (given how it has been produced) about how it can be used. In other words the relationship of social science theory to social change exists both at the level of ideas and theories, and at the level of the social organisation of the movement that produces and

uses these ideas.<sup>(27)</sup> We cannot look at one side of this relationship (the ideas) without looking at the other. The relationship becomes even more complex when it is realised too that these ideas and the movement of which they are a part, themselves form part of the subject matter of the scientific analysis itself.

Thus to take a recent example, I think that Thompson's comments about Althusserianism and its effects in Britain are in some ways less about 'the Poverty of Theory' as theory, than about the ways of thinking about people and therefore the method of political organisation and relationship between theory and practice that this theory implies. This relationship between political organisation and theoretical development is another issue which would fill an entire study, and given my earlier qualification that I did not wish to attempt to write a 'history of ideas' it would be illegitimate of me to suggest any definite relationship between the history of the marxist left in Britain and America; and the dominance of 'leap and logic' theory, but I think it could be very strongly argued.

'Science' both in its social and natural branches (although it will be argued below that such a division is unfortunate) is Janus headed. It appears as a liberating force whether in terms of greater control of the natural environment, or better self understanding and collective regulation of the social. But it also appears as the 'servant' of power.<sup>(28)</sup> in both these guises too:

"Science, which is in fact the general intellectual product of the social process, also appears to be the direct off-shoot of capital. (since its application to the material process of production takes place in isolation from the knowledge and abilities of the individual worker). And since society is marked by the exploitation of labour by capital, its development appears to be the productive force of capital as opposed to labour."

(29)

It can take the form of a juggernaut, apparently emancipated in the 'political military-industrial complex.'<sup>(30)</sup> From any social control over its development, throwing up ever more powerful weapons of destruction, despoilers of the earth's limited natural resources and 'engines of

immiseration' in modern industry. Social science can become a tool of manipulation for the powerful. Is science to be seen as a means of domination over people or a potential resource for them? Is theory of necessity 'poor' or can it be made to bear fruit. Nor is this simply a question of the 'uses', benevolent or malevolent as the case may be, to which an inherently 'neutral' science is applied.

There seems to be a 'vicious' cunning of reason' operative in the heart of science itself. When it is examined closely it seems that science offers greater knowledge and greater control over nature and society to the scientist, in proportion as it denies it to the layman. This contradiction was well summed up by Weber when he commented:

"(Do) we, today.....have a greater knowledge of conditions of life under which we exist than has an American Indian or a Hottentot? Hardly. Unless he is a physicist, one who rides in the streetcar has no idea how the car happened to get into motion .....The savage knows incomparably more about his tools."

(31)

Thus it appears that science is simply another example of the division of labour, and of the necessary inconsistency of efficiency and democracy. At least it so appears until we recall that this brings us back to our original proposition that this inconsistency has nowhere been proved as opposed to assumed. Our problem is not any cunning of reason inherent in 'science' as such, but that particular model of it which is itself a product of this prior original proposition. We assumed that 'science' inexorably meant specialist and expert, yet behind this lies a prevalent assumption that must be challenged: namely that there is such an activity as 'science' as such, as opposed to different activities differently organised and with varying purposes which have used the title 'scientific.'

Again we are entering a whole new area of debate and it is obviously beyond the scope of this work to propose a new analysis of what constitutes science, and the history of its practice and theory. However, what I do want to argue, and which I think can be easily shown, is that leap and logic theories are dependent on an uncritical approach

to what 'science' is, and the value of its procedures. It is difficult to acquit Marx, Weber, or for that matter most of the 19th Century and later figures of sociology of this uncritical belief in the marriage of science and progress. However, I try to suggest in chapter 4 that Marx's idea of 'science' can at least be interpreted in a non determinist fashion.<sup>(32)</sup>

I have already alluded to the uneasy tension in Marx's approach between his claims to scientific stature on the one hand and his insistence on the primacy of collective self emancipation on the other. Clearly Marx believed this tension could be resolved, and if it cannot be, then there is not much to salvage from his work. However, there is a patent incompatibility between orthodox notions of science (to which it must be said it certainly appears that Marx, at times subscribes) as the discovery of "laws of motion" or of essences behind appearances whether of people's behaviour or of things, and concepts of self-emancipation which appear to be rooted in the malleability of these same laws and essences. One solution to this problem, which maintains intact the orthodox concept of science and the possibility of such emancipation is 'leap and logic' theory. And this must be a factor which has made it so popular. But at what a cost!

Science is allowed to explain the actions of people as the agents of a logic which remains all powerful and obscure to the people themselves till the final 'leap' in history, at which point, on the morrow of the new socialist society, social relations become collectively regulated and transparently clear. There is no longer any need for science, we reach the end of political economy. Mankind leaps from agent to author overnight and no longer requires the aid of 'science.'

This tension finds its clearest expression in the relationship it entails between the class and the scientist, or theoretician or expert. Marx argues that emancipation, if it is to be real and thoroughgoing, must be the collective work of all. And yet it is the scientist who appears to 'direct' it, who uses the superior analysis of the logic of present society to show the movement where its future lies. The expert presents the results of science to the mass, and the relationship appears very much as one way. The scientist (or the party which

is usually the institutional setting for the scientists' analyses) shows the movement what it must do and what is possible, it produces a 'correct' programme or manifesto which 'the class' will ultimately see as in its interests, and follow.

But surely if the scientists' analyses of the logic at work is correct, such intervention is unnecessary. Logics can be discovered, and their end results explained, but they surely do not need the scientist to bring about their resolution. If a scientific analysis of the laws of motion of capitalist society shows that the latter produce the pre-conditions of socialism what need is there for the scientist to intervene (indeed how can he or she?) And conversely, if they do not, what scientific basis would there be for such intervention if it was necessary: we would surely be going back to the moral or utopian basis for struggle and change, which Marx claimed he was leaving behind in his scientific approach. It is in these debates that we find the 2nd International caught, unable to think through a consistent relationship between its science, its programme and the movement, except in the two alternatives which 'leap and logic' models threw up: the movement is all (Bernstein) because it must inexorably reach its goal anyway, and the goal (revolution) is all because only there will be any of the solutions to the social problems the movement faced (Luxembourg):

"Even Social Democracy as the organisation of the proletariat in its class struggle cannot do without the ethical ideal, without ethical indignation against exploitation and class rule. But this ideal has nothing to do with scientific socialism which is the scientific study of the laws of evolution and motion of the social organism.... it is of course true that in socialism the investigator is always also a militant and man cannot be artificially cut into two parts with nothing to do with each other. Even in a Marx the influence of a moral ideal sometimes breaks through in his scientific research. But he rightly sought to avoid this as far as possible. For in science the moral ideal is a source of error. Science is always only concerned with the knowledge of the necessary."

( 33 )

"Several writers, Stämmeler for instance claim that if the triumph of Socialism is a historical necessity then the practical activity of the Social Democrats is completely superfluous."

(34)

The model of science which 'leap and logic' theory and most social science today retains, the model of science which poses the paradox of mode of production and throws up the 'tension in Marx' is a determinist one because it squeezes out any 'space' for social science and its correlate, practical action, to operate. Does this mean we have to abandon claims to scientificity? I think not. Indeed to give up the attempt would simply be to fall back upon empiricism. We will end up assuming that because there is no 'science' any change might be possible if we care to try it.

In chapter 4 I will take up the theoretical problems of what a better approach to 'science' might be and in chapter 5 I will deal with the 'organisational' side of the relationship.

It will become clear in the course of this thesis that many of my arguments rely heavily on the work of E.P. Thompson, both his historical and more overtly political writing. If we substitute the term 'structure' for 'logic' then I think it can be seen that the objections Thompson makes about structuralism are those I am making about 'logics'. There is perhaps a difference of emphasis in that the concept of 'logic' suggests inexorable progress of development while that of structure suggests that of static or frozen development. However, it can be seen that this difference is a surface one: stasis is just as much a 'logic' except that the 'leap' at the end is defined away. I think this difference in emphasis is explained by the different objects of critique: in Thompson's case (in *Poverty of Theory*) Althusserianism and the "anti-mode of production-ism" of Hindess and Hirst, whereas my main concern is with logic theories which posit the existence of inexorable economic laws in capitalist mode of production. Thompson is concerned mostly with the 'logic,' this thesis with the 'leap' aspect of the argument, but the two are so intimately connected that we are, I think, arguing about the same theory.

However, I think at one point Thompson's quite correct arguments against reducing capitalist mode of production to a structure or logic unwittingly accept the terms of the debate posed by leap and logic theory itself. At times Thompson gets pushed into accepting the paradox of mode of production and simply asserting the subjectivist side against structuralism's objectivism. This is a false choice, as Thompson's own writings show.

Thus in order to avoid determinism, Thompson stresses the importance of moral choice and values. Crucially, the provisionality of science or practical action (which we have argued is a correlate of any non determinist position) comes to rest on the starting point of the scientist, or practical actor. Thompson does qualify this by his stress on importance of 'experience' but it remains unclear how the tension between experience (the objectivist side) and moral choice (the subjectivist side) is resolved. The end result is that Thompson leaves himself unnecessarily open to the charge of empiricism, when he is really trying to stress the significance of the empirical. The problem which the first part of this thesis has been trying to address is precisely how to draw distinctions between these two.

I think that this is why Thompson ends up classifying Marx as a leap and logic theorist, ensnared in the theoretical tentacles of political economy and ultimately merely inverting it : producing an "anti-structure". Thompson argues that Marx was not 'empirical', Volume one is theory, a model, which must be distinguished from the capitalism behind it. Thompson portrays Marx as caught up in political economy's own problematic: involved in a debate with its theory, its model of the logic of capitalist mode of production rather than investigating capitalist society empirically. While this seems an attractive interpretation on many accounts (on almost every page are footnotes referring to the work of classical political economists) there are two reasons for doubting it. The first is that Marx clearly did not see himself as a model builder: he claimed not to 'start out from concepts' or provide recipes for 'trimming the epochs', and indeed the structure of the book follows this: he starts not from a critique of other theories (that is reserved for theories of surplus value) but with an empirical object: the vast accumulation of commodities in capitalist society. In Chapter I argue why this is what Marx did and that this is quite different to classical political economists' procedures. The second reason (which I think Thompson himself advances elsewhere) is that capital, is a thoroughly empirical and historical work: its origins lie as much in Blue Books, government reports and statistics, and historical accounts as in the abstract disputes of classical political economists.

There is a further reason for wanting to go beyond Thompson's approach. As well as being too unkind to Marx he is too kind to Marxism. I think the problems of leap and logic ways of arguing, and assumptions about the commodity status of labour go far beyond Althusser to a good deal of most modern 'marxists'. It is perhaps worth noting that Thompson's impatience with such theory pre-dates the Althusserian trend in British academic and new left circles: there is the 1965 debate with Anderson, and before that the tenor of political argument in 'Out of Apathy' and the early 'old' New Left Review.

I think the leap and logic ideas embrace equally the 'hegelian', early Lukacs and the structuralist Althusser, 'technological' determinism' and its critic Braverman, the 'idealist' Gramsci, and the materialist Cohen and so on. Focussing on a common element in such diverse approaches might be thought to have little value and be an exercise in academic sophistry, I want to argue, however, that in many ways the similarities in these writers outweigh the importance of the differences and that this leads to the inability to deal in empirical or strategic terms I noted at the outset. I want to suggest that energy devoted to developing the claims of one approach within the tradition against those of another is wasted.

Footnotes to Chapter 2

1. Thompson (1968) p.210
2. Many writers argue that what differentiates Marx from classical political economy is his concept of a mode of production. They argue that the latter was ahistorical or viewed the social relations of capitalism as eternal. I argue below in Chapter 4 that this is a distortion of Marx and classical political economy that leap and logic analysis is forced to make. Classical political economy did not lack a sense of history which Marx added, rather its conception of history was contradictory and inconsistent: it did not lack a concept of mode of production, rather it had a bad one. An example of those who see classical political economy as ahistorical is Rowthorn. (1980) Ch. 1. It is interesting that Rowthorne also sees the division between Marx and political economy as one between objectivism and subjectivism. Again I argue in ch. 4 that this is misleading. Banaji (1976) points out that the characterisation of Marx as objectivist is a product of the desire to confront modern neoclassical subjectivist economic theories. Usually classical political economy is then seen as objectivist in contrast to its neoclassical progeny, and Marx treated as a member of the classical school. I think that this confusion illustrates the problem of placing Marx within an orthodox 'economic' tradition, which many writers attempt to do (See Elson 1979 for a critique of this.)
3. By 'space' I mean to convey the idea that there is room for meaningful social action. The course of history is never reducible to a pre-determined unfolding of laws. The term also implies that this space is not infinite. If we are not imprisoned by determination neither are we free to do whatever we choose.
4. This point relates back to the characterisation of classical political economy again. There is a tendency to dismiss classical political economy's analysis of capitalism as purely technical neutral and natural, and to see Marx's contribution as the analysis of capitalism's social and historical character. I

I want to argue that the issue is not whether or not capitalism is social and historical, but rather what kind of history is envisaged, and the nature of its social character.

5. For example R.O. Clarke et al's (1972) contention that: (pp.12-13)
 

"Any notion that industry can effectively be administered by continuous committees, general assemblies or referenda is certain to end in organisational chaos or economic disaster, since for technological and economic reasons many decisions in industry must be taken swiftly and carried out expeditiously."
6. Marx, 1976, p. 83.
7. Marx and Engels (1968), p.97. ("the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte")
8. Marx, ((1973a) Preamble to the Rule of the International Workingmen's Association.
9. Marx, 1976, p. 92).
10. This idea may be traced back to Vico.
11. Dilthey, quoted in Outhwaite (1975) p.26.
12. I have taken the idea of leap and logic from Elson's article, (Elson 1979) where she argues that orthodox Marxist theories:
 

"leave us unable to think fo the transition from capitalism to socialism as an historical process .....rather than as a leap between two fixed, pre-given structures....." (Elson, 1979) p. 173)
13. Poole, (1975) p.8.
14. ibid p. 46, p.9.
15. To use the language of our earlier article (Cressey and MacInnes 1980) Poole assumes industrial democracy to be about advance without adequately considering that it may be about incorporation.
16. Cressey, Eldridge, MacInnes and Norris (1981 a and b)
17. Elson (1979) p. 123.
18. This problem affects very different sorts of Marxism's not just technologically determinist explanations, or those which uncritically use 'base and superstructure' analyses. Althusser's concept of 'practice' seems to perform this role of a universal concept into which everything is resolved. He dared not have used the term 'labour' but the difference in meaning "in the last instance" escapes me. See also my commetns on Mill's views of the 'metaphysic of labour' in Ch. 5.

19. As Weber, Braverman and countless others have done, explicitly or implicitly.
20. I argue below that it is precisely the separation of theory from the empirical that is the problem in the first place.
21. By positivism I mean the search for universally valid laws considered as having the same status as natural physical laws in the natural sciences. Insofar as Marx argues that value relations develop akin to a process of natural history and argues for the eventual 'unity of science' he might be considered a positivist. However, I think the ambiguity arises because whereas Popper seeks to base his social science on natural scientific procedures, Marx could be seen as doing the reverse.
22. Popper (1957) p.103
23. This argument comes from Norman Stockman.
24. Fay (1974) argues this case for positivism generally:
25. Clarke (1977 p.7) uses the concept of 'correspondence and dislocation' in his discussion of Stalinist dogmatism. I wish to apply the concept far more widely than Clarke.
26. Marx and Engels (1976), p.166 (The Poverty of Philosophy.)
27. It should be clear from my argument that I am not arguing that the material organisation of the movement 'determines' the ideas it produces.
28. Baratz (1965)
29. Marx 1976 p.1053 (The 'Resultate')
30. C.W. Mills (1959)
31. Weber (1970) p.139 (Science as a Vocation). This resembles closely Marx's analysis of the division of labour in capitalism;
 

"The knowledge, judgement and will which, even though to a small extent, are exercised by the independent peasant or handicraftsman, in the same way as the savage makes the whole art of war consist in the exercise of his personal cunning, are faculties now required only for the workshop as a whole. The possibility of an intelligent direction of production expands in one direction, because it vanishes in many others. (1976 p. 482)
32. Where Weber differs from Marx is in his contention that his hypothetical streetcar rider 'does not need to know': a striking assertion of faith in the neutrality and benevolence of technology!
33. Kautsky (n.d.) p. 141
34. Plekanov                      quoted Colletti (1976) p.70

## CHAPTER THREE : LABOUR

"We live and die rationally and productively" (1)

### 3.1 Marx and Weber on labour as a commodity

I have argued in ch. two, that one of the features of 'leap and logic' theories of modes of production is the tendency to reduce them to a defining characteristic, either in terms of a permanent feature, or a particular historical event which sets the logic of the mode of production in operation.

Leap and logic analyses arise from capitalism being defined and explained by the dominance of free wage-labour in Weber's terms, or the existence of labour as a commodity in Marx's. It is fairly easy to establish the decisive role that this idea plays in the model of capitalism put forward by both theorists.

For Weber modern society is to be distinguished from its predecessors by the dominance of the rational association of means and ends, and 'legal rational' social action, in contrast to the conservative and static traditionalism that went before. There are two features of this. One is the spread of rational values, characterised in the religious field by the 'protestant ethic.' The other, and the more important factor so far as the study of industry is concerned, is the existence of free wage labour, for it is the existence of the latter which allows rational calculation and double entry bookkeeping to take place:

"The following are the principle conditions necessary for obtaining a maximum of formal rationality of capital accounting in production enterprises: 1) complete appropriation of all material means of production by owners and the complete absence of all formal appropriation of opportunities for profit in the market; that is market freedom; (2) complete autonomy in the selection of management by the owners.....(3) complete absence of appropriation of jobs and of opportunities for earning by the workers and, conversely, the absence of appropriation of workers by owners. This implies free labour, freedom of the labour market, and freedom in the selection of workers,.....With respect to the freedom of labour and of jobs from appropriation it is true that certain types of unfree labour, particular full-fledged slavery, have guaranteed what is formally a more complete power of disposal over the workers than is the case with employment for wages. But there are various reasons why this is less favourable to rationality and efficiency than the employment of free labour: (a) The amount of capital which it is necessary to invest..... (b) the capital risk.....(c) the slave market and

and correspondingly the price of slaves have been particularly subject to fluctuation.....(d).....recruitment.... (e).....the owner has had to bear the cost of maintaining the women and rearing the children.....(g) it has in general been impossible to use slave labour in the operation of tools and apparatus, the efficiency of which required a high level of responsibility and of involvement of the operator's self interest" (2)

The repeated sale and purchase of labour on the market gives rise to a new system of accumulation based on the organisation of production for profit, in contrast to previous systems of 'violent accumulation' consisting of the transfer of wealth from one person or group to another on a one-off basis, organised by force.

For Marx too the commodity status of labour forms the basis of the constant revolutionising of production which characterises the capitalist mode of production and forms a complete contrast to all earlier epochs where the interest of the ruling classes lay in the maintenance of the status quo unchanged. Since it is the writers in the marxist tradition that I am concentrating on it is worth examining the core of Marx's supposed argument in some detail. (3)

Within capitalism all the main elements of production, both labour and the instruments of production, raw materials and means of subsistence take the form of commodities, they are owned, privately, by individuals who are thus sovereign over their disposition. Hence the comment is often made that labour (or more specifically labour-power, the capacity to labour as opposed to the act of production itself) is free in a double sense. It is free in the sense of not being owned permanently by a particular lord, or tied to a particular means of production (e.g. a piece of land). Thus in contrast to a serf in feudal society, the labourer in capitalism is the owner of his own labour power as a commodity, he has private property in his own person. This appears as the 'progressive' side of the freedom of labour. The other side is labour's freedom from the means of subsistence, which have also been turned into commodities which only a minority of people own. Thus, although the worker insofar as he owns only his labour power, ( a commodity which he can continually re-sell) is free of any lord or any means of production in particular, the worker is dependent on the class

of owners of the means of production in general, because he or she must sell their labour-power to them in order to be able to purchase their means of subsistence as a commodity on the market.

Capitalism remains a class society because although labour is 'free' and therefore must be bought by the ruling class (in contrast to feudal society where directly political or legal arrangements could be used to extract a surplus from the direct producers) as long as labour power is paid for at its cost of production (which will occur so long as we make the reasonable assumption that commodities exchange at their values) there is every possibility that the value of what it produces will exceed this, but the right to appropriate this surplus remains with the capitalist who has set the whole process in motion, who owns each of its constituent parts, and who therefore also owns its end results. Class is based on the existence of this exploitation of surplus labour.

This means that one difference between capitalism and other societies, because of the existence of wage labour as a commodity, is that the ruling class does not appropriate labour directly nor does it appropriate a surplus product but rather appropriates surplus value. Its ability to appropriate anything at all therefore depends on ensuring that the labour power it has purchased yields as much labour as possible, and that, in turn, this labour results in the realisation of as much value as possible once the products it is worked up in have been sold. Thus if the labour set in motion is not "socially necessary", in the sense of producing commodities which can be sold at, or preferably above their value, then little or no transfer of surplus to the ruling class appears to take place.

There are two main ways of appropriating surplus value. One is simply to extend the working day and force the producers to deliver up more labour from their labour power. To work a 12 hour day rather than a ten hour one for example. This is termed absolute surplus value. This appears to correspond with the main way in which an increased surplus is obtained in earlier modes when labour is not free: the direct producer is simply squeezed harder.

The second way, which is peculiar to capitalism is to increase the

productivity of labour, for example by setting it to work on larger masses of capital that enable it to produce more efficiently: to make the labour that is employed more productive than the average socially necessary labour. There are two factors involved here. First of all, if one capital moves ahead of the others, using a process of production more efficient than the others, it can appropriate extra surplus value because it can set the price of its commodities below the value of the commodities produced by other capitals yet above the individual value of its own products. Secondly, even if this new production process is generalised across all capitals, more surplus value will be appropriated than before because the reduction in price of commodities will eventually lower the value of labour-power.

There will be a very powerful pressure for relative surplus value to be more important than absolute surplus value, because of the 'freedom' of labour once again. Relative surplus value depends on using labour more effectively whereas absolute surplus value is based on squeezing more labour out of the same worker in the same work process. Any unit of capital which relied on the latter process while others innovated would soon tend to find itself short of labour, which is free, of course, to move to capitals which use it more effectively, and will, therefore accumulate and have a greater relative demand for it anyway. (4)

These pressures, which are summarised in Marx's 'General Law of Capitalist Accumulation' have a peculiar result which 'explains' the dynamic logic of capitalism, as opposed to the static nature of previous modes of production: any continued appropriation of labour is dependent on the re-accumulation of the value realised in previous appropriations in order to develop the means of production and masses of capital available to be set in motion. Competition forces the capitalist to personify capital in order to survive at all: hence the "constant revolutionising" of the means of production! Surplus cannot just be consumed it must be used. (5)

This produces a paradox. At first sight the contrast between capitalist mode of production and earlier modes of production appears to be the absence of any direct transfer of surplus from the direct producers to

the ruling class, and the emancipation of production from the direct aim of producing for the needs of the ruling class. Yet the net effect of the freedom of labour, is a tremendous increase in the attempt to maximise the appropriation of a surplus from the direct producers because the drive to exploit labour has been liberated from the immediate needs of the ruling class and rather is rooted in the relations of production as a whole!

The issues of the liberation of production from the direct aim of rendering a surplus for consumption by a non-producing ruling class shows how the visibility of capitalism as a mode of production becomes a problem. Now production appears to be simply "for production's sake." The pressure produced by the general law of capitalist accumulation appears to be that of maximising efficiency in production, and developing hierarchy and authority within production only insofar as it contributes to efficiency and not for 'political' or 'class' reasons:

"The corporate manager.....is part of a group that enjoys power only so long as it does not exercise power the way men used to before the capitalist transformation"

(6)

This is a summary of Marx's approach to which I shall return, for it underlies many different developments of the analysis of capitalist mode of production. I believe it to be a mistaken reading of Marx's analysis, despite its compatibility with much of Marx's work. Neither do these mistakes spring from any simplifications in the above argument that I have made in order to be as brief as possible.

There are two reasons why we might consider that a leap and logic analysis is produced by reducing capitalist mode of production to the effects of the commoditisation of labour. We have to ask whether this is all that modern society consists of. It appears that a two-fold reduction is taking place. First of all society is being reduced to the performance of labour, life is being conflated with work.<sup>(7)</sup> Secondly this work itself is being equated with wage-labour or rather the social form which this labour takes. There is a tendency to assume that the most decisive elements in the mode of production are to be found at

the point of production, and that in turn, the nature of these elements arises from the wage-form of organisation of this production itself. We do not have to argue about car-producing wage labour, or shipbuilding wage labour or coal-getting wage labour but wage labour per se. Nor do the rate of wages enter into it, it is the fact of their existence that appears decisive. It appears that the relations at the point of production are themselves analysable by the global relations of production: the existence of wage labour. We therefore, face the question of the extent of commoditisation of labour in social production as a whole and the nature which it takes.

Any attempt to reduce capitalism as a mode of production to the existence of wage labour per se faces the problem of accounting for the large and important areas of social production where labour is not commoditised: domestic labour for example. There are two possible solutions: it may be argued that the survival of these areas is limited and that the logic of commoditisation must eventually swallow them up as well. A good example of this is Braverman's conception of the 'universal market' <sup>(8)</sup> Or it may be argued that a different analysis has to be applied to these areas, and that they act as qualifications to the universal operation of the logic. This is often expressed in terms of a distinction between mode of production and social formation. The implication is clearly that the latter elements are less important or less decisive. We get a split, for example, between 'exploitation' and 'oppression.' <sup>(9)</sup>

The fact that I want to follow through the question of the nature of commoditisation of labour does not mean that I think that the point of production is the most important element, or defining characteristic of capitalist mode of production. I want to argue that it is only through re-thinking how we understand wage labour in capitalism (and in particular stop defining capitalist mode of production in terms of wage labour) that progress can be made in understanding either sort of labour. I want to suggest that this two-fold reduction is unnecessary and wrong. The aim must be to produce a coherent account of capitalist mode of production in terms other than the commoditisation

of labour. This is what I try to do in chapters 4 and 5. In order to prepare the way for this, chapter 3 proceeds to look at the way the conception of capitalist mode of production which is dominant has come together and the effects it has on trying to analyse the social nature of production when the latter appears to be emancipated from its directly social form in pre-capitalist society.

By doing this I hope to lay the theoretical basis for the argument that the 'point of production' in the sense of wage labour-capital production relationships is not the vital point of contradiction and site of struggle in capitalist mode of production that many current interpretations of Marx assume it to be. My aim is to show how the misinterpretations of Marx's theories has produced an inflated role for the workplace in marxist theory and practice.

There are three main consequences of defining capitalist mode of production according to the presence of wage labour. There is the problem of how to deal with areas where wage labour is not the norm. Are these 'feudal remnants' (as the 'universal market' implies,) elements of a coexisting mode of production (a domestic mode of production for example,)<sup>(10)</sup> or indeed not worthy of consideration because they do not really concern production as the latter is seen as what takes place within the labour-capital relation.<sup>(11)</sup> The second problem, which I have followed in greater depth above, is that defining capitalist mode of production in terms of wage labour leads also to an explanation of the contrast between capitalist mode of production and earlier modes of production in terms of an inexorable logic of dynamism in capitalism, and static traditionalism before it. This is more than just a question of empirical accuracy (was feudal society so traditional?) Rather it is part of the leap and logic approach to the analysis of modes of production: the dynamism of capitalist mode of production appear to come from this vital element of wage labour. It appears that the empirical content of production relations, their real historical development, is determined by this particular social form of labour, which establishes laws of motion we cannot resist.

The third problem is that this has led to two divided approaches to the

study of the relations of production. One school of thought stemming from Marx has emphasised the existence of wage labour per se as the problem to be examined. Since the development of the mode of production is determined by its existence, it is argued the real question to ask is whether or not we face 'the abolition of the wages system', whether a leap to a new logic, the only escape from the present one, is possible.

The other school of thought takes the existence of wage labour at least for the foreseeable future, for granted, and proceeds to examine the terms on which labour power is bought and sold, the terms on which the logic operates, for example by examining what people perceive as a "fair day's work for a fair day's pay."

Nor is it possible, as it might appear, to simply combine these two approaches and produce a more sophisticated analysis, because each treats the questions posed by the other as irrelevant, as a non-question, not capable of a meaningful answer within their terms of reference: it seems quite impossible to relate the terms of exchange of wage labour to the fact of its existence. Each approach shares a 'leap and logic' model. One defines only change from one logic to another as 'real'; the other considers only changes in the terms of the operation of the logic.

First I turn to the theory of value and the law of value as they have been developed in classical political economy and Marxism as models of the operation of capitalist mode of production. As I argued above, a theory of value is intimately related with the concept of a mode of production. Secondly, I turn to the labour process debate and the related questions of ownership and control as presented in more mainstream industrial relations studies and argue that precisely the same problems and contradictions that I identify in the labour theory of value are encountered in the later debates precisely because they all start out from a model of capitalism based on the commoditisation of labour.

One important point for the development of the argument that arises from our consideration of the commodity status of labour is the

contradictory analysis it produces of the nature of production in capitalism. From one perspective it appears that the market forces produced by the commoditisation of labour remove directly social or political constraints or effects on how production is organised. It appears that it must be purely for production's sake, geared purely for efficiency. From another perspective, however, within the development of the same argument, it appears that production, as the production of things, use-values, is for the first time no longer the aim of production at all. Rather the production process is only a means to the greater end of the accumulation of capital.

The inability to resolve this contradiction in an empirically satisfactory manner manifests itself in a number of ways. It is a reflection of theory's inability to grasp the social nature of production in capitalist mode of production. It can only present it as 'on the one hand' a purely technical matter, or free of social constraint for the first time ever, or 'on the other hand' a purely social matter, not a question of the production of things at all, but rather understandable only as an accessory to capital accumulation. We might summarise this by saying that it cannot choose whether capital is a thing or a relation, it cannot grasp the proper relation between use value and value. I turn now to the form this contradiction takes in the labour theory of value.

A second decisive point that should be remembered, is that for both theorists the existence of labour as a commodity not only establishes the existence of quantitative value relations, the process of exchange, but does so *inter alia* by rendering labour calculable and measurable. We have an economic system which not only places a premium on efficiency, but also the means to achieve it. In Weber's case calculation arises on the basis of costing labour purchased on the market. In Marx it is a question of distinguishing the value of labour power from the value it bestows on the means of production it sets in motion.

I think it can be shown that all these contradictions resolve themselves into one central concept: that of the commodity status of labour. It is to this concept, and its intimate connexion with labour theories

of value, that I now turn.

This chapter attempts to show that the idea of labour as a commodity (and analyses of capitalism which rest on this concept) inevitably give rise to 'leap and logic' resolutions of the paradox of mode of production, with all the problems this brings. Inherent in the idea of labour as a commodity are the problems of subjectivity/objectivity and relations of contradiction and history which lie at the root of leap and logic approaches. Presenting capitalism as the development of the commoditisation of labour condemns all attempts to understand its history to an irresolvable tension between an ahistorical and unqualified individual sovereignty on the one hand, and the objective development of collective material subjection to economic 'laws' on the other. This is the contradiction which the commodity status of labour embraces. It is the same contradiction which lies at the heart of Marx's 'general law' as I have summarised it above. It is the same contradiction which lies behind Weber's celebration of individual value freedom, and resignation to the 'iron cage of bureaucracy.' It is the same contradiction which lies behind the paradox of the mode of production. But this contradiction is not an empirical one it is not one which i

"the result of prior process and an index towards the direction of it's future flow."

(12)

It is, instead, a contradiction with its roots in bourgeois ideology, by which I mean arguments about the nature of capitalism which use its appearances to make false propositions about its real nature. The idea that labour is a commodity, and that this is the basis of capitalism is not the starting point for a scientific analysis of capitalism, but rather the cornerstone of the fetishism thrown up by this mode of production which science must penetrate.

### 3.2 The commodity status of labour and the labour theory of value

Nowadays it is common to associate the idea of a labour theory of value with the work of Marx and socialist arguments. For example the labour

theory of value is taken as proof that labour is the source of all wealth and, therefore, ought to collectively own and control it. On the contrary, I think Marx's differences with classical political economists might well be summarised in terms of his rejection of the latter's labour theory of value. That labour theory of value has its roots in bourgeois theories of natural right and individual sovereignty. What they both start out from is a model of capitalism based on the assumption that labour is a commodity.

I, therefore, have two objects of criticism in mind. The first is the idea that capitalism as a mode of production can be adequately defined by the commodity status of labour. The second is whether labour can be analysed as a commodity in capitalism. These are the two elements of the 'Two-fold reduction' I have argued takes place in most analyses of capitalism: of life to work, and of work to wage labour.

Marx is often viewed as an economist who in contrast to subjectivist theories of marginal utility and consumer preference, explained price or market relations by production relations. The argument that labour is a commodity would explain both the existence of values and prices in the first place, and the ability to calculate amounts of value and price. Sweezy's work 'The Theory of Capitalist Development' to which I refer later, is a good example of this. Sweezy argues that whereas classical political economists, (for example Adam Smith) simply analysed exchange as a 'universal and inevitable form of economic life'<sup>(13)</sup> Marx saw the production of commodities as a social and therefore historically transitory form that production takes. In addition to 'quantitative' problems analysed by orthodox economic theory, there therefore exists the historical 'qualitative' problem of the abolition of the commodity status of labour.

Central to such approaches is the idea that the relations of production in capitalist mode of production are historically specific and therefore transcendable. The roots of this historical specificity lie in the commodity status of labour. This accounts for the exploitation of labour in capitalist mode of production, and its abolition will

end both the exploitation of labour along with the 'economic laws' believed by classical political economy to be natural and immutable. Marx is therefore seen as adding an historical perspective to classical political economy. This historical perspective can also be seen as adding a 'social' perspective to questions hitherto considered to be 'technical'. The 'labour process debate' has arisen on this basis. It sees itself as Marxist insofar as it tries to analyse the social form which apparently 'technical' production takes in capitalism by virtue of the commodity status of the labour used.

Marx is seen as arguing that labour's commodity status, which is a historical and social, not natural or technical condition, lies behind the economic laws which classical political economy portrayed as immutable and eternal. He is seen as arguing that this commodity status ensures that a surplus value is always appropriated from the direct producers, in contrast to the appearance of equality in exchange. Labour process theorists, such as Braverman are seen as demonstrating that this commodity status also effects the material technical process of production itself: the power relations in production arising on the basis of labour's commodity status dictate the use of particular technologies and production arrangements.

According to the summary I set out in the previous section, labour's commodity status performs a dual role. It acts as the starting point for the analysis of the laws of motion of capital accumulation; it is the key to understanding the whole system. And it explains the material powerlessness of the proletariat. The decisive feature of labour's commodity status is the 'double freedom' it entails: freedom to sell labour power, and freedom to starve if it cannot be sold.

But if the commodity status of labour is a finding with such a radical implications it is difficult to see why it was a cornerstone of classical political economy, and classical liberal political theory from the outset. MacPherson (1962) describes this tradition well as that of "possessive individualism", it is worth considering his

summary of it at some length:

- "(i) What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others.
- (ii) Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest.
- (iii) The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society.

Proposition (iii) may appear in a theory as an independent postulate, or as a deduction from (i) and (ii) plus a concept of property as an exclusive right. Thus: since the freedom, and therefore the humanity, of the individual depend on his freedom to enter into self-interested relations with other individuals, and since his ability to enter into such relations depends on his having exclusive control of (rights in) his own person and capacities, and since proprietorship is the generalized form of such exclusive control, the individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities.

- (iv) Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his property in his own person, he may alienate his capacity to labour.
- (v) Human society consists of a series of market relations. This follows from the assumptions already stated. Since the individual is human only in so far as free, and free only in so far as a proprietor of himself, human society can only be a series of relations between sole proprietors, i.e. a series of market relations.

Or propositions (v) may appear in a theory not as a deduced proposition but as the primary or even the sole social assumption. This is possible because propositions (i) to (iv) are contained in it. The concept of market relations necessarily implies individual freedom as defined in (ii) and proprietorship as defined in (iii) and (iv); and the postulate that human society consists of market relations necessarily implies that an individual's humanity is a function of his freedom (proposition)" (14)

We can recognise here not only Hobbes or Locke's vision of society, the material of MacPherson's study, but also the roots of Adam Smith's economic man or the Robinson Crusoe figures favoured by the classical economists. MacPherson makes it clear that from these assumptions about individual freedom and sovereignty flow the proposition that people's productive capacities rather than being seen as a directly social affair, are something over which they individually may exercise control, free of any direct obligation to others about how they might be applied. A person's ability to work, to produce, becomes seen as a thing which is alienable from them but which they own as private property: labour power is a commodity. Thus production relations, the social nature of production, must take the form of market relations: sales and purchases between owners of this commodity.

As MacPherson goes on to show, these theories lead directly to the concept of a state being necessary for the maintenance of private property.<sup>(15)</sup> MacPherson considers these theorists in terms of their justification of state power and the form it might take to preserve the operation of these market forces, principally by guaranteeing the sovereignty of private property itself. I want to consider another aspect of Hobbes and Locke's theory: namely that it forms the basis for a labour theory of value.

The essential point in the development of the argument is the individual and private nature of people's productive capacities. This is a necessary component of the idea that labour power is a commodity: what is social cannot form the basis for a theory of natural private right. Ownership of these capacities naturally (literally) confers ownership on the results of the exercise of these capacities on nature. This produces things which, because they are now privately appropriated and owned, take the form of commodities.

"Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in he hath mixed his labour with and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property."

This is a 'natural' law or right that gives rise to private property:

"every man has a Property in his own Person. This no body has any right to but himself.....this Labour being the unquestionable Property of the Labourer, no Man but he can have a right to what that is once joyned to."

(17)

Hobbes was quite explicit about his assumption, on the basis of his highly individualist theory of the nature of 'men's powers,' that

"a man's Labour, also, is a commodity exchangeable for benefit, as well as any other thing."

and

"The Value, or Worth of a man, is of all other things, his price."

(18)

The idea that labour confers ownership must also imply that labour, insofar as it produces use-value by 'mixing' with nature, determines the value of that use value if it is to be exchanged:

"it is labour indeed that put the difference of value on every thing."

(19)

Thus appropriation of nature, by private labour, is the basis of ownership of property. And the exchange of such property produces value relations.

The labour theory of value is an explanation of how the relations of production develop if labour takes the form of a commodity. It is both a description of the system, and itself a theory of natural rights or political and moral convention underlying it: the principle of individual sovereignty over private property (including property in oneself.) It is both an explanation of the relations of production and a demonstration of their inherent equality and fairness.

The theory of labour as a commodity gives rise to a labour theory of value because labour as the appropriation of nature becomes the source

of all value, all commodities which might be exchanged. Both the produce of labour, and labour itself are exchangeable and as such possess value. The terms of this exchange, if relations of fairness and equality are to be maintained, must be the amounts of labour embodied in the commodities exchanged. Labour is the determinant of value, because it is its only source. This is what Marx meant, I think, by his comment that:

Political economy has indeed analyzed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms."  
(20)

In other words, classical political economists had come to see labour as the substance of value, and had gone as far as putting quantitative dimensions to this.

Marx comments that Locke's "philosophy served as the basis for all the ideas of the whole of subsequent English political economy"<sup>(21)</sup> For later theorists like Ricardo, the proposition that the amount of embodied labour in a commodity determined its value was taken as the starting point of the whole analysis.

This is a vital development of the argument, for it means that just as in political theory, the analysis of the state could proceed from the analysis of labour as a commodity, so too in economic theory, the commoditisation of labour explains not only the existence of market relations and market forces, but also the terms of their operation: the labour theory of value appears to explain price and exchange value by reference to the amounts of labour involved. Through a theory of natural rights to individual sovereignty over one's person and property, we obtain a theory which maps the process of distribution of use value to its production by means of the concept of value. We can explain market forces in terms of production.

The labour theory of value appears in this light as a defence of the freedom and equality in capitalism, as opposed to the exercise of authority by lord or priest in feudal society. It starts out from the concept of individual sovereignty in production, and so long as relations between producers are market relations, then commodities, ie. things

in which persons have a private, sovereign property, will exchange at their value and there will be no exploitation: through exchange each producer receives other commodities of equal value to those he or she has produced. It is also a theory of the freedom of production within such a society from any social regulation or obligation: each individual is sovereign over how they choose to set their labour capacities in motion, unlike the slave or serf.

### 3.3 The Leap and Logic contradiction at the heart of the Labour Theory of Value

As MacPherson notes, "the idea of property in one's person and the corresponding rights to the product of its labour" is not at all inconsistent with the assumption of a natural right to alienate one's labour in return for a wage. On the contrary, the more emphatically labour is asserted to be a property, the more it is to be understood to be alienable. For property in the bourgeois sense is not only a right to enjoy or use, it is a right to expose of, to exchange, to alienate. (22)

Marxist approaches which emphasises the commodity status of labour as Marx's main starting point base their critique of classical political economy on this idea. If labour power is a commodity it may be sold rather than exercised by the owner. The use values and value this alienated (sold) labour produces, becomes the property of the purchaser of the labour power. In fact this development of the argument was recognised from the beginning. For example Hobbes distinguishes between 'instrumental' (purchased) and 'natural' powers, and Locke makes the argument explicitly:

"Thus the Grass my horse has bit, the Turfs my Servant has cut; and the Ore I have digg'd in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property.  
(23)

Marx's work has been taken as posing the question of what happens when access to nature (in order to appropriate it via the exercise of one's own labour power) is closed off by virtue of private property in that nature itself becoming universal. (24) This likely result is contained

in the original proposition that labour 'mixed' with nature confers ownership upon it. Once all nature, or what we could just as well call means of production, have become social, have been taken into ownership, then a class of people must arise who, having nothing but property in their own persons, are forced to sell their labour power (and the result of its produce) to the owners of the means of production. Thus quite in accordance with the free and equal bourgeois justice of the original labour theory of value, we reach a situation in which the appropriation of nature (production) is carried out by those who do not own nature (as the means of production) but have access to it only by virtue of alienating their ability to work with their labour power. This alienated labour does not confer ownership of the result of that labour on those who perform it, but on the owners of the means of production set to work. Out of relations of equality springs the appropriation of surplus labour by the owners of the means of production, once the process of primitive accumulation, the expropriation of the mass of the direct producers from nature (the means of production) has taken place.

If we think of this in terms of value relations we could say that the special character of labour is its ability to produce value. (by producing use values from its interaction with nature.) This special character can also be seen as its ability to produce more value in the act of production than it must consume in order to be in a position to produce that. There is a quantitative difference between the value of labour power and the value produced by the exercise of that labour power. Within the social relations of production established by the existence of labour as a commodity this extra or surplus value, is appropriated entirely by the owners of the means of production.

The commoditisation of labour or the labour theory of value therefore embody a central contradiction which also can be seen as an inversion. We start out from the sovereignty of the individual over his or her own productive capacities, and end up with the collective surrender of all control over these very capacities by the direct producers to the owners of the means of production. We start out from the proposition of labour as the basis of all value, and finish with the owners

of the means of production as the appropriators of all surplus value beyond the basic reproduction of labour power. This contradiction can be expressed in even more general terms, which is well summarised by Marx in the chapter in volume one where he considers how it is that, if all commodities exchange at their value, without any 'theft' of private property from anyone, the system as a whole still results in the appropriation of surplus value:

"The sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, let us say of labour-power, are determined only by their own free will. They contract as free persons, who are equal before the law. Their contract is the final result in which their joint will finds a common legal expression. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to his own advantage. The only force bringing them together, and putting them into relations with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interest of each. Each pays heed to himself only, and no one worries about the others. And precisely for that reason, either in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an omniscient providence, they all work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal, and in the common interest.

When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities, which provides the 'free-trader vulgaris' with his views, his concepts and the standard by which he judges the society of capital and wage-labour, a certain change takes place, or so it appears, in the physiognomy of our dramatis personae. He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but - a tanning.

(25)

The distinctive character of Marx's analysis has, therefore, been taken to be his distinction between labour and labour-power which

arises when labour takes the form of a commodity. The first describes the act of production itself, the second the potential to perform it. The value of the latter is simply the cost of reproduction of the labourer, the former has no value, but produces value itself. Surplus appropriation arises because labour-power is paid for at value on the market, whereas appropriation of all the value produced by that labour-power can take place. (The only rationale for purchasing the labour power is that this will be a greater amount.) This qualitative distinction between labour and labour-power, the activity itself on the one hand, and ownership of the potential to exercise it on the other, has been seen as Marx's way of expressing the fact that labour exists as a commodity in capitalist mode of production.

The quantitative distinction between labour-power and labour sets in motion the laws of capitalist accumulation which I outlined earlier, and which gives rise to the climax of Marx's volume one, the inversion at the heart of capitalist mode of production produced by the progress of the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation. The laws of motion of the value relations established by the commoditisation of labour result in the domination of dead labour over living, the worker becomes an appendage to the machine which is in turn merely a vehicle for the further accumulation of capital at the fastest possible rate.

Thus in contrast to the picture of individual sovereignty and freedom portrayed by the classical theorists, we arrive at a picture of universal collective submission to exploitation by the laws of motion of capital: an exploitation from which even the exploiters themselves are not free, for they must personify capital in order to survive. From the idea of production liberated from the aims of serving a ruling class we arrive at the total subordination of production to this end.

Is this 'inversion' not curiously reminiscent of the slippage between determinism and voluntarism which I argued above was characteristic of leap and logic theories? We commence with voluntarism, the idea that as sovereign controllers of their individual labour capacities,

people are free to do as they choose. We finish with an iron determinism: people are mere agents of the logic of capital accumulation. Nor is this result surprising: as I have already argued we started out from a 'definition' of capitalism in terms of the existence of labour power as a commodity, or with a historical point of departure: the arrival of the individual with private property.

It appears from this that Marx's work can be characterised as an inversion of the conclusions of classical political economists, and this has often been rooted in his account of primitive accumulation: the forcible expropriation of the direct producers from the means of production and subsistence in order to force them to sell their now 'free' labour-power. This account has been viewed as adding a historical perspective to capitalist mode of production which, showing its historical and class origins, also demonstrates that it is a class society which can be overthrown. Exploitation in capitalism is explained by the prior theft of the means of production from the producers.

But this inversion of the conclusions of classical political economists, now appears less of a distinctive development on the part of Marx, than the development of a contradiction inherent in the concept of individual sovereignty in production from the start.

What has appeared to be an analysis which goes beyond classical political economy, because of its insistence on the historically specific character of the commodity status of labour, and on the essential exploitation behind the appearance of freedom and equality, now appears as the elaboration of a contradiction internal to classical bourgeois thought itself.

How can we credit Marx with "adding a historical perspective" to classical political economy if the concept by which he is supposed to have achieved this was one central to classical political economy? The only distinction it seems possible to draw is not one between the presence and absence of the commodity status of labour and a labour theory of value, but between the significance attached to them. For Marx's difference amounts to the argument that once labour as a

commodity is sold (and employed) as opposed to owned and exercised by the original owner, its significance is inverted. But as our brief look at the early theorists showed, they did not believe this inversion to be a problem. The 'addition of historical perspective' through this inversion also appears to be less than it seems. It is more like the addition of a changed version of pre-history than a historical perspective proper. Has not Marx merely replaced Adam Smith's notion of a 'previous accumulation of capital' with his own account of primitive accumulation? The difference between them is only that the process described by Marx loads the terms of exchange against the labour commodity in capitalism. It cannot be considered as a historically adequate account of capitalism's genesis.

I want to argue that this was not Marx's project at all, and already we can begin to see why in terms of the problem of 'inversion'. For the 'inversion' of the conclusions of classical political economists which Marx is seen as producing can be seen to be contained in the original propositions which classical political economists put forward. This 'inversion' itself is a product of the 'leap and logic' method of the theory itself, and obscures rather than facilitates analysis of capitalist society. I shall argue that Marx's work can and should be seen as a rejection of the terms of this inversion because of its basis in a dubious theory of the commoditisation of labour: a theory which I will argue rests on the fetishes thrown up by capitalist mode of production, not the relations behind them. What he has been presented as doing, and what the problematic does, is to choose between the sides of the antimony presented by the inversion at the heart of the commodity status of labour. This produces all manner of confusion and problems which I now proceed to investigate by showing the origins of the labour process debate in the commoditisation of labour and the labour theory of value and thereby show how its shortcomings are attributable to its misreading of Marx's theory.

### 3.4 The Labour Theory of Value and the Labour Process Debate

In the previous section I have suggested that seeing the commodity status of labour as the historically specific feature of capitalist mode of production is unlikely to transcend the limits of classical political economy's thought. Rather than adding a missing historical perspective the idea of the commodity status of labour only elaborates a contradiction internal to bourgeois thought itself. That is the opposition between individual sovereignty and collective submission to laws of the market. This means it will be a poor starting point for analysing the social nature of production in capitalism. In this section I want to suggest that there are two versions of the labour theory of value which correspond to two approaches in the study of the labour process. Both start out from the commodity status of labour and as a result adopt a 'technicist' view of production. By 'technicist' I mean an inability to analyse the social nature of production beyond the recognition that productive activities considered technically, take place within social relations which are however historical.

The roots of technicism lie in the concept of commodity status of labour itself. As the account of Locke and Hobbes arguments above showed, the concept embodies the idea of personal sovereignty over ones own productive activity. This implies that production is an individual, not social affair. It is a technical relationship between the sovereign individual and nature, a question of use value only. If we can accept that the individual's labour is personal and private, owing no obligation to society, then we have the basis for a theory which explains price and distribution in terms of prior independent variable: production.

Marx may be seen as explaining these social relations of distribution, the terms of operation of the logic, the terms of exchange, by reference to production. The amount of labour in production determines the value of commodities and therefore their price, in a cause effect determinist relationship. For Dobb, Marx's task is that of:-

"explaining exchange in terms of production."

(1971 p9)

This version of the labour theory of value gives explanatory power at the cost of seeing the individual's labour as non-social, whereas pace the individualism of classical political economy's theorists, it is clearly socially determined as well as determining. This recognition lies behind the second type of labour theory of value, which sees production and distribution to be in a reciprocal relationship:-

"not only is labour time seen as the determinant of exchange value; exchange value is seen also as the determinant of labour time. That is, exchange values are in equilibrium, equal to socially necessary labour time embodied in commodities: and the distribution of total labour time between different commodities is regulated by the difference between market price and relative labour time requirements of different commodities.

(Elson 1979 p126)

The apparent problem with both these theories of value is their inability to cope with the social nature of production. If we argue that production determines exchange, that market forces are the epiphenomena of the real question of production, to which we attribute causal significance, we face the problem that market forces obviously do affect the course of production. It is difficult to see the latter as an independent variable. Indeed the labour theory of value was supposed to analyse the effects on the historical development of production of the social relations in which it takes place. Only a very technologically determinist position which views everything as an epiphenomena of the productive forces would be consistent. The problem for the second version of the theory is that it substitutes a purely circular mode of argument for the unacceptable monism it replaces. Is it labour time which determines exchange value (price) or vice-versa? It appears that if we let the sphere of circulation influence relations in the sphere of production we either fall into relativism or essentialism.

Both these versions use the commodity status of labour as the explanation of production's social character. They set out to analyse the nature of the social relations surrounding production, which arise of the basis of the apparent freedom of the individual from any social constraint on the use of his or her productive powers. These social relations are the value relations, the market forces of the commodity producing society which the

commodity status of labour establishes. Analysis of these relations appears to demonstrate that production does have a social and historical character after all. It is dominated by the laws of motion of capitalism, expressed in these market forces. The second version of the theory argues that these social relations, which at first surround the technical act of production, now come to react back upon and invade it, determining its development.

Both the versions are technicist, in that the social character of production becomes a question of social relations of distribution surrounding a technical production process whose nature is not considered.<sup>(26)</sup> The specific social character of capitalist mode of production gets reduced to the presence of quantitative value relations which commoditisation has established, which in the second version of the theory, are seen to control the direction of production itself, by controlling the distribution of people and resources as inputs to and outputs from the production process. Thus Rubin summarises the theory of the law of value in capitalist mode of production in the following way:

"The relation of labour to things refers to a given concrete form of labour and a given concrete thing. This is a technical relation which is not in itself, the subject of the theory of value. The subject matter of the theory of value is the inter-relations of various forms of labour in the process of their distribution, which is established through the relation of exchange among things."

".....the moving force which transforms the entire system of value originates in the material technical process of production.....social production relations.....are causally dependent on the material conditions of production and on the distribution of the technical means of production."

(Rubin 1972, p67, p66,p29)

Let me emphasise again. The only specific historical feature of production in capitalist mode of production that the labour theory of value based on the concept of commodity status of labour is able to posit is the presence of quantitative values which establish these relations of distribution. Corresponding to these two sides of the development of the commodity status of labour idea Marxist theories

have tried to show how these relations of distribution maximise the appropriation of surplus value, while orthodox theorists claim that efficiency, and rate of innovation are maximised. Since the existence of prices is the only historically specific feature of capitalist mode of production identified by commodity status of labour theories, it is unsurprising that all social relations become a question of quantity and distribution of use-values which have in themselves no social character.

These readings of Marx's value theory see historical perspective being provided by the recognition of a second 'aspect' to the value problem. In addition to the immediate quantitative matter of the terms of exchange, there is the 'qualitative' question of the very existence of quantitative exchange of commodities in the first place:

"Marx's theory of value was something more than a theory of value as generally conceived: it has the function not only of explaining exchange value or prices in a quantitative sense but of exhibiting the hisorico-social basis in the labour process of exchange - or commodity-society with labour power itself become a commodity."

(Dobb 1971 p. 11 emphasis mine)

In the concepts we have employed in chapter 2 we could re-phrase this as the laws at work in the logic of the mode of production on one hand (quantitative) and the conditions for a leap to a new logic on the other (qualitative). The following comment from Meek also makes clear that this reading of the labour theory of value also sees Marx's contribution as that of adding historical perspective to classical political economy:

"The qualitative aspect of the solution was directed to the questions: why do commodities possess price at all"

(Meek, 1967, p.10)

The following quote from Sweezy makes it clear that these theorists see the 'qualitative' value problem as representing the nature of the social relations between producers: their commodity status:-

"Commodity production .....is not the universal and inevitable form of economic life. It is rather one possible form of economic life.....No longer can the economist afford to confine his attention to the quantitative relations arising from commodity production: he must also direct his attention to the character of the social relations which underlie the commodity form. We may express this by saying that the tasks of economics are not only quantitative, they are also qualitative. More concretely, in the case of exchange value there is, as Adam Smith saw, the quantitative relation between products; hidden behind this, as Marx was the first to see, there is a specific, historically conditioned, relationship between producers." (Sweezy, 1968. p.25)

The weakness of such a historical perspective becomes clear when we ask how the 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' aspects of the theory are to be combined: how can we understand both the terms of operation of the social relations of production and the genesis of its existence. It seems there is only a choice between the technological determinism of the theory's first version (the proposition that the development of the forces of production in their technological aspect has fostered the development of commercialisation as well as determining the terms of exchange) and the converse proposition contained in the second: that social relations arise independently of the productive forces and in fact determine their development. We seem to face a choice between an unacceptable determinism which at least claims to offer explanations and a converse proposition that gives more influence to social relations in the development of production at the expense of being able to explain the existence of these social relations in the first place. We start out from the commodity rather than arrive at it!

These two theories of history lie behind the account of historical development of production in terms of tension between the forces and relations of production. Technology and production on one hand, and the social relations within which they exist on the other, are seen as separate factors to be brought into relationship.

Technology can be viewed as a structure of tasks defined by the material interchange with nature which it involves. This structure of tasks is itself not a social but a naturally defined phenomenon, a question of use value. We could call it a technical division of labour. Modes of production therefore depend on two factors. One is the level of development, higher or lower, of this structure of tasks: how great has been the development of the productive forces, the discovery of new means of

interchange with nature producing greater results and more powerful resources for future development. The other is the social means of distribution of labour to these tasks and distribution of the results of production to the producers: the social relations of distribution. This allows us to ask two questions. What is the relationship between the technical and the social: are the productive forces and relations of production in correspondence (and therefore together forming a logic of operation) or are they out of correspondence, in a state of dislocation, forcing a leap to a new state of correspondence. That is to say are the relations of production fostering or filtering the development of the forces of production. The second question to be posed is the direct of determination between these two factors: are the forces or relations of production to be taken as determinant.

If we search for the answer to this question in the labour process debate, we find two answers. These correspond to the two labour theories of value we have discussed.

The first answer expressed at its crudest in the work of Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism (1938) is the orthodox technological determinist thesis that the development of the forces of production is the ultimate 'motor' or history: the material foundation for different modes of production constituted by the bringing into correspondence with technological developments of new relations of production.

The second answer, best developed in the work of Braverman, is to reassert class struggle as the motor of history, and to insist that the nature of the development of the production forces is itself determined by social relations. Braverman's work is thus, explicitly, an attack on the technologically determinist, productivist thesis. The point of departure for this attack is Marx's theory of real subordination of labour: the argument that work under capitalism is not a neutral technical affair but takes along with the material technical structure of production itself, a historically specific capitalist form.

Insofar as it corresponds to the second version of the labour theory of value, Braverman's work will have to overcome two problems. The first

is the circularity of explanation between production relations and exchange relations. The second is the problem of starting out from the social relations of production, in terms of the relations established by commoditisation, when it is these very relations that remain to be explained. The third is the problem of technicism. I have argued that commodity status of labour and labour theory of value arguments contain the assumption that production is at heart, 'technically' defined, independently of its social form:

"the labour process as a material mechanism is dominated by the physical laws of nature and technology."

(Althusser, 1975 p171)

It is surely difficult to square such an assumption with the aim of demonstrating, on the contrary, the social nature of the labour process in capitalist mode of production behind its neutral technical appearance. Braverman's answer, as I intend to show, mirrors the labour theory of value's formulation that the social relations surrounding production come to invade it. Braverman's problem however is to put any empirical content into this formula, especially if the second problem remains unresolved.

Finally, Braverman will face the problem of 'historical' perspective of uniting his account of the social nature of production with its evolution from other forms, in a non technologically determinist fashion.

It will come as no surprise that I think Braverman fails on all these scores and ends up repeating the errors and failures of the theory of value as I have mentioned here. The point of my argument is to lay bare the roots of the labour process debate's inadequacies in its adherence to the idea of the commodity status of labour and the leap and logic analyses it produces. The structure of Braverman's work is wrecked by irresoluble contradictions because he pushes his anti-technicist aim from a theory (of commodity status of labour) which is definitely technicist and ahistorical.

What I have tried to show here is that arguments which start out from the commodity status of labour, and what amounts to the same thing, a labour theory of value, are products of 'technicist' ways of thinking about

production. Because they separate our the technical and social aspects of production they make it very difficult to avoid technological determinism on the one hand, or the obverse position that technology is the product of social relations whose material content (because it nowhere forms part of the argument) is impossible to grasp. Braverman is unable to produce an adequate account of the social character of work and the development of the productive forces in capitalism because he remains trapped within these ideas.

My aim in what follows is not to criticise Braverman's work for the sake of criticising it. Rather it is to take his work as an example of how limited a conception of the capitalist mode of production is possible if we remain a prisoner of commodity status of labour analyses. It is to make the case for jettisoning many established interpretations of Marx's work and searching for complete alternatives, rather than trying to bale out unacceptable theories by heaping qualifications and caveats around what we propose. I hope to show that what is required is not the empirical or theoretical refinement of the debate, but a transformation in its entire orientation and point of departure.

### 3.5. Braverman's work: Labour and Monopoly Capital

In view of the criticisms which I intend to make of Braverman's work, I should make clear at the start that I consider his work preferable by far to the technological determinists, those theorists of industrial relations who simply take technology as a 'given' factor or exogenous variable, and the mechanical Marxists he sets out to attack. I am in complete sympathy with the subject of the attack and his aim in making it: to demonstrate the social nature of technology and from that to examine the nature of capitalism as a mode of production in the sense in which I have defined the term. Indeed it seems to me that Braverman's conclusions are often sounder than his analyses and arguments, and certainly where the theoretical implications of his work appear unacceptable he

himself draws back and points to qualifications to his thesis.

For example his footnote on industrial democracy and workers control (1974 pp 445-6) is quite admirable. He makes two central points which this thesis also seeks to establish:

- 1) formal structures of egalitarian decision making in industry are quite illusory if the issue of the nature of technology, science and expertise go unchallenged.
- 2) Marx's whole project can be seen in terms of 'workers control' and it is modern theorists inability to understand Marx, rather than any 'silence' on his part, that accounts for the idea that workers control goes 'beyond' Marxism, though it certainly goes farther than its Stalinist or technologically determinist ramifications.

The problem becomes one of putting an empirical content to these two statements which Braverman's approach makes it difficult to do.

However acceptable theoretical deficiencies may have been in Braverman's hands, I think they have had truly awful consequences when developed, or rather aggravated by those who have followed. I think much of the labour process debate has produced and fed on the worst aspects of these theoretical confusions. Consequently empirical studies and practical conclusions abound which are exceedingly harmful and misleading when they are not nonsense: in particular 'leap and logic' type analyses of the worst order occur often.

In the remainder of this section I outline Braverman's argument. In the next section I consider some of the problems it gives rise to. In the final section I try to show that these deficiencies can all be seen as a product of Braverman's starting point. Chapter four proceeds to develop an alternative point of departure for the analysis of capitalism as a mode of production.

- a) Two aims behind Braverman's work.

Braverman makes it quite clear in his introduction that the aim of the work

is to establish that work and technology in capitalist mode of production take on a specifically capitalist form. There are two reasons for wanting to establish this. One is to explain the explosion of interest in participation and humanisation of work schemes. These schemes are seen as rooted in the real causes of 'alienation' in the capitalist work process: the capitalist nature of work itself. However these schemes refuse to address this problem because in fact, they are there only to defuse worker resistance by homeopathic palliative measures and habituate the workers to their own exploitation. His aim here is to show that the capitalist nature of work is not a question of levels of income or prospects for mobility as the theorists of the 'end of ideology' imply, but of the technical nature of that work itself: ideology is as relevant as ever despite the apparent mass prosperity produced by the post-war boom. Braverman's aim is to show that exploitation is not a question of the rate of wages but the existence of the wage labour relations and the production relations it produces. The second reason is to counter technologically determinist arguments, of which those of the end of ideology theorists themselves are a variety. Against those theorists of 'convergence' between Soviet Russia and the capitalist West who argue that industrialisation itself must give rise to the similar forms of work and technology found in the East and West, Braverman argues that these similarities only prove the limited character of the change in social relations in Russia. The other technological determinists Braverman wishes to challenge are Marxist ones: those such as Stalin, who have reduced human history to the epiphenomena of the progress of the productive forces and have therefore adopted precisely that uncritical attitude to the development of technology which has choked off the true development of socialism in Soviet Russia.

#### b) Technology as the product of social relations

Braverman therefore argues that his aim is to produce:

"concrete and historically specific analysis of technology and machinery on the one side, and social relations on the other, and of the manner in which these two come together in existing societies.....Within the historical and analytical limits of capitalism, according to Marx's analysis, technology instead of simply producing social relations, is produced by the social relation represented by capital."

Braverman reverses the terms of the orthodox, technologically determinist interpretation of Marx and asserts the primacy of social relations. What are these social relations? Braverman sees these as the process of commoditisation: the generalisation of the commodity form of labour on the one side and units of capital subject to the pressures of accumulation which I outlined above (p.57) on the other:

".....the first volume of Capital may be considered a massive essay on how the commodity form, in an adequate social and technological setting, matures into the form of capital, and how the social form of capital, driven to incessant accumulation as the condition for its own existence, completely transforms technology".

(1974, p20)

In contrast to the idea that capital is a 'thing', a question of the development of the productive forces:

"the handmill gives you society with the feudal lord, the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist."

(Marx and Engels, 1976 p166)

Braverman sees capital as a relation: the social form which transforms the production process and the position of the worker - it becomes the material incarnation of the purely social relations of which capitalist mode of production consists.

Braverman defines the specifically human character of labour as conscious and purposive: in contrast to animal activity it involves a relationship between conception on the one hand and execution on the other. This relationship poses the potential, once a division of labour arises that "the unity of conception and execution may be dissolved. The conception must still precede and govern execution, but the idea as conceived by one may be executed by another.....the unity between the two maybe broken in the individual and reasserted in the group, the workshop, the community, the society as a whole." (p50-51)

Braverman (claiming Marx as his authority) defines 'labour-power' as 'the human capacity to perform work.' As such it is indeterminate (this expresses our point (ch.2) above that any concept of mode of production

must grasp the fluidity of labour) and can take different social forms. Braverman argues explicitly (1974 p 52 ff) that capitalist mode of production's "differentia specifica is the purchase and sale of labour power." This results from the divorce of the direct producers from the means of production, the freedom of the direct producers to dispose of their labour power as they choose, and:

"Third, the purpose of the employment of the worker becomes the expansion of a unit of capital belonging to the employer, who is thus functioning as a capitalist."

The fact that labour power exists as a commodity purchased by capital in order to further expand itself means that the labour process and the process of production and development of technology can no longer be considered as a technical process, a production of use-values:

"It has become, in addition, a process of accumulation of capital. And, moreover, it is the latter aspect which dominates in the mind and activities of the capitalist, into whose hands control over the labour process has passed. In everything that follows, therefore, we shall be considering the manner in which the labour process is dominated and shaped by the accumulation of capital."

(1974, p53)

We can see from this that Braverman's argument is rooted in a commodity status of labour analysis. On the basis of the sale and purchase of peoples labour powers arises their collective submission to the domination of value relations established by the process of commoditisation. What Braverman has added is the idea that this domination extends to the use value aspect of the production process itself: value comes to dominate use-value.

### c) The problem of management

However, this domination is not effected automatically, for the very reason for which capital requires labour-power (its fluidity, its ability to produce use-value and therefore expand value,) prevents the capitalists owning and controlling it as they would inanimate commodities:

"one cannot endow another with one's own capacity for work, no matter what price.....the worker does not surrender his or her capacity for work. The worker retains it, and the capitalist can take advantage only by setting the worker to work.....what the worker sells, and what the capitalist buys, is not an agreed amount of labour, but the power to labour over an agreed period of time."

(1974, p.84)

This is the problematic side of the 'fluidity of labour' for capital: it is the problem of management of labour. Capital must translate its 'right to manage', its 'formal' subordination of labour which emerges directly out of its commodity status into the ability to manage and a real subordination of labour in which all the workers' capacity for labour is directed towards the valorisation of capital. It must translate ownership into control. This latter point is the good side of the fluidity of labour for capital: for once owned and controlled by capital the fluidity of labour becomes the variable aspect of capital: the basis of its self-expansion and accumulation.

This is the horns of the dilemma which the capitalist faces. It is worth citing Braverman's exposition of it precisely:

"From the point of view of the capitalist, this many-sided potentiality of humans in society is the basis upon which is built the enlargement of his capital."

".....it is also this quality, by its very indeterminacy, which places before him his greatest challenge and problem. The coin of labour has its obverse side: in purchasing labor power that can do much, he is at the same time purchasing an undefined quality and quantity. What he buys is infinite in potential, but in its realisation it is limited....."

"Having been forced to sell their labor power to another, the workers also surrender their interest in the labor process, which has now been "alienated." The labour process has become the responsibility of the capitalist.

(emphasis in original)

(1974, pp56-7)

Thus if the fluidity of labour is the source of dynamism in the capitalist system, it is also the source of uncertainty and instability. This uncertainty and instability must be removed by the capitalist by taking

greater control over the labour process. This greater control is simultaneously the achievement of greater efficiency in extracting more labour and therefore more useful effects and therefore more value, from a given amount of labour-power.

Securing such control is made possible by the potential to divorce conception from execution in labour power once a division of labour has been established. The capitalists, as purchasers, owners and therefore controllers reserve for themselves the powers of conception, and leave to the workers the task of execution. Braverman points out that 'functions of management were brought into being by the very practice of cooperative labour' (1974, p 59) but in capitalist mode of production "The capitalist assumed these functions as manager by virtue of his ownership of capital." (p60)

#### d) The real subordination of labour

As I mentioned above (p58) the drive to exploit labour in capitalist mode of production is liberated from the limitations of the immediate needs of the ruling class. Rather than coordinating or directing a given labour process to a given end (Braverman cites the example of the construction of the pyramids) management by capital in the capitalist mode of production also has the aim of transforming the labour process (and the means of production used in that process and so the entire mode of production) so as to maximise the production of value. The immediate use-values in which such value is embodied are of little concern to the capitalist. This means that the 'conception' must embrace what the production process itself is to be (its aim is no longer the production of specific use-values as such but rather whatever use-values will maximise the realisation of value) and how it is to be executed, once it must ensure that all the labour power purchased maximises its contribution to this process of valorisation. It does this by transforming the labour process in such a way that the technology used controls the worker and limits the exercise of his or her labour power to the execution of the valorisation process that management has conceived.

The social nature of the labour process means that it must embody relations of conflict between the sellers of labour power, who do not wish to alienate their own creative powers, and the purchasers of labour power, whose only desire is to maximise the subordination of these powers to the requirements of the self expansion of capital:

".....new social relations.....now frame the production process and the antagonism between those who carry on the process and those for whose benefit it is carried on, those who manage and those who execute, those who bring to the factory their labour power, and those who undertake to extract from this labor power the maximum advantage for the capitalist."

(Braverman 1974, p69)

In the real subordination of labour, where capital has taken over the production process itself, as well as the social relations surrounding it, the technological structure of the production process itself expresses the antagonism.

e) The detail division of labour in capitalist mode of production

One final component in Braverman's argument is necessary, and we have the basis for his entire theory. This is the proposition that as soon as labour power becomes a commodity, the process of valorisation will maximise the detail division of labour (the divorce of conception and execution at the level of the individual job) to the extent that:

"a structure is given to all labour processes that at its extremes polarises those whose times are infinitely valuable, and those whose time is worth nothing. This might even be called the general law of the capitalist division of labour"

(1974, p83)

Again claiming Marx as his authority Braverman draws a distinction between the social and detail division of labour. The first refers to the existence of branches of production: coalmining and fishing for example, and is a division of labour that is transhistorical. The second refers to the division of labour within a particular occupation and is a direct product of the commodity status of labour. The two divisions are contrasted both by the nature of their organisation and their effects:

"In capitalism, the social division of labor is enforced chaotically and anarchically by the market, while the workshop division of labor is imposed by planning and control. Again in capitalism, the products of the social division of labor are exchanged as commodities, while the results of the operation of the detail worker are not exchanged within the factory as within a marketplace, but are all owned by the same capital. While the social division of labour subdivides society, the detailed division of labor subdivides humans, and while the subdivision of society may enhance the individual and the species, the subdivision of the individual, when carried on without regard to human capabilities and needs, is a crime against the person and against humanity."

(Emphasis in original)

(1974, p.73)

The detail division of labour is a specifically capitalist phenomenon:

"it is not 'pure technique' that concerns us, but rather the special needs of capitalism."

(p.75)

It involves the separation of the process of execution into its separate constituent parts and the allocation of each of these parts to a separate worker:. The succession of separate tasks which the craftsmen formerly performed in sequence is now performed in sequence by different workers. This has two effects. Firstly, it enhances the capitalists' control of the process because his role of conception and coordination is more necessary, whereas the detail workers know correspondingly less about the process as a whole and how to organise it themselves:

"in destroying the craft as a process under the control of the worker, he reconstitutes it as a process under his own control."

(p.78)

Secondly, it cheapens labour power because the capitalist will pay less for those parts which are now less skilled. The labour process is now performed by a hierarchy of labour powers, each progressively cheaper, while before the capitalist paid for the most expensive sort to perform not only those aspects which only it was capable of, but all the other aspects too. Braverman takes his argument directly from Adam Smith, but makes it clear that a vital presupposition is "a society based on the

sale and purchase of labour power. (p.80) Braverman does not want to make the link between hierarchy and efficiency transhistorical: it is particular to capitalist mode of production. Its overall effect is to produce a labour process and production process peculiar to capitalism in which all powers of conception, all knowledge of the process as a whole, all expertise is concentrated at one end in capitalist management, and at the other end labour power is deskilled and reduced to the mere execution of the simplest possible details of operation in order to minimise its ability to control and its price. Hence we have the structure as described in his page 83 quote cited above.

f) The work as a whole

The whole of the rest of the book is an elaboration of this argument, and its situation in an empirical and historical context, drawing on historical and statistical data from the U.S.A. The theory and practice of Taylorism is analysed and described as the procedure whereby capital appropriates all conception of the process of production (including the design of the technology and exact instructions to the workforce about how it must be used) while the workforce itself is deskilled by virtue of the detail operations left to it. The formal subordination of labour, and formal right to manage and control labour, the requirement to subordinate the material nature of the production process as a technical process of production producing things, use-values, to the production realisation and expansion of value which is implied in the commoditisation of labour becomes real subordination once the Taylorist application of science and technology give rise to a production process which in its very technical and material structure forces the worker to valorise capital as the sole object of the production process. The social relations which surround the technical process of production, within which production takes place have come to dominate that process and invade the technical aspect of production itself.

"The subjective factor of the labour process is removed to a place among its inanimate objective factors.....the process is henceforth carried out by management as the sole subjective element.

(1974, p.171-2)

The climax of this process is reached where the 'inversion' at the heart of capitalist society (the domination of the means of production over the direct producer) becomes manifest in the technical process of production itself:

"Considered only in their physical aspect, machines are nothing but developed instruments of production whereby humankind increases the effectiveness of its labour.... Once labour has been embodied in instruments of production and enters the further processes of labour to play its role there, it may be called, following Marx, dead labour, to distinguish it from living labour.....As such a purely physical process, its terms are as clear as the relation between the first axes or potters wheels and the men and women who used them.

But within the framework of capitalist social relations all this is reversed. The means of production become the property of the capitalist and thus past or dead labour takes the form of capital. The purely physical relationship assumes the social form given to it by capitalism and itself begins to be altered. The ideal to which capitalism strives is the domination of dead labour over living labour. ....as capitalism develops machinery and makes use of its every suitable technical peculiarity for for its own ends, it brings into being this system of domination of living by dead labor, not just as an allegorical expression, not just as the domination of wealth over poverty, of employer over employed, or of capital over labour in the sense of financial or power relationships, but as a physical fact.....(machinery) seen in human eyes to act for themselves and out of their own inner necessities. These necessities are called 'technical needs,' 'machine characteristics', the requirements of 'efficiency', but by and large they are the exigencies of capital and not of technique."

(1974 pp 227-228, 230)

Thus the value relations established in capitalism on the basis of the commodity form become the material shape of the production process itself: the division of labour, the divorce of conception from execution, the unity of efficiency and control and their subordination to the maximisation of the rate of capital accumulation arise from this form itself.

Braverman proceeds to analyse the process across as well as within branches of production and units of capital: the relationship is a reciprocally reinforcing one. Competition generalises the pressures to accumulate across capitals, and fosters the further development of real subord-

ination; this itself makes labour more and more free to move between capitals and branches of production. Braverman's analysis reveals itself as the reflexion at the level of the labour process in the individual capital, of the progress of the general law of capital accumulation at the level of the mode of production as a whole, as outlined by Marx.

The situation described by Braverman in terms of Taylorism and deskilling, is termed by Marx the real as opposed to formal subordination of labour. It is achieved when capital controls labour through the process of production itself. Its technical design leaves no space to the worker to do anything but valorise capital. The worker becomes the object, not the subject, of the production process.

Braverman himself completes his analysis with the demonstration of how the general law of capitalist accumulation applies to modern American conditions, and how as labour is deskilled, it gets sloughed off as the variable, fluid aspect of capital to new branches of production which are relatively less mechanised:

"The result is not the elimination of labour but its displacement to other occupations and industries....  
 ....The paradox that the most rapidly growing mass occupations in an era of the scientific-technical revolution are those which have the least to do with science and technology need not surprise us."

(p.171, p.384)

I have cited Braverman's argument at length, and as far as possible, in his own words. I think it repays careful attention because its aims are laudable and its conclusions appear to provide a vivid critique of the ideology of the inexorably benevolent nature of technical progress in capitalism. However, I think that Braverman's theory is internally contradictory, takes a 'leap and logic' approach to the paradox of the mode of production, starts out from rather than deciphers the fetish of social relations that makes capitalist mode of production not immediately visible, and produces conclusions for class strategy and the potential for changing social relations of production either between or within the modes of production that are useless. It inadvertently lends weight to the non-progressive thesis that worker organisation within capitalism

is necessarily a barrier to efficiency and unwittingly reproduces the arguments of traditional industrial relations theory in a barely altered form. I will now try to show that because it starts out from capitalist ideology, (in the form of the proposition that labour in capitalist society takes the form of a commodity) it ends up analysing the fetishism thrown up by capitalism, rather than the real relations behind it.

### 3.6 Contradictions in Braverman's analysis

I want to suggest that the way Braverman tries to develop an account of the social nature of technology from a technicist theoretical framework leaves him with an account of the relationship between the forces and relations of production, between use value and value, between production and the social form which is riddled with contradictions.

The existence of contradictions is not what I wish to question. Indeed in ch. 2 I have argued that grasping the contradictory nature of social relationships is a vital part of analysing the process of historical change. The point at issue is the nature of the contradictions. I hope to demonstrate that Braverman's contradictions are 'leap and logic' ones. That is to say they have no empirical limits and imply mutually exclusive development. It is this situation that underlies the phenomena of reversibility and qualification I outlined above. Reversibility occurs because the contradictions can be invested with diametrically opposed significances. Qualification occurs because it is necessary to qualify the purely theoretical and logical nature of the contradictions to enable them to bear any relation to empirical history at all. The following sections illustrate this situation in Braverman's work.

#### 3.6.1. The nature of the productive forces

One way this contradiction is expressed is in the conclusions to be drawn from his theory about the nature of the productive forces and their constant revolutionising in capitalist mode of production. They appear to have both a benevolent and malevolent role, which it is difficult to reconcile. Thus Braverman stresses that in terms of use value the development of the productive forces, irrespective of their social form, express a 'physical' relationship between man and nature: the development of more powerful, more efficient ways of appropriating nature to produce useful effects. (see 1974, p.227, quoted in my

summary of Braverman above p.93 ). In this light the development of the productive forces is not only desirable it is an absolutely necessary precondition for the development of a socialist mode of production and the relative material abundance this presupposes. Socialism cannot turn its back on the productive forces. But on the other hand, this march of the productive forces, once we consider their social form, their material embodiment of the capitalist relations of production, their incarnation of the real subordination of the worker and absolute dedication to the single goal of valorisation, appears as purely malevolent. Hence the accusation has been levelled at Braverman that he is a 'neo-Luddite', because it is such productive forces which, if they are the basis of capitalist exploitation, and control, must be dismantled if new social relations of production are to be established. (27)

The only way to resolve this global contradiction appears to be formulas of the sort: 'the development of the productive forces themselves is progressive, but they must be liberated from their capitalist social form.' The problem with this is, of course, that Braverman's whole argument is that the technology and the social form is the same thing! Capitalist technology is the material incarnation of social relations. Thus the whole analysis of the nature of the transition to a new mode of production appears to crumble: on the one hand new social relations of production appear as a requisite, but on what basis are they to be constructed? On the other it appears that we simultaneously require a complete revolution in the technology and productive forces (given that present technology is an incarnation of capitalist social relations.) Not only does this present the prospect of a dramatic break in history which appears empirically implausible and difficult to conceptualise, it makes a mockery of claiming any scientific or material basis for the arrival of a socialist mode of production: its prospects now appear to depend on an effort of will. We jump from a determinist analysis of the capitalist mode of production to a voluntarist analysis of the possibilities of socialism.

Another 'reversal' is contained in these propositions. Social relations<sup>and technology</sup> are seen as two separate factors which fuse in the real subordination

of labour, and are expressed in the material form of the technology (which Braverman has already defined as expressing a physical relationship between man and nature). This must mean that orthodox arguments that authority in the production process arises from the technical requirements of production itself are in fact correct.

No practical political strategy for tackling 'new technology' or the development of the forces of production can be devised from this theory. Is new technology to be accepted (or welcomed) as part of the progress of the level of the productive forces which, for the moment, are in capitalist hands, but pave the way for a socialist morrow? Or is it to be opposed as another stage in the drive to maximise the subordination of labour and defeat any vestiges of skill or control labour has left? As I argue below, it is no accident that Braverman considers the working class as object rather than subject, as solely a 'class-in-itself' in his work, and when called upon to deal with the question of strategy, analyses this purely at the level of consciousness and not material action.

Because 'deskilling' theory views the contradictory potential of the productive forces as a progressive content in a reactionary form, it cannot produce any immediate concrete strategy. It also fails to grasp the complex nature of the effects on introducing new technology. For in many cases new technology does mean 're-skilling' or the development of a new division of labour with more pleasant and less boring monotonous jobs. To say this does not mean accepting the capitalist thesis that new technology is inexorably enlightening, benevolent and progressive. It does mean that it is an inadequate response to simply invert this contention.

Braverman's problem with technology is a function of his 'leap and logic' concept of contradiction, which cannot grasp the contradictory nature of technology or production within capitalism, its potential for development and constraint on development, except in global correspondence and dislocation terms. Thus the contradiction becomes one of the authoritarian aspect of the productive forces in terms of their

social form, and progressive aspect in terms of the material abundance they have the potential to produce (the march of the productive forces). These are abstract contradictions which the abstract notion of a leap to a new logic can solve, but which empirically become quite unfathomable if we look at possible practical conclusions.

Instead we are presented with an analysis which suggests that the forces of production are both in absolute correspondence and total dislocation with the relations of production. The first aspect of the relation is expressed by the existence of the real subordination of labour and the logic of capital accumulation. The second aspect is explained by the existence of crisis and class struggle between labour and capital. What Braverman's inability to produce a practical material strategy in capitalism shows is that his theory can conceive of this contradiction only as a global and total one. Partial resolutions are not possible: Braverman has to make much use of the in-itself/for-itself class distinction, because the only preparation which the class-in-itself can make to resolve the contradictions is to prepare itself, at the level of consciousness as a class-for-itself. What this expresses is the leap and logic theory of history I criticised earlier.

One way of illustrating the relationship I am proposing between the technological and the social, is to consider the argument found in a variety of forms that modern society is characterised by the over-development of society's technological capabilities and the impoverishment of its ability to handle these on the other, and use them well. Thus the ability to build vast nuclear arsenals may be contrasted with widespread famine and disease. This is sometimes presented in the form of the argument that science and technology are being abused by the class system in which they are located. Or it maybe argued that these problems occur because the level of development of the technical productive forces has outstripped the social relations of production and are thereby fettered or deserted by them.

These arguments surely depend on the separation of the technical from the social that we have set out to reject, and I think that because of

this they can be improved upon. Both depend on the idea that technology, scientific expertise, the forces of production, are an independent, neutral entity, and their relation to the 'social' is a question of how much their development is fostered or frustrated, how much they are used and to what purpose: they are a resource which different classes can use or abuse, squander or cultivate. But this is surely not the case. It is inadequate to see the productive forces as a resource that can be applied at will to various ends, 'good' or 'bad'. Rather the potential for their application is contained in the social circumstances of their own development. It is not a contrast that ought to be drawn between social relations and technology, but rather an examination of their inseparable relationship. It is because science and technology have been developed in a particular way that we have nuclear arsenals on the one hand and famine on the other. It is not a question of measuring the higher or lower level of the productive forces but of grasping the alternative potentials for development in the concrete social form they take. Thus the mass of technology with which we currently work has built into it all sorts of assumptions about the relations of authority of those who work with it : the assembly line is only the most stark example of this. No matter how dramatically we may choose to revolutionise the social relations 'surrounding' that assembly line, the immediate social relations on that line itself remain unaltered until its technical form is reorganised too. What I hope to show in section 8 below is that Braverman's analysis assumes the ability to rank levels of technology and skills in an unproblematic way.

### 3.6.2 The role of management

The issue of the role played by management as agents, or otherwise, of capital is a central one for the analysing of the mode of production and issues of industrial democracy. To borrow Marglin's phrase, the issue of "What do bosses do?" is a vital starting point for tackling the issue of 'What could worker bosses do differently?' However, in Braverman's work and in the labour process debate generally we find

the same set of contradictions as we encountered in the issue of technology. Nor should this be surprising: for the twin role of management appears as the developer of the forces of production in a technical sense, and the enforcer of capitalist relations of production in a social sense. We face again the same problem of separation and identity of these two aspects. For the purposes of the present discussion I shall follow Braverman's assumption that management and capital are virtually synonymous: that managers are simply the empirical representatives of capital in general. This is quite consistent with Braverman's use of the dichotomy of class-in-itself and for itself. The role of management will be defined for it by its class position, even if individual managers subjectively reject or question this. I have already indicated my dissatisfaction with this approach, and the issue of the distinction between capital and management is one I will turn to in ch. 5. At present I will continue to treat 'management' and 'capital' as identical, as the differences become really significant only once we have dealt with Braverman's work as whole.

Management appears in Braverman's work alternatively as a mere cypher, a trigger of the laws of motion of capitalist society whose actions are determined elsewhere, and as omnipotent, the real controller and director of all that goes on in the mode of production.

Management appears as a cypher in Braverman because it appears that its concrete actions in each unit of capital are in reality determined by the relations of production in which these units are situated. Market forces and competition force each particular capital to valorise itself and accumulate as fast as possible in order to survive. They, therefore force management in each of these units to pursue policies which foster that process of accumulation of labour in order to maximise valorisation, and this will involve deskilling and the development of science and technology to promote this. Its actions appear to be as determined by the overall development of value relations in capitalist mode of production as the labour which it controls.

However, management also appears as the only factor in the analysis of

the mode of production which is not subordinated and controlled, but rather subordinates and controls. Is it not dominant, in the process of production which it has itself designed and created, using the pool of expertise, powers of science and knowledge of the production as it has removed them from labour? Has it not found, in Taylorism, the ability to totally control what goes on at the point of production, and concentrate all power to develop this for its own interests in the future. Nor is it only in the theory of Taylorism, the real subordination of labour and deskilling that we find this proposition. We find it in Weber's theory of bureaucracy too:

"Superior to bureaucracy in the knowledge of techniques and facts is only the capitalist entrepreneur, within his own sphere of interest."

(Weber, 1978, p.275)

It could be argued that Weber's theory of 'bureaucracy' can be considered to be virtually identical to Braverman's presentation of Marx's theory of the real subordination of labour. (28)

This antimony between management as cypher and omnipotent manifests itself in a number of ways, and of course presents further problems when we try to follow through Braverman's way of linking the social and the technical.

The concept of management as cypher appears to express the 'determinist' side of the paradox of the mode of production. It personifies capital because its actions are determined by the laws of motion by which we understand the mode of production in the first place. From this aspect the prospect of 'worker bosses' acting differently from traditional management appears impossible: they will be forced to do the same things by the same laws as determine the actions of present-day management. We can see here the basis of the incorporation approach.

Conversely, if we see management as vital and omnipotent in its control of the production process, it appears that a proper strategy is to 'capture' management positions in order to gain access to its vital expertise on how to organise production, and in order to use the power

afforded by this position to change the course of the development of production away from that of the progressively greater subordination of labour. We have here the voluntarist side of the paradox.

From one perspective management appears as a dispensable parasitic exploiter, whose only role is to enforce the capitalist social relations of production, to develop and enforce the capitalist form of work while labour actually produces the use value and therefore value which capital appropriates and turns against it: it appears that management can simply be abolished as a tyrant who is even worse than the feudal lord of pre-capitalist society, because its demands for surplus value and surplus labour are no longer restricted to its immediate needs, but are literally limitless.

From the other perspective management appears as the technocracy, indispensable to the process of production (in contrast to the feudal lord who merely appropriated parts of its end results) and indeed playing a progressive role insofar as developing the forces of production is a necessary prerequisite of the transition to socialism itself. From this perspective the goal must be to 'capture' management, because now it appears quite utopian to 'abolish' it given its vital part in the organisation of the production process itself. (29)

We thus face the same set of contradictions as with technology: and Braverman's conclusion that social relations dominate and invade production directly makes any resolution of this contradiction, except in leap and logic form, quite impossible. For example, we cannot divorce management's 'progressive' technocratic role from its 'reactionary' capitalist form for this technocracy itself is seen to embody value relations and social relations. We cannot separate out these two elements, just as we cannot separate out authority arising from the needs of production itself and from its capitalist form. As Marx comments:

"Even though we have considered the process of production from two distinct points of view: (1) as labour process (2) as valorisation process, it is nevertheless implicit that the labour process is single and indivisible. The work is not done twice over, once to produce a suitable product, a use value, to transform the means of production into products, and a second time to generate value and surplus value, to valorise value."

(Marx, 1976, p.991)

It is in this set of leap and logic contradictions that some theorists have set out to examine the 'contradictory class location' of white collar workers. A similar thrust lies behind most efforts to determine who is and who is not a 'productive' labourer. The contradictions of people's class locations arise because according to whether we examine their technical role in the production process from a use value perspective, or their part in the social relations of production from the perspective of value relations and the accumulation of capital, they appear correspondingly as progressive or regressive, boss or bossed, productive or unproductive. From the approach I've taken, it can be seen that I see no value in such debates. Any 'contradictory class location' applies as much to deskilled manual workers and boards of directors as to the ranks between them. The contradiction which these approaches try to grasp is that between some 'real' productive role that people occupy in production (which is held to make them members of the working class) and some degraded capitalist function that these same people occupy by virtue of the capitalist form of this productive role. But like the rest of Braverman's contradictions, this is one that cannot be empirically fixed or practically challenged. The two roles cannot be distinguished if the technical and social are bound up together.

### 3.6.3 The role of labour

A corresponding set of antinomies underlies Braverman's approach to labour. This can best be seen in the way in which he sees 'the problem of management'<sup>(30)</sup> and its solution as the same process. On the one

hand labour is what capital would prefer to do without: it is the source of uncertainty in production and of the antagonistic relations of production. It resists capitals' attempts to develop a real subordination of labour. To use Lukacs' classic formulation, the worker appears as a mere source of error in the production process. It is towards this problem that Taylorism, the real subordination of labour and deskilling is addressed, the aim being to avoid as far as possible any dependence on labour whatsoever, and to constrain labour to do nothing but what management has prepared for it. In the face of this all worker organisation and action appears as a restrictive and reactionary defence against managements' aims of efficiency and competitiveness. However, once capital has achieved a real subordination of labour this appears to be a minor problem for it leaves labour quite powerless. As Braverman makes clear it has only the potential at the level of consciousness, to organise as a class for itself to overthrow the system as a whole, not materially affect its present organisation. The other side of capital's omnipotence is labour's impotence in the face of the capitalist control of work.

But on the other hand labour appears as absolutely vital to capital. The dream of the automatic factory independent of reliance on labour's recalcitrance remains a dream because labour is also the variable aspect of capital. It is the source of value, capital cannot be accumulated without it: no matter how real the subordination of labour it can never lead, as Braverman himself stresses, to its elimination. It is precisely because capital needs labour that it also requires its subordination. Once deskilling has transformed managements' right to manage into its ability to do so, what appeared as a problem, is now the heart of the whole process - the expansion of value and capital achieved by employing labour.

This is surely one of the central contradictions at the heart of Braverman's work, which he never attempts to resolve. From the point of view of control and accumulation, capital's interests appear to rely on maximising the real subordination of labour, the amassing in its own hands (via technology) of all powers of conception and all direction of the process. But what does this express but the minimisation of reliance on the very value creating powers of labour, the appropriation of

which in order to valorise and accumulate capital was the original raison d'être of the whole process. The paradox about the problem of management being its solution, which Braverman himself points up, is unproblematically resolved in favour of capital by Braverman. But the contradiction must work both ways. The 'solution' is also the problem. I want to deal with this problem more fully in the context of a discussion of efficiency and control, and so I shall leave more detailed consideration of this argument till then. For the moment it is worth pointing out one side effect of this contradiction which we have already noted in passing: the question of the survival of skill and a formal subordination of labour within capitalist mode of production itself. It is unclear whether the existence of areas of skilled work in capitalist mode of production is to be taken as a 'feudal remnant', an enclave of a previous mode of production which the logic of capitalist social relations has yet to reach. Or does it signify the successful resistance of labour to the real subordination of labour, the rolling back of capitalist control and the embryo of future workers control?

We can think of the presence of areas of formal subordination of labour in terms of the existence of a 'frontier of control', which raises a second dimension to the antimony. If areas of formal subordination of labour do exist, does this represent a real unity of conception and execution, a real achievement of workers control (irrespective of whether this control is seen as a remnant of things past or portent of things to come) or does it represent a merely apparent development, which in reality consists of the incorporation of workers into a capitalist decision making system.

Braverman's theory requires that skilled labour is portrayed both as commoditised and as non-commoditised according to the aspect of the analysis under consideration. In order to explain the existence of a formal subordination of labour in capitalism, and the existence of skilled labour and a frontier of control that sustains some unity of conception and execution for labour it can be argued that this apparent non-commoditisation of labour is only apparent, that control of the labour process by capital, and the divorce of conception and execution are rooted at a deeper level Brighton Labour Process Group argue that capital:

"does not need to exercise its power via a system of direct face to face power relations..... Autonomy (for labour) is only possible on the basis of an increase in the material basis of capital's power.....Capital determines the form its own personification takes."

(BLPG (1977) pp.18-19)

In this case, the logic of the argument is that formal subordination of labour - real subordination of labour and deskilling is a movement within a process of commoditisation, and the logic of capital accumulation is compatible with the existence of skill.

But elsewhere, as I have already outlined, skilled labour and the unity of conception and execution are seen as the negation of the commoditisation of labour by definition. If this were not the case there would be no logic for the battle over the frontier of control: it seems as if the capitalist need not contest this frontier at all, but merely appropriate the end results of the labour process. Here the point emphasised by Braverman is the drive of capital accumulation to go beyond a merely 'formal' commoditisation of labour to its real state.

The confusion about the status of skilled labour and formal subordination of labour also lies behind the advance - incorporation antimony to which I have often referred. For 'advance' theory formal subordination of labour must indeed represent a real incursion into commoditisation, and a real redrawing of the frontier of control which can, in principle, be rolled back as far as labour is prepared to push. For 'incorporation' theory on the other hand, any formality within capitalist social relations is only another manifestation of the real subordination of labour. Any existence of a hierarchy of more or less skilled jobs is likely to be an:

"artificial and unnecessary division of labour"  
(Stone, 1974, p.114)

created by capital to divide and rule the mass of really deskilled labour it controls.

There are two main points in the analysis at which the contradictions I have pointed out come to a head, which I now want to deal with in turn. These are firstly the question of the relationship between labour and capital, and significance to be attributed to struggle and conflict between them and secondly, the question of the compatibility, or otherwise, of capital's goals of efficiency and control.

#### 3.6.4 Conflict between Capital and Labour

Virtually all contributions to the labour process debate assume that a more or less global conflict exists between capital and labour, the two classes founded on ownership of labour power as a commodity on one hand, and the means of production on the other. However, the significance and nature of this conflict is widely disputed, and mutually contradictory interpretations are placed upon it. Before proceeding to examine these, it is worth noting that many of the labour process theorists such as Noble, start out explicitly from the antagonism between capital and labour without having to arrive at it or explain it and prove its existence. As a result their arguments lie open to the accusation from pluralist quarters that their conclusions merely demonstrate the argument's point of departure. This is true also of Braverman's approach, insofar he starts out from assuming the global commoditisation and expropriation of the direct producers by capital, without investigating its historical dimensions: the problem of the origin of the antagonistic value relations which underpin capitalist mode of production is not investigated.

While I think this is a problem with the labour process debate, and I will be critical of the way it deploys the concept of class, I hope to show that it is possible to account for the coherence of 'labour' and 'capital' as categories, so that I leave aside consideration of this particular problem at this stage.

At first the basis for antagonism between labour and capital lies in the nature of exploitation of labour consequent in its commodity status.

Capital has the formal right to appropriate the maximum amount of labour from the labour power it has purchased, while labour has corresponding interest in yielding up as little as possible. Here lies the basis for what Baldamus terms the 'effort' bargain.

However, with the development of the real subordination of labour, it is not the amount of work, but its form and capitalist nature which becomes the object of struggle. Once the technical process of production itself embodies the relations of production which formerly surrounded it, then the struggle between capital and labour must centre on the issues of control of work, the form of production process and its ability to control labour, the character of the division of labour, and so on. There are two major lines of development of the argument, one corresponding to the 'advance' approach, the other corresponding to the 'incorporation'. First I consider their answer to the question: does material conflict actually take place in capitalist mode of production?, I then go on to consider their analyses of the significance of such conflict as does take place.

For the 'incorporation' approach the conclusion to be drawn from Braverman's analysis is that no material does occur within capitalist mode of production once the real subordination of labour has been achieved, because quite simply, if the means of production employ the worker in a technical and material sense, and this state of affairs is necessary for each individual unit of capital to survive the competitive pressures it faces, then there is no prospect of labour making any material gains. Any battles it might win would be Pyrrhic victories, since units of capital where labour has been defeated will take advantage of the situation. The only prospect for a victorious material struggle by labour lies not in the attempt to reform or ameliorate the present system, but in its global abolition and the establishment of a new mode of production, which requires the universal struggle of the working class. The only real, genuine struggle which can take place within capitalist mode of production is at the level of consciousness and ideology:

"It is only through consciousness that class becomes an actor on the historical stage."

(1974, p.29)

What is apparently material struggle within capitalist mode of production is viewed from this perspective as artificial. Any merely formal subordination of labour which still exists, whether in terms of areas of skilled work and job structures and hierarchies, or the existence of effective trade union organisation, represent artificial devices ultimately sponsored by capital to prevent the full development of a homogeneous revolutionary labour movement with common conditions and common objectives. Stone concludes her survey of job structures in the U.S. steel industry with the comment that:

"The institutions of labour then, are the institutions of capitalist control"

(1974, p.168)

Indeed insofar as trade unions exist at all, they merely facilitate the smooth operation of the system by organising the terms of exchange for the commodity labour power: a fair days wage for a fair days work. They cannot question the commodity status of labour, or the abolition of the wages system, and insofar as they pretend that, within capitalist mode of production, the interpretation of 'fair' which will be enforced will be anything other than capital's, they direct attention away from the 'real' struggle.

Any real basis for struggle in a material sense is prepared by capital in this perspective, insofar as its accumulation gives rise to a materially homogeneous working class who can embark on a political struggle against capitalist mode of production. Insofar as it develops economically, capitalist mode of production digs its own grave politically.

There are two major problems which this account faces, apart from the general problems I have already outlined about posing change in terms of a leap between two modes of production in this way, and the empirical form such a leap would take if all prior organisation is allowed to take place only at the level of consciousness and political activity.

First of all it cannot easily account for the vociferousness and

watchfulness of capital when it comes to the defence of its prerogatives. It is hard to believe that all that effort and noise is the result of an artificial struggle which according to the thesis is not necessary to maintain capital's already established omnipotence. Palmer comments on Stone's work:

"As much as the steel magnates desired to break the backs of the craft unions, this end would have been accomplished even without their active encouragement, the inner logic of mechanised steel making was itself capable of destroying craft distinctions within the industry."

(Palmer, 1975, p.31.)

Secondly, surely such 'artificial' stratagems, if they are pursued, cost just as much in efficiency terms as any 'real' concessions, so that the same objections which are raised to the ability to concede those, must apply to 'artificial' struggles also.

A final point to note is that the 'incorporation' conclusions from the debate lend weight to the idea that any form of worker organisation within capitalist mode of production acts as a brake on the efficiency of capital, and that such organisation is by its very nature negative and defensive in the short term. If capital has appropriated to itself all powers of conception and technical expertise then this is the only role left for labour.

For the 'advance' approach the fact of original material resistance to commoditisation and the implementation of a real subordination of labour, and the struggle of workers against Taylorist strategies, holds out equally the prospect of rolling back real subordination of labour, and extending the frontier of control generalising craft based individual job control into collective control of production. The very survival and existence of worker organisation in capitalist mode of production is taken from this perspective to be proof of their potential to advance further. Apparently 'negative' working class action, like 'restrictive practices' and other checks on managerial prerogative demonstrate the potential of workers to generalise their resistance to the capitalist form of work and re-unify conception and execution.

The problem with the 'advance' approach is that it takes the fact of resistance itself (something which the incorporation approach finds difficulty in dealing with) to demonstrate the compatibility of a purely formal subordination with a capitalist mode of production. If it can survive thus there must also be the potential to generalise it further, to roll back real subordination. What has happened is that we have taken the movement from formal subordination of labour to real subordination of labour as one which occurs within commoditisation. We have taken advantage of the slippage in Braverman's concept and posed the possibility that if a move from formal subordination of labour to real subordination of labour takes place within commoditisation, then surely also the reverse can occur too. The problem now becomes one of seeing any constraint on the development of labour's advance at all! Moreover, the unity of conception and execution can be achieved within commoditisation, there appears to be no need to transcend the mode of production. It is difficult too to see why deskilling was necessary for capital, if it can cope with a formal subordination of labour. In effect the advance argument returns to the side of the contradictory commoditisation of labour stressed by classical bourgeois theorists: the 'freedom' inherent in free labour.

A further problem which arises, is its concentration again on craft control as the basis (through its unification of a fractured conception and execution) to resist capitalist forms of work. This can be seen as a product of Braverman's 'romance of craftism' to which we referred above. It begs the whole question of what the social nature of skill and craft, and the mechanisms used for its defence represent. Why is it the prerogative, overwhelmingly, of white, male workers in the heartlands of the capitalist system? I think there has been a very dangerous tendency to identify what started out as a conceptual category (the unity of conception and execution) with the historical existence of groups of workers who claimed to be skilled or were termed skilled by their employers. The problem arises when we admit that the origins and nature of these 'empirical' skills have absolutely no necessary connexion with our conceptual category. In particular, it appears that the unity of conception and execution in womens work universally fails to qualify it as skilled. I return to the question of skill, and its

place in Braverman's conceptual framework in the section of 'efficiency and control', and in ch. 5 in the context of gender and class.

There are some comments which apply equally to the 'advance' and 'incorporation' schools of thought which arise in the debate. Both approaches stem from the divided approach to the commodity in the theoretical approach which lies behind Braverman's work: the split into its quantitative terms of exchange on the one hand, and the fact of its existence on the other. While the advance approach concentrates on the former, the incorporation takes the latter as the 'real' issue. No matter what heuristic value there might be in Sweezy's distinction, and his assertion that Marx's approach copes with both these dimensions in a single conceptual framework, it seems as through the elaboration of this distinction inevitably condemns us to a leap and logic analysis. Within the mode of production the only question seems to be that of the terms of exchange of commodities, whereas the question of the existence of commodities requires raising the question of transition to a new mode of production. The link between these two issues seems impossible to fix too: at what point does conflict over the terms of commodity exchange become a question of the existence of a system based on this exchange? When does haggling between respective owners of commodities assume the dimension of conflict between classes of commodity owners, or challenges or defences of a mode of production?

These confusions lead both approaches to a mutually antagonistic romanticisation of struggle and sociology of betrayal. There is a tendency for each approach to assume all conflict which matches its theoretical prescriptions is inherently anti-capitalist. Meanwhile the very struggles which it romanticises for this reason is written off by the other approach as betrayal of such struggle, and 'objectively' reactionary. Thus in the advance approach, as I have already pointed out, there is an uncritical attitude to the traditions of craft control and a tendency to assume that individual job control pre-figures collective workers control rather than being symptomatic of sectionalism or incorporation into managerial 'divide and rule' strategies. For the incorporation approach such organisation on the basis of skill is merely a betrayal of the working class because it frustrates the true develop-

ment of a homogeneous, revolutionary class for itself. It represents the betrayal, by the trade union bureaucracy, of the real anti-capitalists interests of the rank and file. Taken in its most logical form, virtually any working class organisation, insofar as it has aspirations to be anything but powerless economically, must be incorporated in some way. If we add to this the tendency in the theory to displace all conflict onto the level of consciousness, then the only 'true' institutions of labour are the rank and file with the right ideas, or rather, subscribing to the correct programme.

At the same time as the institutions of the labour movement are regarded as instruments of betrayal, all 'independent' working class action', regardless of its actual content, is romanticised as inherently anti-capitalist, no matter how instrumental or limited it may be (economic wage demands, sabotage, turnover, absenteeism) because it must pose problems for maximising capital accumulation and therefore demonstrates its progressive character.

Conversely, what the incorporation approach romanticises as anti-capitalist struggle, the advance approach views as betrayal by undisciplined sectarian or ultra-left sections of labour, of the advance of the class as a whole through the patient reform of the terms of operation of the capitalist system. Both sides can therefore accuse the other of disturbing the necessary unity of the labour movement.

Finally, it is possible, to an extent to combine the best (or worst) of both approaches and to view some institutions as instruments of incorporation, and others as organising resistance to it, some as standing for the terms of sale of labour power, others for its abolition. Gramsci contrasts trade unions as organisations for labour as a commodity and therefore:

"in its essential nature is competitive, not communist."

with the factory council which organising the workers as a force of production (presumably as opposed to the relations of production embodied in their commodity status) constitute "a denial of industrial legality." (Gramsci 1977, p. 99, p. 266)

I have more to say about the conceptualisation of conflict, and how breaking away from Braverman's theories might avoid these antinomies in Ch. 5. But as a footnote to this passage I want to pursue some parallels between the analysis of class struggle which arise out of Braverman's work, and the early writings of Marx and Engels, and in turn to 'leap and logic' theories of social change which I have already discussed. (in Ch. 2)

Marx and Engels' writings, especially their earlier works, contain many formulas which closely parallel the sorts of conclusions arrived at by the incorporation approach which I have just outlined. The idea of a working class made revolutionary by its progressive reduction to a fairly unified mass of underpaid and simplified unskilled labour, disciplined both by the capitalist process of production inside the factory, and the industrial reserve army at the gates, is central to Marx's theory of the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation which I outlined earlier. The implication in many writings is that the struggle for economic reform, while useful as a political, educational and confidence building strategy, is utopian if it expects material gains. This is the whole tenor of Marx and Engels writings on the trade unions, from the Manifesto to Value Price and Profit. Engels in *The Condition of the English Working Class* describes trade union history as 'a long series of defeats of the working men, interrupted by a few single victories' (1969, p.243). Unions were simply powerless against the law of capital. Marx in *Value Price and Profit* states:

"I think I have shown that their struggles for the standard of wages are incidents inseparable from the whole wages system, that in 99 cases out of 100 their efforts at raising wages are only efforts at maintaining the given value of labour, and that the necessity of debating their price with the capitalist is inherent to their condition of having to sell themselves as commodities. By cowardly giving way in their every-day conflict with capital, they would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any larger movement. At the same time, and quite apart from the general servitude involved in the wages system, the working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of those everyday struggles.

They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady."

(Marx 1899, pp.92-93)

Hence Marx and Engels' optimism about trade unions (Hyman, 1971, p.4) and their view of them as potential 'schools of revolution': their inability to reform would strengthen the case of the urgency of revolution. Therefore the struggle against capitalist mode of production, both before and during any revolutionary situation, is loaded heavily onto development of consciousness given the impossibility of any material advance:

"If the competition of the workers among themselves is destroyed, if all determine not to be further exploited by the bourgeoisie, the rule of property is at an end."

(Engels, 1969, p.243)

The same ideas can be seen behind Marx's early ideas on co-ops 'ghosted' for Ernest Jones. Marx argues that individual co-ops must succumb to the pressures of market forces and competition, so that the only solution is to tackle the problem universally and 'nationalise cooperation'

I think these similarities help explain the popularity of Braverman's argument: it appears to carry the authority of a whole tradition of marxist analysis stretching from Marx himself. These similarities also pose a problem for my approach here. I am arguing that Marx must be differentiated from Braverman's analysis, and forms the basis for a superior analysis to that offered by modern 'marxists.' I must, therefore, explain Marx and Engels' apparent support for the sort of analysis produced by Braverman.

I think I have two grounds on which to argue this. The first is that Marx need not have been consistent. It is surely quite reasonable to use some of his arguments while dismissing others, or disagreeing with

the conclusions drawn from these arguments. The second reason is that just as I have argued that Marx's economic theories have been interpreted in a particular and partial way, so too have his political conclusions. The passages I have cited could be read not as an opposition between dealing with the effects and causes of capitalism, but as an appeal for the development of political initiatives within and beyond trade unionism. The character of these initiatives is not specified.

### 3.6.5 Efficiency and Control

Almost all of the antinomies I have discussed can be traced back to Braverman's attempt to link together the relations of production and the technical process of production, relations and forces, social form and technology, value and use value, only after he has started out from a theoretical position which sees them as separate. As a result he tends to see their relationship in terms of a global contradiction, a correspondence or dislocation between the two factors. Thus the attempt to grasp the social nature of technology becomes the proposition that technology in its use-value sense is social relations, comes to embody and express social relations. At the same time many of the developments in the analysis presuppose the ability to separate out again the specifically capitalist form of technology from its other aspects, so as to compare relations of authority required by production per se, from those arising purely from its capitalist form.

These contradictions come to a head when the question is posed of Braverman's analysis: are efficiency and control simply different aspects of a unified capitalist strategy towards labour in the production process, or are they contradictory goals which capital must attempt to reconcile? It is possible to find both conclusions in Braverman's work itself, and in the labour process debate as a whole. Nor should this surprise us. 'Efficiency' in Braverman's framework, must concern the development of the productive forces in their use-value aspect, the development of a more and more productive interchange between people and nature. 'Control' must refer to the maintenance and

and reproduction of the social relations of the mode of production, the defence of class relations and their basis in commoditisation. Because of the leap and logic concept of contradiction underlying Braverman's work the only way he can retain a sense of history, of both the reality of the present and the tensions inherent within it which set the terms for future development, he must see these as simultaneously absolutely contradictory and absolutely in correspondence. Only the contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the relations of production explain the potential for the revolutionary development of the mode of production and the prospect of the abolition of commodity relations. Yet the survival of capitalist relations of production in the present is only explicable, in terms of his theory, by the correspondence between the forces and relations of production expressed by the real subordination of labour which all capitals must enforce if they are to survive.

Braverman's problem is that his theory, because of its concept of contradiction, can only posit the goals of efficiency and control as potentially contradictory, a potential which only ever realises itself at the point of breakdown and leap to a new mode of production. As long as the logic of capitalist mode of production survives, the twin goals of efficiency and control must fuse just as the forces and relations of production fuse and embody one another. This leaves Braverman with a rigid 'incorporation' type thesis of management strategy, which also explains his emphasis on Taylorism as the management theory and practice which comes closest to his theory of capitalist mode of production's operation.

It also tends to lead to the conclusion being drawn from Braverman's theory that capitalism is about the production of things efficiently. This is the particular nature of production that value relations enforce: the constant revolutionising of technique, and economy of usage of labour. It appears that the view that within capitalism worker organisation can only be defensive and negative, and frustrate the development of the productive forces, is indeed correct. Management's right to manage must also be its ability to do so in response to these pressures, and any worker interference in this process can only impair

that ability, and the efficiency which characterises it.

The problem is that Braverman cannot consistently deal with qualifications to his rigid incorporationist logic of deskilling and capital accumulation, which he himself admits must exist, and which must mean that the twin goals of efficiency and control do not simply coincide for management in the short term. If Taylorist deskilling strategies do not render capital universally omnipotent, and labour totally powerless, then each capital's management must face a choice between strategies designed to maximise accumulation in the short term, and those designed to maintain capitalist relations of production as a whole in the longer run.

Braverman argues that the 'displacement of labour as the subjective element of the process .....is an ideal realised by capital only within definite limits, and unevenly among industries. The principle is itself restrained in its application by the nature of the various specific and determinate processes of production.....in industry all forms of labour co-exist.' (1974, p.172) and this recalls Marx's caveat about his own general law of capitalist accumulation on which Braverman's account is based:

"Like all other laws it is modified in its working by many circumstances, the analysis of which does not concern us here."

(1976, p.798)

### 3.6.6. Qualifications to the identity of efficiency and control

The first set of qualifications is based on the argument that worker resistance to real subordination forced capital to adopt alternative strategies. 'Responsible Autonomy' as described by Friedman (1977) is a good example of this. Rather than keep a detailed control over all aspects of production there are areas, where it has coopted workers' skills, and their retention of conception and execution to its own ends.

There are two aspects of the problem with this formulation of the qualification. The first concerns the material basis for successful worker resistance to deskilling which is nowhere consistently explained. The theory seems to require that there are areas of expertise possessed by labour which capital either cannot appropriate or finds it too expensive or inefficient to do so. But once we admit this the whole structure of the theory crumbles away because in effect we are arguing that labour cannot become a commodity. This leads us to the second aspect. Posing this qualification to the 'incorporation' thesis must tend to lead us back to the 'advance' thesis. If deskilling is not inevitably the most efficient course of action for capital, then we are returning to the view that the movement between a formal and real subordination of labour is one that takes place within capitalist social relations, and that both aspects of it are compatible with a capitalist mode of production and that the same unity of conception and execution is possible even when labour is commoditised. We cannot therefore think of a logic and its qualification any more but only of an internally contradictory logic.

If we are to attempt to avoid 'advance' type conclusions from the existence of material resistance to real subordination of labour and deskilling, we must argue that any apparent qualifications are 'artificial.' But this does not allow us to escape from the contradictions we face. Either these artificial qualifications impair efficiency (in which case we have a basis for seeing management strategy as contradictory but we have no basis for explaining why capital accumulation survives if its efficiency is thus impaired) or they do not, in which case we are back to a theory of a uniform management strategy that faces no internal dilemmas. It seems as if any attempt we make to qualify the omnipotence of capital in the analysis simultaneously destroys our analysis of the basis of the logic it is supposed to qualify in the first place!

A second set of qualifications has tried to avoid this problem by locating qualifications to management's strategy at the level of consciousness rather than the material level. Thus Burawoy has argued that the capitalist faces the problem of directing attention and resources to its

own legitimation:

"the dilemma of capitalist control is to secure surplus value while at the same time keeping it hidden."

(Burawoy, 1978, p.261)

This is a development which is also anticipated in Braverman's work itself, in the way the whole tendency of his analysis of capitalism is to displace any struggle for change or the potential for change to occur onto the level of consciousness and politics, rather than locate it in the process of production itself. However this account of the dilemmas faced by the capitalist faces the same set of problems as the first type of qualification. If this process of legitimation, even at the level of consciousness, requires material actions which challenge efficiency (through adopting less obvious means of surplus value appropriation for example) then we face the same contradictions as before.

A new problem also confronts this thesis however. For in contrast to the feudal lord or slave owner, the appropriation of surplus labour in capitalism is by its nature hidden. While legitimation of its activities is empirically an activity which obviously concerns capital, it is not at all clear from the analysis that Braverman presents of capitalist mode of production why capital should be so concerned about its appearance, as the fetishism which obscures the nature of the production process surely arises from that production process itself! It was in order to uncover the hidden social character of production in capitalist mode of production that Braverman set about his task in the first place. As I have argued above capitalist mode of production is distinguished by its lack of visibility as a mode of production. This is surely even more the case in a state of real subordination of labour where relations of domination in the production process appear to and do arise (in Braverman's theory and in reality) from the technical nature of the production process itself.

The limitations of the debate on efficiency and control are well illustrated by Gordon's article 'Capitalist Efficiency and Socialist Efficiency'. He identifies the central problem we have been considering,

and its implications:

"Is it possible for capitalist to display technologies and job structures which 'control' workers if these elements of production are not "cost-minimising.

(1976, p.19)

The significance of the question lies in the fact that, if capitalist techniques are the most efficient possible, then it is difficult to see how socialism can turn its back on them, because of the ultimately 'progressive' nature of the development of the productive forces which we pointed to earlier.

"In a period of socialist transition, why is it not in the interests of the workers to develop the most 'efficient' production process, expanding the productive forces as rapidly as possible, even though such a process might 'degrade' them to a 'fragment of their former being.'

(pp.19-20)

The dimensions of the problem are that if efficiency is a transhistorical concept (and Braverman's account certainly suggests that this is the case given his conception of the use-value aspect of technology (see the quote on page 93. above)) then it is difficult to see either how capitalists face any problem in reconciling their twin aims or how socialism can turn its back on 'specifically capitalist' work methods and technology without sacrificing efficiency! We appear to have returned to the conclusions of the technological determinist approach we set out to avoid, that the development of the productive forces brings with it inexorable social costs which it is Utopian to expect not to have to pay. Capitalism, as the production of commodities, is as Braverman's analysis itself shows, the production of things, efficiently. Insofar as the term 'efficiency' summarises the effect of value relations in capitalism on the production process (though its well established identity with 'control') then it appears that we have to admit that capitalism is what it has always claimed to be: not about exploitation at all, but about efficiency. Indeed one of the decisive points which must be grasped about Braverman's analysis is that within

it, exploitation and efficiency are the same thing. At first sight this appears a radical conclusion: it seems that we have penetrated commodity fetishism and revealed capitalism's claims to be dynamic and progressive, by revealing the real content of degradation of work and exploitation which lie behind them. But on reflection it appears that this equation works both ways! If efficiency is a transhistorical concept, and what lies behind it is exploitation, then what we thought were effects purely of capitalist social relations now appear as the bottom line of progress and efficiency itself. It appears that Weber was right! We cannot turn our back on capitalism, and the iron cage of bureaucracy without also turning our back on advanced technology. Despite its radical intentions, Braverman's theory has arrived back at technological determinism, and the inherent rationality of capitalism.

### 3.7 The Commodity Status of Labour: A Dual Relation with Capital?

In an article written with Peter Cressey we tried to resolve the contradictions in Braverman's work and the debate that surrounded it, in order to develop a better basis for examining 'qualifications' to capital's omnipotence, and so to produce an account of the problems and dilemmas facing capital within capitalist mode of production, and therefore to produce a more coherent case for denying that capitalist forms of hierarchy are necessary for efficiency. We saw the argument as turning on the peculiar status of labour as a commodity:

"The basis of the distinction between Formal Subordination of labour and real subordination of labour lies in the peculiar status of labour-power as a commodity which, unlike others, is not physically alienable. Exchange normally involves the physical transfer of use-values, things, along with the formal right to appropriate ('control') them i.e. 'ownership', over which the will of the individual 'owner' is sovereign. (Marx, 1976, Ch. 2). But labour power is an altogether peculiar 'thing', comprising as it does:

'...the aggregate of those mental and and physical capabilities, existing in they physical form, the living personality, of a human being.' (Marx, 1976, p.271)

Its use, appropriation and control cannot be physically alienated to the buyer, for the worker must always set his own capabilities in motion, and:

'The totality of the free workers' labour capacity appears to him as his property, as one of his moments, over which he as subject exercises domination.' (Marx 1973, p.465)

In a state of formal subordination then, the capitalist is able to appropriate the worker's product, but not control how it is produced. In real subordination the capitalist prevents the worker being the author of the capabilities he or she sets in motion, instead the worker must work as defined by the specifically capitalist mode of production."

This peculiar nature of the labour-power commodity had been misapplied by Braverman, and Marx, to produce the theory of the logic of deskilling and incorporation either as unqualified or qualified only by the need to 'habituate' the workers critical faculties. In the theory of real subordination of labour what became obscured was the fact that labour always had to delegate some features of 'control' of the immediate process of production to labour:

'The means of production employ the workers': it is a striking metaphor, a spare and lucid summary of the essence of a developed capitalist system, and the exact reversal of the definition of a socialist mode of production. Literally speaking however, it is a nonsense: it grasps not the essence of the capitalist mode of production, but the fetish that it throws up. For the logic of the 'inversion' becoming real, and of production being totally geared to valorisation is that concrete society simply disappears into pure form: all real needs become nothing, the social form (valorisation) everything. Everyone, 'capitalist' and worker, becomes a collective slave to the mere form which everywhere arises behind their backs. Conversely, the social form of production relationships becomes concrete (a 'technical and palpable reality'): moreover, with capital as the dominant concrete entity, dead labour subordinating living. Hence we have the classic bourgeois fetish of conflating the means of production

and their capitalist form: dead labour comes to life and becomes productive: it 'designs', 'controls' and 'executes'. And capital would need to be productive if it was to materially control labour for it would have to undertake the various tasks previously left to the initiative, creativity and dexterity of the worker. Only by doing that could capital abolish its dependence on the workers as a subjective force of production and reduce them to simple labour power: to a pair of 'hands'. Such a reduction is nonsense: for in terms of Marx's own definition of labour-power and labour, to abolish dependence on the workers as a subjective force is to abolish any dependence on their labour as value-creating activity: it is to subordinate labour by eliminating it.

The key to the critique of R.S.L. theory lies in Marx's own comments about the dual nature of the labour process within capitalism. From the point of view of the social form of organisation of production it is quite correct to say that capital employs labour. However, even in the most highly developed capitalist society, from the point of view of material production, from the aspect of use-value, labour employs capital. Only by controlling the means of production in the sense of subjecting them to its own physical and mental operations, its own will, does the workforce actually expend any labour and create use-value, and therefore exchange-value as well. Marx himself defines labour power as:

'.....the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind.'

(1976, p.271)

and in the celebrated 'architects and bees' passage he makes human will a defining characteristic of all human use-value creating labour. For even though capital owns (and therefore has the right to 'control'), both means of production and the worker, in practice capital must surrender the means of production to the 'control' of the workers for their actual use in the production process. All adequate analysis of the contradictory relationship of labour to capital in the workplace depends on grasping this point.

Although the 'inversion' (capital employs labour) may become technical and palpable in the sense that the assembly line (rather than the overlooker) may pace the worker, this does not represent any real or material control of labour beyond the formal rights of ownership already present in the wage relationship. Just as much as before the workers themselves actually control the detail of the performance of their tasks, and the importance of this, though it varies with the production process, never disappears altogether. Even the smallest degree of subjectivity and detailed control of the direction of the process by labour can be used as a weapon against capital in the workplace and is so used whether consciously or not.

For capital, the tendencies outlined in R.S.L. theory grasp only the value aspect of the relationship. Here indeed capital seeks to reduce the workers as far as possible to the status of commodities, enforcing the wage form and divorcing them from the means of production in order to maximise the alienation of surplus value and abolish all dependence on the workers' own skill and initiative, lest that frustrate the requirements of valorisation. However, the use-value aspects of the relation of capital to labour are directly contradictory to this. Valorisation has to be embodied in use-value: the capitalist must therefore always seek to maximise relative surplus value by revolutionising the forces of production. He can do this only by seeking to abolish the constraints imposed on the forces of production by the capitalist form of the relations of production: he must actively seek to abolish the commodity form itself. Thus contrary to the implications of the R.S.L. argument capital has an active interest in suppressing its own dominance in the workplace to the extent that dominance flows purely from the social form of the relations of production and not from the requirements of production itself. To develop the forces of production capital must seek to develop labour as a subjective force to unleash labour's powers of social productivity rather than abolish these powers. Thus in the use-value aspect of its relation with labour capital will seek a purely cooperative relationship in order to abolish the antagonism between the worker and the means of production that its capitalist form throws up.

For labour there is a correspondingly contradictory relationship to capital. From the aspect there is again a direct antagonism between capital and labour: the latter seeking to resist its subordination to the goal of valorisation through the reduction of labour to a pure commodity. From the use-value aspect, however, since labour can only gain access to the means of production through selling its labour-power to capital it has an interest in the maintenance of that relationship and therefore the viability of the unit of capital which employs it. Moreover, the degree of this interest will increase with the skill and scope for self-expression (distorted as it is within the capitalist form) that the job provides. Hence labour too will have a direct interest in developing the forces of production within the factory, but again in contradictory fashion, since it will not wish such development to be used solely to benefit valorisation, but also to increase wages or provide more pleasant jobs.

We saw these conclusions as stemming from a point which is implicit in aspects of both Braverman and Marx's approach, and is made explicitly by Baldams through his concept of the 'effort bargain' that the difference between the value of labour power purchased by capital, and the value which that labour power could itself produce, which capital sought to maximise by addressing the problem of management and developing a real subordination of labour, could not be determined quantitatively with any mathematical certainty. To quote Baldams:

".....who can define ability, restricted output, capacity ('fullest' or otherwise)? If the intensity of effort is expected from the worker is left undefined, then, surely, everything else that is stated about wages, hours, and method of payment is equally indeterminate.....the formal contract between employer and employee is incomplete in a very fundamental sense."

(Baldamus, 1961, pp90-1)

This incompleteness meant that the subordination of labour was never completely real, and that because of the contradictory nature of the relationship between labour and capital, there was as much reason to give the 'qualifications' to real subordination as much the status of a 'logic' as the logic of real subordination itself. This answered the problem of analysing and explaining the potential for material strategies to resist capital by labour in the workplace, because 'incompleteness' provided the 'space' for political action:

"The dual nature of labour within capitalism implies the dual character of 'control' itself. From one aspect the phrase 'control of labour' implies capital's ability to enforce valorisation and the production of commodities, from another it implies the control labour has of the production process bequeathed by capital's continued reliance on its cooperation in order to get the work performed at all.

It implies a rather different analysis of the relationship between class struggle and the production process: job hierarchies and authority relations can be seen as having their roots in the production process itself. In turn the precise form of that process is a joint creation, the outcome of class struggle rather than the 'logic' of capitalist development and as such capable both of further development within capitalist social relations of production, and subversion of it, not only ideologically, but materially too. The object of class struggle can be seen as the form of the relationship between conception and execution, and the form of the overall 'plan' to which it is subordinated. The unity of conception and execution has never been the exclusive property of the craft worker, never entirely disappears in any 'deskilled' labour-process and cannot of itself be an adequate definition of socialism. As engels makes clear, authority will change its form not disappear altogether.

The material 'space' for struggle at the point of production also cuts both ways, however. If we escape from the notion of a working class which prior to the

historical break is merely an 'aspect of capital' but exists politically as a universal force opposed to it, and open up the possibility for a 'practical and prefigurative socialist politics' then it must also be remembered that such a struggle roots itself initially in the workplace rather than in the class as a whole. Just as such struggles are not artificial and 'incorporated', neither are they necessarily 'spontaneously' socialist. They may take either form, and the task before us is surely thus to develop yardsticks for differentiating the two, and promoting the latter.

To do so must involve jettisoning a lot of categories and antinomies which we tend to work with at present. If there is no abstract measure of use value, and the 'real' abstractions apparently imposed by the market are always mediated by workplace struggle, then what constitutes 'skill' becomes itself an increasingly fluid category, capable of being defined and argued over in a variety of ways. This raises the possibility of posing the question of what consists of 'useful work' within the labour movement, and of the evaluation of the contribution of different groups of workers in a manner which prefigures 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs', rather than the needs of capital reproduction.

Similarly, in the analysis of trade unions, F.S.L-r.s.l. analysis portrays them from one aspect as the agent of capitalist control, the 'reflection' of capitalist society as an institution committed to the sale rather than the abolition of labour power, and from another aspect as the forerunner of workers control, either as a craft organisation able to 'control' work, or as the 'ever widening union of the workers' which in defeat becomes a school of revolution. This antimony tends to get uncritically translated into theories of 'betrayal' of the implicitly control seeking 'rank and file' by the incorporated 'bureaucracy'. What has to be developed here is an adequate analysis of the terms of the sale of labour-power and compromise with capital which, coexistent with it in the short run, undermine it in the longer run, rather than simply tail-ending militancy for its own sake. We have to develop the categories of analysis which can illuminate how capital's contradictory aims in the workplace can be exploited to prefigure socialism, not by rolling back a 'frontier of control' but by subverting and changing the form of hierarchy and production relations within the workplace as well as without, to transform the rebellious impulses produced by the situation capitalism has imposed on the working class into consciousness and revolutionary creativity' both in a material and ideological sense.

It seemed that by pointing to the weakness in Braverman's conception of the commodity status of labour we had found the basis for his analysis of capitalism as a remorseless and inexorable logic of deskilling.

We had produced an analysis of the relationship between labour and capital within capitalist mode of production which avoided the drawbacks of both advance and incorporation approaches, and treated the development and resolution of contradictions, and therefore the potential for struggle and historical development, within capitalist mode of production. But we had retained a role for the concept of mode of production and had some conception of the limits to what might be achieved within it.

The argument turned on the proposition of 'space' for struggle within capitalist mode of production, its existence on the one hand but limitations on the other, underpinned by the 'incompleteness' in the exchange between labour and capital. It seemed to offer a coherent account of the genuine interest on the part of capital in industrial democracy schemes beyond rhetoric and propaganda purposes, because it had a genuine need to develop aspects of a cooperative relationship with labour. It also seemed to offer an account of the ability of labour to extract concessions from capital because of this and place a premium on the investigation of the alternative forms these concessions might take. It seemed that if yardsticks could be developed to distinguish economic sectional or short term strategies, from ones which challenged capitalist forms of authority and sought to broaden worker expertise and ability to perform managerial functions which were not purely exploitative but had real roles in production, we could produce an empirical account of realistic strategies for labour at the point of production, in contrast to the utopian notion of 'abolishing' management or the reformist concept of simply 'capturing' it.

The problem which was implicit at the end of the article and became more apparent in our efforts to develop its analysis in a more historical and empirical direction in later work (eg. Cressey & MacInnes, 1982) was that the dimensions of space seemed impossible to capture empirically, and the yardsticks equally difficult to produce.

While "Voting for Ford" still stands as a useful contribution to the Braverman debate, in particular because of its analysis of the inadequacies of simply elaborating qualifications to Braverman's thesis, I think we can now see, from the analysis of the roots of Braverman's work and its relationship to the analysis of capitalist mode of production in terms of theories of value and commodity relations, that "Voting" remained trapped within the problematic inhabited by Braverman, and failed to notice the implication of its own conclusions.

There are two major arguments that can be levelled against "Voting", both of which turn on the analysis of the commodity status of labour and both of which explain our problems with the concept of 'space'.

The first is that insofar as the idea that labour power is a commodity at all is retained, which the argument in 'Voting' clearly does have to retain in order to maintain a theory of capitalism as a mode of production, then the argument does not go beyond the proposition that is implicit in Braverman's work itself, that the movement between the formal and real subordination of labour is one that takes place within commodity relations, within capitalism. What the argument does is point out that Braverman's transfers contradictions which are inherent in the commodity status of labour itself onto a historical movement going from one side of this contradiction to the other. In contrast "Voting" can be seen as arguing that these contradictions remain inherent in the commodity form throughout capitalism. Thus while Braverman's argument is cast in terms of the invasion and domination of use-value relations by value relations in capitalism, Voting presents the analysis of capitalism in terms of the contradictory unity of the two. We questioned only the direction, and not the nature of a fundamentally faulty contradiction.

This explains our inability to analyse 'space' in empirical terms, because "Voting" retains the concept of contradiction used by Braverman, and the same separation of use-value and value, the social and the technical, which Braverman employs. It replaced a unilinear logic with a contradictory logic, but it was a logic nonetheless. We replaced Braverman's analysis of a global correspondence between the relations and force of production in the capitalist mode of production, tempered by their

potential dislocation which explains the potential leap to a new mode of production, with an analysis in terms of their simultaneous correspondence and dislocation. We saw ourselves as resolving the contradictions in Braverman's approach, whereas in fact what we were doing was simply placing them side by side and setting one off against the other. Our conclusion ought to have been that the contradictions were by their very nature irresoluble.

This brings us to the second argument which I wish to make about "Voting". Although it based its argument on the incompleteness of the exchange between labour and capital, and took the commodity status of labour as the starting point of its critique, it then proceeded to develop an analysis in terms of the contradictions inherent in this commodity status which had been apparent in the theory from the outset: we fell into exactly the trap which we accused Marx of making: forgetting our own best point. Cooperation between labour and capital and the 'space' for struggle were based on the recognition that labour power is a commodity physically unalienable from its worker owner. This is simply a development of the 'progressive' side of the commoditisation of labour: the idea that it is freer in capitalist mode of production than in feudal society for example. Conflict between labour and capital and the limitations on space for struggle were based on the recognition that the commoditisation of labour implies its ownership and control by the capitalist. This is simply a more developed expression of the 'reactionary' side of the commoditisation of labour.

What "Voting" should have established was that any theory based on the commodity status of labour would ultimately degenerate into the elaboration of these contradictions, rather than the transcendence of them. I think it is also easy to see why we unconsciously avoided developing the argument in this way: if the commodity status of labour is rejected, then so too must be the entire analysis of capitalism as a mode of production that depends upon it! The real significance of the argument about 'incompleteness' was that it ruled out not just Braverman's account of the real subordination of labour but a whole tradition of the interpretation of capitalism as a mode of production that stretched back through Marx to classical political economy.

### 3.8 Braverman and the Theory of Value

In order to explain these contradictions in Braverman's theories I want to analyse the theoretical origins of his work. I want to do this because I think the problems are to be attributed to Braverman's uncritical acceptance of the concept of the commodity status of labour, and the central role it occupies in his work. This leads him to confuse the form and general determinants of value in his work.

In classical political economy the commodity status of labour concept acts as the link between private interest and public good, individual freedom and social relations of equality and fairness. According to the bourgeois theorists the apparent absence of any independent form of value, any social regulation of production as a whole, is real. The 'hidden hand' to use Smith's phrase, is a benevolent and neutral one. Any coordination and regulation of the independent producers actions which the market forces upon them is simply the reflection back onto themselves of the sum total of their own subjective preferences. This gives rise to the proposition that the absence of any social form of value regulation in capitalist mode of production is proof of the neutral and technical character of production there. It also means that what value relations there are (in the form of the market, the 'hidden hand') are purely quantitative. That is to say social relations do not exist in production, but rather in distribution. The labour theory of value is then a theory of both the fairness or natural character of property rights, and a theory of the inherent efficiency of such a system: of the harmony between private interest and public good.

Marx has been read, I have argued, as inverting this proposition. The apparent absence of any direct social regulation of production is myth. Rather all social relations, are dominated by the law of value, the dominance of technical production by the need to valorise capital. Public bad is the general result of collective private subordination.

It is sometimes thought that classical political economy's problem with history is its recognition of the transition from 'artificial' (feudal) to 'natural' (capitalist) society, and its inability to recognise the possibility of a corresponding transition from capitalist to other forms of society. In other words if it defines private property as naturally, as opposed to socially, based, history appears to come to a halt once artificial unnatural institutions and restrictions of feudal society have been thrown off. We could put this argument into the concepts I elaborated in chapter two by saying that classical political economy sees the commodity status of labour as a transhistorical feature of production. Classical political economy's problem is then the usual paradox of the mode of production. If commodity status of labour is transhistorical how is it changeable and historically evolved, and how can there be any threat to its existence, whether from socialist movements, trade unions or governments? It cannot explain why 'natural' society did not always exist, or what the origins of artificial society in the past were or the threat of socialist society in the future.

In contrast to this Marx's critique of classical political economy is seen as 'adding a historical perspective' to classical political economy's ahistorical formulations, demonstrating the historical specificity of commoditisation.

In chapter 4 below I argue that the view that classical political economy was ahistorical, and that Marx's work ought to be seen as the addition of historical perspective to it, is mistaken. What is at issue is not the presence or absence of historical accounts, but the type of history they propose. Insofar as labour theories of value and marxist theories of the labour process continue to base themselves on the commodity status of labour idea then I think they unwittingly retain, rather than transcend, classical political economy's approach to history.

Three main criticisms can be advanced of classical political economy's account. It cannot consistently explain the existence of non-capitalist society, and it cannot explain the origins of capitalist society

except by assuming that it already exists. History, insofar as there is any, is the arrival of commodities and commoditisation. This is explained in two ways. One is that there is a natural, transhistorical tendency to organise production in this way. An example is Smith's definition of human beings in terms of their

'natural propensity, to truck, barter and exchange''

This begs the question of why this natural propensity was frustrated in artificial society. The second way is to assume a genesis of commodity relations at some point, which then inexorably generalises itself. We get 'Robinsonade' accounts of individual commodity producers coming into relations with each other, without any explanation of how they came to be here. Or we get accounts of the accumulation of capital which assume the 'previous accumulation of capital.'

To this I would add a third point. Classical political economy reduces history to the presence or absence of commodity exchange. By doing so it confuses the form of value with the existence of the general determinants of value. It sees in commodities the only social form which the technical production of things can take. A specific form of value (the existence of commodities) comes to be seen as the existence of value itself: 'artificial' and 'socialist' society thus appear as impossible because they wish away the ever present general determinants of value. This explains both the crisis of feudalism and the utopianism of socialism.

Braverman's work is best seen as an extension of reading Marx as inverting classical political economy, applying its insights to the nature of the production process. What all these approaches share is their dependence on the commodity status of labour theory and its contradictions. I hope to show that Braverman's aim of producing a non technologically determinist theory from this basis is impossible.

Braverman argues that in capitalist mode of production value dominates use value. Production of use value only takes place within social relations based around the self-expansion of value, and these relations invade production itself. Indeed Braverman's account presents the

history of production as the introduction of commoditisation and value relations, and the prospect of their removal.

What is the origin of value relations in Braverman's theory, and what is his theory of value, his account of the form of determination of labour? Nowhere does Braverman give an historical account of the genesis of the commodity status of labour. Once we have labour as a commodity, then we will also have market relations and the operation of a law of value, as classical political economy showed, but in his account Braverman takes the commodity status of labour as given. It is his point of departure which he does not feel it necessary to explain.

Instead we are presented with a contrast, implicitly historical, between labour before and after its commoditisation. This contrast has been the subject of the debate over the "romance of craftism" in Braverman's work, started by Elger. It is in this contrast, presented analytically rather than historically, that we find Braverman's theory of value too. His analysis of the form of determination of labour in capitalist society is his theory of deskilling: the proposition that the commoditisation of labour leads to its real subordination and transformation into abstract labour.

Braverman's analysis of capitalism is that it systematically removes skill from the process of production: work becomes degraded. Prior to capitalism we have workers' craft skills. There is not detail division of labour within the branch of production, there is unity of conception and execution in the individual workers, the worker control his or her own job. Capitalism divorces conception from execution, introducing a detail division of labour leaving the worker only the task of following the orders of his or her employer or the dictates of the machinery which 'controls' their actions.

I think the problem with this argument goes deeper than the 'romance of craftism' which has been discussed. This contrast between two forms of labour is the point of entry to Braverman's analysis of all of classical political economy's worst errors.

Braverman contrasts the divorce and unity of conception and execution in the worker, and uses this as the defining characteristic of capitalist society as opposed to those not dominated by value relations. But all that the idea of the divorce of conception from execution conveys is the presence of a division of labour, the fact that production is social, not individual, and that as a consequence of this, there will be 'value' relations of some form, in that the social production must be ordered in some way or other. What the idea does not tell us is what form the divorce of conception from execution takes, how the division of labour is organised or what the form of value is. Braverman has confused the issue of the general determinants of value with the form of value.

The point on which Braverman lays so much stress in his analysis,

"the unity of conception and execution may be dissolved" (p.51)

and that 'the idea as conceived by one may be executed by another' does not establish anything other than the potential for a division of labour. It tells us that human labour is social: the point of departure of the argument itself. It cannot establish what Braverman implies it does: that this dissolution is dependent on labour being commoditised.

Some divorce of conception from execution must be involved in any production process because of the fact that production is social: it involves more than one person. If a production process involves more than one person then they must jointly conceive how they are to execute it, but what is decisive are the terms of this cooperation. It cannot be reduced to a total divorce of conception from execution, the one conceiving and the other 'executing'. This is because the 'execution' itself must always involve a constant revaluation or conception of how to achieve the end result in view of the progress of the 'execution' to date. It is precisely because of the need for such powers of 'conception' that labour is employed by capital at all. Otherwise its dreams of the fully automatic factory and freedom of reliance on the 'refractory hand of labour' would be fulfilled. Any

division of labour must involve both some unity of conception and execution, and some divorce: we have to try to produce an account of the social form which the relationship between conception and execution takes. All this expresses is the idea that any social process of production involves relations of control and coordination that are inherent in the division of labour itself. We cannot abolish relations of production by returning to individual production.

What Braverman tries to present as a historical development is in fact a transhistorical feature of any production process. The tension between the unity and divorce of conception from execution is always present. The origins of its usage in Braverman's work stem from the commodity status of labour theory of classical political economy because the two sides of the commodity status of labour contradiction can be presented precisely in terms of the unity of conception and execution (the idea that the individual is sovereign over their own, personal, private, asocial labour power) and their divorce (the idea of the alienation of that labour power). I will return to this point below.

Braverman is able to present this contrast as a historical one by twisting his use of the concept of division of labour to obscure the fact that value relations do not exist in his model of pre-capitalist society (production is not social, it is "as such"). This clears the way for him to present the development of capitalism as the development of value relations based on the commoditisation of labour.

He makes a distinction between the detail and social division of labour, as I outlined above. This distinction is not found in Marx's work, and the reason for its introduction in Braverman's work is now clear: it allows him to refer to the pre-capitalist craftsman as 'suffering' no division of labour in his trade, without having to make the ludicrous contention that there was no division of labour in pre-capitalist society. Herein lies the basis for the 'romance of craftism': at the level of the job the production has no social form or constraint of any kind. It is not surprising, since Braverman starts out from

commodity status of labour theory, that he arrives at one of its core ideas: the free individual from which the 'Robinsonades' started out. This conceptual framework is quite inadequate for accounting for the development of social relations of production, because it presents us with a contrast between labour process without social relations and one with them.

It is worth noting in passing that this romance of skilled, individual labour gives rise to a peculiar way of looking at how work relations in capitalist mode of production might be changed. It becomes the history of the capitalist assault on personal autonomy at work and the search for ways in which it might be recovered. This approach is of no use at all. It does not tell us anything about capitalist mode of production. It only demonstrates the confusion in Braverman between the form and general determinants of value. Social production of any sort involves constraints of individual freedom, precisely because it is social. The aim must be to specify the particular nature of the constraints brought by different forms of value in different modes of production. Instead Braverman sees 'value' as something which is present in capitalist mode of production only, and can therefore explain the social nature of production there.

One result of the confusion, if we consider the conclusions to be drawn from Braverman's analysis, is a tendency to see the solution to the problems caused by capitalist social relations in the labour process in terms either of a straightforward abolition of these relations as the source of subordination and authority superimposed on top of the real nature of production or in terms of demands to a return to individual control and personal autonomy in the workplace.

The implication of the first development is the tendency to associate all constraints on the way people produce their lives all social aspects of production with the capitalist form of social relations within which such production takes place. The impression can then be created that the overthrow of these social relations would remove all constraints on production. We slip from a dialectic that contains the historical tension between determinism and voluntarism into one which associates determinism with capitalist society and voluntarism

with the socialist future. Thus if we analyse production in terms of production as such within social relations, the question of subordination of labour reduces itself to whether labour is commoditised or not. This gives rise to the romance of the artisan: in the purely formal subordination of labour his work is not commoditised. The historical development from feudalism to capitalism gets reduced to the introduction and removal of relations of commoditisation into the labour process. The appropriation of nature as a purely technical process is seen as taking place either within or without the ownership of the direct producers as commodities. It also gives rise to utopian notions of work in socialism. The removal of commoditisation apparently also removes the source of subordination too.

At first then, Braverman presents the contrast between the two forms of labour as a historical one. In pre-capitalist society we have free, skilled, whole labour without a detail division of labour. It is not commoditised. It is not dominated by value relations. In capitalism we have unfree, deskilled, commoditised labour, broken up into detail operations and subordinated to valorisation. This contrast appears as one between two modes of production.

But this same contrast, in terms of the process of deskilling and degradation of work, is presented as one occurring within capitalism. Skilled labour still exists within capitalist mode of production, at least until it has been degraded, is still formally sold (and is therefore commoditised) and exists within value relations. It takes the form of a commodity on the market, but once bought, the owner is unable to exert the real control implied by their formal rights. What the logic of deskilling, the move from formal to real subordination of labour represents is not the move from the non commoditisation of labour to its commoditisation, but rather the move from one side to the other of the contradiction inherent in that commodity status itself.

There is a confusion in Braverman's theory as to whether the process of deskilling and development of the real subordination represents a movement from the non-commoditisation of labour to a state of commoditisation, or rather the progress of commoditisation itself once it is

established. Whichever choice we make there are problems for the theory as a whole. If we see the process of deskilling as a process of commoditisation, and skill as compatible only with a non commodity status of labour, then it is difficult to account for the concept of the formal subordination of labour: the existence of skill within a process of commoditisation. If on the other hand, we see deskilling, and the move from formal to real subordination as a process within commoditisation, it is difficult to see why the direction of the logic should be from the formal to the real, rather than vice versa. If a formal subordination of labour is compatible with commoditisation, why does it not remain compatible?

The 'romance of craftism' in Braverman is more than just an uncritical nostalgia for craft based forms of work. It betrays a conceptual slippage in Braverman's work around the role of skill, unity of conception and execution, and formal subordination of labour and absence of a detail division of labour. These appear alternately as describing a state of affairs in which commodity relations do not exist, and one in which commodity relations do exist but have not developed into capitalist relations.

This slippage is the point of entry into Braverman's work of the technicism he originally sets out to confront. It arises in two ways, in his assumptions about the nature of skill, and about the nature of technical innovation he requires to keep his theory consistent. It also wrecks any attempt on this part to make his analysis historical, because of this confusion between the transition to, and development within capitalism, which reduces its history to the unfolding of a logic which has nevertheless always been there. In short Braverman has exactly the same conception of history as classical political economy itself.

Technicism enters back into his analysis via the conception of production as such, production free of any social constraint, that lies behind the concept of skill. His 'leap and logic' conception of history stems from the necessary slippage in his concept of deskilling. The 'leap' from skill, is also the point of departure for the logic of deskilling. Braverman has taken the contradiction internal to the

concept of commodity status of labour, (that labour power may be exercised or sold) and given it a historical dimension. The problem is that if we argue that skill is incompatible with value relations, then there seems to be no possibility for any material qualification to the logic of capital accumulation: we simply leap from one logic to another. The only way 'history' can be hitched onto this logic is through the development of the productive forces: technical innovation requires a readjustment of the social relations surrounding the new technology. Yet this process of innovation itself is seen as a product of pressures for efficiency in the accumulation of capital: Braverman unwittingly reproduces the proposition that all we can say about technical innovation is its rate, and that what capitalism does is promote efficiency. To make these points clearer I want to return to the points I made about value, and investigate the 'analytical' as opposed to historical dimension of the slippage in Braverman's concepts.

Braverman sets out to investigate the effect of 'society' on 'technology', in contrast to the orthodox notion that technology is a straightforward question of the quantitative productivity of labour it produces, a question of the level and rate of development of the productive forces.

But if we accept that there is a distinction between the technical and the social, that value and use-value are separate, then all that is left of value is a quantitative dimension. This conclusion is explicitly admitted in the characterisation of the value problem as having a quantitative and qualitative dimension. The second relates to its existence, once that is admitted we are talking about quantities, about number. But this must also mean that the social aspect of production is in fact reduced to question of number. It becomes an analysis in terms of social relations of distribution. Another way of expressing this is that if we accept the concept of the sovereign individual producer contained in commodity status of labour, the only way that their labour can become social is through exchange, through market relations according to the quantitative values embodied in the product of their respective labours. The commodity is understood as a thing (use value) with a price (amount of value). A thing within a quantitative

value relation.

Braverman's attempts to develop an anti-technicist position from this led him to investigate the relation from value to use value. It is in this context that he investigates the development of technology and the development of the labour process. His analysis must be contradictory from the start, for he commences from the idea of the technical and the social as coherent explanatory categories which are separate.: his object is to explain technology and production from social relations. But what relationship can he now pose between these two, separate, factors. Unless some mechanism of relative autonomy can be employed we are left with a choice between maintaining the independence of the technical (and by implication agreeing with the original thesis that production in capitalism is technically neutral and efficient) and arguing that quantitative social relations determine technology: value dominates use value. This is what Braverman argues. The social relations surrounding technology invade the production process itself.

How does this occur? How do we explain the logic of deskilling in the production process from market forces in the social relations of distribution? Braverman argues simultaneously that deskilling offers more control over the production process for capital, and is also more efficient because it maximises the quantitative difference between the value of labour and the value of labour power. These are not, in fact, two separate arguments, but two aspects of the same argument. The problem of management is defined as extracting labour from labour power, or what is the same thing, maximising the quantitative difference between the two. Capitalist control of the labour process is assumed to deliver this because it will turn labour powers attentions to delivering whatever 'labour' will do this. The problem of management appears to be solved in the formal subordination of labour - real subordination of labour movement, which translates formal ownership into real control (this also expresses the real operation of formal natural rights). Why will this also be cheaper? Because if capital has appropriated the skills of conception, then these need no longer be paid for: unskilled labour power is cheaper. In other words the

logic of deskilling is Braverman's theory of value and also his theory of the effect of value relations on the production process itself. Real subordination of labour, which renders labour abstract, is the material incarnation in capitalism, of what were purely 'social' value relations.

Braverman's thesis of deskilling and the degradation of work in capitalist mode of production only works if there is the identity between control and efficiency practically that his theory of the identity of value and use-value preposes theoretically. (I have already expressed this idea in Braverman's work by pointing out that for him the 'problem of management' is also its solution.) This can only take place if deskilled labour is correspondingly cheaper: Braverman's conception of a hierarchy of labour-powers, each with a higher or lower accretion of skills and paid accordingly, comes directly from Smith, and the famous pin makers. Such an argument rests on the idea that skills are clearly identifiable, are relatively easy to place in a hierarchy of costs of obtaining them, and relatively fixed in their application and development. This idea is definitely technologically determinist. Underlying it is a conception of 'production as such', pure use-value, free from social relations, where a hierarchy of skills based on their use-value content can be identified. We have a continuum of skills, each higher and more universal than the last. Deskilling involves lopping off the waste involved in employing more skills than are necessary for a particular operation. As little 'conception' as possible is paid for.

Firstly this assumes that capitalists know what skills, what powers of execution, are necessary in a given production process, and what value they contribute to that process, and that these are technical not social relationships. None of these propositions is true. The first proposition is another aspect of Braverman's assumption about capital's powers of design and control. In practice no-one knows in advance how production is going to work out in detail: considerable fluidity of labour is always required, often for quite unexpected reasons. That is to say even in the most automated processes, considerable reliance is placed on the skills of even the most

'deskilled' workers. If assembly line workers just carried out orders, no matter how detailed, the work would never get done. People are employed to use their initiative. This is even assuming that management issue fairly rational orders in the first place, which anyone with any knowledge of industry will regard with suspicion. The second proposition is unprovable too. As I argue in the following chapter, all a capitalist knows is the money cost of different labour powers, and the revenue from the final product. He or she cannot know the values involved. There's therefore no way of knowing, within a complex division of labour, what particular group of workers or combination of skills were better or worse at creating value. Until the commodity is sold it exists as value only in the capitalist imagination. It is built as a use value. We cannot rank the use-value aspects of the skills involved in that process. For example both a brain surgeon and cleaner are necessary to perform certain hospital operations. We cannot say that the brain surgeon is any more or less vital to the finished product than the floor cleaner: the patient will still die if the operating room is not sterile.

There are only two bases on which we can claim the greater vitality of the surgeon. The first is the 'hierarchy of skills' argument, which comes from Smith. This is the idea that the surgeon is more skilled than the cleaner because the surgeon could swap jobs but the cleaner could not. The idea behind it, which we have already encountered, is the idea that skills can be ranked according to their range, and that higher ones 'contain' lower ones. Deskillling is then cheaper because only the highest skill used by any particular workers is paid for. But this idea of ranking is a fallacy. Different use value cannot be reduced to quantity, cardinal or ordinal. The surgeon would not be as good as the cleaner at his or her job: there would be "lower" skills that the surgeon would not possess. This leaves us with another way of proposing the basis for a hierarchy of skills: training times. Here the surgeon would have an apparently clear basis for claiming superiority. But this merely begs the question of why this superiority is reflected both in longer training times, and a much higher salary, and why it should be that a hierarchy of skills, with extreme concentrations of expertise at one pole, and a corresponding dearth at the

other should be more efficient. It could as plausibly be argued that such a division of labour wastes skills, not rations them (which was the basis of the 'Voting' argument). Finally (to come to my third original point) the definition of these skills and their relation to what is counted as training times or costs of production, plainly has little to do with technical relations and everything to do with 'social' ones. 'Male' craft skills in manufacturing are the subject of long apprenticeships which cannot simply be explained by any technical component. But apparently similar 'female' craft skills, 'nimble fingers' trained in sewing and knitting which can then be applied to electrical or assembly work or cleaning skills also from the realm of domestic labour, are defined as free, because they are learned in the home.

To sum up my point. We cannot make a direct correlation between use-value and value aspect of 'skill'. This means that the capitalist at an individual factory level, or all capitalists at a social level, cannot make the comparison between the value of labour power, and the value it adds, nor translate this into an appropriate division of labour, as Braverman implies they do.

Braverman cannot explain this process in capitalist society: I will argue in chapter 5 that there is no immanent economic tendency in capitalist mode of production towards deskilling. Neither can he explain how it might be organised in socialist society, because as I have suggested, value relations disappear there altogether. But there would have to be some form of regulation. We cannot all choose to be cleaners, or brain surgeons, nor could we choose to be everything at once (e.g. critical critic in the morning, fisherman in the afternoon.) There is a tendency in Braverman's work to see deskilling as the solution to this problem. Because the logic of capitalist mode of production reduces work to the level of interchangeable abstract labour, socialist society will start out with a range of jobs which everyone can switch between, if their reactionary capitalist form has been swept aside. (!)

What is not transhistorical in all this however, are the categories brain surgeon and cleaner: ie. the division of labour which produces

certain packages of human abilities as jobs. And what Braverman has not done, is prove the definite connexion he asserts, between capitalist mode of production and a particular development of the division of labour. In contrast he is dependent on technicist assumptions about the nature of skill and the nature of technical innovation to be able to keep the relationship between efficiency and control on which his theory of the development of the labour process is dependent.

How does Braverman explain the 'constant revolutionising of the means of production'? He must be able to argue that such innovation involves both a heightening of capitalist control (capital must be able to incorporate powers of conception and direction which were previously the prerogative of the workforce into the technology itself) and more efficient production in value terms. This relationship is nowhere proved. Nor is this surprising because to prove it would require us to make an assumption Braverman must be unwilling to make. We must assume that the development of the productive forces in their technical aspect satisfies these requirements anyway. If we accept this then we return to technological determinism. Deskilling is just a product of the efficient use of the productive forces as they develop higher forms. We cannot wish away authority in production without also wishing away its level of productivity.

The analytical and historical slippage in the concept of the commodity status of labour enters Braverman's work directly from classical political economy. Indeed it performs the same role there. The Robinson Crusoe figure is both the starting point of history (and logic of development of capitalist market forces and the hidden hand) and yet at the same time an explanation of why historical explanation is unnecessary, the individual is a natural phenomenon, a starting point any analysis might choose and produce transhistorical results. Just as the category skilled worker effects the leap between feudal and capitalist society in Braverman's work, in classical political economy the 'individual' spans artificial and natural society.

This concept of the commodity status of labour also effects Braverman's explanation of the logic of deskilling. Braverman's account of deskilling is empirically attractive at a superficial level. It is certainly the case that the organisation of production within capitalism has been characterised by a progressive shift from reliance on the craft knowledge and experience of workers to production systems where management uses its own knowledge and expertise to decide how things are to be made. This is reflected both in the development of the technology of the labour process and its social relations: areas of responsibility allowed to workers, payment systems and so on.

Braverman's purpose is not to argue about the existence of deskilling but to analyse its dynamic and root its existence not in any transhistorical considerations of efficiency but the social relations specific to capitalism. His theory of deskilling came not from history but commodity status of labour theory. Deskilling is the process of moving from one side of the commodity status of labour antimony to the other: from the existence of labour power to the real appropriation of the labour within it. I have already pointed out the strange character of Braverman's account of conception and execution. This is because it comes straight from commodity status of labour theory. It is simply an application to the labour process of the natural right theories of ownership and control contained in

the original commodity status of labour proposition. If capitalist mode of production really is a society where the commodity status of labour exists then the owner of the commodity labour must have not only the right but the ability to control it. The formal subordination of labour must be made real. The purchaser of the commodity labour must also own and control its powers of conception as well as execution. This is what Braverman proposes: despite the empirical impossibility of such a transfer of the powers of conception (which even Braverman himself writes on occasion). The nearest approach Braverman can find to this in real history is Taylorism as a doctrine. Even Taylorism in practice does not measure up because for obvious reasons it could not achieve its original aim.

The definition of skill, as I argued above, is too complex for Braverman's theories to cope with. Braverman's account of deskilling appears convincing because it traces the decline of one particular type of skill: male craft knowledge which served as the basis for craft union organisation. Such skill has been the victim of restructuring of the work process, and the organisations which were dependent on it have been seriously weakened. Power in the trade union movement lies with the general, not the craft unions. But to identify this form of job control with workers control, this basis of workers influence in production with all workers influence in production, is quite misleading. It is to confuse parts of the experience of a very small part of the working population with the total experience of all. In the case of Britain it is the attempt to reduce labour history to the Engineering lock out of 1897 and the assertion of managerial prerogative which was imposed at its end. As such it is poor history. This particular attempt to ban the influence of craft unionism from the shop simply brought forth the shop steward system: the curse of employer and union official for many years to come.

Braverman analyses not capitalist relations but the fetishistic illusion which they throw up. In doing so he replicates almost all the ideas he attempts to negate (the equivalence of hierarchy and efficiency, the productive nature of capital, technological determinism). He ends up with his fetishistic conclusions because he starts out from the central illusion that capitalism throws up: the idea that commodity is a straightforward unity of use-value and

value, and that the defining characteristic of capitalist mode of production is that labour is such a commodity.

The commodity status of labour antimony presents a contrast between the idea of labour as such, free from any social determination, a relationship existing rather between the individual person and nature, and the opposite idea of labour as a social relations between buyers and sellers of a commodity: the collective subjugation of the person as commodity to the laws of the market. I have tried to show that what Braverman presents as a contrast between the nature of production in capitalist society, and that in societies without commodities, is in fact only the elaboration of this commodity status of labour antimony into a historical dimension. As such it makes bad and contradictory history. Not only is the direction of operation of the contradiction (from the first pole towards the second) not attributable to any logic of the capitalist mode of production, the nature of the contradiction is at fault.

Braverman confuses the form and general determinants of value, characterises capitalist mode of production as a society with value relations, and sees the commodity as simply use values which have become commodities by virtue of their having a quantitative value, represented directly by their price. But all that Braverman expresses when he proposes this is that capitalist production is social. He cannot tell us what form these value relations take once their existence is admitted except a purely quantitative one. There is the realm of 'real physical' relations, use-value, and the realm of social relations, value. When Braverman argues their identity (which he must do to be consistent with his argument that production is social) and that in contrast to technologically determinist theories, 'society' dominates 'technology', what else can Braverman conclude but that ownership does give rise to control, that the use-value aspects of production do correspond to the self expansion of value, that consequently hierarchy does mean efficiency, and that capitalism is about maximising the rate of development of the productive forces.

Value appears as directly visible in capitalist society, as the

quantitative indicator (in terms of the difference between labour and labour power) of capital's success in rendering labour abstract, while maximising labour's productive powers as measured by value itself.

Nor are these conclusions surprising: because if we confuse the form and general determinants of value, and in so doing reduce the social nature of production to a purely quantitative phenomenon then we can only pose the questions of whether or not a given mode of production is 'efficient' (does it maximise productivity or not) and whether it is fair (do equal 'values' exchange). Try as we might we cannot consistently investigate what Braverman sets out to investigate: the social organisation of production and technology itself irrespective of the distribution of inputs and outputs from it, or how efficient it is in itself.

What Braverman ends up doing is asserting, not proving, that quantitative value pressures (the need for capitalists to be efficient) force capitalists to organise the production and labour process in a specific technical use-value way. Formal value relations logically require real production relations. This in turn gives rise to Braverman's empirical problems and the phenomena I drew attention to in chapter 1 of 'reversal and qualification'. Because Braverman presents value in quantitative transhistorical terms, it is difficult to see how questions of efficiency and development of the production forces would alter in non commodity producing societies - unless we wish away value relations altogether. 'Reversal' arises because we can choose which side of the directly antithetic antimony to emphasise: the material development of the productive forces (good) or their capitalist form (bad). Qualification arises from the vain attempt to get logic to correspond to history at all.

This also explains the inability of Braverman to produce empirical analyses or conclusions. Because production must always be in a social form, and the only concepts of the social nature of production Braverman has developed are applicable to capitalist society we get presented with an analysis of the inevitability of whatever exists

within capitalism (since it must be social it must be capitalist) and empty formulas about removing the 'capitalist' aspects.

What Braverman and classical political economy share is their ahistorical concept of value, and concept of commodity status of labour. Because of this it must be argued that it is hopelessly inadequate to take the commodity status of labour as a definition of the form of value operative in capitalist society. But there is a more intimate connexion between the two categories. We have to ask where the concept of commodity status of labour came from if it is so historically useless. My comments on classical political economy and the labour theory of value above suggest that the roots of the commodity status of labour idea lie in the idea of individualism, the idea that individuals are sovereign over their own labour capacities and owe no obligation to society for them. This idea is clearly an ideological lynch-pin of capitalist social relations of production. Without it the rationale for private property and its association with equal rights and freedom all become hollow tautologies. It is clearly also a totally ahistorical notion: individuals can only exist in societies. This aspect of the problem has been dealt with many times (e.g. Marx in the introduction to the Grundrisse, MacPherson's writings on democratic theory.)

What has been less well noted is that the idea of commodity status of labour gives rise directly to the very conception of value relations that we have criticised classical political economy and Braverman for. Societies have one of two sorts of value relations: those that start out from individual freedom and those that subject the individual to direct social determination in the application of their labour. This contrast then appears not as one between two forms of value, but between the presence and absence of value relations: that is to say precisely the terms of debate between classical political economy and Marxism I outlined at the start of this section. What appears on one side as the antimony between individual and society appears on the other as the antimony between presence and absence of value relations.

These antinomies get us nowhere of course, Braverman's characterisation of the 'inversion' at the heart of capitalist mode of production as representing the domination of man by machinery (as the incarnation of the social relations of production) is just as meaningless as the classical political economy theorists contention that capitalist mode of production represents the ultimate freedom of the individual.

The inability of these theories to analyse relationship between the individual and society and their inability to separate the general determinants of value from the form of value are merely different aspects of the same problem: the inability to resolve the paradox of mode of production and identify the form of value in capitalist society.

The most direct aspect of this failure is the treatment of the form of value relations in capitalism. The presence of value relations is indicated by the commodity status of labour and the consequence that wealth takes the form of commodities. But the confusion between the form and general determinant value means that the commodity appears not as a particular historically possible form of value but as the social form which things take when value relations exist. Commodities are things with a value. Value relations without commodities just cannot be imagined. Another vital dimension of the confusion of form and general determinant of value in Braverman and in many other 'marxist' accounts as well, is the conflation of price and value in the treatment of the commodity. This in turn creates the impression that value relations in capitalism are visible and directly calculable. This assumption is present in many points of Braverman's argument. The reason for example, that the 'problem of management' (in extracting labour from labour power) is also its solution, is that management is seen as being capable of assessing the value of labour and labour power and maximising the difference. The reason that market forces can generalise deskilling is because management is assumed to be able to read from the value relations present on the market, the corresponding use-value relations required in the production process.

The implication contained in Braverman's work that capitalists know what they are doing, because they can calculate values directly, brings us back to the 'paradox of the mode of production' and the role for social science. For if the capitalists and workers are immediately aware of the terms of the value relations at work, then they must be able to know in advance what 'laws' they create. They would not need social science to reflect upon the commodity and its fetishism. They could predict the consequences of their economic organisation directly and organise it in a rational fashion. The market would be precisely what supporters of private enterprise have always claimed it to be: a transparent, neutral allocation mechanism. What else can it be if money is a numeraire? The 'laws' of the market would be directly visible by virtue of their social construction, and alterable according to whatever priorities might be socially agreed. Clearly this is not the case, nor would Braverman support such a view of the market. His aim is to prove how market forces, as the transmission belts of the inner logic of capital, enforce a particular social form of production within capitalism. As I summarised it above, his argument is that the social relations originally surrounding production, invade its inner nature. Once again Braverman's arguments point to mutually contradictory conclusions, he has not found a way through the paradox: if 'value' is a social creation, how can all of society be collectively subjugated to itself.

This conflation of value and price is a decisive one, because it implies that value relations in capitalist mode of production are visible. This is not a surprising result when it is remembered that the contrast between classical political economy and Braverman was the assumption of the former that value relations (in the sense of direct social regulation of production) were absent from capitalism, whereas the latter sought to characterise capitalism in terms of the dominance of value relations. But this impression that value relations in capitalist mode of production are visible falls foul of both dimensions of the paradox of mode of production. Firstly, it was one of the starting points of the argument that the peculiar character of capitalist mode of production was the apparent absence of value relations. There is clearly no direct social form of regulation of

production. If value relations are in fact visible then this would not be the case and the problem of searching for value in capitalist mode of production would not arise! Braverman seems caught in a trap. The purpose of his argument is to show that value relations do exist in capitalist production, in contrast to its free and neutral appearance. Yet any argument produced to demonstrate this must suggest that these value relations are in fact visible. If the social scientist can see them why not others too? Secondly Braverman suggests more than this. His argument requires people in capitalist mode of production itself to be conscious of the value relations at work and therefore of the operation of the law of value through market forces. This casts doubt on his theory of 'inversion' at the heart of capitalism. If value relations are so visible people must be aware of these laws, and conscious of the fact that they are their own collective creation. The collective subjugation of the producers to value relations must be of their own making and require their consent. Braverman has not posed an answer to the problem of how people are dominated by social laws (value relations) when these laws are their own creation. Braverman has not identified a specific form of value for the capitalist mode of production, he has been unable to characterise it as a mode of production.

Braverman's inability to characterise capitalism as a mode of production means that he is unable to differentiate the specifically capitalist elements from more transhistorical ones. He is unable to locate empirically the points of contradiction at which change might occur. He cannot separate out the capitalist aspects of the technology used or the relations of authority applied. Instead he arrives at the formula (since value relations as such have been made synonymous with capitalism) that technology is capitalist, that authority relations are capitalist. Contradiction and historical change cease to be empirical matters and instead we arrive at an account of history in terms of leaps between different logics cast in terms of the simultaneous correspondence and dislocation between the forces and relations of production which gives rise to the phenomenon of 'reversal' I described in the previous sections of this chapter. In order to

insert empirical history into this determinism empirical 'qualifications' to the logics originally identified have to be preposed. This has set the tune of the whole labour process debate. But these qualifications have no consistent place in the theory. As I argued above if they are to be accepted as real qualifications they invalidate the original idea of a logic. They are best seen as the way in which Braverman and theorists who have developed his ideas, seek to insert history into an ahistorical set of concepts.

Braverman simultaneously confronts two ideas. The first is the capitalist notion that authority at work in social terms (the right to manage and the nature of the development of the division of labour) and technical terms (the hierarchy of tasks and functions produced by the adoption of a particular technology) arises from technical facts of life. The second idea is the stalinist theory that what is important is simply the level of development of the productive forces. His aim is to show how both these kinds of authority relations in the labour process are rooted in the social relations of production. His problems stem from an inability to break out of a school of thought which saw these social relations and productive forces as separate in the first place. Ultimately Braverman's work inverts rather than transcends the capitalist thesis: instead of technology or authority relations in production as such determining social relations, social relations, conceived as separate from production are argued to determine production and technology. Deskilling is best seen as the material incarnation of what started out as a purely formal social relation: the commodity status of labour.

But the conceptual relationship between technology and society is not one that can be reversed. While a coherent theory of technological determinism is possible (if mistaken), to reverse the proposition tends toward the utopian notion that people are free to construct technology as they choose, without any restraints imposed by the existence of natural physical laws. Braverman never reaches this voluntarist conclusion, but the internal contradictions in his work wreak havoc with any attempt to draw practical conclusions from it.

I have argued from the outset of this work that one aspect of the problem has been the separation of the technical and the social in the first place: we cannot identify use-value with purely natural, transhistorical phenomena and value with the social and historically changeable. This is because such formulas inevitably confuse the form and general determinants of value. The problem before us now is how to analyse production, including its material-technical aspects as immediately social, without returning to a historical relativism, or the tautological assertion of the social nature of everything!

Underlying the various dimensions of Marx's differences with classical political economy and with the reading of his work which has dominated Western marxism which I want to reject is the recognition that the theory of the commodity status of labour, and the associated labour theory of value, on which these analyses are founded describe not the real processes of capitalist society, nor form an abstraction or model of its laws of motion. Rather they are a fetish which it throws up.

We have to reject the idea that the form of value in capitalist mode of production is to be found in the commodity status of labour and the consequent process of commoditisation. This is a formula that inevitably confuses form and general determinants and falls foul of the paradox. We must also find an independent form of value in capitalist society distinct from the idea of the existence of value relations as such. These are in fact the same task: the one proposition is the other.

The starting point of our critique depends on the understanding of two points: labour never has and never can become a commodity in the sense that classical political economists or later 'marxist' analyses uses the term. The purpose of Marx's work in capital was to find an alternative starting point for the analysis of capitalist mode of production. He finds it paradoxically in the commodity, and in the demonstration that money is a commodity. He does not start out from labour at all, far less from the concept of its commodity status.

The second point is that the commodity is more complex than the straightforward unity of use value and value, a thing with a price, which commodity status of labour analyses assume it to be.

It is strange that in all the voluminous debate which has taken place since Braverman, not one observer has pointed out a curious feature of his work. In the 400 odd pages of "Labour and Monopoly Capital" there is not one reference to money. In contrast to this I think it was his analysis of money that permits Marx to break free of the technicist implications of classical political economy and the labour theory of value, because it allows Marx to get beyond the simple contrast between value and use value, the technical and the social.

Footnotes to Chapter 3

1. Marcuse (1968) p.120
2. Weber (1979) pp.161-163
3. I must emphasise that I do not believe that what follows is a correct interpretation of Marx's arguments. It is an attempt to summarise the central points in the way most writers represent Marx.
4. Brenner (1977) argues this case for agriculture in Europe in the transition from feudalism to capitalism by showing the reverse: that where it was possible to keep labour unfree, there was no compulsion to develop the productive forces. The Polish Junkers responded to the increasing world market for grain by squeezing more surplus from the peasantry, in the course of which productivity and the level of technical development fell in the face of the Junkers' rapaciousness.
5. This theme is re-stated in Marx from Wage Labour and Capital and the Communist Manifesto through to Capital itself. 1976a ch. 24 and ch. 25 are his fullest accounts, especially pp 798-9
6. Davenport et al (1951) p.180
7. If this were Marx's intention 'Capital' would be the greatest ever monument erected to the 'Protestant ethic.'
8. (1974) ch. 13
9. CSE Sex and Class Group (1981)
10. Harrison (1973) argues the case for a 'domestic mode of production'. see also Barrett (1980) pp.172-6
11. Nor should it be thought that this is a problem only for Marxist capital logicians. R.K. Brown (1981) suggests that the focus for industrial sociology, in order to give it a disciplinary coherence, should be 'the employment relation.'
12. Thompson (1978) p.239
13. Sweezy (1968) p.24
14. MacPherson (1962) p. 263-264

15. As Pashukanis (1968) argues, commodity production and private property also give rise to the idea of individual morality, and the separation of 'is' and 'ought'. The actions of commodity owners are 'objectively constrained in their actions by the laws of the market, while subjectively they may reflect on their course. (ie. place 'value judgements' on them). The commodity status of labour might therefore be seen as constitutive of the subjectivity/objectivity split in social science I discussed in ch. (2).
16. Locke, quoted Marx (1969) p.365
17. Locke " MacPherson (1962) p.214
18. Hobbes, quoted MacPherson (1962) p.62, p.37.
19. Hobbes, quoted Marx, 1972, p. 353
20. Marx (1976a) pp. 173-174.
21. Marx (1962) pp. 367.
22. MacPherson (1962) pp. 214-215.
23. Locke, quoted MacPherson (1962) p.215
24. That is what most interpreters take to be Marx's theory of Primitive Accumulation: it is seen as a process which gives rise to capitalism. I will argue that it is better to see Marx's account of Primitive Accumulation as a process which takes place within capitalism.
25. Marx 1976a p.280
26. Both Clarke (1977) and Elson (1979) use the term. Clarke (in the context of a discussion of Poulantzas) argues that separating the forces and relations of production leads inevitably to the reduction of social relations to relations of distribution, and uses the concepts of correspondence and dislocation which I use below. Clarke is not to blame for the way I apply his concepts here.

Technicism has an illustrious precedent in Marx's treatment of the labour process in chapter 7 of Vol 1 where he proceeds "to consider the labour process independently of any specific social formation".(p.283) But as I argue in chapter 4, if the crucial distinction between aspects and types of labour is made, Marx can be absolved of charges of technicism.

27. Szymanski, (1978).
28. The parallels between Weber and a commodity status of labour based reading of Marx are legion, but would require another thesis to develop. Both theories produce global contradictions which are impossible to locate empirically. Weber contrasts individual freedom with bureaucracy's iron cage, a close parallel to Braverman's picture of universal collective subordination.
29. This antimony lies behind the development of the ownership and control debate. If we emphasise a historical setting we can produce the 19th C. tyrant and the 20th C. technocrat.
30. See p. 88 above for an exposition of Harry Braverman's problem of management.

CHAPTER FOUR : MONEY

".....it is money and not labour-time which functions as the social standard of measurement, in Marx's Capital, as in capitalist society itself. The reason that labour-time is stressed as the measure of value, is to argue that money in itself does not make the products of labour commensurable. They are only commensurable insofar as they are objectifications of the abstract aspect of labour.

(Elson 1979 p. 138)

#### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3 I have argued that the roots of the impasse in the labour process debate (itself symptomatic of failure in other branches of the study of the workplace and industry) lie in the labour theory of value and commodity status of labour analyses underlying it. In chapter 2 I have argued that this is a particular example of a pervasive way of thinking about societies and historical change which I labelled 'leap and logic' approaches because of the sorts of analysis they produce.

This gives rise to a new set of problems: for en route it seems as if we have destroyed the idea of capitalism as a coherent mode of production altogether. I have argued that wage labour cannot be understood as the reduction of labour to a commodity. I have also questioned the prevalence of wage labour itself. I have, in turn, argued that the ideas that capitalism is characterised by the maximising of efficiency or rationality in production must be wrong because the calculability rooted in the commoditisation of labour is not present. With this must be questioned the idea of the 'constant revolutionising' of production. For the idea seems to assume that the only issue at stake is the rate of technological development as opposed to its character. I have argued that labour theories of value are either technologically determinist, or a mere tautology, and do not prove that labour is exploited in capitalism, just as in their bourgeois version they do not prove that the hallmark of capitalism is efficiency!

It appears that I have argued too much in my efforts to overcome determinism and voluntarism. I have perhaps implied that there are no general features of capitalism as a mode of production, and correspondingly no general constraints on how we might try to change it or re-make it in the future. However, I think what I have argued above is something different. I have argued for the illegitimacy of 'leap and logic' conceptions of capitalism, and tried to show that throughout, they reduce empirical historical questions to those of form and logic. They cannot grasp historical concrete change. I think, however, that it is possible to argue that capitalism is a coherent mode of production, but that the 'laws' or constraints which characterise it are of a different nature to those

produced by leap and logic theory. This chapter attempts to identify an alternative 'logic' to the capitalist mode of production. In doing so I hope also to produce some answers to the issues I raised in chapter two, on the 'paradox of mode of production.' In particular I want to argue that Marx's concept of 'law' is not that of a model of otherwise unknowable social behaviour, but a description of a real process with historically bounded roots. It expresses the form of unconscious economic regulation which dominates capitalist society, but which is not transhistorical because it has (unconscious and unintended) social origins.

I want to argue that it is possible to read into Marx's mature works an approach to the study of society which can still legitimately claim to be 'scientific' but which does not degenerate into determinism as a consequence. This method is at the same time an analysis of capitalist society that dispenses with either a labour theory of value, or the notion that the vital aspect of capitalism is the commodity status of labour.

From my arguments in chapters 1 to 3 I have to present an analysis of capitalist mode of production that envisages it as 'logical' enough to merit a scientific analysis of its nature, yet humanly constructed so that any such logic is historically contingent. I think the key to this paradox lies not in any special procedures social science might produce to unravel it, but rather in the special character of capitalist mode of production itself. It is a mode of production which in some vital respects is unconsciously constructed.<sup>(1)</sup> This special feature gives rise to the space for social science to operate without determinist assumptions or results. It is money that is the basis of this feature. That is why money, not the commodity status of labour is the most significant aspect of capitalist mode of production.

Marx's object in the theory of value is the clarification of how labour comes to be determined, made necessary by the peculiar nature of that form of determination in capitalism: its fetishistic character. It's aim is not to tell people what their future is by trying to see it as an effect of a causally explained historical past. Rather its role is to 'decipher' the fetishistic character of production relations within capitalist mode of production and by thus clarifying what the nature of production relations or the 'conditions' facing people are, to enable them to make better

attempts to change it. The key to this process of deciphering lies in analysing the commodity: the form things take when they are produced for exchange. This is why Marx starts with the commodity and not directly with the form of labour. It is surprising that those who have seen in Marx's theory an explanation of capitalism as a mode of production in terms of the dominance of a particular type of labour or relations of production at the point of production, have not found it puzzling that the consideration of labour is only developed after consideration of the commodity. The order of development of the argument must appear, to say the least, rather unusual. Marx begins with the commodity because in contrast to classical political economists and most modern 'marxists' he realised it was more than just a thing with a quantitative price.

One problem our alternative theorisation will have to address is the basis of calculation and quantification in capitalist mode of production, if we are rejecting the assumption that this arises unproblematically from the existence of wage labour. I have tried to show the problems with an analysis which reduces capitalist mode of production to a specific social relations of distribution or of quantitative value relations mapped onto use-value relations. But it remains the case that the reduction of real production relations to number and quantitative issues of, for example, rates of return, do play a large and important part in capitalism itself as well as the analysis of it. This is the significance of the arguments made in the following section on the status of money in our analysis. The problem before us is to escape from the determinism produced by the idea that calculation (and efficiency on that basis) spring directly from the wage labour relation (and the ability of the capitalist to render it complete) without slipping over into the voluntarist position that calculation in capitalism is quite relative and there is no requirement to be efficient. This will appear as the second significance of money in our analyses. As well as the basis of fetishism it is also the basis of calculation. When we combine these results we will see that, far from embodying the maximisation of efficiency or exploitation, capitalist production relations systematically prevent and obscure efficiency and rational calculation.

## 4.2 Marx and Classical Political Economy

Many of the problems I have outlined can usefully be considered in terms of the relationship between Marx and classical political economy, one of the major objects and sources of his study. In particular I have suggested that the problem with many of the accounts I have considered is that they see Marx as doing two, related, things to classical political economy. The first is to 'add a historical perspective.' Here it is argued that Marx shares many of classical political economy's formulations, for example, the commodity status of labour or a labour theory of value, but sees them as historically specific: as particular to a society in which labour is a commodity. Thus Sweezy depicts Marx as adding a 'qualitative' 'historical' dimension to classical political economy's 'quantitative' value problem for example. The second is to characterise Marx, either consciously or unconsciously as inverting classical political economy's propositions: stressing the opposite side of the commodity status of labour antimony, emphasising primitive accumulation and the prior theft of the means of production, arguing that exploitation of surplus value and not equal exchange is the essence of capitalism. I think that neither of these propositions describes Marx's relationship to classical political economy. It should be clear from chapter 3 that what these propositions reveal is continued subjection of their adherents to the 'leap and logic' mode of arguments of classical political economy, and explain why an alternative 'reading' of Marx is required.

The question of historical perspective can be answered thus: it was not an absence of it in classical political economy that Marx set out to change, but the nature of it. That is to say he did not set out to prove that 'men make history' but to argue about how they do so, and how this might be understood, and therefore what the role of social science might be.

One student of early 19th century political economy has noted how (in contrast to today's neoclassical systems) it spent time "comparing the course of economic development in Britain to that of other Western economies, that of primitive societies, that of previous historical epochs." (Berg, 1976 p.17) Marx, in his survey of classical political economy, "Theories of Surplus Value" makes comments which suggest he fully recognised class-

ical political economy's possession of a historical perspective which with Richard Jones, reached the point where capitalist mode of production was seen as a historical form of organisation of production. Marx speaks of his work as:-

"distinguished by what has been lacking in all English economists since Sir James Stewart, namely a sense of the historical differences in modes of production.' Jones states quite explicitly that capital and the capitalist mode of production are to be "accepted" merely as a transitional phase in the development of social production, a phase which if one considers the development of productive forces of social labour, constitutes a gigantic advance on all preceding forms, but which is by no means the end result, on the contrary, the necessity of its destruction is contained in the antagonism between the "owners of accumulated wealth and the actual labourers."

(Marx 1972, p. 428)

For leap and logic theories, the above would serve as a good summary of Marx's own work. In which case it begs the question of why he thought it necessary to spend years of exhausting intellectual endeavour, apparently neglecting far more urgent political tasks, to produce a work which was but part one of the first of six works he originally contemplated. All this on a project he at first expected to finish in six weeks!

Marx has been read as the last of the classical economicists, rounding out its contradictions and problems by the addition of 'the historical perspective'. But I think we can argue that this is something which classical political economy has already done from within itself. Not only the work of Jones, but the works of the Ricardian Socialists, and even Smith's writings on the nature of the state prove that classical political economy was not the historically naive science it is often portrayed as.

His work took so long I think, because rather than adding a missing historical perspective he tried to rethink what history was and how it was made. It seems to me that this is the issue he explicitly confronts Ricardo with in the obscure opening chapters of volume one. This also means that these chapters are decisive for the rest of the book and

cannot be ignored, because the entire significance and interpretation of the apparently more straightforwardly economic parts of the text turn upon them. Without these opening chapters, Marx does undoubtedly become a 'leap and logic' theorist. I would go so far as to say that this is in fact what Marx was in terms of his economic writings at least, until the appearance of Capital. The 1844 manuscripts are riddled with examples of circular and tautological arguments: for example the inability to pose the relationship between private property and alienated labour except as a logical one of mutual presupposition. Indeed it is a moot point whether Marx does break free from leap and logic arguments in Capital itself. The point which I wish to make, however, and which is central to this whole thesis, is that Capital taken as a whole makes sense only as a critique of leap and logic theories. Because of the way he formulates his arguments it is very easy to read Capital as an analysis of the 'logic' of capitalist mode of production in a leap and logic tradition, but I think the effort Marx expended makes nonsense of reading him as just another classical economist. The problem is made worse, both because of the pressures to read Marx in this way (Banaji, 1976) and because Marx, insofar as he is debating with classical political economy is forced to use the same terminology: "laws of motion", "value", "labour", etc. so that often, at crucial stages in the argument, it is easily forgotten or rather never even appreciated, that Marx meant different things by his concepts, established them in a different way and drew totally different conclusions from them. The opening chapters are crucial because what they do is suggest a new understanding of what economic "laws" are.

Thus it is in the answers to the questions posed here that we must find the solution to the 'riddle' of 'choice versus conditions,' of laws and <sup>tr</sup>äger versus struggle and authors, the solution to the apparent tension in Marx and the 'paradox' of the concept of mode of production. It must provide an account of the 'inversion' at the heart of capitalist society which sees this not in terms of a formula with no real content, but in terms of peoples own social relations with each other and how they have become obscured.

I think that it is in Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, which I proceed to elaborate in this chapter, that Marx's solution to these problems is to be found. This point leads us to the second characteris-

ation of Marx: as 'inverting' classical political economy.

I think he does not 'invert' it, because his theory of commodity fetishism starts him off on an altogether different track from the start. Unlike classical political economists Marx poses the question of what a commodity is and what lies behind it. This enables him to argue, not that the commodity status of labour is a historically specific phenomenon, but that it is a fetish, an illusion, part of the ideology, not reality, of capitalist production.

This enables us to answer an otherwise puzzling problem: why does Marx not start either with a presentation of his method, or with labour, the apparent object of his analysis, and the subject of what he claimed to be the 'best point' in his work: the two fold character of labour.

I think it can be answered in the following way, and the remainder of this chapter may be seen as an elaboration of this thesis. Marx claims, unlike relativist approaches to science, not to start out from concepts or models. Instead he has as his object of analysis value: something he claims to be real but not necessarily visible. It is only visible in capitalist mode of production through the commodity. It is therefore with this which Marx commences his analysis, rather than some formal presentation of his method. It is also in the commodity that Marx finds his differences with classical political economy because he argues that the latter has taken for granted something which is the key to analysing capitalist mode of production. Marx does not begin with labour directly because the labour visible in commodity producing societies is not immediately social, but private. Its social character is revealed only through the social relations of its product. And in capitalist society these social relations are not conscious and visible to their human authors. They are, paradoxically, a material thing: the commodity.

#### 4.3 Commodity status of labour arguments and the origin of commoditisation.

Arguments, such as Braverman's and varieties of the labour theory of value which start out from the commodity status of labour face an intractable problem accounting for how that status has come about. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Braverman nowhere deals with the origins of the labour-capital relation, but assumes its existence from the outset. This method of argument is also largely true of other anti-technological determinist authors who set out from a consideration of social (value) relations and proceed to investigate the effect of this on technology. They simply invert the technological determinist thesis.

This problem also dominates the debate over the transition from feudalism to capitalism, to the extent that it has gone beyond empirical histiography to attempt to draw theoretical conditions. Justifying this proposition properly would be a work in itself, albeit one which I believe would be straightforward as so many of the protagonists (Dobb, Sweezy and others) are common to the value debate as well.

The problem facing both Braverman and the transition theorists is that the commodity status of labour and the generalisations of commodity production and exchange appear to pre-suppose each other. Thus on the one hand only if the means of production and means of subsistence have become private property does it seem possible to make labour a commodity. On the other hand, only if labour is a commodity, does it seem possible to generalise the production of commodities. Private property in the means of production or subsistence is of little value if the means of subsistence cannot be sold to wage earners who have to buy it nor if labour power cannot be purchased to operate the means of production. In other words we require a 'leap' to enter into this 'logic' of commodity relations. For classical political economy the 'leap' is immaterial. Given the assumption that the commoditisation of labour is a 'natural' right, there seems little need to account for its genesis:

"the pre-bourgeois forms of the social organisation of production are treated by political economy in much the same way as the Fathers of the Church treated pre-christian religions.....  
Every religion which is not theirs is an invention of men, while

their own is an emanation of God."

(Marx 1976, p175, p175n)

For marxism, however, the character of the leap is of great importance: it sets the terms of operation of the logic which follows it and guarantees the preconditions for a following 'leap'. In fact the revolution to a socialist mode of production tends to be seen (as I have hinted in my account of Braverman) in terms of a reversal of the original leap: history falls into relations of commoditisation and then escapes from it again. Production both before and after capitalism is seen as directly socially regulated and visible: a question of concrete labour and use value. Within capitalism it becomes dominated by value relations, is privatised and becomes abstract.

The 'leap' is the process of primitive accumulation: the forcible expropriation of the direct producers from the means of production and subsistence in order to turn them into commoditised wage slaves. The significance of this leap is twofold. First of all it 'explains' the origin of capital and labour at once. Smith faced the problem of accounting for what he termed 'the previous accumulation of capital' which enables the original entrepreneur to set the process in motion, without having the results of that process, accumulated capital produced by surplus value, available.<sup>(2)</sup> Leap and logic theorists can claim that Marx's solution to the problem is simple. The capitalists stole it. The expropriation of the direct producers, in contradiction to their 'natural' bourgeois rights is the basis of the whole process. It also determines that it is the reactionary rather than progressive side of the two fold 'freedom' implied by the commodity status of labour which is dominant: the direct producers must alienate their labour power and therefore the surplus value it produces to the capitalist. The prior theft of the means of production renders the individual sovereignty of the direct producers over their own labour powers mythical.

This point is vital, for it establishes the only real difference between the marxist and bourgeois versions of the labour theory of value. Because the terms of exchange of commodities are loaded by this prior theft, marxists can present the laws of motion of capitalism as the further development of this original inequality. It is this which allows them

to see the historical development of the contradiction between the individual and the social aspect of the commodity status of labour as malevolent whereas the bourgeois theorists can present it as inherently free and benevolent. The leap and logic contradiction underlying the commodity status of labour is therefore developed in its voluntarist aspect by the bourgeois theorists (all men are now sovereign over their own productive capacities and free to organise production as they see fit) and in the determinist aspect by the marxists (all men are now subject to the laws of commodity exchange and capital accumulation).

There are three major defects with this model. The first is that it does not (and I fail to see how it ever could) explain why the leap occurred in the first place. It tends to present the development of capitalism in terms of a choice by the ruling class at some point to commoditise labour. It is clear neither why they should decide to do this (although there is of course a crude technological determinist account in terms of levels of technology facing more 'liberal' labour relations arrangements) nor how they were able to. The process of primitive accumulation is presented less as a question of class struggle than a world historical class defeat: from then on, literally, capital is omnipotent and the direct producers smashed. Indeed here we have nothing but a straightforward inversion of the 'Robinsonade' theory of classical political economy, but with the other side of the commodity status of labour antimony emphasised. The point of departure, historically and analytically, is not the sovereign individual, but the propertyless proletarian. Just as classical political economy then proceeds to establish laws of motion of a society constituted by such individuals, so too does its Marxist mirror image: here is the overall context in which Braverman's work ought to be seen. (It is perhaps best seen as a religious one: there is a fall from the original unity of conception and execution into the eternal damnation of commodity relations and the accumulation of capital). We are left with the same sort of historical conception as classical political economy. There is prehistory and then there is the arrival of primitive accumulation (just as in classical political economy we have the arrival of the entrepreneur).

The second defect with this model is the historical timing. The process

of primitive accumulation depicted by Marx in Vol 1 centres on the enclosures and expropriation of the peasantry in Britain from the end of the fifteenth century and reaches its zenith only in the eighteenth. (1976, p883 and ch 28 *passim*). If this is so it cannot account for the process of commoditisation (including commoditisation of labour) and the development of money and commodity production, for they are much older.

I think the process of primitive accumulation as it is described by Marx in volume one was not the cause or origin of the development of capitalist social relations but its result: a process spurred on by a landed capitalist gentry in the countryside and a capitalist state acting under the banner of nationalism and protestantism (the Reformation.) <sup>(3)</sup> I argue below that primitive accumulation is not a move towards commoditisation (and not the establishment of a formal subordination of labour) but one within it.

The third defect, is that it reduces Marx's analysis virtually to the status of one of the theorists he spent most time attacking: Proudhon. Proudhon's motto was 'property is theft.' The analysis of commoditisation produced by leap and logic theorists amounts only to 'the means of production are theft,' or rather 'property is prior theft of the means of production.' It replaces Proudhon's phrase with an analysis of capitalism as theft dressed up in the appearance of free exchange whose real terms have been fixed by the original expropriation of labour. I don't believe this was the sum of Marx' efforts.

Part of the problem is that it was from something akin to this perspective that Marx certainly set out: in the 1844 manuscripts for example, Marx proposes that:

"Private property (ie. commodity production and its relations JM) is thus the product the result, the necessary consequences of alienated labour.....though private property appears to be the reason, the cause of alienated labour, it is rather its consequence.....Later this relationship becomes reciprocal.

(Marx, 1975 pp 279-280)

And so Marx asks how 'does man come to alienate, to estrange his labour?'. (opcit p281) He proceeds to avoid answering the question because the

solution, in terms of his starting point is obvious. The relations of the worker to production is expressed by the existence of private property, and the result that:

"Labour produces not only commodities, it produces itself and the workers as a commodity, and this at the same rate at which it produces commodities in general."

(p. 272)

Marx is caught in the same problem as the latter day commodity status of labour theorists: the logic of capitalist development seems quite straightforward but its origins appear as a contradiction in terms. The analysis moves round in circles, like the apparent immutable logic of capitalist mode of production itself. Its conclusion that the abolition of the form of labour and the mode of production are mutually reciprocal preconditions of any forward development, cannot be empirically fixed.

Marx's personal intellectual battles of the twenty three years between the Paris manuscripts and the publication of Volume One were Marx's attempts to escape from this analytically vicious circle. Thompson doubts that he ever escaped it, and this must certainly be the correct verdict on the bulk of his contemporary interpreters and of their influence in the debates I have considered. However, I believe that there are elements of alternative readings in Marx, as I have already suggested.

The first issue I tackle is the question of the nature of commoditisation and the significance of the commodity. Then I turn to Marx's consideration of the character of labour in capitalist mode of production. Taken together I suggest these amount to the raw material for an analysis of capitalist mode of production of the sort required by my arguments in Chapter. 3.

#### 4.4 Money makes the world go around

My argument requires that Marx's project be seen as transcending rather than inverting the arguments of classical political economy. I have already suggested that the common view that Marx improved on classical political economy by adding a historical perspective, introducing the 'qualitative' value problem and showing capitalism to be a mode of production is quite insufficient to deal with the point and bequeathes to Marx the irresolvable contradictions of his intellectual forebears.

There are two pointers to the nature of Marx's distinctions. The first is his preoccupation with the form of value and its result: the concept of the fetishism of commodities. The second is his refusal to attempt to analyse "labour as such." I concentrate on the second point in the following section. Both points are relevant to the issue with which I now wish to start my discussion: Marx's starting point in Capital.

In all the writings on the labour process, on the labour theory of value, and other aspects of Marx's work no-one (so far as I am aware) has asked why it is that if Marx's focus is the determination of labour, he commences his analysis with the commodity, the product of labour. In contrast to his 1844 point of departure Marx proceeds to analyse capitalism not as alienated labour, but rather as:-

"an immense collection of commodities" (1976 p.125)

Many theorists have skipped the opening chapters, dismissing them as a product of 'flirtation with Hegelian mode of expression' probably encouraged by the infamous carbuncles. Althusser advises his readers to start at chapter 6 in order to commence directly with the form of labour, and Joan Robinson dismisses them as 'mysticism.' This, as we know, was certainly not Marx's view, and there has been a lot of attention paid to the section on commodity fetishism, as many ideas appear to be contained there.

The problem is two-fold I think. First of all, it seems perfectly

possible to make sense of the rest of Capital without the opening chapters, and indeed their connexion with the rest of the work is hard to grasp. I think this tends to result in a classic 'leap and logic' formulation. The remainder of Capital is viewed as the explanation of the 'logic' of capital (its economic laws of motion) while the opening chapters are seen as an explanation of the problem of visibility of the historical specificity of these laws. We return to a bifucation of economic determinism at one level, and struggle at the level of ideas: fetishised versus scientific consciousness, on the other. It is clear that I wish to reject this (see my discussion of Braverman on class consciousness and strategy above).

The second aspect is simply that it is hard both to understand the content of the opening chapters (the language even for Marx, is remarkably Aesopian) and to understand their aim.

It will come as no surprise that I wish to argue that the opening chapters are decisive because they, in their consideration of the form of value, attempt to solve the problem of the paradox of mode of production and thus form the vital context for the laws which are to be elaborated later on. In doing so they also solve the problem of the origins of commoditisation. They answer the question: what is a commodity? In the course of his answer Marx establishes the crucial proposition that the form of value in capitalist society is to be found in the commodity form itself. Moreover, it is this form itself which renders value relations in capitalist mode of production obscure. In order to appreciate the novelty of this, it is worth reviewing the answer to this question assumed by classical political economy/labour theory of value theorists.

As I have suggested above, for them a commodity is a thing with a price. This permits a quantitative investigation into the nature of these prices, and it may be argued that prices can be explained (more or less directly) by amounts of labour. (It is from this basis that Braverman's account of the real subordination of labour ultimately springs. The need of the capitalist to minimise prices can be met only by maximising the real subordination of labour in order to

extract the maximum amount of value producing labour from a given amount of purchased labour power in order to further hasten accumulation and the amounts of average socially necessary labour absorbed.) It also permits a 'qualitative' investigation into why things possess price at all. This is the investigation which is seen as particular to Marx. But the only answer it can give is a totally circular one! Things possess price because.....they are commodities. Why do the products of labour take the form of commodities? The answer usually returns to the commodity status of labour, primitive accumulation and so on: we are back to 'leap' theory.

There are two important implications of this view of the commodity. The first is the role attributed to commodity fetishism: this is reduced to the proposition that commodity production makes itself appear permanent when it is in fact historically transitory. It obscures its own basis in the commodity status of labour and makes capitalism appear natural. For example the commodity status of labour appears to be a natural right. Against this, the aim of Marx's theory is seen to be to show its social and historical character. The opening chapters can then be read as an explanation of why classical political economy mistook the commodity for a transhistorical feature of production, instead of a feature of capitalist mode of production only. We are back to the idea that Marx's work is basically 'the addition of historical perspective.'

The second implication is the status attributed to money in the analysis. It inevitably becomes a secondary feature, a numeraire for accounting the real basis of social relations of production: labour and its value. We could summarise this by saying, in the historical epoch characterised by commodity status of labour, things, as products of labour, have value, and production relations take the form of value relations, which are purely quantitative, and as such accounted in monetary terms. The nature of these relations is such as to force producers to maximise efficiency in production in order to maximise exploitation and thus the maximisation of value production and expansion. The opening chapters then read as an explanation of 'money' in terms of the real labour relations lying behind it. (4)  
Money becomes an imaginary symbol for real wealth.

This begs the question of the origin and character of money in capitalist society. Money is obviously important, but it appears from the line of argument pursued so far that it is only a technical device made necessary by the commodity status of labour: a question of finding a unit of account to measure value relations which themselves have no intrinsic connexion with the nature of money.

This poses a serious problem for the theory because it now appears that, in contrast to the idea contained in commodity fetishism that commoditisation is a process which renders the participants unconscious of their position, we are now proposing that money was established consciously by a social convention to use it as it were.

This problem expresses the difficulty which commodity status of labour arguments face, that if commoditisation was originally a conscious historical development, it is difficult to account for the fetishism of commodities, and the need for science to decipher value and penetrate the 'invisibility' of capitalist mode of production. If, on the other hand, we argue that there was no such intention and conscious purpose behind commoditisation, it is very difficult to account for its historical genesis at all.

This is nothing but the paradox of the mode of production staring us in the face. If money is a social product, how have we 'forgotten' or become blind to its nature? On the other hand if money is not a social product, it must be a natural eternal feature of production which since it must always be that and cannot be changed, need not concern social science. Classical political economy was right after all - we should simply ignore the form of value.

The problem which such marxist theorists have with money is again, a reflexion of classical political economy's difficulties: it could only account for it as a natural phenomenon or one established by a convention too. Its significance for Marx was different. For Marx money is a commodity not a mere symbol of wealth underpinned by a social convention but as much a part of social production as other commodities. It is thus vital in two ways. Analysis of money is a decisive part of the analysis of what commodities are: for they are

altogether more complex and mystical than things with a value: money is the form of representation of the value of commodities. And money is vital because it, not value or labour time is the basis of calculation and measurement in capitalist production. For the point to grasp about commodity fetishism is not that it produces a false picture of what commodity production is, a false consciousness of a 'true' state of affairs, it is that the social relations of production, the social character of production in capitalist society, is really materially invisible to the producers themselves.

Almost all interpretations of Marx simply see this as a question of the visibility of capitalism's historical character: a question of the existence of value relations as such. The aim of the analysis is to show that there is a form of regulation in capitalism, as opposed to the appearance of individual freedom. This 'regulation' reveals itself ultimately as the general law of capitalist accumulation.....in other words we are straight back to the elaboration of the antimony between determinism and voluntarism at the heart of the commodity status of labour.

Marx's point is a different one. He goes beyond the demonstration of the presence of the general determinants of value in capitalist society to ask the question of the form they take. It is that commodity fetishism obscures the quantification of value and its terms as well as existence. It is not a question of the invisibility or obscurity of the value-form as such, or the fact that capitalism is a historically specific mode of production: it is the fact the content of value relations are hidden from the producers. It is not just that the existence of social relations of production is not immediately apparent, it is that no-one can ever discover what the terms of these relations are: for at the centre of capitalist society lies the anarchy of the market. What the analysis of commodity fetishism reveals is not that the regulation of value relations is obscure, or other than it appears to be, so much as that it takes place only in blind and unconscious and unplanned forms. That is not to say that it does not take place, only that there can be no direct social control over it. Here lies the escape from the paradox. In the value form of capitalist mode of production we find a set of economic laws which are certainly

socially constructed, but which, by their very nature, cannot be consciously grasped, and cannot have been consciously planned.

Value in capitalist society may exist, but it can never be directly observed. Only money, which is merely a form of representation of value can be. By the social character of production I mean far more than the fact that the producers have a historically specific social relation to each other (Sweezy's Qualitative value problem) I mean also that it is quite impossible for them to know what the precise terms of their relationship to each other are. It is not just that they are unaware that they produce value as a historically specific form of production, it is that they can never know how much value they produce. One might express this by saying that commodity fetishism is a true consciousness of a false state of affairs.

I think we can begin to imagine just how revolutionary this insight might prove because it offers to break down that bifurcation terms and existence, form of production and its empirical content, which we have been up against from the start. More specifically for our purposes, it poses the possibility of a break between capitalism and efficiency that we have been looking for. I will now try to clarify the argument about the commodity, money and value in the opening chapters of Capital to demonstrate how this argument may be made.

Commodity fetishism is the basis for Marx's 'theory of value' in capitalist mode of production, because it is through the fetishism attached to commodities that value finds a form of expression in capitalist mode of production. Marx's argument is that classical political economy did not investigate the nature of the commodity, and so could not discover the nature of the form of value within capitalism. His argument was not that classical political economy did not recognise the historically specific nature of commodity production, but that its inability to grasp what the commodity was and what form of value this entailed, rendered classical political economy incapable of understanding history adequately. I would argue that the most important division to be made is not between ahistorical and historical approaches, with classical political economy on the one side and marxisms of all kinds on the other, but between leap and logic approaches to history (embracing both classical political economy and modern "marxists") and Marx's attempt to produce a more coherent analysis of history. Commodity fetishism is therefore not about recognising the existence of the commodity, but analysing what it is. Marx noted that classical political economy:-

"has never once asked the question why this content has aroused that particular form, that is to say why labour is expressed in value and why the management of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of value of the product."

(1976 p.174)

"Even its best representatives, Adam Smith and Ricardo treat the form of value as something of indifference, something external to the nature of the commodity itself.....We therefore find that economists who are entirely agreed that labour time is the measure of the magnitude of value have the strangest and most contradictory ideas about money, that is, about the universal equivalent in its finished form."

(1976 p.174n)

He commences with it because it is the almost universal form which wealth takes in capitalist society, and because it is only as the producer of commodities that labour can be seen as social in

capitalist mode of production at all! He cannot (as he tried to do in 1844) start with labour, because its social character only reveals itself indirectly in exchange. The labour which is directly visible in capitalist society because it is labour which produces commodities is private and independent: one of the presuppositions of the existence of commodities in the first place.<sup>(5)</sup>

Finally, starting with the commodity means that Marx can legitimately claim to be avoiding a heuristic approach for model building exercise. He is not starting out from concepts but from something real.

Commodities are combinations of use value and value. As use values they appear straightforward. Use value simply "constitute the material content of wealth whatever its social form may be". (1976 p.126) Similarly as values, they can be no more of a problem, for the 'general determinants of value' are as straightforward as the concept of use value:

"For in the first place, however varied the useful kinds of labour, or productive activities, it is a physiological fact that they are functions of the human organism, and that each such function, whatever may be its nature or form, is essentially the expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles and sense organs. Secondly, with regard to the foundation of the quantitative determination of value, namely the duration of that expenditure or the quantity of labour, this is quite palpably different from its quality. In all situations, the labour-time it costs to produce the means of subsistence must necessarily concern mankind, although not to the same degree at different stages of development. And finally, as soon as men start to work for each other in any way, their labour also assumes a social form."

(Marx, 1976, p.164)

And so to what can we attribute classical political economy's difficulties with the commodity? The answer must be the form of value found in societies where production takes the form of commodities: for there appears to be no social mechanism through which the general determinants of value come to be expressed. Marx's comments on p.174, quoted above, suggest clearly that the point at issue is the character of the social form of production when commodity exchange appears to be the only mechanism for the regulation of value:

"Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly, it arises from this form itself."

"It is one of the chief failings of classical political economy that it has never succeeded, by means of its analysis of commodities, and in particular of their value, in discovering the form of value which in fact turns value into exchange-value. Even its best representatives, Adam Smith and Ricardo, treat the form of value as something of indifference, something external to the nature of the commodity itself. The explanation for this is not simply that their attention is entirely absorbed by the analysis of the magnitude of value. It lies deeper. The value-form of the product of labour is the most abstract, but also the most universal form of the bourgeois mode of production; by that fact it stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character."

(Marx, 1976, p164, p.174n)

Marx refuses to account for the genesis of the commodity in terms of a leap to relations of commoditisation. The commodity is not peculiar to capitalism, in fact it is highly developed well before capitalism and not all dependent on the existence of a specific form of labour or of private property. All it requires is that there be producers (individuals or groups) who are independent of one another and do not produce for each other directly. Exchange may begin with the sporadic barter of things between different groups. But as this process of exchange becomes more widespread different use values will begin to exchange in indefinite and more regular quantities. (This is most obvious in capitalist mode of production itself where commodity production and exchange is general.)

"Their quantitative exchange relation is at first determined purely by chance. They become exchangeable through the mutual desire of their owners to alienate them. In the meantime the need for others' objects of utility gradually establishes itself. The constant repetition of exchange makes it a normal social process. In the course of time, therefore, at least some part of the products must be produced intentionally for the purpose of exchange. From that moment the distinction between the usefulness of things for direct consumption and

their usefulness in exchange becomes firmly established. Their use value becomes distinguished from their exchange value."

(1976, p.182)

What is involved in this process of quantitative exchange of commodities? The reason for exchange is fairly obvious: the difference in use values. The problem is to explain not the qualitative difference but their quantitative identity! The basics of Marx's argument is well known. The quantitative commensuration of two commodities entails that there is a 'common element' between them: the fact that they are both values, both products of human labour in its generality.

In labour theory of value approaches this is taken to mean that labour time, observable separate from exchange value or price is the 'cause' of value and therefore of price, and therefore that it is the 'real' source of wealth behind money.

Marx's argument is not this however. Firstly, labour time observable in capitalism is that of particular, concrete labour not general-social labour. Secondly value and exchange value are two different things. Exchange value expresses the relative values of two commodities. (If one of the commodities is the money commodity it expresses the others' price.) But it cannot, and does not, express the 'absolute' value of either commodity. 'Value' has no direct expression when the exchange of commodities occurs. It has only a form of representation: exchange value. Here is the key to the 'mystical character' of commodities. Let us examine Marx's account of the exchange of two commodities more closely because its significance is beginning to become apparent: the mysticism of the form of value in commodity production arises from the fact that it has no independent form of expression. There is no direct social regulation of production, nor can there be. However 'value' must, none the less, exist, we cannot wish away the general determinants of value in any society. The conclusion to be drawn is that the form of value is to be found in the exchange of commodities itself.

When two commodities are related together each expresses the others value, but the relation only proceeds in one direction at any time

(ie. we cannot use one relation to express the value of both commodities.) Marx uses the terms 'relative' and 'equivalent' to distinguish this. I will use Marx's first example in Volume 1 (1976, p.139 onwards.)

"20 yds of linen equal/are worth one coat"

In this relation the first commodity relates itself to the second by having its value represented by the use value of the second commodity. The commodity which is having its value expressed is in the 'relative' form, that which serves as the body of expression of value, through which the value of the other is expressed, is in the 'equivalent' form.

"the coat counts as the form of existence of value, as the material embodiment of value, for only as such is it the same as the linen."

This is because, as we argued before, it is only as values, as quantities of congealed human labour in general, that commodities can be seen as equivalent. This process of exchange, this relation between commodities gives value in commodity producing society its form of appearance, which it could not otherwise have.

"If we say that, as values, commodities are simply congealed quantities of human labour, our analysis reduces them, it is true, to the level of abstract value, but does not give them a form of value distinct from their natural forms. It is otherwise in the value relation of one commodity to another. The first commodity's value character emerges here through its own relation to the second commodity."

(1976, p.141-2)

As such it is this relation between commodities which reveals the existence of the social determination of labour in commodity producing society: <sup>(6)</sup>

"By equating for example, the coat as a thing of value to the linen, we equate the labour embedded in the coat with the labour embedded in the linen.

(1976, p.142)

In the relative form of value, a commodity gains a form of representation for its own value in the use value of the commodity in the equivalent form. What of this latter commodity itself, the commodity which is directly exchangeable with the first? The vital thing to note about it, the significance of which will soon become apparent, is that insofar as it is in the equivalent form expressing the value of the other commodity in the relative form, it cannot express the magnitude of its own value quantitatively.

"Two coats can therefore express the magnitude of value of 40 yds of linen, but they can never express the magnitude of their own value.....the equivalent form of the commodity contains no quantitative determinant of value."

(1976, p.147-8)

This also expresses the fact that a change in the relative value of the first commodity may be caused by a change in its own value, that of the equivalent, or a change in both.

There are three other interesting results of this relation that requires emphasis.

- 1) in the commodity in the equivalent form, use value becomes the form of appearance of value (despite the fact that "not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values")
- 2) Corresponding to this, concrete labour, labour in its aspect of being a particular type of use-value producing labour (making linen as opposed to coats for example) comes to count as its opposite: human labour in general. The use value of the commodity in its equivalent form counts as value, so too the concrete labour which produced this use-value now counts as value producing, abstract labour.

This leads to the third peculiarity of the equivalent form:

"private labour takes the form of its opposite,  
namely labour in its directly social form."

(1976, p.151)

The significance of all this becomes clear when it is realised that this presentation of exchange value, the relation between one commodity and another commodity contains all the relations at work when one of the commodities in the relationship is money. Money is only the 'universal' commodity in the equivalent form. This is how Marx's argument proceeds, and it is helpful to keep following it closely, however it should be emphasised that when we come to examine what is involved with money relations we are dealing with propositions already contained in the relationship of one commodity to another.

Marx argues from the 'simple' form of value to the 'expanded' form, in which a whole series of amounts of commodity are equated. So that '20 yds of linen', the original example, has its value related to different quantities of other things, tea, coats, boots, and so on. This situation shows more clearly that what lies behind value is human labour in general.<sup>(7)</sup> The labour which has gone towards the range of commodities, each equated with the linen:

"is now explicitly presented as labour which counts as the equal of every other sort of human labour, whatever natural form it may possess, hence whether it is objectified in a coat, in corn, in iron, in gold....."

(1976, p.155)

However, this is still not as visible as it might be: for each commodity has a chain of relative expressions of its value which are different from the chain of relative expressions for all other commodities: iron may express its value in corn, gold and linen, gold in corn, iron and linen, and so on. This means that:

"Since the natural form of each particular kind of commodity is one particular equivalent form amongst innumerable other equivalent forms, the only equivalent forms which exist are limited ones, and each of them excludes all the others."

(1976, p.157-8)

This will apply to the labour represented in them also. There is no single form of appearance of 'labour in general.

The second stage in the argument is to consider the 'general' form of value. Here all other commodities are in the relative form, and one only takes the role of equivalent. We can think of this form as a reversal of the previous form, and have linen as the commodity in the equivalent form:

x coats, y corn, z gold etc = 20 yds of linen

Here all the commodities except one are in the relative form, expressing their values in the bodily form of the linen, which itself, in equivalent form, is immediately exchangeable with them and counts as value, as the objectification of human labour in general. We now have a value form common to all commodities for the first time: they all express their value in relation to the use value of linen:

"Through its equation with linen, the value of every commodity is now not only differentiated from its own use-value, but from all use-values, and is, by that very fact, expressed as that which is common to all commodities....."

As for the linen itself, it has become the universal equivalent in that

"its own natural form (ie. use-value, JM) is the form assumed in common by the value of all commodities....  
.....The physical form of the linen counts as the visible incarnation, the social chrysalis state, of all human labour."

(1976, p.158, 159)

and it must be the only commodity to play this role: otherwise we would simply have returned to the 'expanded' form.

If we now replace '20 yards of linen' with '2ozs' of gold we can see that the money form of value is simply the universal equivalent commodity form:

"The simple commodity form is therefore the germ of the money form."

(1976, p.163)

We have, therefore, deciphered the form of value in capitalist society! We have discovered the genesis of money in the commodity, and in the commodity too we have found the most immediate social form which labour takes: the form of its product: the value form of the commodity and the commodity form of the product of labour are the same thing. It is best to return to the simple form of value, before going on to consider money, in order to fully grasp commodity fetishism.

The first point to note is the mutual exclusiveness of the relative and equivalent forms. The relative form is the 'active' side of the relation. It is the commodity which seeks to realise its value, to be exchanged. The equivalent form is, correspondingly, the passive side, the incarnation of the value which the commodity in the relative form seeks out. Unlike the relative form, however, it possesses direct exchangeability because its bodily form is the form of value:

"a commodity is only exchangeable with another commodity insofar as it possesses a form in which it appears as value. A body of a commodity is immediately exchangeable with other commodities insofar as its immediate form, its own bodily or natural form, represents value with regard to another commodity or counts as value form."

(Marx 1978, p.136)

Even in sporadic barter, where there is no universal equivalent, the equivalent and relative forms are separate and opposed:

"Let us consider exchange between linen-producer A and coat-producer B. Before they come to terms, A says: 20 yards of linen are worth 2 coats (20 yards of linen = 2 coats), but B responds: 1 coat is worth 22 yards of linen (1 coat = 22 yards of linen). Finally, after they have haggled for a long time they agree. A says 20 yards of linen are worth 1 coat, and B says 1 coat is worth 20 yards of linen. Here both linen and coat are at the same time in relative value-form and in equivalent form. But notabene, for two different persons and in two

different expressions of value, which simply occur (ins Leben treten) at the same time. For A his linen is in relative value-form - because for him the initiative proceeds from his commodity - and the commodity of the other person, the coat, is in equivalent form. Conversely from the standpoint of B. Thus one and the same commodity never possesses, even in this case, the two forms at the same time in the same expression of value."

(Marx, 1978, p.135)

This means that the social character of the labour embodied in commodities is always dependent on exchange, NOT on any direct relationship between labour and value.<sup>(8)</sup> Unless it is the money commodity that is being produced, it must be in the relative form: we cannot assume its exchangeability. This is precisely what labour theory of value approaches or such approaches as assume that value is simply a question of magnitude miss: the illusion arises that:

"all commodities can simultaneously be imprinted with the stamp of direct exchangeability, in the same way that it might be imagined that all catholics can be popes."

(Marx, 1976, p. 161)

Here is one key to the nature of the 'chaos' at the heart of commodity producing society: no one can know in advance, or by reflection, precisely what will be 'exchangeable.' Value may be created in production but it is realised only in exchange.

A second point arises from the antagonism of the relative and equivalent forms. Whereas it is a definite quantity of the commodity in the relative form which has its value expressed:

"the equivalent form of a thing contains absolutely no quantitative definiteness."

(1978, p.138)

The amount of the equivalent commodity which is equated with that in the relative form has nothing to do with its property of being exchangeable for it. Marx claims a useful analogy with the iron weight on a pair of scales: weighing sugar:

"Were both things not heavy they could not enter into this relation and hence the one could not serve as the expression of weight of the other .....we see in fact that they are as weight the same, and hence in a definite proportion also of the same weight. Just as here, the body of iron represents simply heaviness as in our expression of value, the body of the coat represents, with regard to linen, simply value."

(Marx, 1978, p.139)

We cannot express the 'weight' of the iron in this situation just as we cannot express the value of the equivalent. Thus we can see that money is on one hand only a relative, not absolute, expression of value (despite the appearance it throws up) but that it is by no means a numéraire. If we assumed it was the latter (which is precisely what commodity status of labour/labour theory of value approaches must do) then the exchange of commodities would reduce itself again to a purely quantitative phenomenon, with no ability to investigate the question of exchangeability: we would be assuming that private labour was already social.

The three peculiarities, or inversions which were emphasised above form the basis for commodity fetishism: the real production relations which commodity exchange throws up. It will be recalled that in the equivalent form (and therefore this includes the money form), the use value product of private (ie. independent as opposed to directly social) labour in its concrete aspect becomes the form of appearance of value produced by social human labour in general. This stamps exchange, once it has developed into a more than accidental process, but even before the universal equivalent, with strange effects:

"the commodity reflects the social characteristic of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things."

(1976, p.164-5)

We have already clarified the basis of this: value relations are only established in exchange where the objective characteristics of the equivalent commodity appear to and do represent value.

"If I state that coats or boots stand in a relations to linen because the latter is the universal incarnation of abstract human labour the absurdity of the statement is self evident."

(1976, p.169)

But this is an absurdity which is in reality not in the producers minds:

"Nevertheless, when the producers of coats and boots bring these commodities into a relation with linen, or with gold or silver (and this mkes no difference here) as the universal equivalent, the relation between their own private labour and the collective labour of society appears to them in exactly this absurd form."

(1976, p.169)

Because only the exchange of its produce renders their private, independent, labour social, it appears that it is the equivalent commodity which performs this service by virtue of its own special powers;

"Since the producers do not come into social contact until they exchange the products of their labour, the specific social characteristics of their private labours appears only within this exchange. In other words, the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers."

(1976, p. 165)

The producers therefore have a correct understanding of the nature of value relations of the nature of the social form of the relations of production as one between products:

"ie. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things."

(1976, p.166)

The magnitudes of value of commodities in exchange:

"vary continually, independently of the will, foreknowledge and actions of the exchangers. Their own movement within society has for them, the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them."

(1976, p.167-8)

We have also identified the nature of these movements, given that they are mediated by value:

"The equality of the kinds of human labour takes on a physical form in the equal objectivity of the products of labour as values; the measure of the expenditure of human labour power by its duration takes on the form of the magnitude of the value of the products of labour."

(1976, p.164)

There are four crucial aspects of this argument which I want to emphasise under the headings, intention, fetishism, inversion and law.

One of the features of commodity exchange, and the relations that arise on its basis, is that it is a development which is not, and indeed could not, be consciously intended. In the first place producers only intend to exchange products. No single producer or authority can develop a universal equivalent commodity. Rather money 'crystallises out' of the development of exchange in general, as 'the joint contribution of the whole world of commodities':

"Men do not therefore bring the products of their labour into relation with each other as values because they see these objects merely as the material ingredients of homogeneous human labour. The reverse is true: by equating their different products to each other in exchange as values, they equate their different kinds of labour as human labour. They do this without being aware of it."

(1976, p.166-7)

"What initially concerns producers in practice when they make an exchange is how much of some other product they get for their own; in what proportions can the products

be exchanged?

(1976, p.167)

Here is a decisive break with leap and logic theory, for the possibility now arises of seeing Marx's riddle "men make history, but not under conditions of their own choosing" in a new light. We no longer need think of it as a question of determinism (the weight of conditions) versus voluntarism (the will to make) but in terms of consciousness both of the nature of the making, and the nature of the conditions of which it is a part. Men may do things whose consequences are unintended, and which arise behind their backs:

".....the equivalence of commodities is established..  
... as the result of a social process. The agents in this process do not seek to establish the interchangeability of all products but simply to exchange their own products."

(Elson, 1979, p. 156)

This leads us onto the second consideration: that of the effects of fetishism on the consciousness of commodity producers.

If on the one hand they did not intend to develop the relations of commodity production, but rather simply to exchange their products, the appearance of this process of exchange is such as to cover up its own genesis, and give the commodity its mystical character:

"What appears to happen is, not that a particular commodity becomes money, because of all other commodities expressing their value in it, but on the contrary, that all other commodities express their values in a particular commodity because it is money."

(Marx, 1976, p.187)

"Value, therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead, it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic."

(1976, p.167)

"The movement through which the process has been mediated vanishes in its own result, leaving no trace behind."

(1976, p.187)

So that not only is the general development of money not a directly social, intended or conscious affair, but in its development and final form, its nature is invisible to its own unconscious creators.

This fetishism has as its major characteristic that of inversion. By this I mean that as a result of commodity relations, it really is the case that the relations between the products of their own labour control them, rather than vice-versa. This is another way of stating that value relations and the fetish are real relations, not a question of lack of consciousness of what is going on, an irrational belief in the magical powers of money of whatever:

"Confusion between (value and value form JM) has misled some writers into maintaining that the value of gold and silver is imaginery.....that (money) is itself a mere symbol. Nevertheless this error did contain the suspicion that the money form of a thing is external to the thing itself, being simply the form of appearance of human relations hidden behind it."

(1976, p. 185)

However, we are dealing not with symbols, and not therefore with "the arbitrary product of human reflection" (p.185) but with material production relationships.

Where Marx thus depicts the producers as subservient to the relations between commodities which were their own products, the tendency has been to interpret this in terms of false consciousness: that the problem is to make people aware of the ridiculousness of their actions and instead to look at their real relations of production directly. We can see something of this sort in Braverman: the 'solution' is to be found in the consciousness of the proletariat which will ultimately recognise its interest in smashing commoditisation and taking 'control' over production. We can also appreciate more fully now the problem with this whole line of approach (aside from the ludicrous strategic implications I have already dismissed). There are no 'real' production

relations beyond the social relations between commodities: the commodity form is the form of value: the process of fetishism is a real process. Its discovery by political economy is not a question of puncturing some ideological balloon. The point is not to see peoples' actions as stupid, false or counter revolutionary, but to understand the basis of these actions. We have discovered that they lie in the production of commodities: not the commodity status of labour.

This can be expressed another way. Money's reality is a purely social one. But this social nature arises not as the basis of people's beliefs, values or intentions (e.g. a social convention to establish money for accounting purposes) but on the basis of their actions which did not have the establishment of money as their purpose at all.

Here is where our final point emerges: the value relations between commodities can be expressed in terms of laws because value is substantial, (not an idea or subjective evaluation made by the exchangers) and because it is value which regulates the terms of exchange:

".....in the midst of the accidental and ever fluctuating exchange relations between the products, the labour time socially necessary to produce them asserts itself as a regulative law of nature."

(1976, p.168)

The use of the term law, and Marx's argument that value (even if it is a purely social phenomenon and cannot be seen)<sup>(9)</sup> is a reality, and not a conceptual but practical abstraction, not a symbol but a real social relation: signifies that the development of the mode of production where production takes the form of commodities does not boil down to the aggregate of the subjective wishes of the commodity owners. He escapes determinism but refuses to take refuge in voluntarism:

"In so far as each commodity owner wants to exchange his own use-value for some other use-value, the process of exchange is composed of individual, subjective acts. But in so far as the exchange-values appear to be 'given' to each commodity owner it is a general social process which takes place 'behind the backs' of the commodity owners (cf. Capital, 1, p.180). Marx wishes to capture in his categories both the subjective, individual and the social, general aspects of the process.

(Elson, 1979, p.156)

"It is, I think, for this reason that he treats the equivalence of commodities in a way that is often found extremely puzzling, as a substantial equivalence. That is, Marx does not treat this equivalence as a matter of some common characteristic in terms of which commodities are commensurated by their owners; but in terms of a unifying 'common element' or 'substance' which the commodities themselves embody, and which is designated by the separate category 'value'. The equivalence of commodities is explained in terms of the nature of this substance, not in terms of subjective commensuration by commodity owners."

(Elson, 1979, p.157)

"The transformation of one commodity into another insofar as the rates of transformation are determined 'behind the backs' of the commodity owners, is akin to a process of natural history, a process that seems to have objective 'laws' of its own which operate over and above the volitions of the individuals carrying it out. Hence Marx poses this process in terms of substantial equivalence, but with 'substance' understood in materialist terms - as an abstraction with a practical reality insofar as one form of the substance is actually transformed into another form, and not in idealist terms, as an absolute entity realising its goals."

(Elson, 1979, p.158)

Here we have the basis for the 'laws of motion' of capitalist mode of production. They have their roots in the production of commodities and the value form that creates. The undeciphered results of their own unintended actions force the producers to act in certain ways, as owners, 'representatives' of commodities. Marx's concept of 'Träger' which earlier appeared as determinism now reveals itself as a specific historical product of commodity exchange.

### CONCLUSION

Marx's chapters on the commodity give us a theory of value in commodity producing society that is not dependent on the assumption that labour is a commodity. His political economy has broken out of the logic of classical political economy and its roots in the ideology of individual sovereignty. At the same time it has shown why it is

that there is space for the operation of a social science 'Value' has to be deciphered by analysis because its social construction was never consciously intended and, moreover, could not have been: its form in capitalist mode of production can only arise "through the joint contribution of the whole world of commodities." Thirdly it gives a new status to the laws which it discovers. They are no longer models of human behaviour or explanations of it in terms of a prior (invisible) cause. (Neither are they a logic, established by a leap from commoditisation, whose nature is unchangeable except by a leap from commoditisation). Rather they are the real consequences of fetishism as a material not ideal process: by their own actions in exchanging commodities people create real value relations which actually do constrain the development of these production relations. The relation between commodities actually is the only social form which production takes and is quite decipherable in terms of laws.

Finally, by developing an analysis of money, we escape from the illusion that rationalisation and calculation in capitalist mode of production arise on the basis of wage labour, and we have a real basis for the account of the 'incompleteness' in the relation between labour and capital. The basis of calculation is not labour time directly but the commodity money. Capitalists thus lose the ability to make calculations about productivity directly which commodity status of labour approaches attribute to them. We have broken the link between the social form of production and its content. We have broken free of determinism and provided a more adequate theoretical basis for the analysis of 'space' without losing sight of the fact that capitalism is a mode of production.

Marx's theory of the commodity and the fetishistic social relations that surround the value form in a society where production takes the form of commodities not only provides a non 'leap and logic' approach to the process of commoditisation, it also solves the paradox of mode of production which was discussed in chapter 2.

There I argued that the central theoretical problem facing a social science's production of 'laws' of social behaviour was that either they were transhistorical, immutable, not socially constructed, in which case it was difficult to see how useful they were (or how social science is to discover them). Or they were admitted to be historical and changeable, socially constructed, in which case it was difficult to see why they required social science to render them visible, or what force they held as laws if, as social constructions, they could be changed, altered or ignored.

But the 'law' of value which Marx analyses behind the immediate appearance of commodity exchange resolves this apparently irresolvable paradox. The process of exchange of commodities gives rise to 'real' laws. Marx is quite clear that value (both in the sense of its general determinants and in the sense of the specific form it takes within the capitalist mode of production) is something real, neither a purely relative phenomenon, nor a scholastic invention, concept or model imposed as reality by the political economist. As I argued above, the idea that exchange is based on something substantial, that it was 'akin to a process of natural history' as Elson puts it so well, comes from the realisation that its regulation is more than a reciprocal relation between the subjective wishes of a buyer and a seller. To reduce it to the existence of such subjective wishes would be to collapse back into the ideological romance of individualism from which 'Robinsnade' theory started out. Another way of looking at this is from the theory of commodity fetishism which we outlined above. It is not a question of false consciousness, of social relations being in some way obscure or distorted, but a real process of materially treating the objective natural properties of things as the incarnation of the social character of people's labour.

Here too we have the basis for a more adequate conception of what Marx meant by the 'inversion' at the heart of capitalist society: the problem of how:

"The value character of the products of labour becomes firmly established only when they act as magnitudes of value. These magnitudes vary continually, independently of the will, foreknowledge and actions of the exchangers. Their own movement within society has for them the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under their control, in fact control them....."

(1976, p. 167)

".....labour is expressed in value, and the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product. These formulas, .... bear the unmistakable stamp of belonging to a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite.

(1976, p.175-6)

As I argued above, Braverman can make no sense of this inversion, except as a nonsense (the machine actually does control the worker) or a tautology (people produce value relations, value relations dominate production, and therefore people). Now the 'inversion' can be seen as a direct result of fetishism. People seek only to exchange their own products, in doing so they also establish the commodity form which comes to be the form of value, one which is all but invisible, but one which, as the collective unconscious product of all producers, cannot be overturned except by a general transformation of the relations of production.

This section has dealt with the theoretical problems of the analysis of the commodity form. I now want to make a few, brief comments on the relevance of this to the historical genesis of capitalist mode of production as a mode of production.

#### 4.5 Money and its legacy: from the commodity to capital

"Money has no master." "Money has no smell" (10)

The last section established Marx's theory of money as a commodity and the proposition that the commodity form of the product of labour does not presuppose that the labour which produces it must itself be a commodity. It only assumes that there is some degree of 'reciprocal isolation and foreignness' between the producers: that production is not directly social, but rather than the producers treat themselves as that which they are: commodity owners. I argued that Marx's theory, starting out from the real existence of commodities analysed the unconscious nature of the development of the social relations which lay behind them, and in particular the real process of fetishism.- the social relations between objective characteristics of things as the basis of value relations in commodity producing society.

In this section I want to argue that the existence of commodities and their circulation explains the possibility of existence of capital, forms its historical basis and starting point for the process of capital accumulation: again without reference to the commodity status of labour.

The Circulation of commodities: money as means of circulation:  
selling in order to buy.

As the argument of the last section implied, the development of the exchange of commodities must involve, to the same extent and as part and parcel of the same process, the development of money, its 'crystallisation' out of the process of exchange. It is not an external device consciously introduced to facilitate the exchange of products, but the external expression, rooted in commodities themselves, of the exchangeability inherent in commodities by virtue of their nature as products of human labour in general on the one hand, but labour that is not directly social on the other. It is the external expression of the opposition of use value and value within the commodity:

"commodities as use-values confront money as exchange value" (11)

(Marx, 1976, p.199)

The production of commodities also requires their exchange or circulation: they are non use-values for their producers, but before they are consumed, by buyers as use-values, they must first be exchanged as values.

"commodities must be realised as values before they can be realised as use-values. On the other hand, they must stand the test as use-values before they can be realised as values. For the labour expended on them only counts insofar as it is expended in a form which is useful for others. However only the act of exchange can prove whether that labour is useful for others."

(1976, pp.179-180)

This is because the commodity producer is only one branch within a social division of labour that is nowhere consciously planned but arises only on the basis of this process of exchange itself:

"a web which has been, and continues to be, woven behind the backs of the producers."

(1976, p.201)

What the commodity producers can make which they will then be able to exchange successfully for money, so as to be able to satisfy their manifold subsistence requirements (apart from those satisfied by their own products which therefore do not take the form of commodities) will be a function of the chaos of the manifold desires of all producers in the division of labour and not one's individual subjective preference on their part: (12)

"The owners of commodities therefore find out that the same division of labour which turns them into independent private producers also makes the social process of production and the relations of the individual producers to each other within that process independent of the producers themselves: they also find out that

the independence of the individuals from each other has as its counterpart and supplement a system of all-round material dependence."

(1976, pp.202-203)

This conversion into money is not of course an end in itself: it is simply the means to the end of the purchase of other commodities, with the proceeds from the sale of the commodities produced. Private concrete labour is thus exchanged for money as the representative of human labour in general, the universal equivalent, and thus the commodity producer appropriates a portion of the total labour of society. Marx describes this process by the formula:

"C - M - C"

It expresses the change in the form of the commodity as the producer seeks to satisfy his own manifold needs: use value is both the beginning and end of a process mediated in the middle by exchange value, money. There are three other features which deserve mention.

Once money has become the means of circulation of commodities, its pace of development is freed from many restrictions. The commodity producer need not find in one and the same person a buyer for his own commodity and a seller of a commodity which he requires:

"Circulation thrusts through all the temporal, spatial and personal barriers imposed by the direct exchange of products."

(1976, p.209)

However because it does this it in no way removes the contradiction between use value and value, or between the relative and equivalent form of the commodity in exchange. Circulation of commodities does not imply any equilibrium:

"if this (equilibrium JM) means that sales are equal to purchases (ie. that every M-C for one person is simultaneously C-M for another, JM) it is a flat tautology. But its real intention is to show that every seller brings his own buyer to market with him."

(1976, p.208)

Clearly this is not the case: labour has still always to prove its socially necessary character in exchange: we therefore have:

"the possibility of crises, though no more than the possibility."

(1976, p. 209)

The second feature is that the development of money not only reacts back on circulation to expand it, but does this in an apparently continuous fashion. Once C-M and M-C have taken place the buyers money is now in the hands of the second commodities' seller and so on: circulation does not finish with the mutual exchange of products, so that:

"circulation sweats money from every pore."

(1976, p.208)

The third feature is that circulation gives another thrust to commodity fetishism for two reasons. Firstly, just as we noted above that it seems as if money is responsible for the expression of commodities' values rather than vice versa, it now appears that the circulation of commodities is the result of the movement of money, rather than money as a means of circulation arising on the basis of the production and exchange of commodities. Secondly, just as the development of money 'vanishes in its own result' so we cannot tell what commodities have been transformed into money;

"In their money form all commodities look alike  
.....it is impossible to tell from the money  
itself how it got into the hands of its possessor,  
or what articles has been changed into it. Not  
from whatever source it may come."

(1976, pp. 204, 205)

#### Money as the form of value

In its role as mediator of the exchange of commodities, money is the value form of the commodities, in exchange. But its role as the form of value does not stop with its origins in commodity production and

exchange: it must also become the sole form of value generally.

There are two main aspects to this. The first is that the circulation of commodities may be interrupted in order to hold fast to value itself, in the form of the universal equivalent. Part of the reason for this is that commodity producers may have needs to satisfy before they can sell their own commodities: money is, therefore, required in order in future to be able to buy without selling. It is obtained by selling without buying: commodity production therefore encourages the hoarding of money as a future means of payment.

But a second, more important aspect of money arises on this basis: as commodity production develops, and with it the role of money as form of value, so too does the power of money grow as the absolutely social form of wealth which is always ready to be used.

And this outstrips commodity production itself because if, as we argued above, we cannot tell what commodities have been transformed into money (because it has no smell), it follows that non commodities can be transformed into money too, and as such, become the property of a private individual: everything and anything may be bought and sold, commodity or not.

This in turn gives a peculiar property to the hoarding of money within circulation: money represents value, but only ever a limited amount: the hoard is always imperfect and incomplete so long as it amounts to not value as such, but a definite limited amount of money:

"The hoarding drive is boundless in its nature. Qualitatively or formally considered, money is independent of all limits, that is it is the universal representative of material wealth because it is directly convertible into any other commodity. But at the same time every actual sum of money is limited in amounts, and therefore has only limited efficacy as a means of purchase. This contradiction between the quantitative limitation and the qualitative lack of limitation of money keeps driving the hoarder back to his Sisyphean task: accumulation."

(1976, p.230-231)

Apparently we have thus arrived at the logic behind the 'spirit of capitalism' without any recourse to explanations at the level of ideas, and without any explanation in terms of the exploitability or calculability of free wage labour, but as a result of the peculiar and unconscious laws which fetishism throws up. The spirit of capitalism is born in the heart of the money fetish.

Buying in order to sell: the circulation of money as the circuit of capital.

So far we have considered the ramifications of the circulation of commodities, "C - M - C". However, because "money has no smell", and every sale, is always also from the other side a purchase, the development of "C - M - C" simultaneously involves the possibility of the series of exchanges "M - C - M", buying in order to sell:

This inversion has no existence for two of the three persons who transact business together. As a capitalist, I buy commodities from A and sell them again to B, but as a simple owner of commodities I sell them to B and then purchase further commodities from A. For A and B this distinction does not exist. They step forth only as buyers or sellers of commodities. I myself confront them each time as a mere owner of either money or commodities, as a buyer or a seller, and what is more, in both sets of transactions I confront A only as a buyer and B only as a seller. I confront the one only as money, the other only as commodities, but neither of them as capital or a capitalist, or a representative of anything more than money or commodities; or of anything which might produce any effect beyond that produced by money or commodities. For me the purchase from A and the sale to B are part of a series. But the connection between these two acts exists for me alone. A does not trouble himself about my transaction with B, nor does B about my business with A.

(1976, p.259)

As such this development may be seen as an unintended consequence of the production of commodities. It may appear that here we are simply

elaborating a tautology, or stating the obvious fact that social relations of production in commodity producing society take the forms of strings of sales and purchases. But this is not at all the case.<sup>(13)</sup> In C - M - C the commodity producers do not sell the commodities they buy, but consume them, they sell only the commodities they produce. What are the differences between these two formulae then?

Firstly, while the object of the first is use-value (the commodity producer sells the use-values he has produced in order to purchase other use-values which he requires) the object of M - C - M is value, its starting point and finishing point is money, mediated by the purchase and sale of commodities. Consumption or the satisfaction of needs, use-values, is no longer the goal of the process: only exchange value.

Secondly, the first process is a definite means to an end which is attained by the metamorphosis of the producers own labour into a portion of the products of the total labour of society, to fulfill his manifold needs. The second process in contrast, ends up at its own starting point, and seemingly is never finished.

The repetition or renewal of the act of selling in order to buy finds its measure and its goal (as does the process itself) in a final purpose which lies outside it, namely consumption, the satisfaction of definite needs. But in buying in order to sell, on the contrary, the end and the beginning are the same, money or exchange value and this very fact makes the movement an endless one.

(Marx, 1976, p. 252 )

This can be thought of in terms of the 'reflux' of money: it is not spent but advanced. In C - M - C, money is spent in order to consume use-value. In order to obtain more money, more commodities must be sold: the process must be repeated. In M - C - M, the buyer:

"releases the money, but only with the intention of getting it back again.....Without this reflux, the operation fails....."

(1976, pp.249 -250)

These two features, plus our arguments about the nature of hoards and money as a form of value, imply that the second process only makes sense if at the end of the process more money returns than was at first advanced. If the aim of the process is value it can only be more value.<sup>(14)</sup> And if the aim is more value, then this reinforces the continuous and boundless nature of the process. It is more rational than the miser's accumulation of a static hoard only if it promises to expand itself, if it produces surplus value, and this surplus value in turn, is valorised again and again:

"the value of the £110 has the same need for valorisation as the value of the £100, for they are both limited expressions of exchange value .....the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself, for the valorisation of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement."

(1976, pp.252,253)

Here, rooted in the circulation of commodities, we have the formula for the accumulation of capital, the dominance of value relations, the reign of the law of value, 'value' as such, represented in the money form, valorising itself as it were. We have proceeded from the fetishism of commodities to the fetishism of capital:

"By virtue of being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring or at least lays golden eggs.....In simple circulation, the value of commodities, attained at the most a form independent of their use values, ie. the form of money. But now, in the circulation M - C - M, value suddenly presents itself as a self moving substance which passes through a process of its own, and for which commodities and money are both mere forms. But there is more to come: instead of simply representing the relations of commodities, it now enters into a private relationship with itself as it were."

(1976, pp.255,256)

We have therefore established the dominance of value relations within commodity producing society without them taking on a palpable form

beyond their representation in the money form. We have established this dominance without posing the existence of a 'leap' at any point to commoditisation, but rather as a result of the development from quite sporadic beginnings, of the exchange of products as commodities. Nor have we had to assume the commoditisation of labour at any point in the argument. We have escaped from any 'Neo-Smithsonian' circularity in posing the origins of capital in terms of its previous existence, or what amounts to the same thing, the existence of labour as a commodity. We have outlined the pressure for the incessant accumulation of capital without reference to competition and market forces whose terms themselves require explanation. We have avoided posing the argument in terms of the surrounding of things by quantitative value relations followed by the invasion of those relations into production itself and the corresponding 'incarnation' of value relations in the physical process of production. Instead we have developed an analysis in terms of the production of commodities and its more or less unintended consequences and possibilities. We have presented the argument in terms of money, as a material form of representation of value around which production, as production of commodities, is unavoidably oriented, but nowhere consciously controlled.

However, we have as yet only outlined the possibility of the capital relation  $M - M'$ , and shown that for this process to take place at all,  $M - M'$  must occur. We have not yet argued how value can valorise itself nor can we within the process of circulation, for circulation itself cannot be otherwise than the change in form of value. As we have tried to demonstrate from the outset, exchange-value is the form of appearance of value: exchange does not establish value, rather it proves the social worth of the commodities exchanged.<sup>(15)</sup> We have proved the necessity of  $M - M'$ , and also rendered it virtually impossible: by exchanging equivalents only it must be possible to end up with more money than at the outset.

The answer is well known: surplus value is produced in the transformation of commodities purchased (including labour-power) which once sold realise more value than their cost of production. Our task must now be to examine this process and in particular demonstrate how

our emphasis on money and rejection of traditional labour theory of value theories gives rise to a different account of this process from that of Braverman.

#### 4.6 A note on the transition and the form of labour

I have already noted that consideration of the transition from feudalism to capitalism forms an important backdrop to the whole of the discussion here, in particular because of my argument that Braverman's theories, labour theories of value and commodity status of labour accounts all assume a 'leap and logic' account of the transition, or at any rate can only explain the arrival of commodity relations, formal subordination of labour or value in a circular fashion. They remain trapped within a Marxist version of Smith's 'previous accumulation' assumptions. A proper consideration of the transition debate in the light of the points I have made here is an urgent task but one which could only be done adequately in its own right as a piece of work.

Therefore, all I propose to do here is make a couple of fundamental points about the transition, and rather than defend them at length, refer the reader to chapters 20 and 36 of Marx (1982) which I have based my propositions on.

The problem facing most accounts, as I have suggested, is that wage labour and capital appear to presuppose each other.

However, in my account of Marx's analysis of commodity relations we have been able to arrive at the general formula for the circuit of capital and its accumulation  $M - C - M'$  without presupposing the commodity status of labour. All we require is for the value of 'C' to change: money can enter into a private relationship with itself on more than one basis. Marx accordingly identifies two forms of capital accumulation which predate and anticipate any capitalist

form of production: merchants capital and usurers capital. Both are parasitic on earlier modes of production (and are incompatible with a developed capitalist mode of production) both act as destabilising, corrosive influences and both lead to great accumulation of money capital.

Therefore their effect is to provide the basis for the accumulation of wealth in the form of capital without having to presuppose the existence of wage labour. At the same time they make the development of wage labour itself more likely, insofar as the concentration of wealth leads to the concentration of means of production and subsistence in fewer hands. They do not, however, themselves form the preconditions for the development of capitalism, we cannot reduce the dimensions of class struggle to the existence of these two forms of capital. What they do allow us to pose is the genesis of capital as the basis of commodity production and exchange within earlier modes of production and corresponding to this, corrosive and destabilising influences within these modes of production which together prepare the basis for the sale and purchase of labour as a commodity but do not require this as a factor in the process itself. Therefore this satisfies the aim we have already set ourselves in the context of the transition from capitalism to socialism of not presupposing the aim of struggle as the point of its departure.

This allows me, therefore, to treat the form of labour within capitalism as something quite variable. All that is required is that it can be bought in some form. This does not mean necessarily as a commodity. As I argued above, the generalisation of the universal equivalent enables all sorts of non-commodities to be brought into a relationship within it, as if they were commodities, because we do not know what has been transformed into it ('it has no smell'). In order for capital accumulation to take place the monetary return from the sale of labour's products (less the cost of other raw materials, objects of labour etc. etc.) must be greater than the price of labour.

#### 4.7 The Analysis of labour: Labour as a commodity and Labour "As such"

Moving on to consider the question of labour must be our final aim, as it will be remembered that the theory of value is but a theory of the form of determination of labour, Our original aim was to try and understand this theory in a non determinist, and non distributist way. Yet this was to be done without abandoning a concept of value, and with it a concept of mode of production, altogether.

I have argued that traditional approaches such as Braverman's reduce the history of successive forms of determination of labour to the introduction and removal of commoditisation. In turn this question of commoditisation is then analysed in purely quantitative terms, so that capitalism appears as 'the production of things efficiently'. I then went on to suggest that Marx's theory could be read in a different way. The point was that the commodity was altogether more complex than a thing with a quantitative value mapped onto it by labour: it involved the process of commodity fetishism, and this fetishism meant inter alia that although value relations took the form of the existence of "Value" as such, whose origin in labour was fairly visible (e.g. by classical political economy, ) 'Value' itself is never directly visible in capitalist society. Not only the form but the terms of value relations remain obscure. Quantification, and calculation are dependent on money, which is only a form of representation of value, not value itself.

I think our consideration of how to approach the analysis of labour and the labour process in capitalist mode of production is best begun by reviewing some of the dimensions of the problems we identified with Braverman's work.

In the course of her review of marxist debate on the theory of value Elson notes that:

"There is a tendency to suppose that Marx analysed capitalism as a form of production in which labour starts off as 'concrete' and 'private'; in the process of exchange this labour, by now embodied

in products, is then transformed into a different type of labour 'abstract' and 'social.'

(Elson, 1977, p.145)

At first sight, it appears that we can characterise Braverman's work as an attempt to overcome this tendency, because it implies that the social character of work is a question of relations of exchange and distribution rather than the nature of the production process itself. Braverman's work, as I have already argued above, can be summarised by the argument that these social relations initially surrounding production come to invade the technical process of production itself.

However, I think this characterisation of Elson's in fact grasps the essence of Braverman's own position and its roots in the concept of the commodity status of labour. The two states of labour mentioned by Elson 'concrete' and 'private' and 'abstract' and 'social' correspond to the two sides of the commodity status of labour antimony. As 'private and concrete' it appears as the progressive fluid side of the antimony, as 'social and abstract' it appears as the reactionary and determined side. What Braverman does is to put a historical dimension on the commodity status of labour contradiction. We start off, historically, with labour as such, the romance of the craftsman-artisan who suffers no social constraint over the exercise of his labour, who need be concerned directly only with its concrete, use value aspect. We end up with the opposite side of the antimony, which is abstract labour as such: labour as the incarnation of value only, with no concrete aspects whatsoever, totally determined by its social form: the deskilled labourer. What Braverman has done is take the contradictory relationship between production and exchange which the theorists of the labour theory of value investigated, and put it in a historical setting as the issue of the relationship between the process of production and its social character.

We are left unable to analyse adequately either the form of determination of labour, or the way in which the fluidity of labour expresses itself. Instead we have only an irresolvable antimony which on one side presents the fluidity of labour as absolute (it is free

of any social determination, it is 'as such', it is purely concrete, because the individual is sovereign over their own labour capacity) and on the other presents the determination of labour as absolute (all fluidity has been subordinated to the law of value which the very concrete nature of labour now embodies).

We are, therefore, unable to grasp empirically the contradictory nature of the form of labour and its potential for development except in 'leap and logic' terms: history becomes the introduction and removal of quantitative value relations.

The contradiction which these accounts all fail to grasp is precisely that of individualism in the midst of society, the character of labour as at one and the same time free and constrained.

One aspect of this is the inability to grasp the relationship between efficiency and control except as goals which appear alternately as mutually exclusive and absolutely identical.

Another is the tendency of the analysis to reduce itself to one of the inexorable developments of the logic of capital. We get a determinist analysis which explains the mode of production in terms of the form of labour. In turn the content and empirical character of production, its use-value aspect, become functions of the form of value. It appears absolutely impossible to alter the character of production within capitalism, all explanation is reduced to the mutually presupposing elements of capital and wage labour.

The result of these tendencies is also to inadvertently describe capitalism in ways more characteristic of its apologists than its critics. It appears that the twin hallmarks of capitalist production is its necessarily efficient character, and the initiative and control of capital and its agent, management. In turn these hallmarks are rooted in its fundamental egalitarianism: in capitalism all men are created equal by virtue of their possession of their own labour power.

I want to suggest that these problems can be seen as rooted in one fundamental problem associated with the commodity status of labour: the concept of 'labour as such', of labour which is not immediately social, of labour which is really concrete, of labour free from any social determinations: labour which simply represents a purely technical relationship with nature. I want to argue that commodity status of labour analyses inevitably see this concept as something real: see it as a type of labour which actually exists, or could exist. In contrast to this, I think Marx can be seen as basing his whole critique on the impossibility of such a concept, except as a partial and one-sided abstraction:

"That the economists, without exception, have missed the simple point that if the commodity has a double character - use value and exchange value - then the labour represented by the commodity must also have a two-fold character, while the mere analysis of labour as such, as in Smith, Ricardo etc. is bound to come up everywhere against inexplicable problems. This is, in fact, the whole secret of the critical conception."

(Marx & Engels, 1975, p.186)

Marx's point about the inexorable problems encountered in analysing 'labour as such' can surely be taken as a rejection of the whole theory of the commodity status of labour. For the concept of labour as such, labour free from any social determinations is precisely what the theory requires. In terms of the original bourgeois 'natural right' theories, the proposition that the individual is sovereign over their own labour power requires the assumption that such labour power is an individual, private, 'as such' thing. As soon as it is admitted to be an immediately social thing, then the natural rights theories which depend on it crumble away. If the individual holds obligations to society for the possession of his labour power, then the individual cannot consistently claim undiluted sovereignty over its application, and the right to appropriate the fruits of its application.

In terms of the labour theory of value, if the labour time which produces value is admitted to be socially determined from the outset, then we no longer have an explanation of values in terms of production

relations but a tautology: value relations determine labour relations, and vice versa. We no longer have two separate factors, labour and value/price, to link together in a causal explanation.

I have already pointed out above the assumption that commodity status of labour analysis makes about individual sovereignty over labour capacity and how this assumes the existence of 'labour as such'. I think there are two corresponding roles which the concept plays in Braverman's analysis of labour.

First of all labour as such forms the point of departure for the process of deskilling and degradation of labour. It is the original state of labour which then becomes commoditised. This expresses the point that Braverman reduces history to the arrival and departure of commoditisation, the arrival and departure of value.

The second role for labour as such then in Braverman's theory is the point of arrival of history, as it were, in the socialist mode of production free of value relations. Here again labour is simply 'as such', free of any social determination, because it is no longer dominated by value relations. Again I have already argued this point in a different form: the idea that Braverman's theory tends to view socialism as the abolition of all determination of labour, rather than a change in its form.

This leaves us with the problem of the form of labour in capitalist society, where the other side of the antimony of the commodity status of labour is dominant, and value relations determine the form of labour. Here again Braverman erects what ought to be a one sided aspect of labour into a real type of labour: in capitalist mode of production labour is seen as being abstract. It becomes abstract because it is totally subordinated, no longer is use-value as such the object of its activities but value, in fact labour becomes merely the incarnation of value relations, the variable aspect of capital as the self expansion of value. It is because labour in capitalist mode of production is abstract that it is seen as directly comparable across units of capital, promoting accumulation through the

working of relative surplus value and the industrial reserve army enabling capital's to do this by maximising their efficiency and rationalising of production. This is because as purely abstract labour it appears that its value is observable and calculable directly.

Abstract labour expresses historically the other side of the anti-mony of the commodity status of labour from 'labour as such': it expresses the idea of the collective material dependence on the logic of capital accumulation of those who are free only to alienate their labour to capital in order to gain the means of subsistence.

Concepts of concrete and abstract labour are clearly much used by Marx but I believe he did not use them to produce such a 3-stage model of the evolution of labour in the transition to and from capitalism. It is however this sort of usage that is common not only to Braverman but to many other theorists. Indeed if we call 'abstract' labour 'alienated' labour then much of the 1844 manuscripts follow a similar approach. The most obvious problem with such a model is that rather than a concept of both the fluidity and social determination of labour, we get first of all labour as purely fluid and limitless, followed by labour as completely determined, followed in turn by labour as fluid again. What should be transhistorical aspects of of labour in any mode of production have been transformed into historical types.

#### 4.8 The Significance of the difference between labour and labour power

The issue of how to analyse labour is at the very heart of the concept of a theory of value or mode of production. It is, therefore, the most difficult concept to grasp because it must encompass at one and the same time the fact of determination of labour without spilling over into determinism, that is to say, forgetting that labour must always be fluid and indeterminate to an extent: it is always activity, never a state of rest. This question is therefore one of fixing labour as a contradictory phenomenon, that is to say, something in

movement, in a state of flux, capable of alternative developments which cannot be exactly forecasted or predicted. I have criticised the traditional analysis of the two fold nature of labour as use-value and value which is presented in Braverman because of the global and non empirical concept of contradiction which it expresses: labour leaps between being a purely technical, asocial, concrete activity (the skilled artisan, the use-value concept in capitalist society expressing the technical-material aspect of production) and a totally abstract, social contentless activity (alienated labour as the material incarnation of quantitative value relations.)

It is the recognition of these problems that brings Marx to introduce the twin categories of labour and labour power. They allow him to use the idea of abstract and concrete aspects of labour as trans-historical categories, and therefore allow him to see labour in capitalism as not without fluidity, not totally determined. This both gives us the theoretical pace for social science to operate, the practical space for historical development to take place within capitalism and breaks with the myth that capitalist mode of production is by definition 'efficient.'

The starting point of Marx's analysis of labour is that the ability to labour cannot be directly alienated:

"He must constantly treat his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and he can do this only by placing it at the disposal of the buyer, i.e. handing it over to the buyer for him to consume, for a definite period of time, temporarily."

(1976, p.271)

"The totality of the free worker's labour capacity appears to him as his property, as one of his moments, over which he, as subject, exercises domination, and which he maintains by expending it.

(1973, p. 465)

It will be recalled that even Braverman makes this point (1974, p.54), but then proceeds to neglect its implications.

This is to say that the social divorce of conception from execution entailed in any division of labour has to be complemented by the

private unity of conception and execution in any particular job or task performed by the worker. We could also express this in the following terms: labour can never be totally abstract. Its value creating powers must always involve the use of the workers concrete functions, his or her brains and muscles, they must also be embodied in a concrete task with use value aspects.

Marx uses the labour-power/labour distinction to make this point. Labour has no value, it is not a commodity, it cannot be sold. Labour power on the other hand may be bought or sold for money, but it represents only the ability and potential to labour, not the act itself. Unfortunately this distinction has tended to have been taken up in a particular way which I think is mistaken. The value of labour power is assumed to be a definite quantity, and likewise the value which this labour produces. The difference between these two quantities is taken to constitute the amount of surplus value appropriated by the capitalist and be the proof of exploitation by the capitalist class. In Braverman for example it is clear that real subordination of labour is explained by the way it simultaneously minimises the value of labour-power, while maximising the value labour produces by rendering it totally abstract: it can do nothing but valorise value (see above ch. 3.5).

There are three problems with this. The first two concern the confusion here between value and its form of appearance exchange value (or price). In capitalist society only the exchange value of the product of labour is visible, not the value represented by it, and the same goes for labour power too. Thus we do not therefore have a 'proof' of exploitation here (any mode of production involves the production of a surplus of some sort over and above subsistence to provide for non producers, and to provide for replacement/improvement of the means of production). Nor do we have any ability on the part of the capitalists to calculate how to maximise the appropriation of surplus value because only money not value relations are visible to them. Braverman cannot explain how capitalists know how to develop the real subordination of labour.

The third problem is the way in which it is assumed that rendering labour abstract, that is totally subordinate to capital, maximises its value production while minimising its costs of production. It could just as easily be asserted to do the opposite. By rendering labour abstract it could be said we abolish all resort to its value creating powers, leaving capital as the only subjective element in the production process. We might also make it more expensive, We could pay in the costs of habituation programmes, industrial strife, turnover and apathy for the privilege of refusing to use labour's creative powers. I therefore think Marx's intention in the use of the term labour power was not to set up such a quantitative comparison, nor to propose that the presence of so called abstract labour in capitalist mode of production would maximise it.

The distinction which Marx draws between labour and labour power is not in any way the acceptance of classical political economy's commodity status of labour theory, but a way to escape from the problems that theory sets up. Most important of all we cannot and must not (as Braverman and others tend to do) associate use-value with 'labour' and value with 'labour-power'. (This was precisely the relationship assumed by 'Voting for Ford').

The distinction is drawn because labour power may take on a commodity form, in the sense that it is a use-value with an exchange value. Its exchange value is wages. Its use-value is its potential to produce more use value and therefore value; to deliver labour itself. But this use value is (as many use-values are) a very imprecise and flexible one. Indeed it is here that we encounter the problems faced by capital in purchasing labour power which Braverman describes. The problem with Braverman's description is the idea that these problems can be overcome. For what the distinction between labour-power and labour should make clear is that insofar as commodity and value relations only embrace labour-power, they cannot come to embrace the process of labour itself. In turn if labour is not commoditised, and its nature as Marx makes clear, is such that it never can become a commodity, then we have to make a clear distinction between the labour process within the unit of capital on the one hand, and the

social relations of that unit of capital to the rest of society through the commodity relations it has on the other. We cannot reduce the former to the latter, no matter what limits it might impose. Bourgeois' ideology may proclaim that the capitalist in buying labour power, has bought labour too, but any real capitalist knows better. Ideologically too it may suit them to complain about worker laziness about the rights of management and so forth, but in reality every employer knows that, at best he has purchased 'a fair day's work' whose content will be struggled over, and at worst he has nothing but a 'legal title to a function. The purchase of labour power may give management the 'right' to manage and appropriate surplus value but it certainly does not give it the ability: it may not be able to secure the right sort of sufficient labour from labour power, and even if it does, it may equally turn out that because of its own shortcomings in anticipating the market, the labour it has demanded turns out not to be socially necessary.

There are two other tasks performed by the distinction between labour and labour power. First of all in contrast to the theories I have been considering, it makes the point that labour is never 'abstract' as such, nor can it ever be commoditised. Labour itself, the workers' creative powers, can not be divorced from the body of the workers. The formal right to direct them for a period of time can be purchased but that can never be the same thing. The distinction between labour-power and labour conveys the idea that labour never completely loses its fluidity, it is never totally determined: the 'incompleteness' of the relation between labour and capital therefore has not only a quantitative dimension but a qualitative dimension too.

The distinction means that any relationship between capital and labour at the point of production is not determined totally by any process of commoditisation, divorce of workers from means of production or laws of capital accumulation, value relations and so on which commodity fetishism throws up. In contrast it must to some extent at least be constructed in a struggle between capital and labour. 'Space' for struggle arises not because the direction of operation of the contradiction is indeterminate (the argument of "Voting"), but because the contradiction never operates like that at all.

There is a third point, more controversial which I think it is worth noting in passing: that is the question of whether it is worth thinking of even labour power as a commodity because its use value is so nebulous it makes a very strange commodity indeed. In particular it cannot be consumed or appropriated in quite the same way as others. It might be better to think of it as belonging to those class of things which not being commodities in themselves, become so because of the power of money to exchange for them. It is a commodity because money has no master, not because labour has none.

Given Marx's distinction between labour and labour power, which emancipates us from the idea of the commodity status of labour, it remains to clarify my account of the abstract and concrete aspects of labour, in contrast to those we earlier rejected.

#### 4.9 Labour: concrete and abstract, value and use-value <sup>(16)</sup>

The first point to make is that it is clear that unless we transform the abstract and concrete into 'aspects' as opposed to 'types' of labour we condemn any analysis to technicism and distributism. By technicism, I mean the tendency we have already dismissed, to posit a technical material basis to production (the realm of use-value as such) beyond its social determination. Clearly if use-value is a reality, not a one sided abstraction from it, then we have to produce such a technicist analysis and suffer all the problems that flow from this as a result. We will also suffer from 'distributism' because, as I have already argued above, if we assume the existence of such a technical 'base, all the superstructure can do is alter relations of distribution around it, and in this way foster or frustrate the rate of development of this technical base. This brings us to a second point. If we think of the concrete and abstract, use value and value in this way then value relations become simply quantitative questions: that is all that is left if use-value totally embraces the qualitative. Here is the root of the idea that capitalism is the production of 'things' (use-values as such) (efficiently)

(in value relations). Money does not even enter into the analysis: it is a technical device, a numeraire, a scholastic invention. All these points can be taken as a further development of the argument I proposed in a slightly different context in chapter 2, that the 'technical' and the 'social' must not be regarded as discrete factors.

If the first point is that 'abstract' and 'concrete' are one sided aspects, the second point to make is that they are transhistorical ones, that is they exist in any conceivable mode of production. I have already argued that value relations are common to any mode of production (above chapter two). It is just as clear then that so too must the abstract aspect of labour be common to any mode. The abstract aspect simply conveys the idea that labour in general has an identity as human labour insofar as it takes time to perform, insofar as time spent performing one task by a particular person is time not spent performing another. The abstract aspect therefore forms the basis for the transhistorical presence of some form of social determination of labour: of value relations.

"Indeed no form of society can prevent the working time at the disposal of society from regulating production one way or another."

(Marx & Engels, 1975, p.187)

The idea of the transhistoricity of use-value and concrete labour are easier to grasp. They express the fact that in any mode of production labour is fluid, and takes different concrete forms: car manufacture, food production, Correspondingly use-values always constitute the material form of wealth: Rolls Royces and baked beans.

What is vital to grasp, however, is that use values are not things but one sided aspects: they cannot be independent of the social form of wealth. Thus there is no concrete production as such, which takes place outside social relations, and there is no concrete labour as such. It is possible to think of examples which make this clear: it is difficult to think of a socialist Rolls Royce, or a socialist assembly line. It is difficult to imagine a feudal space rocket.

The one sidedness of use-value and concrete aspect of labour stems from the simple point that the fluidity of labour is never total. The form of the relationship between these two aspects is what characterises a mode of production, and the nature of the contradictions of their relationship constitutes the way we see history developing. This returns us to the point I made in the introduction to this chapter, that the point at issue was not 'a historical perspective' as such, but its form.

What is Marx's analysis then, of the relationship between the one sided aspects of use-value and value? We have already examined it! We may appreciate more fully its significance now. It is simply the existence of the products of labour as commodities and capitalist society, as:

"an immense collection of commodities".

The commodity is the unity of use-value and value. Commodity fetishism is the analysis of the implications this has for understanding the mode of production. In particular, Marx stresses the way in which the abstract aspect of labour is dominant, and that the social character of labour, revealed only in the exchange of commodities is determined by its abstract aspect, as the measure of 'value' in commodities, the specific and mystical form of value relations in capitalist mode of production. It is the objectification of labour, its product, which is commensurated through the process of exchange and, as the money form becomes the measure of value, labour itself is never directly compared. Thus it is not a question of use-value creating concrete labour becoming the material incarnation of value, but rather the production of use value being dominated by the requirement to produce such use values as will maximise the realisation of value. This process can only be deciphered by social science because its origins, in the development of exchange of products were not conscious and intended.

4.10 The abstract and concrete aspects of labour and fetishism of commodities.

I have suggested that Marx's analysis of labour in terms of the relationship between its abstract and concrete aspects: the fetishism of commodities, allows him to characterise capitalism as a mode of production but in a non determinist way.

Marx's analysis of the "laws" of value relations and the role of money in capitalist mode of production through his analysis of commodity fetishism should not be seen in a determinist way as the theory of the logic of capital. The economic laws of motion established by commodity exchange (social relations between things) are not expressions of some hidden structure - a prior cause which only social science can determine, but of the mutual relation of the direct producers own private labours.

They are 'private' in the sense that the social character of labour is only realised in exchange, through its value aspect: it is labour which produces commodities (as opposed to directly social labour of people in a direct relationship unmediated by exchange.)

Exchange value is the object of the performance of concrete, private labour. This gives labour its immediately social character in the process of production itself, but does not mean that such production is determined by value relations, because these value relations are the unconscious products of the producers own labour, as they sought to exchange their own products.

Marx can analyse exchange and market forces in terms of a 'natural' process, and treat value relations in terms of 'substantial' equivalence, and thereby describe them both in terms of laws of motion not because he has fallen into a determinist account of capitalist mode of production, nor because he has retreated to producing a model of human behaviour based on concepts, but because in capitalist society this is the real form which such economic action takes. Value is not a 'concept' or 'idea': it is real, if only in a social

sense. It cannot be touched, but a society without value relations is quite unthinkable. Their mystical form in capitalist mode of production springs from the fact that they are nowhere consciously regulated or directly visible. The terms of exchange can be said to be determined by 'value', because they are not determined, subjectively by the individual commodity owners, but by the general course of exchange of all commodities which no individual or class foresaw or consciously did or could design. The 'fetishism' of commodity exchange is not an ideological but a real process, and thus may be described in terms of 'laws of motion'. However the nature of operation of these laws is far more limited than those proposed by a labour theory of value, because they arise from the actions of the producers themselves who can never themselves be aware of the direct value implications of their activity: it is based on money calculations, not value or labour time directly.

The 'laws of motion' of commodity exchange are made by the actions of the direct producers themselves: it is a question of the development of the commodity form rendering this process obscure, both ideologically and practically. The fact that the relations between commodities merely represent the character of the producers own labours does not mean that they can, once they have realised this, alter the course of these laws by dint of their own isolated private actions. They remain the bearers, the <sup>U</sup>träger of an 'objective' social process from which they can only collectively escape. This is the sense in which capitalism remains a mode of production.

Market forces arise 'behind the backs' of the producers, even though their origin lies in the mutual relation of the producers to each other as they produce commodities. Because fetishism is a real material process however these forces can never be consciously discerned or directed. They express a 'logic' not of the essence of capital, but of mutual relations between the producers which are materially obscure because of the commodity form of production: social determination of labour arises only chaotically and anarchically behind the backs of the producers so that their own social powers of production come to confront them as an apparently indep-

endent antagonistic force: the laws of the market. Here is the meaning of Marx's 'inversion' at the heart of capitalist society.

On the market, where the capitalist sells the commodities he has produced and buys the commodities he is to produce them with, the capitalist deals in money terms. So too is his internal accounting and monitoring of the production process done in terms of money. But these money figures and calculations and transactions, both real and ideal, will never allow the capitalist to read off directly the implications for the organisation of production or control of labour. We see commodity producing labour, labour which only 'proves' its social worth once exchanged and that social worth in turn is given only in money terms: it does not tell us exclusively how valuable the labour 'itself' has been (it may have been exceedingly badly organised, lazy, expensive etc) but also the socially useful character of the product in which it is embodied.

Voluntarism is avoided because nowhere is it suggested that the development of commodity production, and the corresponding crystallisation of money form of value out of it, was a conscious intended process. Private property was not established, as if by a convention, because anyone had the idea of establishing it, whether because it was fairer, more efficient or appropriated a greater surplus product for the ruling class. Indeed Marx's analysis of the development of the commodity form of value makes it clear that it could not be consciously established in such a fashion. Similarly, the prospect of abolishing commodity production, in particular the prospect of developing a socialist mode of production cannot be a matter of willpower either (or of willpower underpinned by corresponding technological developments.) The fetishism of commodities is a real process, and cannot be abolished by the conscious recognition of its existence and character.

Marx's analysis of money and the value form, makes clear that it is impossible to render labour social, or render visible its abstract aspect before it is exchanged. It always remains immediately private, so that the fluidity of labour is never fully extinguished. Production

remains the production of use value: its object is the realisation of exchange value, but the producers can never know, either in advance or after the event, the terms of the value relations involved in production. Hence Baldamus's argument about completeness in the relationship between labour and capital can now be seen in a new light. First of all its basis has to be removed from the question of the commoditisation of labour, but rather of the nature of value relations within a commodity producing society: money relations (including the exchange of labour for capital) do not allow us to read off directly what lies behind them. Secondly it has to broaden in scope. It must be seen to refer not only to the quantitative dimension of the exchange. Indeed there is a sense in which it cannot refer to this aspect at all, because this assumes that the labour purchased and set to work are abstract, quantifiable directly social labour. We cannot compare quantities of labour power and congealed labour because they are only visible in money terms, and money only reveals to us their exchange values, not their values. What the distinction must be seen as referring to is a qualitative one, a recognition of the points I have made above about the irreducible fluidity of labour. Labour power is purchased for its value creating ability, its ability to appropriate nature in various ways. Thus even under the domination of capital, under a real subordination of labour, labour retains some control and influence over the process. The division of labour springs not from the logic of capital, but is constructed in the struggle between labour and capital. The question must now become the nature of that control and influence which labour retains, and the way in which it is directed. It is here that our discussion of prefigurative form can develop. It starts out from the proposition that if commodity fetishism is real, then alternative value relations have to be constructed, in contrast to the determinist assumption that they are actually produced by capitalism. In contrast to reformism or voluntarism, however, it sees that the basis of alternative value relations in terms of the possibility of constructing them, has only been put on the historical agenda by capitalism itself.

#### 4. 11 Money Relations and Labour Relations

"Those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer's time and their 'own' time. And the employer must USE the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted.....Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent."

(Thompson, 1967, p.61)

"What Marx proposes is that in a capitalist economy (labour) time becomes money in a more than purely metaphorical sense."

(Elson, 1979, p.139)

Time becomes money because the abstract aspect of labour, measured by its duration, regulates the magnitude of value of the product and so too its form of representation in its price. Here lies the way the general determinants of value operate in capitalism. Here lies the pressures to be 'efficient'. But the fact that there is such a reduction of money to labour time does not and can not mean that such a reduction is direct or can be measured. Capitalism does not render the abstract aspect of labour visible: we only know post festum (and even then only imperfectly) if the labour embodied in a commodity was of the socially necessary quality, or if the use-value in which it was embodied was adequately satisfying a social need. This is the point I have already made above. The money form gives rise to the possibility of the self expansion of value, so long as it can appropriate surplus value from setting labour to working in some way, and so produces the possibility and pressures towards accumulation. But it can never determine the rate of accumulation required or how it might be achieved in any concrete instance. There is no direct reduction of labour relations to money relations.

The fact that exploitation has been liberated from the immediate needs of the ruling class means that the desire to expand value is in principle infinite. As we pointed out above: Marx argues that any amount is only a definite, finite amount, capable of further increase. But we must not confuse desire and performance! The drive to accumulate is rooted in this desire, not a detailed knowledge of the requirements produced by competition from other capitalists. Thus whereas in most labour process and labour theory of value analyses, the general law of capitalist accumulation is seen to arise on the basis of capitalist control and knowledge of the conditions of production, we can now see that on the contrary, its roots lie in ignorance and fear of what other capitalists might have up their sleeves.

In commodity status of labour approaches, the concepts of calculation, efficiency and control all run together. The commoditisation of labour gives rise both to calculation of its performance and the ability to maximise efficiency via maximising control. The problem of management is the problem of maximising the difference in the value of labour and labour power. Our approach splits these three concepts apart.

We can agree that calculation is vital to capitalist mode of production, but it has neither the causes or effects that tend to be assumed. Wage labour cannot give rise directly to rational calculation and double entry book-keeping (even if there might be a historical fit between the rise of these phenomena) because it is not labour that is purchased but labour power. Labour (and even labour power) never becomes a commodity like any other. The exchange between capital and labour is always incomplete. Thus calculation can never be of labour directly, but of the money relations involved, and there must always be an absolutely vital distinction between the two: for what lies behind that money transaction can never be entirely clear.

As for the effects of calculation, these too must be less rational and far reaching if its basis is not directly in labour relations but instead is in money relations. All the capitalist or entrepreneur can calculate is money relations, but these no longer arise directly from labour relations in production, but are influenced by market factors too. The 'real' basis of a particular monetary result will always remain obscure. The hidden hand is an ideological tautology. There is no necessary relation between capitalist social relations, control and 'efficiency'. The capitalist only knows post-festum what has been 'efficient', and he never knows why he has been so. This can be expressed in terms of the private and social aspects of labour in capitalist mode of production. All the capitalist can measure directly is the private aspect. How socially necessary this labour is, its social aspect, is never fully revealed to him and emerges only via the exchange of the final commodity on the market. But even this does not reveal to the capitalist the actual

value relations involved: it only reveals exchange value. The accounting and control of capital is always indirect and vague. This, therefore, opens up the space, even within capitalist mode of production itself, to tackle it differently, according to alternative criteria and standards.

Money, the objectification of the abstract social aspect of labour, is the basis of 'constant revolutionising' in the capitalist mode of production, not the presence of something called abstract labour itself. Abstract labour is not labour dominated by and therefore taking the form of the material incarnation of value relations which the labour theory of value and commodity status of labour analyses suggest. In capitalist mode of production not labour but its products become comparable and as such, the basis of value relations. The basis of capitalist mode of production is, therefore, not that all men are created equal, but that their products are treated equally, as commodities. This is of absolutely vital importance for two main reasons.

First of all, recognising this breaks the last threads of the argument that capitalism has an inherent connexion with rationality or efficiency. I have already argued that calculation in capitalist mode of production is based on money, and not value relations directly. We can now see a further development of this argument. Because labour in capitalist mode of production is never reduced to a type of labour, abstract labour, which is homogenous and comparable across capitals, (I reiterate below the significance of the distinction between aspect and type) the argument that efficiency and accumulation result from the necessity of all capitals to compete for and exploit mobile labour, no longer holds.<sup>(17)</sup> This is another dimension of the argument that value relations do not come to be inherent or materially incarnate in the labour process itself, but only operate through money as the object of this process.

Secondly, if money is the focus of capitalism, rather than the commodity status of labour, this allows us to explain the apparently

tenuous connexion between capitalism and human rights, equality and labour freedom, on one hand, and yet produce an analysis which gives far more scope for class struggle and the construction of class relations within capitalism (including issues like skill) on the other.

I have already noted the ideological role that the concept of commodity status of labour plays of presenting capitalism in terms of personal freedom and sovereignty. This idea has carried over into the idea that capitalism without equal human rights, even if the sum total of these rights is the compulsion to sell one's own labour power, is an aberration. Racist or imperialist societies appear as a distortion (caused by prejudice perhaps?) of the pure capitalist form. Perhaps the best example of this is Max Weber's distinction between violent and rational capital accumulation, the former characterised by lack of respect for personal sovereignty or property, and therefore alien to a rational bureaucratic capitalist system.

But what of the empirical history of capitalist production. Corrigan (1976) has pointed out the extent of labour arrangements in Britain in the 18th century which do not conform to the wage-labour or commoditised labour norm. Was not cotton textiles the most significant industry in the industrial revolution in Britain? Did it not depend on slave labour for its raw material? What of the accumulation of wealth from empire, prior to its application in the imperial heartland, and its modern counterpart, the Gastarbeiter, the immigrant labour reserves and foreign contract workers. How do bantustans in South Africa or international market zones in South East Asia, square with the concept of labour as a commodity? Does the commoditisation of labour explain the employment opportunities of black people or women in the capitalist heartlands today. How do we explain shock workers or labour camps?

One would be forgiven for thinking that it is not the absence of 'free' labour that requires explanation but its presence. This requires the analysis of capitalism in terms of money relations

rather than the commodity status of labour. For if labour relations within the money relations remain to be constructed then it is quite easy to see the different forms of labour control and organisation found in the world as being constructed by capitalists, through struggle with the direct producers, in order to promote production of commodities. (18)

Pollard (1965) demonstrates the range of tactics adopted by the early entrepreneurs before primitive accumulation had improved their supply of wage labour. Moore (1966) suggests that the transition from feudalism in Britain can be accounted for by the strength of the direct producers in the aftermath of the black death (our emphasis on money and usury would add that this would also help account for the decline of the feudal nobility) followed by their immiseration as the terms of agricultural production went against them. They were too strong and independent simply to be enserfed (as in Eastern Europe) as market opportunities opened up, but not strong enough to resist being turned into wage labourers.

By contrast a capitalist in the Southern States of America would not have been interested in the supposedly rational and productive character of wage labour because it would have expressed its rationality and productivity by learning to farm the ample virgin territory available.

Similarly South Africa should not be seen as some wart on the face of capitalism, but another mode of its existence. Labour does not have to be 'free' to accumulate capital, it is only necessary for the capitalist to have access to markets for their commodities and as little responsibility as possible for the costs of reproduction of their labour supply. This also explains much of the character of 'world market factories' in the 'third world' analysed by Elson and Pearson. (19)

This is one aspect of what I mean by the construction of labour relations within capitalism: that commodities can be produced with the aim of realising their value and thereby accumulating capital by

labour which has none of the freedoms that are traditionally associated with capitalism.

The second aspect flows from this. These freedoms, where they do exist if they are not any part of the logic of capitalist development, must themselves have been constructed in the struggle over the nature of production relations between labour and capital. The fact of this construction also implies the possibility of its further development, limited by the fact that it takes place within money relations. We have now arrived, I think, at the point where we can analyse the question of industrial democracy.

If we have abandoned the concept of 'labour as such', because of its roots in the commodity status of labour ideology, then we must also abandon the attempts implicit in many labour process debate approaches to distinguish the capitalist form of authority in production from authority 'springing from the productive process itself': for there is no 'productive process itself' on which to base such a differentiation. This point can also be seen as a consequence of our arguments about the immediately social character of all production, and the presence of value relations of some sort in any mode of production.

The aim of real subordination of labour theory must be to demonstrate that contrary to its appearance of being merely neutral and technical, labour and the process of production takes on a definite social form and has a specifically capitalist character. Investigation of its social character has led us to consider two aspects: money relations and labour relations. I think it is in consequence of these two sets of relations that we can talk of labour's twofold character. It is a question not of stating the existence of a concrete and abstract aspect, use value aspect and value aspect, but examining the interconnexion of these aspects (which in themselves are transhistorical) in capitalist society.

In fact the point of real subordination of labour theory (in contrast to Braverman's interpretation, and indeed Marx's at some points in

volume (1) is not of use value coming to incarnate value, but that control authority and power in the process of production do indeed stem from the production process itself. The point is, however, the social form of this process. It is a capitalist labour process in which use value and the concrete aspect of production are subordinate to the specific form of value relations which exist in capitalist mode of production: ie. the realisation and accumulation of 'value' in its money form.

Labour relations come to be dominated by money relations, but this does not mean that they are determined by them, rather that they limit the development of fluidity of labour and the course of the construction of labour relations and the division of labour.

Marx's distinction between the formal and real subordination of labour can not then be taken to represent not a process of commoditisation of labour (or a movement within that commoditisation I have already discussed the confusion that exists on this point.) Rather it should be seen as a process whereby the organisation of production is reoriented from production of use values which are then appropriated according to the value relations characterising that society, to a process whereby the organisation of that production itself is directly dominated by the aim of producing value.

Real subordination of labour must be an analysis of the nature of the immediately social character of production in capitalism. It expresses the development that money relations become the immediate object of labour relations, that exchange becomes the object of production, that production is the production of commodities, and that this represents not the triumph of individual sovereignty but a process of commodity fetishism. The latent character of the social nature of production arises behind the producers backs and expresses itself as an apparently independent force.

This is a more limited concept of real subordination of labour than it traditionally is given, but it seems to me it is the only one consistent with avoiding posing formal subordination of labour as a

state of 'labour as such' as it appears in Braverman. Use value 'as such' can never be the object of a labour process or an adequate description of its character: it is only a one-sided abstraction. What the concept of real subordination of labour therefore illuminates is that while the use-value aspect directly of a labour process remains its object, as opposed to the exchange value of the commodity produced by that labour process then the General law of capitalist accumulation will not hold full sway: there is still scope for its further development.

Footnotes to Chapter 4.

1. I mean more than the presence of unintended consequence. I mean that in contrast to a feudal society for example, the social regulation of production arises only as a side effect of other processes.
2. To emphasise this point, capital is both necessary to produce surplus-value, and the result of its production. Thus capital seems to be a pre-requisite of its own genesis. See Brenner, 1977.
3. Again justification of this proposition is a work in itself. I would cite the arguments of E.P. Thompson (in particular, Thompson 1965) and Christopher Hill for this proposition.
4. The idea that values are mapped onto labour, and that money is a numeraire can be seen as the origin of the tendency to reduce all social relations to those of distribution.
5. This is altogether different from commodity status of labour's assumptions about individual labour powers. 'Private' here means only not directly socially regulated. Commodities can only enter a relationship of exchange if their producers are alien to each other.
6. We have done this without ANY assumption about whether or not labour is commoditised.
7. We can make no quantitative inferences here, that is a legacy of those approaches we are criticising.
8. This is really re-stating our argument: in capitalist mode of production value only materialises through the commodity form and the process of exchange.
9. "So far no chemist has ever discovered exchange value either in a pearl or a diamond....." (Marx 1976, p.177)
10. The first is a french proverb quoted by Marx (1976, p.247n) and the second, the reply of the emperor Vespasian to his son Titus, when the latter objected to this taxation of public lavatories, again quoted by Marx (1976, p.205).
11. I must emphasise again that what is involved is the form of appearance of value, not the direct measure of value itself.

Money never directly represents labour time, and money's twin role as measure of value and standard of price entails that there is no necessary direct connexion between prices and values.

12. As well as its place in the development of our argument here, this quote is significant because of its parallels with the contradiction we identified at the heart of the commodity status of labour: individual sovereignty versus collective dependence. The advantage of Marx's formulation lies in its more consistent and empirical character: its superior concept of contradiction as a historical rather than logical phenomenon.
13. To think this would be to fall back into seeing money as a mere numeraire established by social convention
14. Otherwise "The misers' plan would be far simpler and surer: he holds onto his £100 instead of exposing it to the dangers of circulation." (1976, p248)
15. The whole of chapter 5 of Vol 1 (1976, pp.258-269 is directed to a defence of this point, against the illusions of classical political economy. However no new arguments are needed to establish it here.
16. My argument here follows Elson (1979), pp. 144-9)
17. A good example of this argument is Brenner on the comparison between Polish and West European Agriculture in the transition to capitalism, Brenner, (1977).
18. It is interesting to note that Marx himself makes this comment in an early work:
 

"Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of ourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value, it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large scale industry. (Marx & Engels, 1976, p.167) ("The Poverty of Philosophy")
19. Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson, "The Subordination of Women and the Internationalisation of Factory Production" in Young et al (ed) (1981)

CHAPTER FIVE : CLASS

"The word "working class" is about the most dangerous word in the rhetoric of the labour movement"

(Thompson, 1960b, p.22)

5.1. Commodity status of labour theories, leap and logic and class strategy.

Any analysis of mode of production must also involve an analysis of class, at any rate so long as we avoid a purely voluntarist or subjectivist account. I have already suggested, in the course of discussing Braverman, that theories of class produced by commodity status of labour analyses are full of problems. I want now to carry this analysis further, and look at these problems in the context of the issues of the status of consciousness, class strategies and the state in such theories and the distinction they draw between changes within and between modes of production. Insofar as we set out to avoid individualist accounts of history we must conclude that it is made by classes not by a simple aggregate of individual actions.

The model of class and struggle which pervades Braverman's work is also representative of many other 'marxist' models insofar as they face similar problems and resolve them in similar ways. Class is defined by property relations. The relationship of people to the means of production is cast in terms of their ownership of commodities: land, capital and labour. This formula seems to carry Marx's authority with it, in terms of the unfinished manuscript in Volume III.

"The owners of mere labour-power, the owners of capital and the landowners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit and ground-rent, in other words wage-labourers, capitalists and landowners - form the three great classes of modern society based on the capitalist mode of production."

(Marx, 1982, p.1025)

Ownership or non ownership of these commodities defines peoples' place in the relations of production and forms them into classes, collectivities of people with the same position and collective interest because their position is determined by the logic of capitalist development. The development of the real subordination of labour and the universal market together create an objectively homogeneous mass of abstract labour which is flung between branches of production as

capital accumulation proceeds. At the same time the quantitative difference between the value of labour power and the value it bestows in production and the relations of control express the exploitative nature of these class relations.

But this process describes the material development of these class relations, not the development of class struggle. Here commodity status of labour theory can be developed in two alternative ways. It can be argued that struggle consists of the battle over the terms of exchange between different commodity owners (principally between labour and capital) and that no significance is to be found in conflict between the different commodity owners beyond this. A functionalist version of this argument is Coser (1956). More common is the development of the pluralist accounts of industrial relations which examines the construction of institutions to channel and control such conflict. Such approaches, aside from the recognition of the existence of commodity status labour, do not see the idea of a mode of production as very relevant. Class becomes synonymous with interest group.

In Braverman and 'marxist' versions however, such struggles are the epiphenomena of the essential contradiction between capital and labour. The problem is how such contradiction and struggle is to manifest itself when Braverman's analysis portrays the logic of capital relations as omnipotent and the working class as powerless proletarians. This is a central part of the problem of the analysis of contradiction given in Braverman's work. If history is the resolution of points of contradiction, and history is class struggle, it follows that when we analyse contradictions we are also dealing with how we think of classes and this relationship. But in Braverman's analysis of capitalist mode of production it appears that all struggle within capitalist mode of production occurs only at the level of consciousness. There is no 'space' for material struggle. Where it does take place its only significance can be political. This is why Braverman has to present his class analysis in terms of the class-in-itself and class-for-itself antinomy. His analysis is of the class-in-itself. If it attains a true consciousness of its material position and common

interest in overthrowing capitalism it will become a class-for-itself. What prevents it doing so must be the dominance of fetishism and false consciousness. This explains, the importance which Braverman attaches to strategies of capital to habituate the working-class:

"since the workers are not destroyed as human beings but are simply utilised in inhuman ways, their critical, intelligent, conceptual faculties no matter how deadened or diminished, always remain in some degree a threat to capital."

(p. 139, 1974)

The contradiction around which class struggle is focussed is that between the material logic of capital which is unassailable and a debate at the level of consciousness as to whether that logic can be smashed and a leap effected to another logic.

Braverman uses the in-itself/for-itself distinction to express the formulation of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production, use value and value relations. As a class-in-itself the working class is defined by its position in the logic of capital accumulation. As a class for itself, armed with scientific knowledge of its position it can effect the required change in form of social-relations by abolishing its commodity status. As I argued in chapter three this formula is exceedingly difficult to situate empirically, for there appears to be no material content to this all important change in form.

I think this conception of class, the role of consciousness and definition of mode of production lies behind the even more widespread debate about 'consent and coercion'. The contrast between consent and coercion arises on the basis of the leap and logic approach because the latter splits the historical process into the determinism of the laws of motion of a particular mode of production and the voluntarism of the prospect of abolishing this mode of production and its laws of motion with it. Coercion is used to interpret the effects of these laws of motion, 'consent' is used to express their

reliance (in the last instance?) on collective ideologically based submission to them which might be overturned 'if all acted together.'

Gramsci argues that:

"every system of state and law and the capitalist system above all, exists in the last analysis because its survival, and the validity of its statutes, are simply accepted as unproblematic.....For the coercive measures taken by society in individual cases are often hard or brutally materialistic, but the strength of every society is in the last resort a spiritual strength."

(Gramsci 1977, p. 260-2)

Although his theory of hegemony can be interpreted in more fruitful and subtle ways (Anderson, 1977) within the commodity status of labour tradition I think there has been a tendency to equate capitalist hegemony with working class submission to habituation and 'false consciousness' and proletarian hegemony with the shift to a revolutionary class-for-itself consciousness. We can find a very similar mode of argument in Trotsky discussing the Russian Revolution:

"Property is a relation among people, it represents an enormous power so long as it is universally recognised and supported by that system of compulsion called Law and the State. But the very essence of the present situation was that the old state had suddenly collapsed and the entire old system of rights had been called into question by the masses. In the factories the workers were more and more regarding themselves as the proprietors, and the bosses as uninvited guests.....The property-holders, deprived of the possibility of using their property, or protecting it ceased to be real property holders and became badly frightened Philistines."

(Trotsky, (1967) p. 197)

This mode of argument reaches its nadir in Lukacs (1971) where the contrast between the material position and consciousness of the working class becomes total. Lukacs argues that in material terms the worker in capitalism comes to appear 'as a mere source of error' (1971, p.89) (a formulation F.W. Taylor would appreciate) but that

the defeat of capital will be brought about by the defeat of reification and the creation of revolutionary consciousness within the proletariat. But this consciousness becomes not even a set of empirical propositions, but an epistemological guarantee, rooted in method alone, that scientific marxist knowledge can decipher the contradictory nature of the logic of capital:

"Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx's individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious 'orthodox' Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx's theses in toto - without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment. Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations. It is not the 'belief' in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a 'sacred' book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to method."

"Proletarian science is revolutionary not just by virtue of its revolutionary ideas which it opposes to bourgeois society, but above all because of its method. The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science."

(Lukacs, 1971, p.1, p.27)

The origin of this peculiar role for labour as resolver of the central contradictions in capitalist mode of production presented by Lukacs or Braverman lies in the definition of capitalism as a system determined by the commodity status of labour in the first place. Its logic must produce a unified working class with no material interest in present society. Its undifferentiated abstract self constitutes the material basis for equality in future society. This is the class for itself. It is not an empirical political evaluation, but a solution to a theoretical puzzle. It becomes the material bearer for marxism's scientific ideas.

The idea that the working class can act to resolve historical contradictions in various ways is quite acceptable. I have already set

my discussion of mode of production and historical change in just these terms in chapter 2. What is at issue is the nature of the contradictions to be resolved. It has been my argument from the outset that Braverman analyses capitalist society in terms of a single universal contradiction with different aspects (form and content, forces and relations, value and use value, labour and capital) which can never be made empirical. It is no surprise then that this gives rise to a conception of class consciousness and 'big-bang' theory of revolution which is also non-empirical.

There are two important points to take from this discussion of the treatment of class in commodity status of labour approaches. First there are the problems which stem from the assumption that scientific knowledge has revealed what the class's 'true' position is. Indeed this is the role of social science in this model: to combat fetishism and habituation and thereby transform what capitalism necessarily creates as a class-in-itself into a class-for-itself. Insofar as the working class is not united and socialist the tendency becomes to focus analysis on why this is not the case. A search is mounted for blockages, material or ideological, which prevent the working class assuming its true role, just as in examining the labour process empirical 'qualifications' to the logic of capital were sought out. These blockages can be the 'artificial' job structures supposedly devised by capital, or the role of the mass media, or the incorporation of union leaders. We end up with a sociology of betrayal because analysis turns into a search for explanations why the working class has not fulfilled its historic mission: this mission and its interests are not arrived at empirically but given by our 'scientific' knowledge.

It is this process which lies behind what Mills referred to as the 'metaphysic' of labour, or which Cutler has called the 'Romance of Labour'. (Cutler 1978) It lies behind the antimony "bureaucracy and rank and file" which underpins much Marxist analysis of trade unions (see my comments on Gramsci above p. 114), and, as Hyman argues, as the rank and file themselves fail to move, we arrive at the phenomenon of the 'bureaucratisation of the rank and file.' (Hyman, 1979).

At the end of this process lies the idea of what might be called 'the rank and file with the right ideas', the vanguard of the class with the correct scientific appreciation of its position: the party with the right programme. We end up with a false choice between "the Marxist-sectaries (with) the ark in which the true Marxist Covenant is preserved (which) must look to support to an hypothetical uncontaminated working class which in some hypothetical eventuality will loom up from the docks and the mills and follow their lead" (Thompson 1960b p. 21) and a rejection of any connexion between the working class and changing capitalism. Mills suggests "the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals - as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change." (Thompson 1960b p. 23). This is an answer which many sociologists have been drawn towards. But it is an unhelpful answer, because we have been pushed into making a false choice. We are really only being asked to swap one set of intellectuals (the party programmes) for another (the social engineers?) while behind both approaches lies the same dichotomy between determinism and voluntarism which we have been trying to escape all along. What should be at issue is not whether the working class is a revolutionary force or not, but how we characterise the working class without transforming it into a metaphysic. We have to identify an alternative theory of the construction of class. It is not supplied ready made by the logic of capital.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that we cannot reduce 'the working class' to a simple idea of the form of labour: its commodity status. Class experience is more rich and varied than this. It is not the straightforward experience of deskilling and degradation to an abstract homogeneous mass of powerless proletarians. Nor can we simply equate working class with production, and ruling class with control and appropriation and then somehow arrive at the 'contradictory class location' of the layers in between. To do so would merely be to return to the sorts of contradictions present in Braveman's work which I examined in chapter 3. I will return to the question of definitions of class in section 3 of this chapter.

The second point to note in this discussion is the way struggle and

conflict are treated, and the 'leap' envisaged. The fact that material struggle in capitalism cannot alter the logic of its operation does not mean that such struggle is eschewed. On the contrary it is welcomed, but its purpose relies on a complete distinction between means and ends. Material struggle is valued not for any immediate material effect (indeed insofar as it might act to qualify the logic of capital it might even 'block' the progressive homogenisation of the class) but for the 'lessons' it provides, because it develops consciousness:

"not for the sake of reform but for the educative value of the struggle."

(Thompson, 1960a, p.7)

it will help remove ideological blocks, by proving to the class, the necessity of overthrowing the logic of capitalist mode of production before the cause of its troubles, the commodity status of labour, can be abolished.

Such a model therefore places tremendous importance on two things. On one side, the scientific programme which contains the correct analysis of capitalism and strategy for overthrowing it. On the other side the state appears as the ultimate guardian of the logic of the mode of production, both in its ideological and material form. It is seen as organising consent on the one hand (through the appearance of democracy, and its control) and coercion on the other (through laws backed up by 'bodies of armed men'). Revolution (which I argued above is a corollary to any concept of a mode of production) then becomes a global cataclysmic affair, corresponding to the global contradiction between form and content, relations and forces, labour and capital, which lies in the capitalist mode of production. The point of transition is reached where the logic of capital is 'smashed' along with the state:

"The class struggle tends to be thought of as a series of brutal, head-on encounters (which it sometimes is); not as a conflict of force, interests, values, priorities, ideas, taking place ceaselessly in every area of life. Its culmination is seen as being a moment when the

opposed classes stand wholly disengaged from each other, confronting each other in naked antagonism; not as the climax to ever closer engagement within existing institutions, demanding the most constructive deployment of skills as well as of force. It is "their" State versus "our" (imaginary) State; "their" institutions which must be "smashed" before ours can be built; their society which must be "overthrown" before the new society can be made. Communists and Labour fundamentalists of the "statist" variety tend to place emphasis upon an hypothetical parliamentary majority which, in a dramatic period of breaking-and-making, will legislate a new State into existence from above. Trotskyists tend to place emphasis upon industrial militancy overthrowing existing institutions from below."

(Thompson, (1960a) p. 6)

Revolution is all, reform is nothing. All change is between modes.

From the commodity status of labour we arrive at an integrated theory of class, strategy, science and the state in the transition from one mode of production to another. Nor do I think it is a caricature which I have presented. Surely it is just such a determinist conception of class which has formed the terrain of much marxist discussion in recent years, even where it has drawn back from the conclusions of its own analysis. Nor is it a new debate. It is clear that these were the issues between the old and new sides of the New Left in the first half of the sixties, not only in the direct exchanges in the early issues of New Left Review but in the more 'cataclysmic' encounter between Anderson and Thompson over the interpretation of English history. Thompson's insistence that we pay as much attention to 1640, to 1688 and to 1832 as to the more 'cataclysmic' events of 1789 and 1917 was surely making the same points about the nature of the mode of production that I have been attempting here. Unfortunately lessons learned in one branch of social science are not always readily appreciated in others. What I have tried to show is that labour process and value theory debates have clung fast to the very models of capitalist mode of production that Thompson was trying to transcend.

What I have tried to do is show the importance of the commodity status of labour idea and its ramifications in this process. I have also shown that the 'constant revolutionising' associated with capitalist

mode of production is not dependent on any commodity status of labour but can instead be located in the money form. The generalisation of commodity exchange to the point that a universal equivalent crystallises out of this process and becomes more and more the focus of productive activity contains a historically novel (and unforeseen) consequence: the liberation of the dynamic of surplus extraction from the petty immediate demands of the ruling class. The genesis of the process of constant revolutionising lies not in wage labour, but in the dominance of money.

What remains for me to do is to propose an alternative account of class and strategy, to avoid 'the false choice' I presented above, and to show that rejecting a determinist conception of class does not mean abandoning the concept, or returning to a pluralist or empiricist theory of class in terms of interest groups which sees no significance in struggle beyond the social relations of distribution at immediate issue. I must also present some conception of the nature a non-cataclysmic account of revolution might take.

I think the concept of pre-figurative form is useful one to develop in this context. It suggests the possibility of material change within capitalism that does not constitute its overthrow, yet is more than a mere change in its terms of operation. It depends on a concept of contradiction that is far less global and more empirical. It suggests that around the central feature of the money form within capitalist mode of production there is much space for the construction of alternative social relations and correspondingly different ways of defining and constructing class. In doing so it emancipates us from a teleological reliance on the 'ultimately' socialist character of the working class, or economic formulations of the relationship between levels of unemployment or standards of living and working class politics. Insofar as we change our conception of the material side, our analysis of consciousness must change too. It must become a more significant part of class construction, in the absence of a material logic to perform this role, and its role must be less universal than a theory with claims to possess guarantees of its scientific nature internal to itself. In the next section

I consider the potential role of theory: the 'space' for social sciences and its relation to practical action, then consider 'class', and finally arrive at the issue of industrial democracy in this context by a discussion of the Alternative Economic Strategy.

## 5.2 Class, science and strategy

The points I made about consciousness and class in the last section imply that any attempt to produce an analysis of capitalist mode of production must also involve some reflection on the status of that analysis in terms of its relation to a possible strategy and how it is to be applied. For example the idea of a perfect analysis or perfect method, as in Lukacs, carries with it the idea of that analysis as the correct programme or state of consciousness for the working class to adopt. If I am arguing for a less determinist approach to capitalism and class then I must also be able to propose a less determinist analysis of the status of my arguments about capitalist mode of production, and how they might be used. I have analysed how I see the space for social science and practical action existing, in terms of less determinist account of capitalism as a mode of production. I have now to clarify what the relationship between such a science and its application could be.

First of all it seems clear that the concept of science as a body of ideas produced by 'experts' separate from the movement that uses them, is untenable. Rather than the property of the experts, 'science' has to be seen as an aspect of a wider movement. Indeed the concept of the expert as ever separate from, and therefore potentially powerful over, that movement seems to be a hallmark of the specifically capitalist ways of thinking about science in the first place. Its repressive or liberating aspects are not contained in its results or method (pace Lukacs) as such but in its relationship to its production and application as well. An 'independent' science emancipated from a

movement, from social control and regulation of its development, is ultimately liable to become the servant of the highest bidder. Once it is allowed to become the province of 'experts' then the divorce of means and ends basic to capitalist social relations must lead to the control of science (in its application at any rate) not by the scientists but capital and the state.

One of the few works which seriously examines the relationship between the content of science and its social organisation is Brecht's play, 'Galileo' (Brecht, 1980) written and revised as it was under the twin impact of the rise of Facism and reversals for the movement of 'scientific socialism' and the American development, of the atomic bomb, in the name of freedom. Brecht makes clear his belief that the revolutionary nature of science was emasculated once it was allowed to pass to experts. Galileo's recantation, and his work in Latin are seen as a decisive defeat: science is allowed to survive because in its non popular form it is no longer a threat. Ultimately the scientist becomes the author of the atomic bomb while, pathetically blaming the 'irresponsibility' of the technology they have "discovered" as though it was always there, waiting to be found by the scientist rather than created.

"The bourgeois single out science from the scientist's--consciousness, setting it up as an island of independence so as to be able in practice to interweave it with their politics, their economics, their ideology. The research scientist's object is 'pure' research; the product of that research is not so pure. The formula  $E=mc^2$  is conceived of as eternal, not tied to anything. Hence other people can do the tying: suddenly the city of Hiroshima became very short-lived. The scientists are claiming the irresponsibility of machines."

(Brecht, 1980, p.121)

One of the clearest formulations of the potential of social science was given by Mills in his book The Sociological Imagination. It is surely no coincidence that this work is one of the few which has seen the material organisation of sociology to be as important as the theory itself. Mills saw the role for social science in its

ability to link public issue and private trouble:

"to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals"

(Mills, 1970, p.11)

The same sort of point, in a very different language, is made by Clarke, in the course of defending the need for 'theory' in the face of its rather dismal performance in British historiography:

"...theory must explain both the unity of class relations and the fragmentation and fetishisation of these relations in experience and the latter is as important as the former"

(1979, p. 153)

This idea is one that I have already hinted at above in the language of modes of production. Social Science can render visible and intelligible aspects of social relations as aspects of a specific mode of production which in everyday life is not always directly visible or intelligible. By doing this we can develop a better idea of what changes may or may not be possible within the dimensions of a given mode of production and how at the same time such a strategy might foster or frustrate the potential to change or revolutionise the mode of production itself altogether.

One defect of the approaches I considered in this last section is the way in which this is done. They contrast the visionary powers of social science or theory, its ability to penetrate through appearance to essence, to illegitimacy, the false conscious nature of the everyday lived experience of people within the mode of production who are to constitute the class or movement. Class in itself, objectively can only become 'for' itself once it receives (from the expert, or via science)'theory', 'correct' consciousness.

Our problem is therefore to retain the problem of visibility, and thereby retain a role for social science, without at the same time maintaining that role only by giving social science some privileged vantage point denied to ordinary people.

In contrast to this I want to propose the ability, and necessity for the roots of 'science' to lie not in 'experts' superior method or theory, but in the aggregate, the collectivity, of individual, private troubles and lived experience itself. Modes of production can be rendered visible, private troubles grasped in their public origins and significance from within the process of mystification and privatisation itself. Theory which simply writes off the visible, the private, the immediate, as wrong, or falsely conscious cannot come to grips with the nature of society as it is, as opposed to how it is proposed it might become. Scientific knowledge is contained within a particular method. Rather it must be developed as part of the collective discovery through experience of the mode of production, of how it is constructed and what potentially there is for resolving contradictions in alternative ways and constructing it differently. This does not mean abandoning intellectuals or theories, but keeping a practical and empirical check on how they relate to the development of movements and classes. This is best expressed by Thompson in his onslaught on mechanical Marxist teleology:

".....history cannot be compared to a tunnel through which an express races until it brings its freight of passengers out into sunlit plains. Or, if it can be, then generation upon generation of passengers are born, live in the dark, and die while the train is still within the tunnel. An historian must surely be more interested than the teleologists allow him to be in the quality of life, the sufferings and satisfactions, of those who live and die in unredeemed time.....any mature view of history (or of contemporary actuality) must in some way combine evaluation of both kinds -- of men as consumers of their own mortal existence and as producers of a future, of men as individuals and historical agents, of men being and becoming."

(Thompson, 1965, p. 86-7)

The problem which faces us, therefore is to see the generation of science as a collective effort, which seeks to develop within any 'movement' or 'class' a process of self clarification in terms of the visibility of its position within a mode of production, and a consciousness of how its position is in a point of Flux between its

determination by current relations of production on the one hand, and its own ability, given its greater or lesser 'vision' to try to remake these relations in the future in a different way, given its perception of what constraints exist on this. Nor must this be seen as a purely intellectual question: one of consciousness. It is a material one too in that only practical action will ever provide knowledge of many of these things.

I am not proposing any sort of anti-intellectualism here: on the contrary my purpose is to erect the very theoretical 'space' in which any social science can operate. I am proposing however, that this science must not see its basis as internal to itself, rooted in a correct method or particular theory which guarantees its results. Instead it must be always linked to empirical study, or practical immediate activity and experience.

The opening up of theoretical and practical 'space' requires a movement whose 'science' is not controlled by 'experts' as opposed to those it 'studies', but a movement whose 'scientists' must always submit their theories to the validation of the everyday experience of the movement and those outside it itself. I think this relationship is best expressed by the slogan of the women's movement "the personal is political". The role of theory ought to be to make some political sense of personal position:

"...!theory' has a more weighty meaning on the contemporary left. It has a grand resonance which comes from the towers of academia and the fossilized authority of sectarianism. Both these approach 'theory' as something unattainable except by the few. It becomes fixed, hanging above us in a kind of ahistorical space. But ideas come from our experience of our lives, from the past wisdom of others and from the movement for change. Our efforts to abstract upon our practice and history through theories of how to make socialism for example are not good for all time, to be handed on like dusty catechisms, repeated by rote as 'correct thought'. They have no universal validity. If they serve more than their time, well and good. But this does not make them sacred texts; it makes them more fitting to be used and enjoyed and developed. I think that each effort of abstraction must be constantly re-examined, criticised, dipped back into experience, merge and be born again.

(Rowbotham, 1979, p.55)

To return to Thompson's analogy, leap and logic theory has had the train's itinerary worked out in principle from the moment of its departure, even if the time of its arrival seems constantly to need to be reassessed (Lukacs will assure us that this is of no consequence). Because we know where we are going, we can invest our programmes for the future (workers control etc) with scientific status.

In contrast the model I am proposing suggests that there is no definite journey, although we cannot immediately decide to go just where we choose, or how we organise who is the engine driver: to quote Rowbotham on a similar theme:

"In order to explore, we need good maps. (I nearly wrote workmanlike!) We need to be able to take stock of the situation and communicate any general principles to other wanderers. We have to establish certain staging posts to refuel and assess the journey. This means we have to sit back momentarily from our immediate response to the route and try to sum up the relationship of what we have travelled to the whole journey. Some of this will be from our experience, with information from other travellers' tales and from any existing maps. Some will be speculation about the way things will be likely to go.

(1979, p.54)

This model of 'science' can be illustrated by the issue of producing 'blueprints' of the future society. At first sight Marx's much quoted refusal to produce blueprints of the future socialist society is a hallmark of his scientific approach. Just as he did not start out from 'concepts', he did not end up with 'blueprints.' That is to say he did not believe his approach to be a moral or utopian one, an idealist reading into history of his own predilections and fancies, ending up with his own preferred arrangements for ideal living. Marx's refusal to write blueprints stood for his rejection of what we referred to as 'voluntarist' theory: the notion that we might remake the world tomorrow in accordance with whatever principles we might choose, without paying any attention to the constraints imposed by the reality of presently existing society.

The blueprint stands as the central feature of those approaches which reject any reality to the concept mode of production, and which therefore insist that the scientist, historian or politician must organise the chaos of the empirical with their own heuristic models or devices, their own concepts: thus Weber's ideal types, or Poppers' hypotheses, and piecemeal social engineering projects can be seen as 'blueprints' in their own way. Insofar as the refusal to produce blueprints is in reaction to such approaches it appears perfectly correct. However it has been interpreted in quite another way: as a rejection of idealism in favour of the 'scientific' determinism that leap and logic theory proposes: the blueprints have come to be seen as unnecessary because the logic of history renders them redundant.

Marx's refusal has been interpreted as the lack of need for any blueprints, because the arrival and much of the details of organisation of future society are seen as being produced unproblematically by the working out of the logic of present day society. 'Science' reveals how future society must inexorably be, rather than how we might create it, and its 'scientific' nature consists in this very fact.

Thus the perfectly correct criticism that we cannot impose blueprints on historical development willy nilly by intellectual effort, hardens into the inverse proposition that we cannot impose anything on history. Indeed it implies that the relationship is the other way around: we are agents not authors, at least until the socialist morrow arrives, and to think otherwise is utopian or reformist.

At present my main purpose is to suggest that if we do not wish to escape idealism by resorting to determinism and the assumption that the future is mapped out without our own intervention, then the crucial issue is not whether blueprints are produced (they will be produced anyway - even under the banner of the refusal to do so) but how. We have returned to the question posed by Ch.4. How does historical change occur? If we can return to the imperfect analysis of train journeys, briefly, it has to be stressed that just because we cannot go in any direction, this does not mean that there are not choices to be made about which directions we can go in. The effect of the dominance of leap and

logic thinking (of both marxist and non marxist variants) has been to illicitly conflate choice with voluntarism, and morals with moralism. For the determinist the only choices to be made are how best to facilitate a predetermined journey, for the voluntarist there are no constraints on the trains' advance anywhere. We have been led to think either we live in a system where choice is free and unconstrained (whether it be consumer preference, the vote) or conversely that in contrast to appearances, there are no 'real' choices. These are false antinomies from which we have to escape and develop theories of what 'space' we have to make different choices and map these out. There is nothing utopian about this so long as the blueprints or maps we construct are rooted in a collective, scientific appraisal of the potentials and constraints of the present. The 'lessons' of history operate not through some supra-individual logic, but the experience of those who have made it and suffered it in different ways, and can therefore usefully argue and debate about possible ways it might be made in the future.

The slogan 'the personal is political' seems to me to pull together a number of important dimensions of the role of science. The first is that it is inadequate simply to treat people as 'agents' of economic laws or other deeper structures beyond their ken. A social science which teaches its practitioners to think of people thus inevitably fosters a political practice which treats them with contempt as political objects of different structures and laws. (Fay, 1975) The second is the idea that unless we can make sense of the political in terms of personal everyday lived experience which can be an object of actions and change in the immediate present rather than the ultimate future or last instance, then we have failed. We will still be caught up in an analysis of models or structures rather than people. It is inadequate to reduce the concept of mode of production to the possibility of different modes of production. We have also to identify empirically how they develop. A third dimension is therefore that personal experience behaviour and consciousness cannot be divorced from so called 'political' activity. We cannot write off people's lived experience as simply a question of false consciousness or bad faith,

but see it in terms of their real situation and the ideologies they employ to make sense of it. A fourth dimension however is that the personal is political, not just personal, as it were. That is to say I am not arguing for the significance of the personal as opposed to the 'political' for that would be to fall back into individualism and empiricism. Indeed the slogan 'the personal is political' is surely about rethinking both sides of the equation, and insisting that such an equation exists, in contrast to empiricist approaches which tend to write off the reality of the political as 'determinism', and marxist approaches that write off any space for the individual in the face of the reality of the political: the march of the laws of history. What is at issue is how personal experience can be constructed into political issue: this is the question of class.

I think that it is in these considerations that a distinction can be drawn between the provisionality of our knowledge, and a retreat to relativism. We do not surely have to find guarantees of the scientificity and correctness of our analysis internal to its method (a preoccupation which the Hegelian Lukacs shares with the structuralist Althusser) in order to avoid the contention that our findings are but a function of the point of departure. It is possible to avoid starting out from concepts which are true as opposed to a model posed by the individual scientist (as with Weber), without arriving at determinist conclusions. I would cite the Marxist concept of value that I have tried to develop in this work as an example of such a procedure.

I think there is a danger that Thompson's perfectly justified criticisms of the determinism of the theories of the kind I outlined in section 1 of this chapter may spill over into a rejection of all theory. We could face an illicit choice between theory and the empirical, or between theory and practice. In contrast I have tried to argue that theory and facts are never separate. On the contrary the value of Marx's 'methodological' chapters considered in their empirical basis: the discovery of the 'concept' value in the very

'factual' commodity. Indeed only this treatment of the value form offers an escape from the paradox of the mode of production. My comments in this section have also suggested that given the intimate link between theory and the empirical, theory can only be tested and developed in practice: in terms of its ability to make sense of the lived experience of people.

To argue this requires us to assume that there is a degree of communality to this experience. That the private and personal is not merely our individual experience but one shared collectively with others. It assumes that experience is a class one. This brings us to the question of the basis of such a shared experience. If we reject the idea that it is objectively defined by commodity ownership, how do we construct class?

### 5.3 The Construction of Class

I argued in section 5 that commodity status of labour theories lead to Marx's theory of class being read as a question of the ownership of capital or labour as commodities. People's class position came to be seen as objectively defined by their position as owners of labour. The contradictions in historical development that class expressed was that between the forces and relations of production. Class-in-itself was created by this contradiction, which will be resolved when the working class throws off false consciousness and realises its true position. The significance of everyday struggles over the terms of exchange of labour power is that they are symptoms of the global contradiction between capital and labour. The construction of class consists of developing a true 'scientific' consciousness to correspond to the material construction of class which the logic of the mode of production itself has effected.

The distinction I drew in chapter 4 between money relations, and labour relations, the fact

that there is no automatic way in which capitalists can realise the commoditisation of labour, or translate market forces into production relations, implies that class is a relationship which has to be constructed materially as well as at the level of ideas. The 'incompleteness' in the labour-capital exchange identified by Baldamus in quantitative terms has a qualitative dimension too.

The fact that labour power is exchanged for a wage does not determine the material content of the transaction; it will still be a matter for class struggle and the form of this struggle can only be examined empirically. The experience of wage labour is not a uniform one, determined by the nature of the mode of production. Nor is the wage form itself universal. In this process of construction elements of shared experiences of this process have to be fused with some analysis of the roots of that experience and therefore how these might be challenged and changed. Thompson has argued that:

"The problem is to find a model for the social process which allows an autonomy to social consciousness within a context which, in the final analysis, has always been determined by social being. Can any model encompass the distinctively human dialectic, by which history appears as neither willed nor as fortuitous; as neither lawed (in the sense of being determined by involuntary laws of motion) nor illogical (in the sense that one can observe a logic in the social process)?"

(1978, p. 81)

I have argued that the solution to this problem, which can be seen as yet another dimension of the paradox of mode of production, is to be found in the distinction between money relations and labour relations. This allows us to attribute a different status to the 'economic laws' of the capitalist mode of production. We can see the role of ideology and consciousness in shaping labour relations, and yet still see the end result as market forces which control and constrain the future development of the social relations of production.

An emphasis on the space for constructing labour relations beyond the sphere of money relations means that we can abandon the view of class

as materially determined (in-itself) on the one hand, and brought to life by possession of true consciousness of its historical mission on the other, whether that consciousness is marxism in the case of labour, or the enlightenment or Taylorism in the case of capital.

Rather than there being any logic of development of some global contradiction in the capitalist mode of production, around which classes evolve materially and at the level of consciousness, class has to be seen as a process of construction around the resolution of points of contradiction which are less monolithic and more empirical in character. Class should be seen as a process of the creation of production relations around the money form, a battle in which there is no simple distinction between material interest and ideology, practice and theory because these 'material interests' can only be constructed and recognised through the making of ideologies, maps, blueprints which define what these interests are.

Rather than trying to establish an analysis in terms of consent and coercion, or logic and consciousness, or base and superstructure, the process of class construction ought to be examined from the issue of shared experience and the definitions of these experiences as collective and rooted in shared problem. Class is the process of transformation of private trouble into public issue, and such a transformation will not be made 'objectively' for us through some underlying logic but is a transformation that can be constructed in different ways.

If we accept these arguments, then just as we have moved away from an analysis of the labour process that poses empirical qualifications to a prior logic of deskilling, then we can also move away from an analysis of working class consciousness that posits ideological or artificial material 'blockages' to a prior logic of material and political class development.

If we consider the translation of experience into the construction of class and strategy it is clear that there is no guarantee that the 'correct' lessons will be drawn from experience corresponding to

a 'scientific' analysis based on the logic of development of capital. Ideology must play a crucial role in the construction of class, not in the sense of false consciousness or fetishism struggling with revolutionary or correct consciousness, but in the sense of rival theories offering to explain the connexion between individual experience and public issue, between the roots of that experience and strategies to change them.

In order to illustrate what I mean by this process of class construction it is useful to consider briefly two aspects of this relevant to Braverman's analysis. That of Taylorism and the capitalist class, and that of skill and the working class.

If we follow Braverman's analysis the class position of management is fairly clear. Because it must maximise the reaccumulation of surplus value it must act as a personification of capital and follow a logic of deskilling and the development of a real subordination of labour. Taylorism therefore represents management's 'true' consciousness of its material position as a class. The problem, as I have argued in chapter 3, is that no empirical content can be put to the sorts of contradictions between forces and relations of production, efficiency and control, that management is supposed to resolve by this strategy. Nor does it adequately describe the variety of strategies management has historically adopted.

A better approach would be to look at the range of different strategies with managers at different times in different industries and countries, have attempted to develop in order to control the organisation of labour and production in order to make profits and accumulate value. The way they have attempted to solve 'the problem of management' is not reducible to a logic of what must be correct or successful. Nor has there been a unitary direction of development, an evolution either towards or away from autocracy.<sup>(1)</sup> What is surely more useful to look at is the ideologies and rules of thumb which have been devised and applied at different points in time,<sup>(2)</sup> and to examine their class conscious character. For example, the

issue of the dimensions of managerial prerogative is a good illustration of how management has used technical arguments about efficiency to reinforce their control. But this does not mean that management have in fact secured that control, or that the aim of control is either identical or subordinate to that of efficiency. Strategies introduced to control labour (whether through the introduction of new machinery or an ideological offensive in the name of participation) cannot abolish the real contradictions management faces between being efficient and maintaining authority.

Because managers do this in different ways, does not mean that it is a less class based process. Beyond the different empirical strategies adopted lies a remarkably united belief in the importance of 'management's right to manage'. What has to be seen is the class conscious nature of the construction and defence of this right. For if, as we have argued, there is no logic of development of real subordination of labour in capitalism, then neither is there any inherent identity of hierarchy and efficiency. Managerial prerogative is rather a particular type of labour relation, a particular type of class organisation, which management have constructed around money relations.

If we turn to consider the construction of class relations in the working class, then it is clear that the waged form of their labour is only part of that experience. It says nothing of the content of that labour, and the identity or opposition of material interest between different groups of waged workers with different skills or working in different regions, in different industries or companies or even plants. Even worse, as I argued about the 'double reduction' in commodity status of labour theory, of life to work, and work to wage labour, not all 'production' takes place within the commodity form. If class is defined in terms of wage labour, then gender relations between men and women just disappear from the analysis. Yet I wish to argue that these gender relations are central to any empirical account of the construction of class in Britain, through the issue (which is also central to Braverman's approach) of skill.

For Braverman 'skill' represents the only material basis of resistance to the complete divorce of conception from execution which the logic

of commoditisation of labour creates. Skill is a question of class relations. Its positive side is that of resistance to capital, its negative side is that it frustrates the material homogenisation of the working class.

This type of analysis could be applied to the rise of craft unions as the major form of stable institution in the early labour movement. Its problem is that it presents as technical (and therefore defines class in technical terms) issues which were social. What has been obscured is that skill was not (and I have suggested in chapter 3 could not be) a purely technical matter. Skill was something male workers had. Skills which women workers possessed did not attract skilled rates of pay or form a basis for craft organisation. Secondly skill was used to argue for the payment of a 'family wage' which underpinned the confinement of women to domestic labour or the 'double shift' of both wage labour and domestic responsibilities. It was used to establish not only a relationship of men to production in the factory, but of women to production in the home, and of relations between men and women. Restriction of entry to the trade was also restriction of women to the home. Skill should be seen as a relationship of gender developed by some groups of workers to define and construct class in a particular way. (3)

We cannot see the structure of skills or relationship between conception and execution in the labour process within the capital-labour relationship as an issue of 'class', and then look at the 'gender' issues involved by considering the distribution of men and women to these positions (and between these positions and domestic labour) to constitute a sexual division of labour. (4) Rather the 'skills' and labour process themselves are gender based. Patriarchy can surely claim as much explanatory power as class defined in terms of (non)ownership of the means of production. The important point is surely to see both these dimensions as relevant. Thus just as class is not automatically determined by some logic of commodity relations,

so too gender is not automatically determined by biology: both are socially constructed, and we cannot adequately grasp either dimension without grasping them both. (5)

Braverman's analysis is especially deficient in this respect, as he does not adequately stress the gender basis of the craft skills of which he speaks. Insofar as his analysis is cast in terms of the generalisation of the commoditisation of labour, women trapped in the domestic sphere pose a problem as their relation to the family unit clearly cannot be cast in terms of commoditisation. Far from being sovereign over their own labour capacities, women only became full legal subjects in 1929. (6) Indeed they are not full legal subjects even today, as the cohabitation and tax legislation amply demonstrate. This explains Braverman's emphasis on the trends in equalisation of labour force participation rates and the theory of 'the universal market in which all non-commoditised production within the family unit is eroded by the penetration of capital even there. In a sense Braverman treats women as a 'feudal remnant', he reduces gender to his determinist conception of class.

Unless the gendered nature of jobs themselves is recognised (7) I think we will end up in a circular argument about the direction of relationship between domestic oppression and economic subordination in arguing about women. We have attempts to explain gender oppression in terms of its functionality for a process of capital accumulation seen purely in quantitative terms. For example the argument that domestic labour 'cheapens' (male) labour power sees the family as functional for capital, and see patriarchy as reinforced by capital. Alternatively we could argue that domestic labour (via the family wage) makes labour power more expensive: patriarchy is really a feudal remnant which the logic of the market will eventually overwhelm. Is patriarchy intensified by capitalist mode of production (dual labour markets, domestic labour, the double shift) or eroded by it as woman as commodities, become more involved in social production? Arguments over women as an industrial reserve army presuppose that the most significant factor is the cheapness of their labour (explained by domestic oppression) whereas arguments about the sexual division of

labour see its restriction to certain jobs (and therefore not capable of forming a reserve for others) as explaining its cheapness.

Perhaps these problems might be seen as the result of trying to produce a historical analysis from the fusion of two concepts defined in transhistorical ways. Thus patriarchy has tended to be rooted in biology, rather than gender, while class has been seen as a function of the exploitation of surplus product. Instead it should be possible to develop a more historical account if instead of seeing wage labour and domestic labour as epiphenomena of a logic of capitalist accumulation or of patriarchy, we were to examine how male workers turned to gender as a basis for the definition of skill, or defined 'class' as a question of their relation to their employer, excluding the question of their relation to their families.

It has never been the case then, that we have, on 'the one hand', class relations between a proletariat and a bourgeoisie, and 'on the other hand' gender relations between men and women, or indeed relations between skilled and unskilled. Still less can we conceive of these relations as secondary empirical qualifications to a 'fundamental' logic or relation defined by the commodity status of labour.

Surely the common relationship to their domestic means of production and reproduction give women an equally good claim to class identity. It is just as powerful and homogeneous as that of waged workers to their 'waged' labour, and has found in feminism a corresponding expression of that collective subordination.

The issue of skill and the sexual division of labour in the home as well as at work is a powerful example of the construction of class in a particular way which cannot be reduced to commodity ownership of the logic or capital accumulation. Not only did male workers use the sexual division of labour to develop the institutions of the labour movement in a particular way, but they then promoted a definition of class which appeared to be irrelevant to gender, and defined issues of gender oppression as secondary. I will discuss some of the contemporary issues arising from this particular construction of class in the following section.

#### 5.4 The Alternative Economic Strategy and Industrial Democracy

The Alternative Economic Strategy forms an admirable focus for discussing the implications of the arguments presented in this thesis for the analysis of industrial democracy. It does so because it brings together the issues of workers control at the level of the enterprise with the issue of the economic laws of the mode of production as a whole. It draws attention to the role of the state in both economic and political terms.<sup>(8)</sup> And it forms an example of a practical set of policies which at least claim to avoid the traditional reform/revolution dichotomy: it can claim to be a policy for developing pre-figurative forms of production. It therefore brings together all the themes I have been discussing in this thesis so far. First of all I summarise the Alternative Economic Strategy, then I suggest that its difficulties can be rooted in its reliance on a commodity status of labour model of capitalism. Finally I propose some possible lines of development of the Alternative Economic Strategy and current issues in industrial democracy in the light of my arguments here.<sup>(9)</sup>

The Alternative Economic Strategy starts out from an analysis of the domestic political roots of Great Britain's economic decline. This is seen to lie in what could be called the 'class barriers to productivity' erected by the labour movement in order to protect itself from exploitation. This has given rise to a stalemate in class relations. The relatively united British labour movement has been able to build strong defensive institutions, especially at the point of production. However, capital has retained sufficient strength to insist on its prerogatives with the result a zero-minus power struggle has developed. Labour is able to 'block' capitalist modernisation and rationalisation, but capital continues to control production if not on terms of its own choosing.

Thatcherism is the latest attempt to break out of this syndrome. The previous efforts of modernisation through consensus - indicative planning in the 1960s and Heathite interventionism in the 1970s - failed to either raise the rate of growth of productivity or manage the

claims on national income in a way that protected capital and avoided political disruption. Thatcherism's douche of austerity is a high risk strategy inflicting immense costs on industry as well as labour. That such risks should have been taken is witness to the strength of the stalemate syndrome.

The Alternative Economic Strategy is an attempt to break the stalemate from the Left, in the interests of labour rather than capital. A fairly traditional Keynesian policy of demand management is combined with policies of trade management to avoid the obstacles of the external deficit undermining internal expansion and the combination of an interventionist industrial policy and industrial democracy to raise the rate of growth of productivity, which enable the various claims on national income to be satisfied in a way that avoids an inflationary spiral. Like Thatcherism the Alternative Economic Strategy aims to 'shake-out' British capitalism, but with the aid of increasing the rate of accumulation and exploitation of labour under the control of labour itself, through industrial democracy within the enterprise and greater state control and regulation of the enterprise.

The Alternative Economic Strategy can claim to be realistic politically in that a great many of the elements of the strategy have emerged from the Labour Movement and its central goals of full employment and higher growth have wide resonance. For socialists the Alternative Economic Strategy is to be used to argue from the widely accepted support for achieving full employment to the necessity of greater state regulation of the economy and industrial democracy. The Alternative Economic Strategy offers the possibility of resolving the crisis via satisfying widely supported objectives (full employment, higher social spending) in such a way that the potential for socialist collective control of more and more areas of the economy becomes both possible and widely perceived as desirable. Ailing British capitalism is to be nursed back to health with socialist medicine, but it is to be a cure which subverts the patient.

It can also claim to be genuinely socialist, as opposed to just

another package of statist reforms supposed to 'control' the capitalist economy, because the rise in productivity necessary to forestall inflationary pressure and fuel accumulation is dependent on the greater control by labour at the point of production. The struggle to achieve this control will require legislative pressure to be placed on capital to acquiesce to joint-control. But the Left government will in turn be dependent on popular initiative at the point of production to achieve the realisation of the productivity potential of its macro-economic policies and the pressure organised labour can place on capital to ensure its cooperation with the economic policies of the Left Government. This is the most vital element of the socialist 'potential' of the Alternative Economic Strategy. The struggle for control of production and the development of popular initiative over production issues provides an organic link with the Left Government's struggle to control the macro economy. The activity of working people themselves would be integral to the successful resolution of the crisis.

In contrast to models of revolutionary transformation which sees all struggle within present day capitalist society as ideological - building the 'Party' which once strong enough will 'smash the state' - and leaves the struggle for material socialist construction to 'after' the revolution, the Alternative Economic Strategy poses the problem of how to transform ways of living and organising within capitalism in a socialist direction, and how to foster and achieve demands that exist within capitalism but which can only be adequately met by institutions and policies that call to question the logic and mores of capitalist society. Rather than starting from a theoretically 'correct' programme and seeking to raise working class consciousness to meet it, the Alternative Economic Strategy starts from demands and ideas which already have some resonance in existing consciousness and experience of working people. In contrast to reformist models the Alternative Economic Strategy sees real barriers within capitalism to the extent to which the material development of the socialist potential inherent in that society can be taken. It recognises the possibility of class struggle developing to a point of 'rupture' -

with intense conflict, involving the possible resort to armed resistance by Capital - and, more importantly, sees capitalism as a 'system'. Thus whilst criticising the notion that capitalism cannot be materially changed short of a socialist revolution, capitalism is still seen as a whole, which is stronger and more resistant than the sum of its parts.

As a material strategy which also points towards an alternative society, the Alternative Economic Strategy raises a new way of relating activity within the state and other forms of political struggle. In contrast to the reformist model of a Left legislative agency substituting 'left' legislation for 'right' in isolation from a mass political movement in civil society; or the 'revolutionary' emphasis on smashing the state as the major obstacle to the process of socialist construction, the Alternative Economic Strategy is a strategy for synthesising struggle within the State to both transform the state and to use the resources and legitimacy of the state to give assistance to Left forces struggling in other political arenas through the development of a new relationship between legislative politics and extra-parliamentary politics.

We could sum up this conception of the Alternative Economic Strategy in terms of planning and mobilisation. State dirigisme on one side, and working class self activity on the other are seen as capable of boosting productivity while transforming economic activity away from uncontrolled capital accumulation to socially controlled aims: production comes to be for use not profit. Industrial democracy is central to both sides of this development, from the state in terms of planning agreements and direction of public and private investment, and at local level in terms of workers control measures which facilitate increases in productivity by allowing workers to drop their 'class barriers to productivity'.

The lessons of the arguments presented in this thesis are that this conception of industrial democracy is quite utopian, and that despite its gestures in the direction of a material, prefigurative politics, the Alternative Economic Strategy is embedded in the old commodity status of labour analysis of capitalism.

The central ideas that degrees of workers control of production can be exchanged for rises in productivity, and what is vital about capital accumulation (from capital's point of view) is this productivity, depend on a model of labour relations we have already rejected. It is the idea that capital is ultimately more interested in efficiency than control, and the labour's commodity status, the immediate social relations surrounding the job, are a fetter to that productivity: deskilling appears as a waste of resources of talent, explicable only by capitalism's perverse social relations. The Alternative Economic Strategy ignores the other side of the argument that efficiency might be frustrated by increased workers control. Might it not be the case that the new forms of organisation of production required, the resolution of disputes about what form authority and coordination of production should take, would lead in the short term at least to a fall in productivity? That is to say the relationship between the social relations of control at work and efficiency cannot be reduced either to the capitalist thesis that hierarchy and the commodity status of labour maximise efficiency or to the obverse side of that argument, that hierarchy and capitalist control exist at its expense. As in Braverman's analysis the Alternative Economic Strategy implicitly uses a contrast between capitalist society with social (value) relations restricting productivity on the one side, and a socialist society free from these restrictions on the other. It has no conception of what the form of value would be, either at the level of enterprise, at the state or in the connexions between them.

One tendency is to see working class mobilisation and workers control in the enterprise as a defence against statism and bureaucracy: a guarantee of its democratic character. But simultaneously another another tendency is to see the ability of the state to control private investment and constrain the activity of these same enterprises (from the perspective of their being units of capital) as a guarantee of the socialist character of the Alternative Economic Strategy. On the one hand the aim is seen to be to maximise productivity, to repair the logic of the productive forces, on the other to alter the aim of production away from profit and towards use. I

have already argued that this contrast is an unhelpful one. There must still be some form of value present which regulates how we decide what is useful. Finally the assumption of the correlation between industrial democracy and productivity is not the prerogative of the left or the Alternative Economic Strategy. All the major political parties subscribe to it, as well as the most divergent currents of opinion in employers organisations and trade unions. This argument represents little more than wishful thinking used to embellish arguments about what the social relations of production ought to be. Given these ideal relations, ~~it is argued~~ productivity will increase.

This inability to grasp any empirical dimension to the form of value shows through in the way the Alternative Economic Strategy treats the issue of class conflict and sectionalism. It argues from the notion of 'stalemate' in class relations to the idea that class conflict in any form other than that prescribed by the Alternative Economic Strategy is really only reproducing that stalemate and harming the broader interests of the class itself.

In turn, once the class has embarked on the Alternative Economic Strategy it has a responsibility for productivity and economic problems, because it now has the power to resolve them to its advantage through control in the factories and power in parliament. It is up to the working class to assume responsibility for the nation, and the national interest because it is no longer a purely capitalist mode of production. Such arguments are best expressed in Hobsbawm's work "The Forward March of Labour Halted" and in the recent work of Purdy and Prior and Hirst in Politics and Power and Socialist Economic Review.<sup>(10)</sup> They argue that outwith the context of an Alternative Economic Strategy, most struggle has no wider significance than redistributing resources within the working class and reinforces negative sectional defensive attitudes:

But to fix the blame for the country's problems on external enemies is to remain desperately blind to the growth in the power of the workers' movement in Britain since 1940. It is ultimately the shift in the class balances set in motion

by the Second World War which underlies the state of socio-political deadlock referred to earlier. Blindness to the crisis of social relations, which has been carried to its highest point in Britain, serves to freeze the workers' movement in the postures of a bygone era. It reinforces the defensive, sectional attitude that economic problems are not the responsibility of the working class, which has played no part in causing them and has no obligation to come forward with solutions. Instead, workers are encouraged simply to resist threats to jobs and living standards and either wait for the system to collapse, or, what is infinitely more probable, wait for the state to step in with a solution.

(Purdy (1980), p.71)

Conversely, within the context of an Alternative Economic Strategy, there is assumed to be no problem involved in the working class removing these defensive and negative attitudes. It will tend to have a universal interest in the Alternative Economic Strategy as a whole, and therefore be prepared to accept responsibility for the national interest, for they now have the power which makes it their interest.

These arguments are rather old mutton dressed as lamb. Hobsbawm's dismissal of working class sectionalism is only a new version of the old contrast between struggle over the terms of sale of labour power (bad!) and the existence of labour as a commodity (worthwhile struggle). The idea of the identity of interest of the class and nation is only the transfer to a new context of the idea of the universal interest of the working class in transcending its commodity status according to the 'scientific' programme provided by the party. The idea that the national interest will be served by the eradication of outdated sectionalism and fragmentation of conflict is a rather puny left echo of the Donovan Commission's recommendations. Behind the comments of these authors lies a curiously simplistic conception of class: as currently powerless sellers of wage labour they all have a common interest (especially once they are promoted to equal membership of 'the nation') in the Alternative Economic Strategy and a common responsibility to serve its ends. But as Tony Lane observes:

"An industrial strategy that ignores the marketplace of sectional interests within and between plants, within and between industrial sectors will fail. Central indicative planning via a battery of tri-partite agreements between government, capital and labour is no solution because it leaves social relations at plant level untouched. Given the ideological and cultural condition of British workers (and that includes managers), greater productive efficiency of a permanent nature can only result from a transformation of social relations in the enterprise.

(Lane, 1981, p.40)

He proceeds to argue that the decisive feature of these relations and the labour movement organisations based on them is precisely their sectional character. It is not that Hobsbawm et al do not address real problems, what is objectionable is the way the Alternative Economic Strategy is used to pose a solution to them which rests not on empirical but bad theoretical formulations: the sets of antinomies contained in the commodity status of labour concept. The concept of class behind the Alternative Economic Strategy that is produced by commodity status of labour theory. The Alternative Economic Strategy, despite its pretensions to a prefigurative politics offers little beyond the 'advance' resolution of the commodity status of labour contradiction, as opposed to the 'incorporation' resolution favoured by Braverman. In contrast to the idea that deskilling maximises control, it focusses on the idea that re-skilling in the form of workers control maximises efficiency, and argues that this is an exchange which capital will accept.

This shows through clearly in the treatment of industrial democracy and the relation posed between 'job decisions' and business decisions. By the former I mean the range of matters frequently bargained by unions (hours, conditions of work, wages) and by the latter I mean top level decisions taken 'unilaterally' by management. The idea of an Alternative Economic Strategy and demand for industrial democracy on the part of the unions is rooted in the idea or a 'gap' in the coverage of joint regulation where business decisions are taken unilaterally. The effects of this gap have expanded over the years and threatened even job decisions bargaining, because it is the

business decisions of 5 or 10 years before which determine what management can concede. From the perspective of an Alternative Economic Strategy this appears as the way in which declining productivity (partly caused by class barriers to production aimed to bolster short term bargaining position) has threatened the ability of unions to operate effectively. We could reformulate Hirst, Hobsbawm and Purdy's argument in terms of this distinction. If unions continue squabbling over job decisions they will lose the real way over business decisions. It is up to the labour movement to accept the responsibility of tackling these (and of course policing the results). The solution to the problem thus appears as a simple matter of advancing joint regulation from the area of job to the area of business decisions: which is just what the Alternative Economic Strategy proposes. Capital is supposed to accept this assault on its prerogatives because of the efficiency and productivity it delivers.

But what is left quite untheorised are the absolutely vital questions of how this rise in efficiency is to take place, what structures are to coordinate the interests of different sections of the working class in taking business decisions and how the resistance of management to the abolition of its powers are to be overcome.

Insofar as it returns to an 'advance' conception of industrial democracy, the Alternative Economic Strategy falls back into reformist analyses: it cannot grasp that capitalism is a mode of production which constrains how it can be changed, it cannot grasp the nature of class relations in capitalist mode of production.

The inability of the Alternative Economic Strategy and the approach to industrial democracy contained within it to get to grips with the conception of class, and to clarify what the form of value is either in capitalist mode of production or in the course of the transition, or in the society which is to result from that, have a common basis in its commodity status of labour analysis of capitalism. This can be shown by considering two glaring omissions in its approach to class: the treatment of women and the prospect of capitalist resistance.

Aside from the obligatory references to nursery provision, support for the welfare state and discrimination legislation, women do not appear in the Alternative Economic Strategy. And where they do appear, through these obligatory references, they appear insofar as they relate to wage labour. It is at best a question of the implication of state policies (eg. through nursery provision) for women's ability to participate in the labour market on equal terms and thus as wage labourers, become members of a class and relate to the process of production. In other words the Alternative Economic Strategy falls victim to the two-fold reduction I analysed earlier: of life to work and work to wage labour. But if we are to accept the arguments about class and gender I made in the previous section, then it is quite wrong to reduce production to what goes on within the wage relations, and reduce questions of workers control and class to the nature of that wage relation. The Alternative Economic Strategy says nothing about the 'resonances' to be found in the shared experience of women of domestic labour in its own right, aside from its implications for the social relations of wage labour. In this context Anna Coote's suggestion that the question 'How do we achieve workers control of industry?' should be replaced by 'How do we want to care for our children?' and that "we begin with the relations of reproduction rather than production" is to be welcomed. (Coote, 1981 p. 14)

As Coote points out: 'Full employment is one of the basic aims of the Alternative Economic Strategy. What does this mean for half the workforce? The problem for women is not employment, since most women are already over employed, working a 12 to 16 hour day.' (1981, p.14) In other words there is no simple identity of working class interest because the relations of production within capitalism do not reduce themselves to the commodity status of labour. Because there is no logic of construction of labour relations around the money form, class is a relationship which has to be constructed across material relationships which provide a real basis for opposition of interests and sectionalism. It is quite staggering that in the context of discussing incomes policy and an Alternative Economic Strategy that so little attention has been paid to the issue of

family wage policy. As Anne Phillips argues:

"Accepting feminist arguments does mean accepting a shift in the balance of power between men and women. There is no easy way out of this, and while in the long run all should benefit, in the short term it involves sacrifices for men.!"

(1981, p. 17)

Such arguments also apply to relations between workers in different companies and industries, different plants, different regions with different skills and employment opportunities, and indeed different views of how production ought to be organised and who has a legitimate basis to tell them what to do. Beyond the common experience of the form of wage labour lies very different experiences of what that means in practice, and different material interests in how the relations of production might be constructed. We can agree with Hobsbawm and the others that sectionalism is a problem but we can disagree violently that its causes are simply working class shortsightedness or that the Alternative Economic Strategy poses any prospect of a resolution of the problem because it simply does not provide any material account of how these differences are to be resolved. Instead we are offered to submerge these false sectional interests to the greater collective good of the national interest for which the working class will have responsibility. One does not have to support a crude theory of 'incorporation' to ask where this refrain has been heard before.

The Alternative Economic Strategy's treatment of capital and management as a class is little better. Corresponding to the working class's common interest in full employment, there is the assumption that capitalists will accept their socialist medicine in the name of efficiency and the 'repair' to the logic of capital accumulation which the removal of class barriers to production on both sides will effect. Leaving aside the question I have already posed about whether such an increase in efficiency would be forthcoming, such an approach falls into the trap of reducing the question of value in capitalist mode of production to that of purely quantitative relations.

Capitalism is about efficiency, and class struggle gets in its way. I have already questioned this equation of capitalism and efficiency. And in the course of questioning it I have posed the question of how managers or capitalists can be seen as a class rather than as cyphers of some logic of capital accumulation. It is a question of how they are seen to translate money relations into labour relations, once we recognise that there is no logic of deskilling which forces them to construct labour relations in a certain way. Beyond this issue is that of how managers or capitalists think and act as a class beyond the immediate question of labour relations at the point of production.

Part of the problem in addressing this question is the lack of empirical and historical evidence available to answer it. Management and those who staff the 'commanding heights of the economy' or the higher reaches of the state, whether in the City, Institutions, the Civil Service or the Armed forces live and work behind closed doors. They do not work by conference or committees, minute books and shows of hands. At least where it is this it is explicitly designed for public relations rather than decision making, a sort of Tory Party Conference. They discuss and act behind a barrier of commercial confidentiality or Official Secrets Act. But what empirical and historical evidence we can muster suggests that managers as a class are far more jealous of their prerogatives than the Alternative Economic Strategy supposes them to be, and that their fellows in the state and the armed forces are most sensitive to the threat from the left posed by such a strategy, whether or not it is framed in terms of national interest.

Rowthorn argues that the lessons of the Allende government in Chile is that the ruling class would be far more concerned with their class position and the threat to class relations than with any prospective improvement in the performance of the economy. (Rowthorn, 1981)

The study of attitudes to industrial democracy and participation conducted at Glasgow University demonstrated clearly that managers at all levels were extremely sensitive to any threat to their power which they defined very broadly in terms of the right to manage and

take decisions on all business issues. Any threat to their discretion to decide when it was possible to consult or communicate or to decide what to do as a result of that process was held to make management impossible and threaten efficiency. Case studies of 'participative' structures in six of the companies studied showed that their role was not to dilute managerial prerogative,<sup>(11)</sup> but on the contrary, to provide a forum for managements' attempt to prove its legitimacy. We can summarise these criticisms of the Alternative Economic Strategy in terms of the treatment of class relations and the form of value. It has an inadequate analysis of the process of class construction. The points I have made suggest that managers and capitalists are far more class conscious and better organised than the labour movement they confront. They have made a better job of forming themselves into a class-for-itself than the working class. Secondly the Alternative Economic Strategy lacks an adequate conception of the form of value. This leads it to assume that value relations within capitalism give rise to a more homogenous working class than is in fact the case, and then lead it to obscure the real differences of interest and outlook of people whose varied position in the relations of production will lead them to seek different and potentially incompatible things from an Alternative Economic Strategy. It cannot tell us empirically what the relationship between money relations and labour relations is in capitalist mode of production, nor how they will be changed in the period of transition. It has no empirical grasp of what 'workers control' would be like.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

I have argued that the concept of the commodity status of labour has given rise to theories of capitalism which make it appear too logical and rational (in the sense of inherently efficient).

This approach has led to a confusion about the status of value relations, and left much marxist work asking questions about the presence or absence of value relations, instead of developing ways of analysing the form of value.

Industrial democracy can be seen as a question of what the form of value is, what the form of determination of labour is in any mode of production. I have tried to show that an adequate sociology of industrial democracy would have to define the concepts of production and labour more widely in order to encompass not only wage labour, but also domestic labour. I have tried to show that it would have to look afresh at the way in which class is constructed in the process of transforming money relations into labour relations, rather than assuming that there is a logic which determines how this process occurs.

This means that the analysis of industrial democracy has to become more radical and more cautious. It must be more radical, in that it must involve the questioning of definitions which are currently taken for granted. It has to redefine what is meant by production, and find new ways of characterising the form of labour relations within waged labour beyond the skilled/unskilled dichotomy. It has to develop a clearer idea of what changes in the form of value might be sought in both the short and longer terms, and how a structure of control might be developed that can arbitrate between competing definitions of what constitutes useful work, and what forms of authority in the production process will be conceived as legitimate. Only such a development will prevent a sterile contrast between the unchallengeable dominance of value 'as such' in capitalist mode of production, and freedom from any value considerations and the unproblematical arrival of industrial democracy in a future mode of production. It has to develop more radical approaches to issues of growth and efficiency, rather than assuming that these are simply quantitative technical issues.

It must be more cautious in the sense that it must locate the possibilities for developing these issues within the context of the present mode of production, rather than assuming that a leap to some new mode of production would sweep away the barriers that stand in the way of their resolution at present. That is to say we have to see the points of contradiction within the social relations of production as empirical rather than global. Class struggle has to be defined not in terms of a world historical abolition of the commodity status of labour but in terms of the battle between alternative definitions of what labour relations are legitimate. For example the issue to be resolved is not the inherently neutral or capitalist character of technology, as such, but the issue of what authority relations different innovations entail, and the prospect for workers to influence the design and application of production processes to render these more acceptable. Perhaps the most decisive issue is that of managerial prerogative. I have suggested that its origins lie not in the logic of capitalist society, but in managers and capitalists construction of themselves as a class and their definition of what their vital interests involve. This means that we ought not to underestimate the reaction to any assault on this prerogative. But it also means we ought not to underestimate the potential for challenging these prerogatives and developing alternative forms of control even within a capitalist economy. It also means that we must be more cautious in pronouncing the class nature or class interest in such a development. For the legitimacy of alternative forms of control must be negotiated between real differences of material position across plants, regions, skill and gender for example. The process of class construction is never complete and can only proceed around the development of 'maps' and 'blueprints' which can be introduced within the present mode of production: 'A new age does not begin all of a sudden'. (12)

Footnotes to Chapter Five

1. H. Ramsay (1977).
2. E.g. Bendix (1956). Piore (1968) reports a preference of capital to labour based on tradition rather than precise costing or explicit control strategies.
3. There is a large literature on the concept of the family wage and I am using the concept for the purposes of illustration here of the traditional uses of class have ignored gender. I am certainly not trying to provide any definitive account of class relations in Britain, or the labour aristocracy debate for example.
4. As Hartmann (1979) does, pp.7-8. Just as in Braverman, prior 'theft' of the mode of production explains the workers subordinate position in capitalism, in Hartmann the prior existence of the technical superiority of the male in the precapitalist sexual division of labour puts them on top when the logic of development of empty places start.
5. Edholm et al p. 101:  
 "If what defines women as women is the eternal fact of biology, this definition will intrude into any attempt at historical and theoretical specificity"  
 In other words we can't make men bear children but can construct our gender identity differently.
6. Barrat, (1980) p. 236.
7. Hakim (1978), Philips and Taylor (1981).
8. I have not explicitly dealt with the question of the state hitherto, except in discussion of class strategy and models of revolution. This is simply because to deal adequately with this issue would require another work in itself. However, I do not think this weakens the arguments I have made. The implication of my argument has been that the state is usually seen as the guardian, whether by consent or coercion of the logic of the mode of production on which it arises. My emphasis on class and its construction would require the state to be seen in a more flexible light. It is not necessarily there to be smashed or captured in order to effect the 'leap' to a new mode of production. Rather what is required is an analysis in empirical terms of its form. An example of the sort I have in mind is Thompson's comments on "Old Corruption" (Thompson, 1965).

9. I must stress that my summary is a very general one: there is no agreed 'version' of the AES, but rather a range of analyses produced by individual authors (Aaronovitch 1981) and groups (C.S.E. London Group) as well as 'official' labour party and trade union bodies.

10. E.J. Hobsbawm (1978), Hirst, (1978), Purdy, (1980)

11. Cressey et al (1981a), Unpublished papers on "Whisco" and "Liftco", 1982.

12. Brecht, 1981, p.386.

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