

Other books by the same author:

Durkheim, Bernard and Epistemology, 1975

Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, 1975 (with Barry Hindess)

Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today (2 vols), 1977, 1978 (with Anthony Cutler, Barry Hindess and Athar Hussain)

Marxism and Historical Writing

Paul Q. Hirst



Routledge & Kegan Paul

LONDON, BOSTON, MELBOURNE AND HENLEY

*First published in 1985
by Routledge & Kegan Paul plc*

14 Leicester Square, London WC2H 7PH, England

9 Park Street, Boston, Mass. 02108, USA

*464 St Kilda Road, Melbourne,
Victoria 3004, Australia and*

*Broadway House, Newtown Road,
Henley-on-Thames, Oxon RG9 1EN, England*

*Set in 10 on 12 point Sabon
by Set Fair
and printed in Great Britain
by Thetford Press Limited,
Thetford, Norfolk*

*Chapter 4 © Routledge & Kegan Paul 1979; Chapter 5
© Routledge & Kegan Paul 1975; all other material
© Paul Q. Hirst 1985*

*No part of this book may be reproduced in
any form without permission from the publisher,
except for the quotation of brief passages
in criticism*

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Hirst, Paul Q.

Marxism and historical writing.

Bibliography: p.

1. Historiography—Addresses, essays, lectures.

2. Historical materialism—Addresses, essays, lectures.

I. Title.

D13.2.H47 1985 907.2 84-9969

British Library CIP data also available.

ISBN 0-7100-9925-8 (c)

Preface'

The theory of history remains a perennial field of debate within Marxism. Not surprisingly since most Marxists have considered the centrepiece of Marx's achievement to be 'historical materialism', a science of history. In *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* Barry Hindess and I challenged this judgment. We argued that the theory of modes of production could not progress if it was viewed as part of a philosophy of history and we also questioned the all too easy assimilation that had taken place in Britain between Marxism and the historian's practice. Our work produced an expected reaction of disbelief and rejection on the part of many Marxists, especially those who were professional historians. It also produced another set of reactions. On the one hand, a grudging acceptance by some Marxists that we were not without powerful arguments for our case. On the other hand, an enthusiastic acceptance by some Marxist philosophers and theorists who saw the need for a radical re-thinking of the role of Marxist theory if it was to serve as a guide to contemporary political practice in the advanced capitalist West. This book is an attempt to bring the debate up to date since our original contribution in 1975.

It reproduces two essays which address the work of two of the leading Marxist historians in Great Britain, Perry Anderson and E. P. Thompson. The first (Chapter 4) is a critical rebuttal of E. P. Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory*, which was first published in 1979, shortly after Thompson's own book. Thompson attempted to stave off the mushrooming popularity of Louis Althusser and the growing influence of our own work in a critique of unprecedented

violence and abusiveness. The second (Chapter 5) is a critical appraisal of Anderson's work on the absolutist state and an attempt to show how and why it fails to address the problems about the theory of modes of production we outlined in *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, published at about the same time as Anderson's own books. These essays remain relevant today and I have re-published them at the suggestion of friendly readers who have encouraged me to put them before the public in a more accessible form.

At the same time more needs to be said. In the first chapter in this volume I have attempted to bring the debate up to date. Reviewing in particular Anderson's attempt to settle accounts with Thompson in *Arguments within English Marxism*, Anderson's and Thompson's enterprises are re-considered, and their respective strengths and weaknesses re-assessed. My own general position on Marxism and historical writing is re-stated and revised. In particular, I have tried to show how Anderson's own position, for all its attempt to do justice to both Thompson and Althusser, fails to address some of their most positive endeavours, and also how he has failed to address or answer the points made by myself and my co-authors. This first chapter serves as a general introduction to the volume.

G. A. Cohen's book on Marx has received lavish praise as a defence of the traditional account of 'historical materialism'. Anderson is one of the leading voices in this chorus. In the second chapter I have tried to show that Cohen's 'defence' is neither faithful to Marx nor does it succeed in its own terms.

The third chapter in the book is a sympathetic exposition of R. G. Collingwood's theory of the historian's practice. I make no pretence that it is my own. On the other hand, I believe that Marxists should read and learn from Collingwood's work. He is a neglected figure of major stature. Marxists will by and large not agree with what Collingwood says. I hope that they will see both that he explodes the myth of historical 'evidence', epitomised in E. P. Thompson's claim that the given 'facts' of history constitute a court in which theories of history are tried. I also hope they will see how Collingwood's insistence on history being written from the standpoint of the present is in some ways a better account of Thompson's practice than his own and that it defends the notion of a 'strategic' historiography informed by current concerns rather than an endless poking in the potentially infinite archive of the 'past'. History

without this strategic dimension can be a diversion for the Left.

The essays on Anderson and Thompson, and the first chapter, 'Anderson's Balance Sheet', make clear the ways in which historical writing is informed by the historian's point of view of politics and the tasks which face us in politics. For this reason I have included two chapters which make my own political concerns clear. Chapter 7, 'Labour's Crisis', outlines my own conceptions of contemporary politics and Chapter 8, 'Obstacles in the Parliamentary Road' – a sympathetic account of aspects of Nicos Poulantzas's *State, Power, Socialism* – is an attempt to make clear my own view of the relationship between parliamentary electoral politics and democratic socialism. The chapter on Poulantzas first appeared in a little-known journal called *Euro-Red*. I have also included an interview in the course of which I review my general theoretical and political position. The interview was published in an Australian journal called *Local Consumption*, and was conducted by Peter Botsman, Judith Allen and Paul Patton.

In this collection I have tried to settle accounts justly and honestly with Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, both of whom have been tragically silenced, the former by mental illness and the murder of the person closest to him, and the latter by suicide. I cannot hide my sorrow and distress at these events. At the same time one must insist that their personal tragedies do not invalidate their respective intellectual and political enterprises. Justice and honesty consist in taking what they did seriously and making clear what is valuable in that work, but also where one differs.

This book does not pretend to be an exhaustive review on the subject of Marxism and historiography. It will doubtless not be my final view on the subject. It is ruthlessly selective but in the manner of Lenin's injunction that while it is permissible in military affairs to attack weakness, victory is victory whatever the point one chooses to strike at the enemy's line, in matters of theory one must attack positions of strength, frontally and openly. I would claim that Anderson, Cohen and Thompson each offer in their own ways strong positions, positions with flaws which admit of criticism and rebuttal but which must be addressed. I expect no more and no less in return. We cannot fear active critical debate. What we must avoid, both as socialists concerned to behave in a comradely spirit, and as intellectuals concerned to preserve the possibility of reasoned debate, is *ad hominem* abuse and the obfuscation of one's

grounds for difference. I leave it to the reader to judge the measure of my own success.

I have to thank the editors of *Economy and Society* and *Local Consumption* for their kind permission to reproduce Chapters 4 and 5, and 6 respectively. I am also particularly indebted to the efforts of Roland Anrup, Mark Cousins, Michael Cowen, Stephen Feuchtwang, Barry Hindess and Maxine Molyneaux in reading the manuscript and offering prompt and invaluable critical comments. Many such acknowledgments are ritual *politesse*, in this case they are probably far less than their recipients deserve.

Contents

Preface	vii
1 Anderson's Balance Sheet	1
2 G. A. Cohen's Theory of History	29
3 Collingwood, Relativism and the Purposes of History	43
4 The Necessity of Theory – A Critique of E. P. Thompson's <i>The Poverty of Theory</i>	57
5 The Uniqueness of the West – Perry Anderson's Analysis of Absolutism and its Problems	91
6 Interview with <i>Local Consumption</i>	126
7 Labour's Crisis – Principles and Priorities for Social Reconstruction	149
8 Obstacles in the Parliamentary Road	171
References	181

Chapter 1

Anderson's Balance Sheet

Perry Anderson's *Arguments within English Marxism* is a remarkable achievement, for in this book he manages a balanced and sympathetic critical assessment of his old adversary Edward Thompson. To one who recalls the furious debate occasioned by the publication of 'The Origins of the Present Crisis' in 1964–6 as a vital part of his intellectual formation, Anderson's generosity of spirit is surprising and admirable. For if ever there was an intellectual 'police action', Thompson's essay 'The Peculiarities of the English' (in *The Poverty of Theory*) must be it. This riposte was intended as a crushing, silencing blow against the youthful new guard of the *New Left Review*, against their attempt to develop through a new interpretation of English history a distinctive political position on the current conjuncture.

When I read *The Poverty of Theory* in 1978 I saw another 'police action', written with an even more violent fury, and found myself one of those on the receiving end. It is never pleasant to find oneself portrayed as a theoretician fool rotting the minds of those intellectual incompetents ill-educated enough to listen to one. In 1966 Anderson responded by hitting back hard, exposing Thompson's own politics to systematic critique. Given the violence of the attack his response was justified. I too was determined to hit back hard and did so in the substantive arguments of my review of *The Poverty of Theory* (reprinted as Chapter 4 in this volume). I was equally determined neither to match Thompson's abuse with my own, nor to denigrate those things he had done which I respected. I said: 'It is an urgent necessity that socialists find means to *differ* which do not destroy the wider possibilities of communication.' (p. 58) This

urgency is even greater today. Socialists are few, in retreat and face an uncertain future. But Anderson's book has tested this conviction almost to breaking, and it is only by a silence of nearly three years that I now feel able to honour it.

For Anderson's generosity towards Thompson is coupled with a churlish disparagement of myself and Barry Hindess. Alone, of all the Marxists mentioned in this work and in a previous one, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, we are subjected to ridicule and abuse. One should note that it is impossible to find any serious argument which justifies or substantiates this outburst. As a consequence our arguments remain unaddressed and unanswered. Anderson inveighs as follows:

There can be no doubt that in England a species of spin-off from Althusser's work occurred in the 70s which does answer to some of Thompson's severest strictures. The writings of Hirst, Hindess and their associates notoriously effected a *reductio ad absurdum* of some of Althusser's ideas – before successively rejecting Althusser himself as too empiricist, then their own earlier notions as too rationalist, and finally Marx as too revolutionary. But this weightless iconoclasm, however understandably a provocation to Thompson, has never been part of the mainstream of Althusserian work – which it has expressly renounced, along with Marxism. (*Arguments*, p. 126)

Later Anderson says:

The Poverty of Theory ends with the declaration of a general jihad against Althusserianism – a call to a new War of Religion on the Left. . . . The harmfulness of this style of polemic to the possibilities of rational or comradely communication on the Left can be in no doubt. (*Arguments*, p. 128)

With this latter statement one can only heartily concur. Anderson rightly rejects Thompson's declaration of war against 'enemies to the Left', but makes one exception to this general armistice, myself and Hindess. Presumably he thinks that as we have 'renounced' Marxism we are fair game. Even if this were true, and I shall return to it in a moment, does Anderson want to have hostile and abusive relations with non-Marxist socialists? He would find it difficult if he were to try and deny we are sincere and committed socialists.

Anderson's exception to his sensible general rule might strike the

reader as irrational and unintelligible. To understand it we must indulge in a little history. The first and probably decisive component of that history is simple; it consists in an essay of mine reprinted as Chapter 5 in this volume called 'The Uniqueness of the West'. That essay could only have antagonised Anderson for it was a sustained critical rejection of the organising problem and theoretical apparatus of his books *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* and *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. It could hardly be called a generous review; it hits hard and fails to praise, but it is neither personalist nor abusive. It certainly neglects to praise the breadth of historical scholarship Anderson displays, and the quality and originality of some of the narrative reconstructions of particular national histories. The reason for this is simple; I regarded Anderson as a thinker of some stature, who neither needed mollifying praise nor would shy away from critical comment. If Hindess or I were indeed 'weightless iconoclasts', Anderson's invective would be unnecessary, our triviality and irrelevance would be manifest to all. But clearly the critique must have weighed heavily, for among other things it demonstrated how divergent were Anderson's problems and concepts from any normal construction of Marxism.

It also made reference to a text Anderson might prefer to forget, 'Problems of Socialist Strategy', published in *Towards Socialism*. In itself it is an interesting and forcefully presented piece. But in that essay Anderson made one statement which he certainly would wish to retract today:

Leninist strategy in the West is fundamentally *regressive*: it threatens to destroy a vital historical creation [democracy – PQH], when the task is to surpass it. . . . Leninism is refused by the whole cultural texture of the advanced capitalist societies of the West. ('Problems', p.230)

Anderson included this in a context of unqualified praise for the uniquely Western political achievement of democracy. In the context of *rapprochement* with the Labour Party in 1964 this was understandable; now it and the NLR's orientation at that time seem uncomfortably close to the Eurocommunism he excoriates in *Arguments within English Marxism*. Subsequent to 1964 Anderson turned toward the Trotskyism of the Fourth International and to a new estimation of Lenin. He now insists on the necessity, at some

point in the revolutionary process, of a violent overthrow of the bourgeois state and the construction of new institutions of mass political power.

I do not regard Anderson's change of heart as absurd, although I do not sympathise with it, but he clearly seems embarrassed to be reminded that it has taken place. In *Arguments* he rehearses the history of his dispute with Thompson and the old *NLR* board, putting forward a case for the new board's consistency in addressing certain problems. He is silent on the complexities and reversals of line, and on *NLR*'s inattention to certain major trends in Marxism (for which see Sassoon, 'The Silences of *New Left Review*'). Anderson passes over a good deal in silence, yet his differences with us surface in short but intense bursts of dismissive abuse.

Why? My review challenged the theoretical foundations of his magnum opus. Our remarks on history in *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* likewise challenged his commitment to identifying Marxist work with a certain type of historical investigation. The commitment in *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today* to a root and branch critique of some of the central doctrines in *Capital* and our insistence on the centrality of the Labour Party for British Socialists certainly cannot have prompted him to agree. An index of this disagreement is that following the writing of the review I was told by the member of the *NLR* board to whom I had shown it as a courtesy that the *Review*'s pages were closed to me hereafter. I had never taken them to be open, and I had not greatly regretted the fact. The political and theoretical differences between us are vast. I see no basis for reducing them and no need to call for a bogus 'reconciliation'. At the same time I see no point in pursuing vendettas. I accept wholeheartedly that certain ways of engaging in disputes on the Left have been nothing other than destructive. We must begin not merely to mouth adherence to norms of rational and comradely communication on the Left but must actually keep to them.

I shall begin in this respect by clearing the ground and outlining my own attitude to the *NLR*. I do this for two reasons. One, to show my commitment to being open and honest about the basis of one's differences. The other, to dispel the possible assumption that I have never taken either Anderson or the *NLR* seriously. The reverse is the case. In the period 1966–8 I was a member of a student

political group at Leicester University which published a magazine called *Sublation* in which *NLR* took a considerable interest. Several members of *Sublation*, myself and Mike Gane in particular, were intellectually and politically close to certain members of the *NLR* board, notably Anthony Barnett and Ben Brewster. Two things broke this limited connection. One was the publication of Althusser by *NLR*; we enthusiastically adopted Althusser's programme of work, whereas after giving it an initial introduction in the UK, many of the board became hostile to it. The other was a large part of the board's growing commitment to Trotskyism, something I frankly admit I do not understand.

The Marxist-Leninist journal *Theoretical Practice* (1971–3), of whose editorial group I, Tony Cutler, Mike Gane, Barry Hindess and Athar Hussain, were among the members, consciously set ourselves the task of avoiding what we saw to be the main failures of the *Review*: its a-political 'culturalism' – winning the English intellectuals to European Marxism, and its failure to establish any political or democratic relation to its own 'constituency'. *TP* sought to be different, to build through study groups and conferences a circle of committed supporters and contributors. Our aspiration was a more open and democratic relation to our constituency. We failed. *TP* exhausted itself in intense and honest, but bitter and irresolvable struggles about the correct line of theoretico-political work. Such is the inevitable fate of any small Marxist sect which sets itself a world-historic task where circumstances defy its accomplishment and whose members are sufficiently clear about elementary political facts not to repeat dogged and irrelevant slogans until and after they become senile. I do not regret *TP*, although it disillusioned and thwarted many of those who believed in it. Its internal mode of discourse accounts for much of the violence of our polemics – fierce about concepts and political positions, but I would say in our defence seldom mean about people.

NLR and *TP* ceased to communicate. Ben Brewster left the *Review* on the immediate issue of their attitude toward China's relations with the Bandaranaike regime. The *Review's* pages were closed to us and we ceased to have any meaningful personal contacts or discussions. It should be remembered that Anderson's work, along with Sartre's, had been central in my own intellectual formation. 'The Origins' opened my eyes to the possibility of

serious Marxist work. We renounced a definite heritage in the break with them. I have no idea whether they had any regrets at our evolution. In 'The Uniqueness of the West' I attempted an assessment of the political strategy of the *NLR* and the role Anderson's work played in providing its theoretical underpinnings down to 1975. This was critical but in my view fair comment. *NLR* did not attempt to engage in dialogue.

To return to Anderson's claims that we have renounced 'the mainstream of Althusserian work, along with Marxism'. This is no less than outrageous. I never developed a direct relation with Althusser and have had only the slightest contact with his circle. This was a matter of choice, for members of the *TP* editorial group did visit Paris to seek such relations and were warmly welcomed. Althusser did not regard *TP* as the product of 'weightless iconoclasts' nor did Balibar, whose 'Self-Criticism' in *TP* 7/8 was in direct response to the probings of Tony Cutler. Likewise, Dominique Lecourt took a close interest in *TP*. I, however, always suspected there was no common situation for political work and that our own independent theoretical work was best served by a definite distance. This being said, I have never 'renounced' Althusser. I have criticised his theories radically but I have always made clear what my critical work owes to its starting point and have never ceased to defend Althusser's enterprise as the most audacious and productive development in Marxist theory since the last World War. Althusser now lies prostrate, his life in ruins and the companion of his adult years killed by his own hand. I have never met the man and yet I feel a profound sorrow for him. To be told I have 'renounced' him is a shabby remark and is undeserved. I have renounced neither him nor his work.

Anderson's 'mainstream' is partly valid and partly curious. I am glad Anderson defends the productivity of Althusserian work against Thompson's ignorant jibes, but his defence is of a 'mainstream', largely confined to those who have 'applied' Althusser's theories in some definite line of research. I have no wish to disparage Poulantzas or Baudelot and Establet, or others. All I will say is that most of the people on Anderson's list have not tried to push forward Althusser's main lines of theoretical work on epistemology or the theory of modes of production. Anderson may not like what we say, and we would accept that it shatters much of the substance of Althusser's theory. But it does attempt to address

and re-pose his main problems. To say we are a diversion from the 'mainstream' is, therefore, incongruous.

As to renouncing Marxism, Anderson is not alone in his claims; they are made by Göran Therborn and many others. For them to renounce the 'determination of the economy in the last instance' is to cut the sheet anchor keeping one's position in the Marxist ocean. I admit it is no minor trifling with points of doctrine. However, as I point out in the essays reprinted in this volume, both Thompson in *The Poverty of Theory* and Anderson in *Passages and Lineages* have hardly kept to the letter of Marxist theory and have radically modified the role of the economy in historical change. Yet both continue to present themselves as genuine Marxists. We, the authors of *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today*, at least try to make our relation to Marx open, to clearly map the theoretical differences between Marx and ourselves. If we have been direct in this matter we have had no choice, our very enterprise demands it. Of course, I am not an 'orthodox' Marxist; nobody actually can be one and Marx certainly was not. But I refuse to concede I have 'renounced' Marxism. Such terminology implies leaving a viable enterprise for discreditable political reasons or intellectual confusion. I write at a time when there is no cachet in seeking to hang on to the label 'Marxist' and venial intellectuals are queueing up to disparage socialism.

Marxists have been struggling with trying to square the circle for a long time, trying to make a viable doctrine out of the 'determination of the economy in the last instance' under pressure of theoretical and political necessities. I have struggled hard to confront these theoretical and political necessities, and in doing so I have been led a long way from the words, concepts and political positions of Marx. I have become convinced we *cannot* square the circle and can only ruin ourselves politically and intellectually by continuing in a futile exercise in loyalty to the greatest thinker in the social sciences and the socialist movement.

I *cannot* abandon or renounce the claim to be a Marxist given my theoretical and political position. I will admit to being heterodox and ultra-critical, yes, but I will not accept the charge of ceasing to be a Marxist. My own work makes no sense if I reject what Marx *tried to do* rather than how he did it. I *cannot* renounce the broadest aims Marx set himself, to provide the theoretical basis for a non-utopian socialist politics which would ultimately lead the

people of this earth to make a human condition without famines, ignorance, war and oppression. Such a politics cannot wait for revolutions in the advanced Western capitalist countries, the tasks have become too urgent. A large part of the world is starving, the whole world is threatened by senseless and barbarous war. We must make what progress as we can where we can, with such small victories as are attainable to us.

Anderson at the very end of his book says: 'the absence of a truly mass and revolutionary movement in England, as elsewhere in the West, has fixed the perimeter of all possible thought in this period' (*Arguments*, p. 207). Yes, how true. But we live in this period and no other, we must face this fact and not live in the hope of revolutions to come. The British working class is shrinking, fragmented and profoundly unrevolutionary. Anderson knows this and yet he cannot draw *my* conclusions. Edward Thompson at least does not sit waiting for the socialist revolution he dreams of. My democratic socialist politics Anderson may consider a dismal social democratic pragmatism. I do not believe it to be so and I cannot accept his commitment to a 'revolutionary' politics which seems a hopeless abstraction in the current situation. The last line of *Arguments* reads: 'It would be good to leave old quarrels behind, and to explore new problems together.' I shall not repeat the same to him; the intellectual and political differences are too great to pretend that either of us could or would wish to 'explore new problems together.' I shall say something different. Let us pursue our differences rationally, and accept that we fight as socialists, from opposed positions, but on the same side.

Anderson's critique of Thompson

Anderson's attention to Thompson's work goes beyond a reply to *The Poverty of Theory* and involves a major re-assessment of his historical work and political positions. I do not intend to review the whole enterprise here but to concentrate on the salient points I consider especially valuable.

Firstly, Anderson offers a qualified defence of Althusser against the claims of *The Poverty of Theory*. Most impressive is his account of Althusser's theoretical-political career in which he decisively rebuts the charge that Althusser is the intellectual culmination of Stalinism and his work nothing more than 'a straightforward

ideological police action' (Thompson, *Poverty*, p. 275). I must admit I thought the charge too absurd to require patient and detailed *political* refutation, and largely ignored Althusser's politics and the French political context of his intervention in my own reply. Anderson's contribution has persuaded me the task was well worth undertaking; it shows that patient historical re-construction of the political context is a valuable complement to the type of theoretical defence of the Althusserian enterprise I offered in 'The Necessity of Theory'.

Secondly, Anderson demonstrates – as I did – Thompson's tendency to equate Marxist investigative practice with historiography *tout court*. Linked to this is a demonstration of the inadequacy of Thompson's central concept of 'experience' and his conception of classes as groups of people who make their history through conscious experience of their nature as a class. Anderson shows that 'experience' is neither a unitary category nor does it always lead to positive and productive knowledge by agents of states of affairs as Thompson supposes. Anderson says: 'Experience as such is a concept *tout azimuts*, which can point in any direction. The self-same events can be lived through by the agents who draw diametrically opposite conclusions from them.' (*Arguments*, pp. 22–9) To reduce classes to bodies of *conscious* agents involves a transformation of the Marxist concept of classes as groups of agents linked by their structural relations to the means of production. Thompson's notion of classes 'making' themselves does involve the corollary that there are not classes until they are made – in which case as Anderson points out classes in the Ancient World or the French peasantry of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* cannot be classes properly so called.

This critical point is pursued through a critical reading of *The Making of the English Working Class*, the main text on which Thompson's reputation is founded. Anderson shows *The Making* rests on three dubious theses:

- 1 The first Anderson calls 'co-determination', the claim that the English working class 'made itself as much as it was made' and that creative agency has at least an equal place with the conditioning of socio-economic relationships. Anderson shows that this stress on making leads to inattention to the socio-economic context – a failure to consider the crucial sectors of the

Industrial Revolution, to recognise London was *not* an industrial city, to reflect the political impact of external events, notably the American and French revolutions, and to record the extent to which the Napoleonic wars fostered ties of national chauvinism between the English people and their rulers.

2 The second is the equation of class with class consciousness.

3 The third is the assumption that by 1832 the working class is substantially 'made', ignoring the decisive political and economic changes after 1832 – in particular the political collapse of Chartism by 1850, the rise of the new unionism and a moderate socialism based on parliamentary representation.

Anderson concludes that on balance as a theorist Althusser is closer to 'historical materialism':

Althusser's unilateral and remorseless stress on the overpowering weight of structural necessity in history corresponds more faithfully to the central tenets of historical materialism, and to the actual lessons of the scientific study of the past – but at the price of obscuring the novelty of the modern labour movement and attenuating the vocation of revolutionary socialism (*Arguments*, p. 58).

The problem I have with this is that Althusser is unable to incorporate the complexities of political organisation, struggle and ideology into his determination by structural necessity. This is nowhere clearer than in the text where he attempts to do so – 'Ideology and "Ideological State Apparatuses"'. Poulantzas likewise repeatedly stood himself on his head trying to resolve this problem. There is a genuine problem of relating classes as groups of agents with a relation to the means of production with classes as social forces, constituted groups of agents which are the outcome of the complexities of political struggles and institutions. Thompson has the merit of trying to address classes as social forces, albeit with disastrous theoretical means which lead him to make them self-willing 'actors' unified by a common 'consciousness'. Marxism continues to have a series of largely unresolved problems in the area of class theory, and it is a mistake to suppose that the obvious errors of one attempted route to their solution are a vindication of the alternative route. Hindess and I have attempted to outline the *problems* in the Marxist theory of class and to indicate why both