

INTELLECTUALS AND TRANSNATIONAL CAPITAL

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The problem posed

It has become a commonplace in discussions of the international political situation during the **1970s** and **1980s** to argue that socialism, defined both in terms of a series of doctrines and arguments as well as social movements and political parties, has been on the defensive. Socialism has appeared to retreat and move towards a position of intellectual retrenchment in the face of the onslaughts of the restructuring of capital and the social relations of production on a global scale. The changes which have taken place have helped to reinforce the positional advantage of the dominant ideologies within the capitalist system. This has appeared to shift the terrain of contestability in prevailing political discourse to the right, with the ostensible return to dominance of ideologies of *economic liberalism*, and cold war (at least for much of the **1980s**). This has been linked to the neo-liberal advocacy of the reconstitution of state power to restore a more hospitable world-wide investment climate for capital, especially financial capital.

One way to explain these complex changes may be to explore how policy is made at the interface between domestic and international aspects of rule within and between the major capitalist states. To date, most Marxist analysis has mainly concentrated on the former. Where work has analysed the international dimension of this question, it has generally been from the viewpoint of classical theories of imperialism or from world systems analysis (both discussed and **criticised** below). However, little empirical work, using primary, rather than secondary sources, has been **carried** out on the transnational aspects of the formation of classes and strategies of **rule** by internationalist fractions of capital and the state apparatus.'

This essay cannot deal with the vast range of evidence needed to explain these issues with any degree of plausibility. However, it will examine one necessary aspect of any approach to understanding such complex questions. It attempts to do this through an investigation of the way in which leading fractions of the bourgeoisie of a range of major capitalist nations have sought, and under certain conditions have succeeded in, international co-operation in the co-ordination of policy. A part of this process entails the epistemology, ideology and techniques of policy conceptualisation and elite

interaction. A framework within which these aspects of elite and ruling class consciousness come together on a transnational basis is in what can be called, in **Gramscian** terms, ideological apparatuses, both formal (e.g. the OECD) and informal (e.g. the Trilateral Commission). The development of strategic consciousness is part of a much wider process of elite interaction which is aimed at the synchronisation and possibly the synthesis of conceptions of the world political economy, and of domestic **rule**. This needs to be understood as an ongoing process under conditions of rapid global change. This is a necessary prerequisite for a series of initiatives which have sought to establish the hegemony of internationally-oriented fractions of capital.

The normative or subjective dimension of the power of capital involves, for example, the salience and political effectiveness of ideas and theories concerning the desirability and necessity of private capital accumulation as the source of wealth, well-being, growth and prosperity. In broader terms, it encompasses the primacy of ideas based upon possessive individualism, rather than collectivist views concerning the constitution of society. Material dimensions of capital's power involve the privileged access to or control over certain state capacities as well as the more basic control over the means of production. At the international level, this dimension includes the scale, scarcity and mobility of private transnational capital *vis-à-vis* the state, 'national capital', and much organised labour. However, the two dimensions are only analytically separate, since much depends upon the consciousness and mobilisational capacities of capital, state and labour, and the perception of leaders and led of the 'limits of the possible' which may inhere in a range of situations, and which may constrain action.²

The developments of the past 20 years are, of course, by no means straightforward. They include contradictions, even for those interests which appear to have benefited most from the global conditions of the 1970s and 1980s. For example, as some of the more far-sighted intellectuals associated with such interests have been swift to point out, the rising power of large-scale, international-mobile capital has gone with global macroeconomic instability and the perversity of a situation where capital has been drained from many of the most needy economies to the most powerful, helping to cut dramatically living standards and thus contributing indirectly to the bleak outlook for economic development in many parts of the world.³ A side-effect of this depressing economic atmosphere is its pernicious contribution to further environmental depredation and ecological catastrophe, although the record of most of the Communist states in this regard has been even more appalling and catastrophic. Nevertheless, contradictory aspects of international market forces, allied to myopic policies on the part of private and public international banks, from the point of view of international capital, undermine the long-term investment climate and the future prospects for more stable accumulation on a world-wide basis.

Prevailing Orthodoxies and Alternative Visions

The prevailing orthodoxy of the ruling forces is based on the doctrine of economic liberalism, with its stress on efficiency and competition and the primacy of the private sector in economic and social life. Its international perspective is drawn from a synthesis of 'transnational' liberalism and **neo-realism**.

There are two distinct vantage points from within this perspective. These are, respectively, 'pure' and 'compensatory' **liberals**.⁴ The former, drawing on the inspiration of the likes of F. A. von Hayek, sees the market as a spontaneous human institution, a source of vitality, motivation, progress and wealth; as such, the state's role should be to act as a nightwatchman, protecting market freedoms or creating the conditions for competitive markets to prevail on a world-wide basis. Much of the thinking of this strand was associated with the market-monetarist policies which were widely pursued during the **1970s** and much of the 1980s. This is a position which has been recently strongly associated with the short-term and often speculative interests of **financial** fractions of capital, as well as with some Reaganite cold warriors at the political level.

'Pure' liberalism is, however, intellectually and politically countervailed by 'compensatory' liberalism, which, like most radical writings in political economy, makes more allowance for market imperfections and the externalities generated by free market forces: thus, *à la* Keynes, the market should be steered to protect capitalism from its own tendency to **self-destruct**. This viewpoint has been associated with a range of centrist forces over the last two decades. It emphasises a longer-term, more productivist vision, which is heavily critical of the neglect of the social, **ecological** and political aspects of development of 'pure' liberalism. Compensatory liberals have therefore frequently attacked the wildcat **free-marketism** of the first Reagan electoral coalition of 1980 using this type of argument. The social democratic variant of this line of denunciation, one which shares many of the assumptions of the 'compensatory' perspective but which is more welfarist in emphasis, is represented in the activities and proposals of the Brandt, **Palme** and Brundtland Commissions.

At any one moment, of course, the actual policy stance of a particular country will depend on a balance of political and material forces, and intellectual influences. In the first Reagan administration, for example, economic policy shifted towards the 'pure' position, although it had substantial Keynesian elements (**e.g.** big budget deficits). From the mid-1980s onward, however, US policies have gravitated back to the more 'compensatory' viewpoint of the East Coast Establishment, and have become **more congruent** with the international orientations of centrist parties in Western Europe and with those of the Japan Liberal Democratic and Socialist Parties. This is the general position taken on the world economy by the bulk of the

most strategically and politically conscious members of the international establishments', and the majority of Trilateral Commissioners.

At the international level, this type of stance implies ongoing co-operation with allies and the co-ordination of economic (and where possible **politico-strategic**) policies. Underlying this point of view is a view of changed international conditions, quintessentially represented by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's concept of 'complex **interdependence**'.⁵ This concept implies a vision of international relations where military-security definitions are given less prominence than in the traditionalist realpolitik concepts of international rivalry and order, so that a range of other social forces—ecological, economic, technological, cultural – and the transnational interactions they are bound up with, create a more complex structure of international relations, with no clear-cut hierarchy of foreign policy issues. In traditional terms this means that the 'high politics' of security may fall from the summit of the international agenda. The 'actors' involved in this structurally new situation include not only governments, but also transnational companies, international **organisations** and non-governmental organisations and networks.

Taken together, the theory and practice of this constellation of forces which comprise the perspective (theoretical, practical and material) of 'compensatory' or 'transnational' liberalism (**i.e.** conducive to the long-term and politically stable growth in the structural power of transnational capital) can be said to be dominant in the global political economy. Its frame of reference largely sets the international agenda and informs the policies of many states and international organisations. This is to say that it has allies drawn from the ranks of the dominant factions in the centrist and right-wing political parties and elements within the state bureaucracies of the major capitalist countries and in key international organisations. It also has adherents from the ranks of privileged elements of organised labour in both the metropolitan and developing capitalist countries. Moreover, we have now arrived at a moment in history where some Western political leaders and capitalists are speaking of the urgent need for a new 'Marshall Plan' for Eastern Europe and an 'Okita Plan' for the Third World (Saburo Okita was the master-mind behind much of Japan's post-war economic **planning**).⁶ The goal of these initiatives would be to widen the ambit of this constellation or bloc of forces to encompass the globe politically. I call this constellation a transnational historic bloc, since it is rooted in material as well as ideological structures which have global reach, and which are strongly associated with the political programme of transnational capital.'

Such a transnational bloc then, is a synergy of powerful elements at the level of ideas, institutions and material forces, and, for much of the **1980s**, has only been significantly countervailed by either the 'pure' liberal vision of speculative financial capital, or by other more nationalist and **security-oriented** forces of the centre and right, for example those associated with the United States' security complex, which pressed in the late 1970s and early

1980s for renewed policies of Cold War *vis-à-vis* the USSR. By contrast, the prevailing elements of transnational capital would wish to open up the Soviet and China trades, integrate these countries gradually into international capital and exchange markets, and thus begin to subject them increasingly to the rule of capital. This transnationalist goal has, for example, already been made clear in the strategies of the IMF, the Paris Club, by most western governments and by the private banks in the management of the Third World debt crisis as it affects Latin America and the larger debtor countries. Despite the limitations and hesitations concerned with this process, it represents an important moment in the development of a collective strategic consciousness on the part of financial fractions of capital in the 1980s.⁸

The need for the left, and its allies, to move swiftly on the questions and challenges of the 1990s is indicated by the fact that the prevailing forces in the global political economy are already well aware of the potential of many **counter-hegemonic** movements, and will undoubtedly begin to develop strategies so as to co-opt them. This possibility was recently suggested in an article which appeared in the American Establishment journal *Foreign Policy*. Its author stressed that the prevailing political forces in the West and in Japan had better pay attention to and come to terms with the changes which are now taking place in the Third World, so as to channel their development in the future:

The great cultural upheavals of the twentieth century – rapid population growth, urbanisation, the advent of modern technology and the spread of Western commercialism – have stretched and often dismantled traditional Third World religious, tribal and village organisations already gravely weakened by the impact of colonialism. In the resulting organisational vacuum a new generation of **grass-roots** groups has steadily, albeit unevenly, risen up since mid-century with particularly impressive growth over the past two decades. Driving this growth have been stagnant or deteriorating economic and environmental conditions for the poor, the failure of governments to respond to basic needs, the spread of new social ideologies and religious doctrines, and the political space opened up in some countries as tight fistled dictators have given way to more permissive political systems – even nascent democracies.⁹

Theorising the International and the Global

One reason why Western socialists have not transcended an inward-looking metropolitanism may be because of a failure of orthodox socialist theory, if not of socialist vision. For whatever reasons, during much of the last two decades, many socialist perspectives on international relations have failed to develop in such a way that they are able to capture adequately the nature of global transformations. This is perhaps because many recent writers have been constrained by the dominant heritage of earlier theories of imperialism. The classical theories of imperialism – inspired by Lenin, Bukharin and Hilferding – were developed at a period when interaction between nation-states, acting in a militarist-mercantilist way to further the interests of their own monopoly capital, seemed to be the primary manifestation of international conflict.¹⁰ These classical theories, developed earlier this century, may thus imply

an inability to conceptualise important questions in global terms. Most classical views have a tendency to **reify** the interstate system, seeing national capitalist classes and states as particular and relatively fixed configurations in a wider system of permanent inter-imperialist rivalry and crisis. Such views counterpose the forces of socialisation and the expansion of capital on a world scale (that is a world market which unifies the globe) with the national class structures and identities which politically divide it – at least until working class forces triumph on a world scale. In this view, international co-operation between capitalists is, in the long-term, theoretically impossible.

An appropriate inference to draw is then, that classical theories have in-built theoretical limitations when applied to present-day capitalism. This is now a more complex and **politically** flexible **transnational** system. Moreover, it is a system where the identification of a nation-state with the material interests of its own 'national capital' is more problematic. In economic terms, this system is increasingly constituted by a deepening interpenetration of capital, both functionally and geographically. This reflects both changes in consumption and production patterns, increasing flows of foreign direct investment within the golden **triangle** of metropolitan capitalism, and the **intensifying** integration of international financial and capital markets under the aegis of the Bretton Woods system. At the political level, there is a policy interdependence which is the counterpart to the economic internationalisation processes, as well as more integral, and more organic alliance structures binding the major capitalist nations together under American leadership, although the decline of the Cold War may begin to erode a primary military justification for **this**.¹¹

None the less, there are often, as I have noted above, considerable divisions between and among more internationally-oriented and nationally-oriented class fractions and associated political constellations. Given the long peace and relative prosperity of the post-1945 period in the capitalist core – in contrast to the international instability and militarism for much of the earlier part of the century – the centripetal forces noted above have had a cumulative if uneven structural impact on the system. Of course, these forces were accompanied by cut-throat competition in the recessionary conditions of the 1970s and **1980s**, which is likely to intensify in the **1990s**. In addition, some have argued that the phenomenal internationalisation of financial capital since the late **1960s** is leading or has led to the apparent delinking of production from the monetary and exchange structures. Others suggest that the system is becoming less and less stable and is losing any claim to legitimacy and moral credibility. The crashes of the late 1980s and the gyrations of international capital and exchange markets are taken as evidence for this. On the other hand, the management of the October 1987 crash, the handling of the 1982 Mexican crisis, and the ongoing containment of the debt crises of the 1980s may be taken as evidence of vastly enhanced surveillance and managerial capacity at the international level, in contrast, say, with the

1930s. In other words, the contradictory dynamics of capitalism mean that centrifugal forces are always likely to be in tension with centripetal ones. The key question here is whether these contradictions **can** be politically managed, and if **so**, by whom and for what purposes?

What I am arguing, therefore, is that the post-war system cannot be accurately characterised in the terms used by the classical theorists: thus it is not simply 'ultra-imperialism' under a new guise: a shift from the hegemonic ultra-imperialism of American leadership to a more tripartite system of global management. Rather, these terms may be anachronistic because the system has novel elements, not least of which is the degree of institutionalisation and informal and formal communication which takes place at the elite level between the state managers and major capitalists in the biggest capitalist countries. In this context, I think it is fair to say that whilst there is no international capitalist class per **se**, there is an intersecting set of establishments drawn from these countries, who together with the leaders of international **organisations** are linked to twin processes we **can** call the internationalisation of the state and its social counterpart, the internationalisation of civil society. Whilst the primary determinants of the international policies of capitalist states are still to be found mainly at the domestic level, the process is becoming tendentially internationalised. What is implied here, therefore, is a set of processes which are helping to generate and partly to configure both political and socio-economic changes which are transforming the globe.

Moreover, it is worth remembering that Marxists have no monopoly of wisdom in theorising the international. The theories of international relations from the perspective of the Establishment and associated dominant fractions of transnational capital has a degree of plausibility and salience lacking in many Marxist writings. Drawing upon concepts of complex interdependence, international regimes (for example in money, trade, exchange rate management) and stressing the importance of international institutions, some of the better writing from the Establishment perspective reflects three possibilities in terms of the appreciation of contemporary conditions. First, they appreciate the possibility of the changes in the nature of the state and indeed in **the** structure of international relations, that is the significance of historical transformations (although their appreciation of the depth and nature of such transformations may be limited). Second, they reflect the capacity to conceptualise such transformations. Third, they reflect or imply **a political** programme to regularise or to contain the contradictions which exist at the global level between a politically divided and constituted world of different territorial units and sovereignties on the one hand; and on the other, the social forces which are transnational or global in nature, such as those of economy and culture. In other words in these mainstream, and hegemonic viewpoints, there is some sensitivity to the problems of history, space and time in their views of modern international relations, although their major

theoretical weakness is the absence of a deeper understanding and therefore integration of the social dimension of economic and political **co-ordination**.

Similar criticisms can be made concerning a second and influential current in Marxist theories of international relations: the world systems theory of Immanuel **Wallerstein**.¹² Wallerstein's theorisation or model has already been **criticised** in the *Socialist Register* and elsewhere as representing a neo-Smithian Marxism, that its major theoretical weaknesses relate to the model's concentration on exchange relations, and because of Wallerstein's perspective of development in a largely Euro-centric **world-view**.¹³ A preoccupation was to assess the propensity to war **amongst** the major capitalist states, a prospect which in today's historical circumstances, looks somewhat remote (in contrast to the Third World where there have been over 160 wars since 1945 and inter-and intra-state violence often appears endemic).

In **Bukharin's** formulation of *inter-national* relations the conflict between capitalist states necessarily took the form of a mercantilist-militarism, its virulence reinforced by jingoistic nationalist ideologies, with each rival capitalist state forced towards conflict by the domestic imperatives of accumulation. We might here note briefly that the very term 'international' was **coined** in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. By contrast, now there are emerging a range of new alternatives in Marxist theorisations of international relations, such as the work of the French Regulationist School (of **Aglietta** and Lipietz), and that of the Dutch School based around the Amsterdam School of International Relations.

My way of approaching these questions is through social forces analysis. This takes as our basic units of analysis and constituting elements in international relations not nation states or an inter-state system, but sets of basic social forces (ideas, institutions and material capacities) which operate and interact at a number of levels: the level or the structure of production, that of state-civil society complexes and at that of particular, historically specific systems of world order. Under certain conditions these social forces may interact and fuse together to generate what **Gramsci** called historic blocs, at either the national or international level. This type of analysis, partly inspired by Robert Cox's reading, avoids conflating the different types of socio-economic structures in the world into the logic of a single world system comprising a **core**, periphery and **semi-periphery**.¹⁴ The strength of the Wallersteinian approach, of course, is to theorise international relations from a global vantage point; its political shortcoming, however, is its determinism which dooms most of the world's populations to eternal peripheralisation and dependency. This perspective is associated with and was inspired by **André Gunder Frank's** early work. Much of the writing on dependency theory suggests policies of intellectual, economic and political delinking from the global capitalist system, at a time when communications flows and ecological problems have a growing global dimension. Under contemporary conditions this is the approach of the ostrich: instead of theorising dialectically the

political possibilities for development and change from a more global vantage point, a narrow and rather exclusive national path is often prescribed.

The project of Trilateralism

As I have noted, in classical Marxist theories of imperialism, the analytical focus was the identification of the contradictions in the international relations of the advanced capitalist nations around the period of World War I, when capitalist production was organised on a primarily national basis, under the domination of 'monopoly capital'. Little systematic attention was paid to the development of the political economy implicit in the work of **Gramsci**, which allows us to develop a new form of historical materialism which can be applied to the constitution and development of international relations under contemporary **conditions**.¹⁵ In this sense, some types of international order can be considered hegemonic, **that** is where a relatively stable congruence of social forces is sustained at the levels of production, state-civil society and world order. Examples of this are the *pax britanica* and the *pax americana*. By contrast the inter-war period of extreme international instability and conflict was non-hegemonic, with a lack of congruence at each of the three analytical levels.

We can use also this method to analyse and explain the activities of the Trilateral Commission, and what I would call the project of Trilateralism. This project has for its historical origins the crises of Western capitalism and of the post-war hegemonic order which began to manifest themselves in the late **1960s** and early 1970s. The first thing to be said in this regard is that it would be erroneous to suppose or to accept what has become the conventional wisdom on both sides of the Atlantic and indeed in Japan, that the international power and hegemony of the United States **declined** substantially during the 1970s and 1980s; and that this thereby opened up the possibility of a disintegration of the post-war global political economy and its associated international economic order into something resembling economic **blocs** or spheres of influence as occurred in the 1930s. Rather it is my contention that the centrality of the United States in a global political economy has changed, partly due to the internationalisation of economic activity within the United States so that in some respects American centrality within the system of global capitalism has been **re-emphasised**. Thus many of the arguments concerning 'hegemonic decline', associated with writers such as Paul Kennedy, David Calleo and Robert Keohane are misdirected and **erroneous**.¹⁶ Indeed, if we associate the capacity to dominate in the future with knowledge-based high technology industries, and if, as many analysts now suspect, the financial surpluses of Japan will begin to decline substantially **during the 1990s**, the prospects for sustained American international power are good. Indeed, American centrality in the global political economy is also associated with the widespread use of English, the lead the US has in global communications and in the media industries,

and with US primacy in the global security structure, a fact underlined by the defensiveness and **military** retrenchment of Gorbachev's USSR. There is no obvious alternative **hegemon**, understood in the conventional **terminology** of international relations, although a reconstructed and more integrated EEC, with a much more developed and independent military capacity might, in the twenty-first century, become a candidate. However, this is to theorise the problem in terms of inter-state interactions, whereas the forces of transnationalisation make this simple identification between state and capital more and more problematic, even for Japan, the most clearly mercantilist and nationalist of the major capitalist **countries**.

An alternative **theorisation** might therefore be to say that the period in question can be best characterised as a 'crisis of hegemony', that is a crisis or transformation which involves a structural reordering of the post-war politico-economic system and with it the political consensus between the prevailing elements in the state and civil societies of the major capitalist nations. This system was politically constructed during the period of the *pax americana* after 1945. In other words the crisis in question is not a crisis in American power *per se*; rather, it is a change in the relationship between key social forces within the constitution of the global capitalist order, a change manifested in different ways in various societies.

Theorists of American decline point to the evidence that the USA is now the world's largest debtor and has become dependent on infusions of Japanese savings to finance its government activity. However, by late 1989 Bush was apparently embarking on a considerable reduction of US military expenditures in order to reduce the US fiscal deficit and to begin to construct the domestic conditions for tackling the problem of international macroeconomic imbalances. Bush and his Secretary of State, James Baker III, now stress more comprehensive co-operation with the major allies (**especially** Japan and West Germany), and a move towards an internationally defined reconstruction of the European political settlement. A large number of plans are currently emanating from government and business circles designed to rebuild Eastern Europe and the Third World politically and economically. Noteworthy here is that, in contrast to the Marshall Plan, both sets of initiatives imply the multilateralisation of financing with large contributions from US allies, especially Japan. In other words, these forces are conscious of the opportunities inherent in the new conjuncture in Europe and elsewhere and are engaged in theoretical-practical activity to shape the course of future events.

Trilateralism needs therefore to be understood as an ongoing set of processes and policy practices in this type of context. With its emphasis on the steering of the market and the need for compensatory and at times redistributive mechanisms and for some international planning as well as crisis management on a discretionary basis, it is a neo-Keynesian attempt to stabilise the global capitalist system in a period of rapid change. In this sense,

the importance of the application of strategic (rather than purely technocratic) consciousness is stressed heavily in the Trilateral Commission's documents and **publications**.¹⁷ Comprehensive global institutions, such as a world central bank, have yet to be endorsed. Instead, Trilateralists stress the strengthening of existing international organisations such as the OECD, the IMF and the World Bank, and the institutionalisation of co-operation, co-ordination and consistency of policy apparatuses so as to 'manage' interdependence. In an era of transformation, the aim is to provide a **kind** of political gyroscope in order to sustain stability amid transformations and contradictions which may have a centrifugal and destabilising impact upon the nature of the system. For such an effort to be possible, this involves consciousness and action at a number of different levels in the system: local, national, regional, global. The effort necessarily encompasses a wide range of questions: economic, political, cultural. These questions have been considered in terms of immediate problems of crisis management, and in terms of long-term structural developments.

The Trilateral **Commission** was created in 1972 by David Rockefeller. Rockefeller drew together a substantial group of eminent individuals from the United States, Western Europe and Japan to his home in **Pocantico Mills** in New York State's Hudson Valley. This group then consulted with leading elements at the most senior levels in their respective countries to see if there would be support for a new private international relations council, for the first time including the Japanese on a multilateral and co-equal basis. The immediate catalyst for the creation of the Commission was disquiet (or outrage) within internationalist circles both in the United States and overseas at the policies of the **Nixon** administration in the early 1970s. It has become a historical commonplace to suggest that these policies represented the repudiation of the post-war liberal universalism of the United States with respect to the international economic order, and a retrenchment of American economic policy in the direction of economic nationalism. The policies in question also directly and severely damaged important European and Japanese interests.

Private international relations councils of this **kind** have a long lineage. Chronologically, we can identify a number of different contexts in which these councils have emerged. The first of these is what might be called the Anglo-Saxon context, that is, councils originating in the late nineteenth century and continuing during the inter-war years, for example the Round Tables inspired by British imperialists like Cecil Rhodes. A second, Atlantic, context emerged after 1918 and more pervasively after 1945 as in the Bilderberg meetings and the Atlantic Institute. This was inspired by a mixture of the American currents of Wilsonian liberalism, the subsequent internationalisation of certain New Deal ideas, and their eventual fusion with the ideas of European supra-nationalists, federalists and functionalists like Jean Monnet, the founding father of the EEC. Similar but less influential

groups also developed in the Pacific, after 1945, but these were more closely associated with the bilateral relations of the USA and Japan (e.g. Shimoda meetings in the late 1960s; the 'Wisemen's' Groups founded by President Carter and Prime Minister Ohira). During the 1980s these forums have widened to include other Pacific nations. The unique Trilateral context, however, forges together both Atlantic and Pacific flanks of this type of activity. The substantial weight and status of the individuals in these groups is reflected in the membership of the Trilateral Commission, as well as the Atlantic Institute (which has now broadened its membership to incorporate some Japanese). In the shadow of the Trilateral Commission we have seen the development of such forums in the Euro-Pacific context, after 1976, with the so called Hakone meetings.

The general purpose of these councils is to provide a politico-educational framework for the internationalisation of the outlook of political leaders drawn from each of these regions. They involve attempts to promote a kind of cognitive shift of outlook of members, away from a short-term, more nationalist viewpoint, towards a more cosmopolitan, long-term one. These councils generally have, as a point of origin, the energy and motivation of a single individual or small group of individuals with some political weight in internationalist circles. In various ways these founders were able to bring together diverse individuals and interests for what was seen as common purposes: they had an idea whose 'time had come' as well as the wherewithal to promote it effectively. In this sense the forging of diverse interests for a common civilisational purpose is the positive side of an elite ideological process. On the negative side these councils are vehicles for the absorption of political frictions between constituent elements: that is at a minimum they enable the understanding of conflicts of position and interest, and provide a channel of communication, as it were an early warning system for political threats to the cohesion of the alliances that such councils reflect and to a certain extent embody.

The way this is achieved, for example in the Trilateral Commission, is by bringing together diverse individuals from the USA, Canada, Japan and the EEC countries (except Greece), who communicate through different, but none the less commensurable academic traditions mainly drawn from liberalism, functionalism and neo-realist theories of international relations. This goal is pursued in a rather unique way, since these efforts combine the work of scholars, policy experts and politicians from each of these nations, to create some type of common vision of how the political economy works, what its key problems are, why these problems exist, how they may be approached collectively, and perhaps solved. In general, when looking at the membership of the Trilateral Commission and indeed some of the other institutions which have been mentioned, the interests represented are those of the internationally oriented

fractions of capital, their allies and associates in the state apparatus, and in the mainstream political parties of the centre. Younger, up-and-coming, future leaders are groomed under the guidance of the established patriarchs and policy intellectuals of high status and of considerable experience.

The Trilateral **Commission** is more than just a debating chamber or a gentlemen's dinner club (very few women have been members): it is, in Gramscian terms, an ideological apparatus with a range of dimensions to its activity. As has been mentioned, central to its purpose is to advance the process of the internationalisation of outlook of members. This is attempted by creating a **forum** (and many others exist) for the forging of a transnational political identity. More concretely, this is attempted through a series of meetings, research activities, consultations and social events. However, the most important of these activities are meetings, held over 3-4 days in rotation in each of the three 'regions' and involving between 200 and 250 of its members and other invited guests and observers (the latter usually drawn from staff members of the American National Security Council, foundations, sometimes from other governments and the establishment press). At these meetings, all addressed by the heads of state and government of the host nation, as well as senior cabinet ministers, the debates are intense. The debates focus upon immediate questions of crisis management, as well as longer term trends affecting the relations between these regions, and the rest of the world. The debates are organised around the task force reports, which are substantial pieces of research written by three to five experts drawn from each of the regions. The authors' work is carried out collectively with a larger group of theorists and practitioners in the task forces. Their objective, where possible, is to try and synthesise a collective position which can serve as the basis for potential agreement about certain types common problems or international **questions**.¹⁸

This kind of process is, however, relatively indirect with respect to the precise contours of policy. It is really designed to help set the agenda and to develop operative or practical concepts which can be applied in discussions and debates and policy considerations in each region. These efforts are better seen as part of an ongoing process of attempting to incorporate immediate and long term developments into the common framework of thought and, at least potentially, a common concept of action.

At this point it is worth stressing the types of intellectuals who are, and who are not involved in this process. Those excluded from the process are those who might be called the literati and, of course, members of the left-wing intelligentsia, as well as those of the far right or indeed neo-conservatives like Irving Kristol (who is mildly supportive of the Trilateral Commission) and Norman Podhoretz. Also largely notable by their absence are the extreme free marketeers of the Hoover Institution, or some elements of the Adam Smith Institute in Britain. The types of intellectuals - what Gramsci called

organic intellectuals – are involved because of their ability to combine theoretical and practical aspects of their activity, and to articulate these within the major discourses which I have mentioned above. They are also chosen because they sit in prominent positions within wider intellectual networks, and partly because of their vantage point from within a particular discipline.

A good example of the latter is Samuel P. Huntington, one of the authors of a very controversial Commission report, *The Crisis of Democracy*.¹⁹ Huntington became President of the American Political Science Association in 1987, he is also the Director of the **Harvard** Center for International Affairs, and has served in a number of governments. Another Commissioner, **Kinhide Mushakoji** is a **former** President of the International Political Science Association. In other words, Commission intellectual networks are based on an international circle of theorists and policy specialists who are often at the summit of their discipline and who usually direct major academic institutes. Many of these theorists are also important practitioners who have held high political office. Examples of such figures include **Zbigniew Brzezinski**, Henry Kissinger and Saburo **Okita**. Other major political leaders have also written important Trilateral Commission publications, such as Yashuhiro Nakasone and **Valéry Giscard d'Estaing**.²⁰

Commission networks are associated with high powered research institutes such as the **Brookings** Institution, (to a lesser extent) the American Enterprise Institute, the Institute of International Economics, the British Policy Studies Institute, and the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, and its counterparts in other Trilateral nations. They are also associated with major American Ivy League Universities, with the ultra-prestigious Tokyo and **Harvard** Universities having many members. The Commission's intellectual networks also encompass important theorists from international economic organisations, such as the IMF and the World Bank, and from the OECD. American academics are very influential in framing the approaches of the Commission, but they are by no means the only important element. All in **all** the intellectual activity of the Commission is a truly transnational enterprise. As has been noted many members of the Trilateral Commission have had an important role to play in the framing of policy in each of its member countries, since many members hold or have held high political office (with the UK being a partial exception during the Thatcher years). It is well known that Trilateral Commissioners filled virtually all senior positions during the Carter administration, less well known that Trilateral Commissioners have also been influential in the (second) Reagan administration, and also in the Bush administration, with President Bush himself an ex-member.

Whilst American members are probably the most influential, Trilateral Commissioners have filled a significant number of high offices in other countries. For example in Japan, three members, Nohubiko Ushiba, Kiichi Miyazawa and Saburo Okita, have all at one time or another held the Foreign Ministry portfolio, and each has been an important figure in the shaping

of post-war Japanese foreign economic policy. Indeed Saburo Okita is the architect of a major Japanese initiative designed to recycle Japanese capital overseas to help deal with the debt crisis during the **1990s**. This initiative, encouraged from within the Trilateral Commission during the **mid-1980s**, is currently being more widely discussed and debated, and is now called the Okita **Plan**.²¹ Other important figures have included Lord **Carrington**, former Secretary General of NATO, and a host of others drawn from each of the member countries. All in all Commission members have been directly or indirectly involved in the making and co-ordination of the foreign and economic policies of most of the Trilateral member countries since at least the early **1970s**.

Corporate networks and affiliations are at the highest levels of blue chip corporate capital and in major international banks, other financial concerns, insurance companies, media and telecommunications/informatics, agribusiness, aerospace and some military-industrial and trading companies. Some of the affiliations are listed below, but it is worth mentioning here that in some countries there is a substantial interchange and rotation between the government, bureaucracy and corporate sector, as well as between academia and think-tanks and government. This phenomenon is well-known and documented in the US case and increasingly so in **Japan**.²² Because of the processes of the internationalisation of production and exchange, as well as through the aegis of international organisations and in **private** councils like the Trilateral Commission, these networks have gradually begun to internationalise, particularly as the post-war generation of Japanese leaders is now slowly giving way to a second generation. Much of this more recent generation had some if not all of its post-graduate education abroad, usually in the American Ivy League school, or at their educational counterparts in Europe, such as the London School of Economics, Oxford, or the University of Paris. This enables senior Japanese to communicate and interact more effectively than was the case even 10 years ago.

The Commission has discussed virtually all important questions of international relations which have surfaced since its inception in 1973. The issues which the Commission has addressed have concerned the political management of global economic forces in a period where it was widely assumed that the power of the United States, the **hegemon** of the **system**, has been in substantial relative decline. In this sense it is argued that a sharing of responsibilities, amongst the Trilateral nations, is necessary, to generate fruitful forms of co-operation and the possibility of an enduring political coalition which provides the means to place some rational control over global economic forces. As a number of the examples cited earlier in this essay indicate, this is by no **means** straightforward. In the early phases of the Commission's existence, Commissioners were generally pessimistic about the international outlook as well as preoccupied with the domestic problems of 'governability' within each of the regions, more so in Europe

than in the United States or in Japan. Part of this problem concerned the managerialism implicit in the Trilateral outlook: given the apparent politicisation of a range of groups and movements at the domestic level in their own countries, leaders were politically constrained from having the autonomy to pursue the necessary policies, in Trilateral terminology, to 'manage' global interdependence. However, the recessions of the **1980s** were crucial in rolling back these 'ever increasing expectations' of change both within the Trilateral nations and from the Third World challenges. A key 'governability problem' for the **1990s** from this perspective is to place some control over the forces of international financial integration so that they can be channelled to allocate resources on a more 'rational' **basis**.²³

To recapitulate: the origin of Trilateralism in the early **1970s** was connected to the attempt at the renovation and reinforcement of the post-war **politico-economic** order (and what might be termed its associated **civilisational** project). Historically this has been associated with the *pax americana*: a system which involved the construction of the Bretton Woods economic institutions, American led military alliances, and the politico-economic reconstruction of liberal democratic capitalism in North America, Japan and Western Europe (and more broadly in the OECD regions). It encompassed, of course, the defence of this system and its values from communist and nationalist challenges, both internal and external. Trilateralism also implies that the increasing equality of economic capacity between the major capitalist regions should be matched by a redistribution of rights and obligations amongst its national members. In particular, Japan and West Germany, given their economic power, should play a more equal and political role in the councils of the alliance, and, for example, have more voting rights in the IMF and the World Bank.

The term transnational historic bloc seems appropriate to describe what Trilateralism is intended to give rise to. This is because the term historic bloc encompasses class formations and conscious initiatives (emanating from the dominant forces of what Kees van der Pijl aptly called the 'Lockean heartland' of the system), that is it implies much more than the interaction of political and economic elements from different nations. " Gramsci's concept of historic bloc suggests that associated social forces are at least potentially able to fuse their identities and interests, more deeply and more extensively (*i.e.* within the golden triangle of metropolitan capitalism, and the wider world order). The term also suggests the leadership of vanguard elements of transnational capital – as a class force – in a process designed to incorporate and engage other powerful elements drawn from the states and civil societies of the OECD countries, and where possible to enlarge its membership as nations 'graduate' economically and **politically** (*e.g.* by allowing South **Korea** to join the OECD). This 'vital core' is seen as a point of anchorage for the wider world system in an era of **transformation**.

At the centre of these endeavours is a fraction of the capitalist class drawn from those corporations and companies which can be included as members of the Fortune 500 biggest banks and corporations. Significant corporate moguls who have been important members include Giovanni Agnelli (Fiat), **Akio Morita** (Sony), Otto Wolff von Amerongen. Top American bankers such as Arthur Bums, Paul Volcker and Alan Greenspan have at one time or another been senior members. In 1986, for example, the Commission had members who were in very senior positions in the vast majority of the biggest 100 companies in a *Wall Street Journal Survey*.³⁵ All top 10 companies had members, 16 of the top 20, 27 of the top 40. Commissioners were directly associated (by personal citation of primary employment, based on Commission membership lists) with at least 60 of the top 100 manufacturing corporations in the world. They were also associated with 9 of the top 10, 18 of the top 20 and 25 of the top 30 banks; 9 of the top 10, and 14 of the top 20 of the world's largest insurance companies. Given the massive appreciation of the Japanese yen since this date, and given that all of Japan's major corporations and banking conglomerates and trading companies are associated with the Commission, it is possible that the proportion in the top 100 has now increased.

By implication, what I have **called** a transnational class fraction is itself partly mobilised by developing its consciousness and solidarity in international organisations of various kinds, such as the IMF, the World Bank, and OECD, as well as in their day-to-day business and leisure activities associated with transnational corporate activity. This class fraction is also heavily associated with other private international relations councils. These would include the Bilderberg meetings (which started in the early **1950s**) the Atlantic Institute (which started in the early **1960s**) and the **Saltzburg Seminars** on multinational enterprise (which began in the late **1960s**). It is also involved with and is partly influenced by the research endeavours of think-tanks and philanthropic institutions or foundations such as those of Ford, Mellon, **Carnegie**, and Rockefeller. The key term which helps to capture the social interactions and processes absorbed here is that of the Establishment. The membership of the Trilateral Commission – about 350 people – consists of intersecting elements of the domestic Establishments of its member countries (drawn from the USA, Canada, the EEC – except Greece – and Japan), and as such can be said to form the outline of an international Establishment. Such an Establishment mirrors aspects of the emerging global civil society. It also reflects the fact that the self-perception of many individuals associated with forums such as these is both conservative (although centrist) and public spirited.

Organisations like the Trilateral **Commission**, in fact, appear to be more moderate and reasonable by virtue of the fact that there are also more right wing, free-market oriented institutes and networks, associated with the Mont Pelerin Society, the American Heritage Foundation and in Britain

the Adam Smith Institute. However these more right-wing groups have been less effective, both in terms of their total capacity to **mobilise** intellectual and political resources on a transnational basis, and in terms of the degree to which they have been able to set the agenda for public debate at the international level. Whilst it is true that the Reagan administration and Thatcher in Britain have been influenced by some of these latter groups, this is much less the case with respect to Western Europe and Japan, and indeed, as has been noted, the new Bush administration in the United States seems more in tune with the moderate 'centrism' of Trilateralism than was its predecessor, with some overlap between the second Reagan administration and the Bush administration in this regard.

This trilateralist perspective and bloc may also be contrasted with 'pure liberalism' and with nationalist blocs which take different forms in different countries, where for example labour may combine with more 'national' fractions of (productive) capital, as well as with elements in the security complex. Such nationalist coalitions tend to argue for neo-mercantilist policies and protection against more dynamic and threatening forms of international competition. More generally this type of formation normally would oppose an uncontrolled or too far-reaching an internationalisation of the domestic economy, primarily for reasons of social welfare **and/or** for national security purposes. Thus the question of the hegemony of transnational capital is bound up with a struggle at a number of **levels**.²⁶ In this context the United States is crucial, both because of its centrality in the world capitalist system, its vast domestic market, and partly because of the policy consequences of the potential clash of perspectives between, for example, smaller firms and banks geared to production and services for the domestic market (strongly represented in Congress) and transnational manufacturing corporations and banks (who often find allies in the Executive Branch and the bureaucracy), as well as between the foreign policy and economic perspectives of the liberal internationalists and the military-strategic intellectuals associated with the US security complex.

Conclusion

My conclusion is implicit in much of my exposition. I have argued that both the **dependency/world** systems and classical traditional theories of imperialism and world systems theory have, therefore, severe shortcomings which undermine their capacities to think through creatively the emerging political possibilities and the contours of an agenda for transnational action. As such it can be suggested that they fail to meet the criterion of contemporary relevance. The prospects of a 'brave new world' (some would call it a dystopia) of global capitalism and the imperatives of a range of other global forces require a re-examination of theory and a search for either a reformulation or generation of new concepts and approaches which can begin to capture, at least theoretically, the changes which are

actually taking place and the logic of their future trajectory. In other words whilst mainstream international relations theory, drawn principally from the liberal and to a certain extent realist traditions, is making progress on the task of conceptualising contemporary transformations, the two dominant sets of approaches from within Marxism have lagged behind.

A major problem with the dominant Marxist theorisations lies in their inability to grasp transformative aspects of the contemporary situation. As such, and at the risk of over-generalisation, I would suggest that they are unable to theorise the possibilities for the synergy of a range of progressive forces across as well as within national boundaries. Such a theorisation is vital so as to give general direction to a counter-hegemonic project which is sensitive to a range of concerns for not only the material aspects of class struggle, but also questions of culture, communication, gender and ecology.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Exceptions are K. van der Pijl, *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class* (London, Verso, 1984); S Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).
2. S Gill and D Law, 'Global Hegemony and the structural power of capital' *International Studies Quarterly*, (1989-90), Vol 33.
3. C F Bergsten *et al*, *Conditions for Partnership in International Economic Management* (New York, Trilateral Commission, 1986); S Ogata *et al*, *International Financial Integration: the policy challenges* (New York, Trilateral Commission, 1989).
4. These terms are used by R D Mckinlay and R D Little in *Global Problems and World Order* (London, Pinter, 1986).
5. R O Keohane and J S Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Boston, Little Brown, 1977).
6. F G Rohatyn, 'Monnet, Not Mao, Had the Vision the East Needs Now' *International Herald Tribune*, 21 November, 1989; Saburo Okita, 'Policy Approaches to the Problem of Development' in L Emmerij (ed.) *One World or Several?* (Paris, OECD, 1989). The Okita Plan continues the logic of the Brady Plan (which itself assumed that the Japanese would foot most of the bill). It entails recycling Japan's massive balance of payments surpluses in three roughly equal portions of up to US \$30 billion per year, allocated respectively to domestic demand growth; to supply capital to the USA and the other major industrialised economies; and to supply capital for development assistance. The Japanese intend to double development assistance from US \$25 billion to US \$50 billion in the period 1988-92, after cancelling debts of about US \$ 5.5 billion to Asian and African developing countries following the 1988 Toronto summit.
7. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*; R W Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: an essay in method', *Millennium* (1983), Vol 12.
8. A somewhat different strategy is emerging for sub-Saharan Africa where the problem is being viewed as one of basic solvency and a fundamental collapse of state capacities. The Brazilian situation has been viewed, for example, as a

crisis of liquidity, and debt restructuring should be geared to Brazil's eventual return to 'normal' participation in international capital markets after it has made the necessary adjustments in macro-economic and other policies.

9. A.B. Durning, 'People, Power and Development', *Foreign Policy* (1989) pp. 67–8.
10. these theories and their limitations are ably **discussed** in A Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism*, (London, **Routledge**, 1980).
11. S Gill and D Law, *The Global Political Economy: Perspectives, Problems and Policies* (**Hemel Hempstead** and Baltimore, **Harvester-Wheatsheaf/Johns Hopkins University Press**, 1988).
12. I Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979). Other world systems writers who are immune to my criticisms are **Giovanni Arrighi** and Christopher Chase-Durn.
13. See for example, P **Worsley**, 'One World or Three? A Critique of the World-Systems Theory of Immanuel **Wallerstein**' *Socialist Register*, 1980.
14. R W Cox, *Production, Power and World Order: social forces in the making of history* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1987)
15. See Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations'; Cox, *Production, Power and World Order*; **Gil**, *American hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, pp. 41–56.
16. D P **Calleo**, *Beyond American Hegemony: The Future of the Western Alliance*, (Brighton, Wheatsheaf Books, 1987); R O Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton NJ., Princeton University Press, 1984); P Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (London, **Unwin Hyman**, 1988). For my criticisms of these and other arguments concerning American decline, see S Gill, 'American Hegemony: Its Limits and Prospects in the Reagan Era' *Millennium*, (1986) Vol 15; S Gill, 'The Rise and Decline of Great Powers: the American case' *Politics*, (1988) Vol 8; and Gill, *American hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* pp. 57–88.
17. For a full list of references to Commission publications see the appendix to Gill, *American hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*
18. For a full survey of agendas and activities see Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, pp. 122–201.
19. M Crozier *et al*, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York, New York University Press, 1975).
20. See V **Giscard d'Estaing**, Y Nakasone and H **Kissinger**, *East-West Relations* (New York, Trilateral Commission, 1989).
21. See note 6 above.
22. In Japan, an entire cohort of bureaucrats retires when a member of a younger 'class of. . .1934, 1947, 1956', etc., (at the Faculty of Law, University of Tokyo) reaches the uppermost echelons of the bureaucracy (**e.g.** becomes Vice-Minister). This is to allow the seniority principle to stay inviolate, since no one should be commanded by someone younger than himself. Most of the retiring bureaucrats then find senior jobs in industry, banking, etc., that is they usually go to sectors they have been administering. In this light it is important to remember that in educational background and career pattern, senior Japanese bureaucrats are generalists. Bureaucrats carry much prestige and weight with them into the private corporate sector, the bulk of whose leadership is drawn from the graduates of the Faculties of Law and Economics at the University of Tokyo, widely known as 'Todai', an academic institution whose status, social centrality and prestige is unmatched: its role would be approximated in the US system if all the Ivy League schools were merged into one big, ultra-elite school. Thus the elite linkages between state and private sectors vary from one system to the next,

in horizontal and vertical terms, as well as intensity: Japan being more integrated and **centralised** than the USA.

23. Ogata *et al*, *International Financial Integration*
24. K van der Pijl, 'The Socialist International and the Internationalisation of Capital' Paper to the *International Studies Association*, annual conference, London, 28 March-1 April, 1989.
25. 'Global Finance and Investment', Special Report. *Wall Street Journal*, 29 September, 1986.
26. For example, between labour and capital, and between national and international blocs of forces, each possibly corresponding, broadly speaking to more 'productivist' and 'financial' fractions of capital. However, in most cases the most meaningful **determinant** of support of capital and labour for protection or openness, mercantilism or liberalism is the degree of its **industry/sector/firm's** international competitiveness.