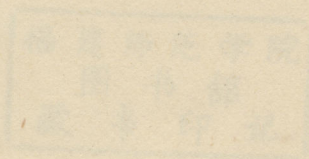


# THE BRITISH STATE

JAMES HARVEY & KATHERINE BOND



LAWRENCE & WISHART  
LONDON

# THE BRITISH STATE



# The BRITISH STATE

by  
JAMES HARVEY and KATHERINE HOOD

1958  
LAWRENCE & WISHART  
LONDON

©  
*Lawrence & Wishart Ltd*  
1938

*Printed in Great Britain by  
The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton*

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. THE RIVAL THEORIES	9
CHAPTER II. THE MARXIST THEORY AND THE BRITISH STATE	15
1. The Theory in Outline	15
2. The Continuity of the British State	17
3. The Bourgeois-democratic State	19
4. From Competitive to Monopoly Capitalism	22
5. Monopoly Capitalism and the British State	24
6. The Imperial State	26
CHAPTER III. POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE CONSTITUTION	29
1. The Two-party System	29
2. The British Electoral System	31
3. Attempts to Justify the Two-party System	34
4. Characteristics of the Main Political Parties	36
5. The Struggle for Democracy within the Labour Movement	45
CHAPTER IV. THE HOUSE OF COMMONS	48
1. The Decline of the House	48
2. The Dictatorship of the Cabinet	49
3. A Forum for Criticism of the Government	57
4. "Parliamentarism"	60
5. A Tribune for Revolutionary Leadership	63
CHAPTER V. THE MONARCHY	67
1. The Monarchy as a Propaganda Weapon	67
2. The Political Role of the Monarchy	69
3. The Creation of Peers	72
4. The Royal Assent and the Power to Dissolve	73
5. The Influence of the Monarchy	74
CHAPTER VI. THE HOUSE OF LORDS	78
1. The Composition of the House of Lords	78
2. Lords versus Commons: 1906-31	79
3. The Lords since the War	80
4. Reform of the House of Lords	82

CHAPTER VII. THE KEY PERSONNEL OF THE STATE	85
1. The Appearance of Political Neutrality	85
2. Education and Social Origin	86
3. Further Training, especially in the Empire	98
4. Entry into the Ranks of Big Business	101
5. West End Clubs	103
6. The Monopoly Capitalists	104
7. The Trade Union Leadership	106
CHAPTER VIII. THE ARMED FORCES	110
1. How the Armed Forces are used	110
2. The Officer Caste	112
3. The Men in the Ranks	116
4. Parliament and the Armed Forces	119
5. The Curragh Mutiny	120
6. Remote Control by Parliament	121
7. The Influence of the Higher Command	123
8. The Future	129
CHAPTER IX. THE POLICE	131
1. The Origin of Modern Police Forces	131
2. The Centralisation of the Police	134
3. Strengthening the Loyalty of the Police to the Ruling Class	137
4. The Record of the British Police	141
CHAPTER X. THE SECRET POLITICAL POLICE	145
1. The Home Secret Police	145
2. The Foreign Secret Service	153
CHAPTER XI. ENGLISH LAW AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM	160
1. The Nature of English Law	160
2. The Common Law	164
3. The Judicial Apparatus	169
4. The Writ of Habeas Corpus	174
5. The Jury System	176
6. The Law and Civil Liberty	178
7. The Attack on Civil Liberties	180
CHAPTER XII. THE CIVIL SERVICE	186
1. The Origin of the Administrative Class	187
2. Changes in the Administrative Class since 1900	192
3. The Influence of the Leading Civil Servants	196
4. The Rank and File of the Civil Service	200

CHAPTER XIII. THE FOREIGN OFFICE	203
1. The Aims of British Foreign Policy	203
2. The Foreign Office before the Second World War	205
3. The "Reform" of the Foreign Service	207
4. The Influence of the Foreign Office	208
5. From the Zinoviev Letter to the M-plan	212
6. The Attitude of the Third Labour Government	214
CHAPTER XIV. THE ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE	217
1. Forms of State Intervention in Industry and Their Significance	217
2. The Growth of State Monopoly Capitalism	223
3. The Purpose of Taxation	224
4. The Meaning of Capitalist Nationalisation	225
CHAPTER XV. THE SOCIAL SERVICES	231
1. The Social-democratic Theory	231
2. The Reasons for Social Services under Capitalism	233
3. Social Services and Capitalist Strategy	235
CHAPTER XVI. LOCAL GOVERNMENT	241
1. Changing Relations of Central and Local Government	241
2. The Struggles of the Inter-war Period	243
3. The Mechanism of Central Control	246
4. Appearance and Reality	253
5. The Drive to Centralisation	255
6. The Future	257
CHAPTER XVII. THE B.B.C. AND THE I.T.A.	262
1. The Importance of Propaganda	262
2. The B.B.C. as a Propaganda Weapon	264
3. Who Runs the B.B.C.?	269
4. The B.B.C. and the State	270
5. The Independent Television Authority	272
CHAPTER XVIII. THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH	275
CHAPTER XIX. CONCLUSION	281
INDEX	285





## THE RIVAL THEORIES

SINCE the end of the war there has been a persistent campaign to persuade the British people that they are a free nation forming, together with the United States of America and other countries in Western Europe and the Empire, part of the free world where the people enjoy advantages of democratic government which are denied to the inhabitants of socialist countries. Many have been all the readier to accept this standpoint because we in Britain undoubtedly enjoy many hard-won civil liberties of the greatest value. There is freedom from arbitrary arrest and a wide measure of freedom of speech; we can organise trade unions and political parties and periodically elect a Parliament which helps to frame the laws and is a forum where the executive government can be criticised and all kinds of grievances aired. This Parliament has indeed been so important in our history that to many people the terms "Parliament" and "democracy" are almost synonymous, and they would say that our country, which has the oldest Parliament in the world, has also achieved a more perfect democracy than any other.

It is the purpose of this book to endeavour to look below the surface at the real content of British democracy; to make an examination of the British State, how it works, who runs it and in whose interests; and from all this to see what conclusions can be reached about the way forward to socialism in Britain.

The starting point for an examination of the British political system must be the recognition that it exists on the basis of a capitalist economy. In Britain the greater part of industry, trade, finance and the land is the private property of a small minority of the population—the capitalist class. It has been shown that 10 per cent of the population over 25 years of age own 80 per cent of the private capital in England and Wales, and that 1 per cent of the population own 50 per cent of the capital.<sup>1</sup> The control of British industry and finance is becoming more and more concentrated into the hands of a small number of

<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Langley, "The Distribution of Capital in Private Hands," *Bull. Inst. Stat.*, December 1950 and February 1951.

immensely powerful monopolies, combines and financial organisations: in 1955-6 over a third of all company profits were made by the four hundred firms whose trading profits were a million pounds or more.<sup>1</sup> They also control the major part of the means of propaganda—the press, the cinema, and commercial television. The activities of this small class of big capitalists—we shall call them the “monopoly capitalists” in the rest of this book—whose investments range all over the world, are directed towards one central aim—profit; the use of the economic resources which they control is determined, not by the needs of the people, but by the opportunities for making a profit. This ownership of the means of production gives the capitalist class a grip over the lives of millions of wage and salary earners—the working class—who have no choice but to work for them and constantly enrich them.

It is in this context that the issue of freedom must be judged. The founders of the socialist movement in this country were never in any doubt that freedom for the working class meant freedom from the economic domination of the capitalist class. So long as the people were not masters of the land, the factories or the wealth which they themselves produced, it could not be said that the people ruled.

Today there is probably widespread agreement among socialists that Britain cannot become an entirely free country until the profit-making system which leads to poverty, unemployment and war has been abolished, and the means of production have been taken out of the hands of the monopoly capitalists so that they can be used for the benefit of the people instead of for the profit of the few. But it is widely believed that the people have the means to solve these problems, provided that they make full use of the political rights they have already gained, without making fundamental changes in existing institutions. Moreover, it is felt that revolutionary changes in the State might very well lead to some kind of absolute rule backed by an all-powerful secret police. It follows that the advance to socialism should be made step by step within the existing political framework.

This may be described as the social-democratic theory of the State. As one of its supporters, Mr. Dennis Healey, has written:

“By choosing the phrase ‘social democracy’ to distinguish their policy from that of other parties, socialists assume that society has already realised political democracy.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Table 30 in 100th Inland Revenue Report.    <sup>2</sup> *The Future of Socialism* (1956), p. 27.

The British people are governed by an elaborate apparatus composed of Parliament, the Monarchy, the Cabinet, the Civil Service, the Armed Forces, the Police, and the Judiciary; and together these institutions make up the modern State. The social-democratic theory accepts the widely-held liberal view that the State is a piece of neutral machinery, impartial in the conflict between workers and capitalists; it therefore considers that the existing State can be used for the purpose of creating and organising a planned socialist society just as well as it has hitherto been used for organising capitalist society. This view was clearly stated by Earl Attlee, writing in 1938:

“The system of government and administration in this country has been evolved through the centuries and adapted from time to time to new conditions. . . . With this machinery . . . we can make such changes as we desire.”<sup>1</sup>

If the State is impartial in the conflict between capital and labour, it can be thought of as an organ which represents the interests of the nation as a whole. In the early days of the Labour Party, Ramsay MacDonald devoted a good deal of attention to the question of the State, and according to him:

“Socialists should think of the State and political authority not as the expression of majority rule or of the rule of any section, but as the embodiment of the life of the whole community.”<sup>2</sup>

Forty years later Mr. Herbert Morrison put the same view in another way when he said in a talk to civil servants:

“Again, the British people have a view of the State which is very different from that held in some parts of Europe. . . . Our State . . . is simply the expression of ourselves as a group trying to do things together in a fair and orderly manner.”<sup>3</sup>

And Mr. John Strachey gives an up-to-date formulation of the same theory in a rather more elaborate style:

“An all-embracing, all-penetrating climate of opinion must be the end product of our democratic processes and institutions.

<sup>1</sup> *The Labour Party in Perspective* (1937), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Socialism and Government* (1909), Vol. I, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> *Peaceful Revolution* (1949), p. 111.

Immersed in this pervasive medium, each of our institutions becomes a different thing. Crown and Parliament, Prime Minister and Cabinet, Army, Navy and Air Force, taxation and representation, political parties and electoral methods, judicial and educational systems—all of them, even when they retain their traditional forms, change their social content as and when they become filled with the impulses of that vast majority of the people who are now at last beginning to play a real part in public affairs.”<sup>1</sup>

The theory of the State which is held by these leaders of the Labour Party is in fact much older than the Labour Party itself. It was the view which was held—no doubt unconsciously—by the trade union leaders in the middle of the nineteenth century who followed the political leadership of the Liberal Party; it was spread more widely by the propaganda of the Fabian Society in the eighteen-eighties, and was carried over into the Labour Party after its formation in 1900 by prominent members of the Independent Labour Party like Ramsay MacDonald. It is wholeheartedly believed by the right-wing leaders of the Labour Party today and is undoubtedly widely accepted among the rank and file of the labour movement as well.

A study of history led Marx and Engels to exactly the opposite conclusion. It led them to the discovery that the State only came into being when society became divided into classes, and to the theory that while there is one class which exploits another, the State is the instrument for maintaining the domination of the ruling class. “It is impossible to compel the greater part of society to work systematically for the other part of society without a permanent apparatus of coercion”, is how Lenin expressed it. And William Morris, founder of the Socialist League and one of the greatest of our socialist pioneers, described the British State in more homely language when he said in 1888:

“The magistrate, the judge, the policeman, and the soldier are the sword and pistol of this modern highwayman, the capitalist. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

The difference between these opposed theories of the State can be put in another way. According to the social-democratic theory, all the various democratic rights which the British people possess—the right to vote, to form trade unions and political parties, to freedom of

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Capitalism* (1956), p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Lecture entitled “True and False Society” (1888).

speech and so on—give them the power to exercise effective control over the State apparatus, and make it representative of the popular will. According to the Marxist view, on the other hand, while all these democratic rights are of the greatest value because they have enabled the working class to build up the modern labour movement and continually to strengthen it, they are essentially *concessions* which the working class in the course of prolonged and hard-fought struggles has wrested from a reluctant capitalist class, and they have not prevented the State from continuing to function as the instrument of the capitalists.

Some social democrats do not deny that the Marxist theory fits the facts in certain capitalist countries. Britain, they claim, is different; a democratic country can only function properly if its citizens possess the spirit of political compromise, and the British have that spirit in a highly developed form. Thus G. D. H. Cole has suggested that in advanced industrial countries, such as Britain, "with a strong tradition of political compromise", it may be possible for the working class to achieve socialism without having to make revolutionary changes in the State machinery.<sup>1</sup> The Marxist view, on the other hand, is that Britain is not fundamentally different in this respect from other capitalist countries, although the British State certainly does possess some unique characteristics.

The theory of the State is of the greatest practical importance, because the most far-reaching conclusions about the advance to socialism depend on it. If the State is already representative of the whole nation, it must follow that any expansion in the activities of the State, whether in the form of nationalisation, extended social services, or additional controls over private industry, is a step towards socialism. Mr. Morrison put this very clearly when he said in 1950 that socialism was

"the assertion of social responsibility for matters which are properly of social concern. . . . The assertion of social responsibility, and therefore the principle of socialism, is also effected in all the work of economic planning and control, the social provision for the young and the old, the sick and the unemployed, education and housing. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

And Mr. Aneurin Bevan, referring to the national health service

<sup>1</sup> *The Meaning of Marxism* (1948), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Labour Party Conference, 1950.

introduced by the Labour Government, has described it as "a piece of genuine, undiluted socialism".<sup>1</sup>

This is the traditional, evolutionary view which was championed so effectively by the Fabian Society in the past. As the State has gradually extended its functions, it was argued, so has progress towards socialism been gradually made within capitalist society. Edward Pease, secretary of the Fabian Society for twenty-five years, wrote in his history of the Society:

"The Fabians regarded socialism as a principle already embodied in the constitution of society, gradually extending its influence. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

If this is so, it follows that the task of a socialist government is simply to continue—no doubt at a faster rate than before—the good work of expanding social services and nationalising industries which had already been started by previous Conservative and Liberal Governments; and it is not required to make any basic changes in the existing machinery of the State.

On the other hand, if the Marxist theory is correct—and we believe it is—and the existing machinery of the State is an instrument which has been evolved to preserve capitalism, it cannot be used for the entirely different purpose of creating a planned economy based on the principle of production for use. There will have to be a fundamental transformation of the State in order to build a socialist society. It follows that until the people under the leadership of the working class begin to transform the old capitalist State into their own socialist State, which they can use to organise a planned economy and to prevent any attempts at violent revolt by the capitalist class, they cannot begin to build socialism.

The kind of fundamental transformation which is required will become clear in the course of this book as the various organs of the British State are examined in turn.

<sup>1</sup>*Reynolds News*, May 6, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> *History of the Fabian Society* (1916), p. 240.

## CHAPTER II

# THE MARXIST THEORY AND THE BRITISH STATE

### I. THE THEORY IN OUTLINE

MARX and Engels held that, in order to understand the State in capitalist society, it was necessary to approach the problem historically and see how the State first arose.

Historical study shows that the State has not existed from all eternity. In early tribal society, where economic development had not yet reached the stage where society could produce a surplus, the conditions for the exploitation of man by man did not exist. This is the stage of human society described by Marx as "primitive communism"; and a careful study of such societies has shown that there did not then exist any special apparatus for the subjugation of people by force. There were no permanent armed forces, police, prisons or law courts.

"We find the predominance of custom, authority, respect, the power enjoyed by the elders of the tribe . . . but nowhere do we find a special category of people who are set apart to rule others."<sup>1</sup>

It was only at a comparatively recent stage of human development, when the techniques of production were sufficiently advanced to produce a surplus of wealth above the level of bare subsistence, so that a minority of the population began to accumulate private property and society began to divide into antagonistic classes—it was only then that the State came into existence.<sup>2</sup>

Every new class which has raised itself to the position of the ruling class—whether slave-owning, feudal, or capitalist—has established a different kind of State apparatus, of which the essential purpose has been the same: to safeguard, through the exercise of coercive power, its right to exploit the labour of the oppressed class—slaves, peasant serfs, or wage-earners as the case may be. When in turn the working

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *Lecture on the State* (1919).

<sup>2</sup> Engels wrote a fascinating study of the rise of private property and the State in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884).



class raises itself to the position of the ruling class it also creates a new form of State, a socialist State, which for the first time in history represents the interests of the vast majority of the population. The building of a planned socialist society, based on the public ownership of the means of production, puts an end to the exploitation of man by man, and the gradual disappearance of the capitalist class ends the division of society into antagonistic classes. The coercive machinery of the State becomes less and less necessary as socialism is established, so that the way is prepared for the withering away of the State. In the words of Engels:

“The society which organises production anew on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers will put the whole State machinery where it will then belong—into the museum of antiquities, next the spinning wheel and the bronze axe.”<sup>1</sup>

The term “dictatorship of the proletariat” was used by Marx to describe the new form of State which the working class would have to establish in order to begin the building of a socialist society. Although the word “dictatorship” is nowadays associated in the minds of most people with the absolute power exercised by a single individual, it is clear from the whole of Marx’s writings on the State that this was the very last thing he had in mind. He meant that the working class, being the great majority of the population, would need to use the coercive power of the socialist State against the capitalist class, just as the latter had always used the coercive power of their State—which he called the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, whether it took the form of an absolute monarchy, a military dictatorship or a parliamentary democracy—against the working class. Lenin emphasised again and again in his writings on the State<sup>2</sup> that nothing could be more dangerous or misleading than to imagine that socialism could be established at a single blow. On the contrary, the transition to socialism would require a whole epoch, and in many ways the construction of a socialist society would be even more difficult than the task of winning the revolutionary struggle for political power which preceded it, for there was a danger that the defeated capitalists would at first resist even more strongly than they did before the revolution. For this reason

<sup>1</sup> *Origin of the Family* (1884).

<sup>2</sup> Lenin’s principal works on the State, where the Marxist theory is fully expounded, are *The State and Revolution* (1917) and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1917).