Anti-politics, the Early Marx and Gramsci's 'Integral State'

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Abstract

This paper traces a line of theorisation regarding the state-civil society relationship, from Marx's early writings to Gramsci's conception of the integral state. The paper argues that Marx developed, through his critique of Hegel, a valuable understanding of the state-civil society connection that emphasised the antagonism between them in capitalist societies. Alternatively, Gramsci's conception of the 'integral state' posits an interconnection and dialectical unity of the state and civil society, where the latter is integrated under the leadership of the former. The paper argues that while Marx and Gramsci's positions are, at first, seemingly incongruous ideas—as to the 'separation' in Marx and 'integration' in Gramsci—this tension can be bridged when the integral state is understood as being always necessarily unstable. The paper argues that this framework can help us understand the contemporary breakdown of political rule in the phenomenon known as 'anti-politics'.

Keywords

Gramsci, Marx, anti-politics, state, civil society

This paper traces a line of theorisation regarding the state-civil society relationship in Marx's early writings and through Gramsci's conception of the integral state in the *Prison Notebooks*. Marx developed, through his critique of Hegel, a valuable understanding of the state-civil society relationship that emphasised the antagonism between the state and civil society in capitalist societies. Gramsci provided an essential elaboration of the relationship between civil society and state in the era of mass representative politics, and his conception of the integral state can help draw out the complex contradictions and interconnections between capitalist social relations, civil society, political society and the state apparatus. The paper offers a bridging of these accounts—as to the 'separation' in

Marx and 'integration' in Gramsci—of the state-civil society relationship. The paper does not propose an all-encompassing theory of the state or politics, but instead argues that the bridged account provides a useful framework from which to analyse the contemporary breakdown of politics that characterised the era of mass politics—in the phenomenon known as anti-politics. Such an approach is considered a productive addition to current analysis of anti-politics in particular, asking not simply why anti-politics developed over the last decades but why we did not have it earlier.

The first section of this paper considers Marx's critique of Hegel on the state, law and politics, before considering Marx's argument regarding the separation and antagonism between the state and civil society developed in his writings of the mid-1840s. Section two considers Gramsci's conception of the integral state, through which he argued there is an interconnection and dialectical unity of the state and civil society—integrating the latter under the leadership of the former. The analysis then considers in section three the tension between these positions, concluding that the distance between the accounts is bridged when the integral state is understood as being always necessarily unstable. This is because a state based on an atomistic and internally divided civil society cannot ever fully overcome the logic of the fundamental social relations that produce those contradictions. The article concludes, in section four, by examining the phenomenon known as anti-politics, in order to demonstrate the usefulness of this approach in analysing politics in the contemporary period. Anti-politics is understood as the increasing detachment from, and hostility to, political parties and the political system. The paper outlines how this framework can explain not only why there is growing hostility to formal politics, but how the operations of politics have successfully ensured that resentment and opposition has been largely muted for a prolonged historical period.

Marx, the state and civil society

Marx developed a valuable understanding of the state-civil society relationship in his early writings, in the course of a critique of the conceptions of Hegel and certain of Hegel's followers. While some scholarship asserts that Marx abandoned, broke with or superseded his early conceptions of the state in his more 'mature' writings (Balakrishnan, 2014, 2015), the analysis here draws on Colletti (1975) and his argument that Marx's later theorisation involved a deepening and enhancement of his initial critique of politics and

the state via the critique of political economy—that is, the critique of the (alienated and exploitative) capitalist social relations that produce bourgeois civil society. This paper does not propose an all encompassing Marxist approach to the state and politics, but instead argues that the approach Marx took in his Early Writing continues to provide a useful framework for thinking about the state–civil society relationship. This is especially so when supplemented with Gramsci's conception of the integral state—which was also developed, in part, via a critical engagement with Hegel.

At the heart of Marx's social critique was what those who followed him often called 'historical materialism', an approach that contended not only that any given society had to be understood in terms of the determinate relationships between living human beings (his theory's materialism), but that the temporally-specific arrangement of social relations of production shaped the entire society in which they dominated (its historicism). In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx (1991: 927–928)) wrote:

> The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers determines the relationship of domination and servitude, as this grows directly out of production itself and reacts back upon it in turn as a determinant. On this is based the entire configuration of the economic community arising from the actual relations of production, and hence also its specific political form. It is in each case the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers—*a relationship whose particular form naturally corresponds always to a certain level of development of the type and manner of labour, and hence to its social productive power*—in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the specific form of the state in each case. This does not prevent the same economic basis—the same in its major conditions—from displaying endless variations of innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural conditions, racial relations, historical influences acting outside, etc., and these can only be understood by analysing these empirically given conditions.

This statement, among others in Marx's 'mature' writings, makes explicit that he saw the form of the state in any given mode of production as specific to that mode of production. This is because, in any such social formation, one form of exploitative social relations of production dominates over others (Banaji, 2010). Thus, those dominant social relations

'assign rank and influence to the others' and the form of production 'is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity' (Marx, 1973: 107). But such statements are unclear on how to theorise what relationship the state and politics have to capitalist social relations more generally. This has led many Marxists to contend that Marx himself never completed a theory of the capitalist state, in particular because he never completed his planned volume of *Capital* on this topic—in which he would presumably have expounded his view at a more concrete level of analysis than the highly abstract critique of political economy in the first three volumes (Hay, 1999; Jessop, 1990).

Bob Jessop (1982: 1) has stated that there are 'discontinuities and disjunctions' in the work of Marx on the state, and that this 'incompleteness and indeterminacy account for the wide range of so-called Marxist theories of the state'. Jessop (ibid 1982: 2–31) has argued that aspects of the writings of Marx and Engels can be found to support competing claims that the state is an 'instrument of class rule', a 'factor of cohesion' and 'an institutional ensemble'. This, he has claimed, means that despite Marxists long claiming special knowledge of the state's strategic significance, debate has often been 'esoteric' and disconnected from those writing in other traditions. Thus, despite Marx's frequent journalistic and polemical writings on contemporary politics and actually existing states, it has been argued he never produced a coherent theory of the modern state, based in his most important lifework: the critique of political economy.

While acknowledging the unfinished nature of Marx's project analysing the contemporary state, in some of his earliest theoretical writings—in the years 1842–1847 in particular—Marx did lay down an important and relatively comprehensive theory of the state and politics (see Teeple, 1984 for a systematic account of these writings). Moreover, this theorisation provides an incisive and useful approach to understanding the relationship between the state and civil society, and one that can assist in analysing the rise of anti-politics. The following section locates the origin of Marx's views in his critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state, before defining the most relevant components of Marx's theory and integrating these with his subsequent critique of capitalist social relations. This line of exploration then facilitates comparison with Gramsci's conception of the integral state.

Marx's critique of Hegel

Marx's starting point in the early 1840s was a critical engagement with Hegel. Contrary to the view among some Marxists that Marx's 'youthful' writings are predominantly 'philosophical' in content and follow Hegel by being 'idealist' in method (Althusser, 2005; cf Teeple, 1984), Marx (1975e) himself lauded Hegel's contribution to a materialist understanding of the state. Marx agreed with Hegel (1967) when the latter insisted that because modern (bourgeois) civil society is atomistic and composed of competing particular, private, individual interests, there is a necessary separation between civil society and the universal or common social interest implied in the form of the state. Hegel argued that modern society allowed individual freedom unthinkable in previous social formations, but also recognised that the constant competition between private individuals in civil society—Hobbes's (1997) '*bellum omnium contra omnes*' or 'war of all against all'—produced unceasing social instability. He argued this necessitated some kind of organism to hold society together: the modern state.

While Marx saw Hegel as the most advanced theorist of the modern state, he took Hegel to task for claiming that the state could truly express the universal social interest. For Hegel, the legislature mediated between a civil society of particular interests and the modern representative state embodying universal interests. But for Marx the legislature was incapable of bridging the divide between individual and universal interests, and instead brought out that contradiction—because 'it is the antinomy of political state and civil society, the contradiction of the abstract political state with itself' (1975b: 158). In other words, Marx identified that the antagonism between civil society and the state was unable to be resolved, precisely because in a society composed of competing particular interests, the state itself would be just another particular interest—even if in a formal or abstract way it claimed to stand for the general or collective interest of the society that it governed over.

Marx and Engels made the more general point that in every class society, the state—no matter what its specific relationship to the rest of society—was the political form of class rule. Marx and Engels (1976: 98) defined the historically contingent development of a specifically bourgeois civil society thus:

> Civil society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite

> stage of the development of productive forces. It embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage and, insofar, transcends the State and the nation, though, on the other hand again, it must assert itself in its external relations as nationality and internally must organise itself as state. The word 'civil society' [bürgerliche Gesellschaft] emerged in the eighteenth century, when property relations had already extricated themselves from the ancient and medieval community. Civil society as such only develops with the bourgeoisie; the social organisation evolving directly out of production and intercourse, which in all ages forms the basis of the state and of the rest of the idealistic superstructure, has, however, always been designated by the same name.

Furthermore, the nature of the capitalist class in bourgeois society was that it was itself internally divided by competition. Therefore it required a state that was formally separate from its individual members and standing 'over against' them (Marx and Engels, 1976: 83–84), and where 'all common institutions are set up with the help of the state and are given a political form' (ibid 1976: 99).

It follows that the historic uniqueness of bourgeois society was that the capitalist class ruled *politically* via a state that was formally separate from the private existence of that class's individual members, each one of whom already ruled *socially* in their respective firm or business. As a result, capitalist class political rule appeared as its own opposite. Thus, the state appeared to stand over all of society, including the capitalist class, in the general interest.

Marx argued that Hegel's error was that he missed seeing the fundamental basis of the state as an estranged expression of civil society, but that this relationship exists in inverted form in reality—in other words, the state appears to be prior to civil society, and politics appears to dominate and drive social relations. Hegel, Marx stated (1975e: 64), was 'not to be blamed for depicting the nature of the modern state as it is, but rather for presenting what *is* as the *essence* of the state'. Put another way, Marx concluded that it was not that Hegel's description inverted what was really happening, but that social reality existed in an inverted and mystified form, because of the dominance of capitalist social relations, and that Hegel did not see this.

Marx located the sharp separation between the state and civil society, and between political and social relations, as emerging historically with the rise of capitalist modernity.

Marx (1975b: 90) stated that the 'abstraction of the *state as such* … was not created until modern times. The abstraction of the *political state* is a modern product'. Modern civil society could, therefore, only organise itself as a state on the basis of this separation. Furthermore, the abstraction of politics from civil society in the form of a state involved the depoliticisation of civil society (1975c). Colletti (1975: 34) has summarised Marx's analysis as depending on the coincident nature of 'the estrangement of individuals from each other, or privacy within society, and the more general estrangement of public from private, or of the state from society'. This antagonism meant that for Marx the notion of 'political representation' is a misnomer. As soon as individuals deputed from civil society enter the state, they stop being deputies and instead become part of the abstract state. In so doing, the role of political representatives changes to one of furthering the interests of the state—and the political society around it—over the interests of those sections of civil society from which they emerged (Marx, 1975b).

This aspect of Marx's argument can throw light on the limits of political representation of social interests within social democratic or labourist parties. It also illuminates how historical debates over the extent of 'relative autonomy of the capitalist state', by Poulantzas (2001) and others (Panitch and Gindin, 2012), might be misplaced. This is because the state is both fully separate from bourgeois civil society—and, moreover, operates on the basis of a political logic that is antagonistic to social logic—yet is also entirely dependent on the perpetuation of the specifically bourgeois civil society from which the state is abstracted.

Nevertheless, while Marx rejected Hegel's notion that the state could truly represent the general interest, he did argue there was no other social force that could act across an entire society to *attempt* to manage the common interests of the capitalist class. This was why Marx and Engels (1976) called the state 'an illusory community': not because it wasn't real, but because it was not a true community of the individuals who formed its social basis. In considering and citing Marx's point in *The German Ideology*, Colletti argued (1975: 88):

> The collective interest … 'takes an independent form as the State, divorced from the real interests of the individual and community', insofar as 'just because individuals seek only their particular interest which for them does not coincide with their communal

> interest—in fact, the general is the illusory form of communal life—the latter will be imposed on them as an interest "alien" to them and "independent" of them, as in its turn a particular, peculiar "general" interest.' Hence 'the social power' transformed into the power of the state 'appears to these individuals … not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside them, of the origin and goal of which they are ignorant'.

Thus, for Marx, there were severe limits on what the state could do to further the management of shared interests for two reasons. The first was that in a society of irreconcilable particular interests, at best the state could enforce some kind of hypothetical 'average' of those different interests (Marx, 1975b). The second was that the modern state's basis in bourgeois society meant that it could never challenge the fundamental social relations that produced such a society—relations based on bourgeois private property—lest it risk eradicating the basis for its own existence (Marx, 1975a). Thus, the state could at best manage or administer problems produced by capitalist social relations differently, but never directly challenge the sources of those social harms.

From critique of politics to critique of political economy

Marx's (1975d: 425) theoretical critique of the state and politics led him to the next stage in the development of his social analysis:

> My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term 'civil society'; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy.

From the early studies in the *Paris Manuscripts* of 1844 to the conclusions of the three volumes of *Capital*, Marx located the basis for the specific nature of civil society in capitalist social relations—that is, in the process of abstraction of value in the exploitation of labour power. Yet, as Colletti (1973: 232–233) has noted, Marx employed a corresponding approach in both his critique of the state and his critique of political economy. In the former, Marx attacked the speculative aspects of Hegel's philosophy of the state, by contrasting the abstract form of the state with its concrete basis in civil

society. Marx thereby revealed how Hegel had uncritically accepted mystified forms precisely because he engaged in the 'crassest materialism' and had not pierced the essence of the matter (see also Marx, 1975b: 174). In the latter, Marx attacked the political economists for accepting the mystified, fetishised forms of appearance of capitalist social relations at face value, rather than grasping their basis in concrete relationships between real individuals (see also Marx, 1976: 163–177). In each case reality itself is upside down and must be turned right side up through practical activity.

From Marx to Gramsci

The century from Marx's death to the beginning of the neoliberal era, in the crisis that ended the long boom, was marked by a tremendous growth in the social weight and apparent importance of the state and political society to the functioning of modern capitalist societies. So much so that, for workers' movements in advanced Western countries, talk of a separation or antagonism between state and civil society would seem divorced from the experience of mass trade unions, electorally successful social democratic parties, and large-scale state intervention in capitalist economic life. In that sense, representation of the social interests of civil society actors in politics and the state could seem not only to have been nearly completely won, but also to have overcome the antinomies that Marx described. Such a view might rest on what seemed incontrovertible empirical evidence during the long post-war boom: unions with power to demand higher wages; a social democratic 'consensus' or Western model of development that could deliver full employment; a rapidly-growing welfare state; and 'Keynesian' policies that *appeared* to have all but eliminated capitalism's tendency to crisis. However, these pieces of 'evidence' would be challenged and eventually buried in practice, by the return of capitalist crisis from the early 1970s and the state-led responses to it in the form of neoliberalism (Humphrys, 2018).

While Marx could only have seen small clues of such tumultuous changes, Gramsci analysed the early decades of mass representative politics in his attempt to theorise the revolutionary potential of 'the West' (and its failure to be realised) in the wake of World War One. This necessitated an understanding of the concrete changes in the state–civil society relationship occasioned by these historic shifts. Like Marx, Gramsci's starting point was to engage with Hegel's conceptions and to build on them, using the toolbox

provided by those of Marx's writings that were available at that time. Because many of Marx's key theoretical expositions regarding the state and politics were unpublished when Gramsci set about composing his *Prison Notebooks* (2011), he often couldn't rely on Marx's positions from those texts. Thus, while Gramsci sought to develop his theory as closely as possible to Marx's approach, some tensions become apparent in the course of mapping out Gramsci's conception of the integral state.

Lo stato integrale

A key contention of this paper is that Gramsci developed insights geared to explaining the state–civil society relationship, which had changed during the historically delimited era of mass politics in advanced bourgeois societies. The theoretical framework for understanding how this took place is Gramsci's conception of the integral state, which is 'a network of social relations for the production of consent, for the integration of the subaltern classes into the expansive project of historical development of the leading social group' (Thomas, 2009: 143).

The concept of the integral state first elaborated in the *Prison Notebooks* was a distinct innovation, not drawn from Gramsci's predecessors, but built on the foundation of insights by Hegel and Marx. Gramsci was also attempting to redefine Marxism in the wake of the Great War: not so much 'against' Marx, but hostile to particular brands of 'Marxism'. Such writings were in critique of 'interpretive traditions within and outside Marxism: both Second International and Stalinist instrumentalisations' (Thomas, 2009: 97).

Gramsci analysed the complex and interrelated mechanisms of consent and coercive rule under capitalism. Sections of the *Notebooks* examine the winning of consent ('hegemony') and the coercive aspect of rule ('domination'), and how these distinctions allow the capitalist state to rule in a way that defends the dominant social relations. Gramsci was not only concerned with how accumulation occurs and how the integral state might try to ensure that this continues; he was also concerned with how the character of production and accumulation—and the civil society which arises from this—lead to contradictions that allow openings for hegemonic struggles by subaltern groups *against* capitalist class rule.

The analysis above emphasised Marx's elucidation of the sharp separation of and antagonism between civil society and the state, and the political society that exists around the latter. Marx also emphasised the depoliticisation of civil society produced by this separation. Gramsci's conception of the integral state is an expanded understanding of how the state and political society come to lead or direct civil society politically. Rather than seeing the state as genuinely universalising in its project, Gramsci argued, like Marx, that the integral state is a process of capitalist class domination and hegemony. This aspect of Gramsci's argument is frequently overlooked in the secondary literature (Morton, 2007: 89), yet the integral state was a conception that Gramsci developed specifically as part of a critique of the liberal conception of the 'separation of powers' (ibid 2007).

For Gramsci, the integral state concept described the particular relationship between the state (political society and the state apparatus) on the one hand, and civil society (atomised social interests and the relations between them) on the other. He conceived the integral state not as an 'identity' between the two (i.e. the same as each other), nor as a 'fusion' (i.e. distinct but in union)—but rather as a *dialectical unity* (Thomas, 2009: 69). He deployed a specific understanding of this dialectical unity as a process of envelopment or enwrapping (*involucro*) of civil society by political society. As Peter Thomas (2009: 189) has explained:

> [T]he definition of political society as an '*involucro*' in which a civil society can be developed would not seem to correspond in any sense to the concept of the state apparatus; for, whereas the latter is normally conceived as a coercive instrument applied externally in order to regulate civil society's inherent tendency towards anarchy, Gramsci here presents the image of 'political society' as a 'container' of civil society, surrounding or enmeshing and fundamentally reshaping it.

In summary, there is a more complex interplay of economic, political and institutional forms to create an 'integral unity of capitalist state power' (2009: 94–95) and Gramsci is attempting to think through the question of the state specifically in advanced capitalist countries ('the West') (Fiori, 1973: 242–243).

Within the integral state conception, processes of consent (hegemony) in civil society are just as important as openly coercive state rule (domination). For Gramsci, conceiving of

the state as something that simply sits above civil society, involved in regulation and coercion alone—even through democratic means—overlooks that it is in practice a 'complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules (Gramsci, 1971: 244; Q15 §10). Thus:

> … the general notion of the [s]tate includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society … in the sense that one might say that the State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony armoured with coercion (Gramsci, 1971: 263; Q6 §88).

Far from civil society and political society only being in contradistinction, civil society is (in Gramsci's conception) in dialectical unity with the state. Civil society and political society are better conceptualised not as geographical locations, but as different sites of social practice: civil society is the location of hegemonic practice and political society is the site of direct domination. Further, the state apparatus plays:

> … an important role in concretising this unifying supplement to civil society's constitutive divided particularity—but the 'political' as such necessarily exceeds the institutions that seek to organise and regulate it, just as, from another direction, civil society necessarily exceeds the political society that attempts to impose meaning upon it. If the political represents the 'consciousness' of the supposedly 'non-political' or civil society, the state apparatus functions as the moment of 'self-consciousness' of the political itself (Thomas, 2009: 189).

In this way the state apparatus is a supplement to the naturally fragmented entity of civil society, 'naturally fragmented' because it is based on capital accumulation and atomised, competing market actors.

Gramsci contra Marx? The limits of integration

It is here that a tension may be detected between Marx's argument about the essential state–civil society antinomy and Gramsci's notions of enwrapment (*involucro*) or dialectical unity. But the distance between the two accounts is bridged when the integral state is considered as always necessarily unstable, because a state based on an atomistic and internally divided civil society cannot ever fully overcome the logic of the fundamental social relations that produce those contradictions. At no point does

Gramsci accept the inverted existence of society as its essence; he repeatedly returns to Marx's arguments from the 1859 *Preface* that capitalist relations of production remain the basis for all other developments, including those within broader civil society and political society (Thomas, 2009: 98). Gramsci's insight is that the chaos of civil society (as it is produced and reproduced by the anarchic process of capital accumulation) can break through the political container in which it finds itself enwrapped and which seeks to neutralise its radical potential to disrupt, and even end, capitalist rule.

For Gramsci, any initiative from below to win hegemony on the terrain of civil society cannot help but enter the terrain of 'the political', because it pushes against the enwrapment of civil society by political society and is comprehended in political terms (Thomas, 2009: 194). Thus, as soon as a social movement starts to contest bourgeois rule on the terrain of civil society, it will come into contact with political society and the state. In examining the rule of the bourgeoisie in capitalist society, a distinction is being drawn in this paper between that class's *social* rule in civil society (rooted in its dominance in social relations of production which Gramsci sometimes described as 'economic' relations) and its *political* rule (through the institutions of the modern state). The question is, therefore, to what extent can political society enwrap and ultimately incorporate non-ruling social groups in its projects?

The *Prison Notebooks* developed detailed historical accounts of how opposed processes of contestation and integration have played out in a variety of societies, but especially in Italy. Gramsci was particularly interested in various civil society organisations—whether explicitly 'political' or not—which played their parts in these processes. He chiefly examined overlapping epochs of rising and consolidating mass politics, stretching from late 1800s to when he was imprisoned. This gave him an historical substrate from which to draw conclusions that went beyond what Marx could theorise in his lifetime. Marx lived in an age where the infiltration of civil society by political society was relatively limited, and where (as an important example) direct representative institutions based on the working class were virtually non-existent. Thus, in Marx's time, the antagonism between the state and civil society was less obscured by the complex (and organic) institutional connections that developed between them with mass politics. For Marx and Engels, the need to understand how organisations such as trade unions and workers'

parties could become incorporated into bourgeois rule was not as clear as it later became, especially with the role of the social democratic parties in defeating revolutionary movements after World War One. In this, Gramsci was consciously following in the footsteps of Lenin, who was forced to rethink Marxist political perspectives and renovate received Marxist theory in the wake of the capitulation of most of the Second International parties to their national war efforts (Harding, 2009).

The analysis so far has reflected on a conception of the state and its relationship to civil society that draws chiefly on the work of Marx and Gramsci. This analysis emphasises Marx's conception of the state as both abstracted (separate) from, and antagonistic to, the civil society from which it emerges. Further, it incorporates Marx's theorisation that civil society's nature—its atomism and internal competition—arises from the abstraction of value within capitalist social relations of production. Gramsci subsequently elaborated and extended Marx's basic critique, in order to analyse later developments in the relationship between the social and political spheres. In particular, Gramsci analysed how the growth of mass politics led to the further enwrapment of civil society by political society in the form of an integral state, and how civil society thereby became further incorporated into processes of bourgeois political rule.

The state-civil society relationship and anti-politics

If Gramsci is the Marxist theoretician of mass politics *par excellence*, the more recent rise to prominence of the phenomenon of anti-politics calls into question the continuing relevance of his insights. In the era of mass politics in the advanced capitalist West, for most of the 20th Century, formations such as trade unions and membership based political parties, alongside broader citizen engagement in electoral processes and the state, allowed an incorporation of the social (i.e. of civil society) into the political process. The current era is marked precisely by a breakdown of these institutional structures, which previously facilitated the complex and profound imbrication of statal and political imperatives with living civil society groups and blocs. Put another way, the separation and antagonism between social and political interests that Marx theorised, and as outlined above, is in the process of becoming the dominant form of state–civil society relations again. The integration or enwrapping that Gramsci called attention to in his concept of the integral state is now eroding.

Anti-politics is understood as popular detachment from, distrust of, and contempt for political elites and their activities (Burnham, 2014; Flinders, 2016; Hay, 2007; Mair, 2013). The phenomenon of anti-politics is increasingly recognised in mainstream debate, and has emerged, in various forms and levels of intensity, across the advanced capitalist countries over the last thirty years. Peter Mair, in his posthumously published *Ruling the Void* (2013), surveyed the state of politics across the European Union and concluded that across a wealth of empirical data—voter turnout, party allegiance, electoral volatility, party membership, and membership of civil society organisations such as trade unions—there has been an unmistakable trend towards popular disengagement from politics. In advanced capitalist countries fewer citizens are voting and engaging with political parties, voting patterns are increasingly volatile, and distrust of political elites is on the rise. Citizens are less partisan to traditional political parties, and although recent economic chaos has accelerated these processes of decline, the phenomenon long predates the current era of 'austerity'. In many ways anti-politics predates the neoliberal period in general, although the phenomenon has accelerated in that period.

It is useful to conceive of anti-politics as having three distinct but related expressions or aspects (Tietze and Humphrys, 2015). Firstly, there is the prevailing popular mood of detachment from, and hostility to, politicians, parties and the political process—including radical forms of politics. This expresses itself in short-lived bursts of protest, electoral volatility and political crisis, but tends to dissipate if not given direction. Secondly, there are political projects from across the ideological spectrum that trade on an appeal to this mood for their own political ends. And thirdly, there is the *social* revolution that Marx and Engels argued would end the state—and therefore end the existence of a separate political sphere—which they considered uniquely characteristic of modern, capitalist society. They described this variously as 'the real movement which abolishes the present state of things', 'revolution against the state' and 'communism' (Marx, 1975b; Marx and Engels, 1976).[1]

This mood is expressed in the United States by figures like Donald Trump, who successfully campaigned for the Presidency against the entire political establishment after

[1] This third aspect is only noted here given it is not the focus of this paper, and there have not been significant social formations engaged in such activity in recent years.

staging what was (in effect) a hostile takeover of the Republican Party, against the wishes of most of its elite members and donors. A similar mood expressed itself in the UK's referendum on membership of the European Union, where voters rejected the stance shared by the vast majority of the country's political class and mainstream media (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). On the Left parties like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain have related to this sentiment, mobilising widespread disenchantment with politicians and the political process into new formations promising to 'do' politics fundamentally differently. In the case of Spain, Podemos was an anti-mainstream party of the Left built on a wave of anti-political sentiment in the 15-M or Indignados movement (Ramiro and Gomez, 2017). A key slogan of Podemos was '*No nos representan*' ('they don't represent us'). In a brief burst of national popularity, the comedian and activist Russell Brand was a progressive expression of this sentiment in the UK. It is also expressed in less ideologically coherent populist formations like Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement in Italy.

Authors have theorised these changes, movements and expressions in various ways. John Keane (2009) argues that changes in the contemporary period are about profound shifts in the nature and institutions of democracy, to a new historical form of 'post-representative' democracy. Similarly, Simon Tormey (2015) views the current crisis of politics is part of an epochal transition within modernity—from one form of representation to another. Colin Hay's explanation in *Why We Hate Politics* (2007) is that the phenomenon is about a shift of popular participation in politics away from governmental sites to wider yet less formal locations. For Mair (2013), meanwhile, the process is about the long-term withdrawal of political elites from popular accountability through the construction of institutions that shield them from democratic control.

However, in examining anti-politics through the framework developed in this paper, one might argue that these approaches to the breakdown of politics get matters in the wrong order. That is, that the current crisis of politics and the rise of anti-politics represents not a contingent break from a norm of a stable politics, underpinned by deep roots in civil society, but rather that instability is the norm in capitalist society. This is a norm, however, which was partially reversed (or at least partially obscured) during a historically delimited era of mass politics centring on the 20th century. Thus, the rise of anti-politics

in the current period is a product of the breakdown of the political order that prevailed in many advanced capitalist countries for much of last century, an order whose historical transiency has now been become more apparent. While this has created space for some political projects of the left and right to take advantage of popular disdain for political elites, it has also thrown light on the more general relationship between the social and political spheres of modern capitalism.

As such, this detachment is not caused by the political class being less 'representative' of their social base than in some previous era, but instead its lack of a social base makes the political class's actual role in representing the interests of the state (and the political society around it) within civil society more apparent. The separation of the state from civil society creates the appearance of representation, one that masks the underlying social relations of domination. Marx and Gramsci help to illuminate that it is this appearance that is now breaking down, rather than a situation where inherently stable political structures are unexpectedly becoming disconnected from interests within civil society. On this analysis, social democratic political cohesion should not be taken as the norm from which we assess anti-political divergence in the contemporary period. Any Marxist analysis of anti-politics needs to explain not only why there is growing hostility to formal politics, but how the operations of politics have successfully ensured that this antagonism and opposition has been largely muted and eschewed for a prolonged historical period. To put it another way, a key question is not simply why anti-politics developed over the last decades but why we did not have it earlier.

As noted above, politics exists as a separate—and alienated—sphere in modern, bourgeois society. As Santucci (2010: 156) explains, using Gramsci, the state is 'only a forward trench, behind which there was a study succession of fortresses and madhouses'. Gramsci associates civil society with the 'function of "hegemony" that the dominant group exerts over the whole society' (ibid 2010: 156). The political party, as the 'collective individual', is the main instrument for the transformation necessary to realise a new hegemonic system—or indeed to maintain the present one. The period of mass politics was established on a base of mass, self-organised civil society organisations, including workers' organisations and their connections with social democratic parties. In the breakdown of these structures, there is a breakdown of effectivity of political leadership of civil society. This includes electorates

rejecting governments, electorates looking to populists as old parties lose control over them, and an inability for trade unions to be agents of state-led macroeconomic reform. Simultaneously, there has been a rise of a socially detached political class whose internal struggles are less and less connected to what voters are concerned with. An analysis focused first on the separation of the state and civil society, and then their dialectical unity, provides a useful way to understand both anti-politics and the now-ended era of relatively stable mass politics in the advanced capitalist countries.

Conclusion

Marx's argument that the relationship between the state and civil society was one based in antagonism, highlights how in a society based on capitalist social relations (the competition between atomised, particular, individual interests) results in a state and political sphere separate from those interests and with particular interests of its own—rather than being a representation of some general or collective social interest. This explains why the 'normal' form of politics under capitalism is one alienated from a civil society already alienated from itself. Gramsci's conception of the integral state allows us to understand how, in the era of mass politics, a dialectical unity of the state and civil society developed—where civil society was integrated under the leadership of political society. In this period, when social and labour movements acted (and highlighted the separation of the interests of the state and civil society) they were often incorporated within politics by the structures of politics—by the trenches and fortresses of the integral state, in Gramsci's terms. With such organic ties between civil society and politics in place, even when radical movements challenging capitalism arose, it could appear to their participants that social change would more likely occur through political and statal channels rather than through their destruction.

The tension between the positions of Marx and Gramsci (of antagonism and unity) was bridged by understanding moments and periods of integration as being always necessarily unstable. An antagonistic and divided civil society based on competition cannot ever fully overcome the logic of the fundamental social relations that produce those contradictions, but the structure of mass politics explains how those processes could be—temporarily—overcome. The combination of Marx and Gramsci's insights can assist to identify the strengths and limits of integrating efforts made by the political sphere, and

the status of politics in capitalist social formations. Importantly, this highlights how the era of mass politics (through its material reality) allowed the state-civil society relationship to *appear* to have overcome its antagonisms.

In relating and reconciling the approach of the early Marx (based in the empirical reality of his time) with that of Gramsci (based on the empirical reality of mass politics), this paper has analysed the relations evident in the decline of mass politics. Anti-politics was understood not as an all-embracing break from the past, but as a new moment underpinned by the structural features of the capitalist mode of production and the material contradiction evident in the state-civil society relationship. This analysis makes a contribution to a broader, necessary, project to develop a 'Marxist theory of politics'—a framework that can deal with changes in the state-civil society relationship over time, as well as account for the contemporary rupture. By examining the state-civil society relationship in this way, we can explain both why anti-politics is more prominent in the last few decades and what material political structures broke down in order to make these antagonisms more apparent.

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