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Bourgeois Organization: The Lie of the 'Democratic' State

International Communist Current
1994

Written by 'JJ' for International Review 76, in 1994. Available online at https://en.internationalism.org/ir/076_index.html.

The sudden collapse of the Eastern bloc automatically gave a new lease of life to its old Western rival's propaganda. For decades, the world has lived in the shadow of a double lie: the lie of the existence of communism in the East, identified with a merciless Stalinist dictatorship and opposed to the reign of democratic freedom in the West. This ideological combat was the expression, at the level of propaganda, of the imperialist rivalries between East and West, and it was the 'democratic' illusion which emerged the victor. Already, the camp of liberal democracy has proven victorious in the two world wars which have ravaged the planet since the beginning of the century, and in each case this has further strengthened the democratic ideology.

This is not mere coincidence. The countries which could lay the best claim to embody the democratic ideal were the first to carry out the bourgeois democratic revolution, and to set up purely capitalist states: in particular, Great Britain, France, and the United States of America. Because they came first, they were best served at the economic level. This economic superiority was concretized on both the military and the ideological level. During the conflicts which ravaged the planet since the beginning of the century, the strength of the liberal democracies has always been to convince the workers, who served as cannon fodder, that in fighting for 'democracy' they were defending, not the interests of one capitalist fraction against another, but an ideal of liberty against barbaric dictatorships. During World War I, the French, British and American workers were sent to the slaughter in the name of the struggle against Prussian militarism; during World War II, the brutality of the Fascist and Nazi dictatorships served to justify democratic militarism. After World War II, the ideological combat between the Eastern and Western blocs was assimilated to the struggle between 'democracy' and 'Communist dictatorship'. The Western democracies have always claimed to be fighting against a fundamentally different system: against 'dictatorship'.

Today, the Western democratic model is presented as an ideal of progress transcending economic systems and classes. Citizens are all 'equal' and 'free' to elect political representatives, and therefore the economic system that they want. In a 'democracy' everyone is 'free' to express his or her opinions. If the voters want socialism, or even communism, they need only vote for parties which claim to embody those aims. Parliament reflects 'the will of the people'. Every citizen can appeal to the law against the state. 'Human rights' are respected, etc.

This naive and idyllic vision of democracy is a myth, something that has never existed. Democracy is the ideology which masks the dictatorship of capital in its

most developed regions. There is no fundamental difference between the various models that capitalist propaganda presents as opposing each other. All the supposedly different systems which democratic propaganda has presented as its opponents since the beginning of the century are expressions of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, of capital. They may differ in form, but not in kind. The naked totalitarianism of the Nazi or Stalinist regimes is not the expression of different economic systems, but the result of the development of the state totalitarianism characteristic of decadent capitalism, and of the universal development of state capitalism which marks the 20th century. In fact the superiority of the old Western democracies lies essentially in their greater ability to hide the signs of state totalitarianism.

Myths have a long life. But the economic crisis which is deepening daily in the most dramatic fashion is uncovering all the lies. Thus the illusion of Western prosperity, which was presented as being eternal at the point when the former Eastern bloc collapsed, died the death some time ago. The lie of democracy is of a different ilk, because it is not based on such immediate fluctuations. However, dozens of years of crisis have led to increasing tensions within the ruling class both internationally and internally within each national capital. As a result, the bourgeoisie has had to maneuver in all areas of its activity, to a far greater extent than ever before. There are more and more examples of how little the bourgeoisie adheres to its democratic ideals. All over the world, the 'responsible' political parties, from right to left, all of whom have followed the same policies of austerity against the working class when they have been in office, are suffering from a general loss of credibility. This loss of credibility, which affects the whole of the state apparatus, is the product of the growing divorce between the state which imposes all the misery and civil society which has to put up with it. But this state of affairs has been still further strengthened in recent years by the process of decomposition which affects the entire capitalist world. In all countries, the hidden rivalries between the various clans who inhabit the state apparatus have come to the surface in the form of endless scandals that expose how rotten the ruling class has become. Corruption and prevarication have become a gangrene throughout the state apparatus, politicians work hand in hand with all kinds of gangsters and swindlers, and all of this goes on in the secret corridors of power, unbeknownst to the public. Little by little the sordid reality of the totalitarian state of decadent capitalism is piercing the veil of democratic appearances. But this does not mean that the whole mystification has vanished. The ruling class knows how to use its own decay to reinforce its propaganda, using the scandals as a justification for a new struggle for democratic purity. Even though the crisis continually saps the bases of the bourgeoisie's domination and undermines its ideological grip on the exploited, the ruling class only becomes more determined to use all the means at its disposal to hold on to power. The democratic lie was born with capitalism; it will only disappear with it.

The 19th Century: bourgeois democracy, but just for the bourgeoisie

The dominant fractions of the world bourgeoisie can claim to be democratic because this corresponds to their own history. The bourgeoisie carried out its revolution and overthrew feudalism in the name of democracy and liberty. The bourgeoisie organized its political system in accord with its own economic needs. It abolished serfdom in the name of individual liberty, to allow the creation of a vast proletariat composed of wage laborers ready to sell their labor power individually. Parliament was the arena where the different parties representing the multiple interests existing within the bourgeoisie, and the different sectors of capital, could confront each other to decide the composition and orientations of the government in charge of the executive.

For the ruling class, parliament was then a real place for debate and decision-taking. This is the historic model which our 'democracies' claim to represent today, the form of political organization adopted by the dictatorship of capital in its youthful period. This is the model that was adopted by the bourgeois revolution in Britain, France and the USA.

However, we should note that this classic model was never absolutely universal. Democratic rules were often seriously bent for the bourgeoisie to carry through its revolution, and to accelerate the social upheaval necessary to establish its system. We need only consider, amongst others, the French Revolution and the Jacobin terror, followed by the Napoleonic Empire, and the way the bourgeoisie brushed aside its democratic ideal when circumstances required. Moreover, bourgeois democracy was in some ways akin to Athenian democracy, within which all the citizens could take part in elections, except of course the slaves and foreigners who were not citizens.

In the democratic system first set up by the bourgeoisie, only property-holders could vote: for the workers, there was no right of free speech, nor freedom of organization. It took years of bitter struggle before the working class won the right to organize in trades unions, and to impose the principle of universal suffrage. The active participation of the workers in democratic institutions in order to win reforms, or to support the most progressive fractions of the bourgeoisie, was hardly part of the bourgeois revolution's program. Indeed, whenever the workers' struggle succeeded in winning new democratic rights, the bourgeoisie did its best to limit their effects. For example, when a new electoral law was adopted in Italy in 1882, a friend of Depretis, then head of the government, described his attitude as follows: "He feared that the participation of new social strata in public life would have as a logical consequence profound upheavals in the state institutions. From then on, he did everything he could to build solid dikes against the flood-tide he so feared" (F Martin, cited by Sergio Romano in *Histoire de L'Italie du Risorgimento a nos jours*, Le Seuil, Paris 1977). This sums up perfectly the ruling class's attitude, and its conception of democracy and parliament during the 19th century. Fundamentally, the workers were excluded from it. Democracy was not made for them, but so that capitalism could be well managed. Whenever the clearest fractions of the bourgeoisie supported certain reforms and proclaimed their approval for a greater participation of the workers in the functioning of 'democracy', through universal suffrage or the right of union organization, it was done the better to control the working class and to avoid social upheavals in production. It is no accident that the first bosses to organize themselves against the pressure of workers' struggles and at the same time the most in favor of reforms were those of big industry. In big industry the capitalists, confronted with the massive strength of the many proletarians that they employed, were fully conscious of the necessity both to control the explosive potential of the working class by allowing parliamentary and union activity, and to permit reforms (limitation of the working day, outlawing child labor) which would improve the health of the labor force and thus its productivity.

However, while the exploited were fundamentally excluded, the parliamentary democracy of the 19th Century was the way the bourgeoisie functioned. The legislative dominated the executive; the parliamentary system and democratic representation were social realities.

The 20th Century: 'Democracy' without content

By the beginning of the 20th century capitalism had conquered the world, and reached the limits of its geographic expansion. It had also reached the objective limit

of the markets required for its production. The capitalist relations of production were transformed into fetters on the development of the productive forces. Capitalism as a whole entered into a period of world crises and world wars.

This decisive upheaval in the life of capital led to a profound modification in the political mode of life of the bourgeoisie and the functioning of its state apparatus.

The bourgeois state is in essence the representative of the global interests of the national capital. Everything to do with global economic difficulties, the threats of crisis and the means of overcoming them, and with the organization of imperialist war, is the business of the state. With the entrance of capitalism into its decadent period the role of the state thus becomes preponderant because it alone is capable of maintaining a minimum of order in a capitalist society torn apart by its own contradictions. "The state is the proof that society is caught in an insoluble contradiction with itself" said Engels. The development of an octopus-like state which controls all the aspects of economic, political and social life is the fundamental characteristic of the mode of organization of capitalism in its decadent phase. It is the totalitarian response of capitalist society in crisis. "State capitalism is the form capitalism tends to take in its phase of decline" (ICC Platform).

As a result power in bourgeois society is concentrated in the hands of the executive at the expense of the legislative. This phenomenon was particularly clear during the First World War when the needs of war and the interests of the national capital did not permit democratic debate in parliament and imposed an absolute discipline on all the fractions of the national bourgeoisie. But afterwards it was maintained and reinforced. The bourgeois parliament became an empty shell which no longer played any decisive role.

The Third International recognized this reality at its 2nd Congress when it proclaimed that "the center of gravity of political life today has completely and definitively left parliament", that "parliament cannot in any case, at the present time, be the theatre of a struggle for reforms and for the improvement of the situation of the working class, as it could at certain moments in the previous epoch". Not only could capitalism in crisis no longer grant durable reforms, but the bourgeoisie had definitively lost its economically and socially progressive historic role. All its fractions had become equally reactionary.

In this process the political parties of the bourgeoisie lost their primary function, that of representing different interest groups, different economic sectors of capital within the 'democratic' life of the bourgeoisie in parliament. They became instruments of the state responsible for making the different sectors of society accept the state's policy. From representatives of civil society in the state, the parties became instruments of the state to control civil society. The global interests of the national capital, which were represented by the state, tended to make the political parties of the bourgeoisie fractions of the state totalitarian party. This tendency toward the single party is expressed clearly in Fascist, Nazi or Stalinist regimes. But even when the fiction of pluralism was retained, in situations of sharp crisis such as imperialist war, the reality of a hegemonic party or the domination of a single party was imposed. This was the case at the end of the thirties and during the war which followed, with Roosevelt and the Democratic Party or, in Great Britain during the Second World War with the 'state of emergency', with Churchill and the war cabinet. "In the context of state capitalism, the differences which separate the bourgeois parties are nothing in comparison with what they have in common. All share a general premise according to which the interests of the national capital are superior to all the others. This premise means that different fractions of the national capital are

capable of working very closely together, above all behind the closed doors of parliamentary commissions and in the highest echelons of the state apparatus.” (‘Notes on the consciousness of the decadent bourgeoisie’, *International Review* 31). The leaders of the parties and members of parliament have in reality become state functionaries.

Thus all parliamentary activity loses any real connection with the decisions which the state takes in the name of the higher interest of the nation. Parliament only serves to mask the development of the totalitarian grip of the state on the whole of society. The ‘democratic’ functioning of the dominant class, even within the limits of the 19th century, no longer exists. It has become a pure mystification, a lie.

‘Democratic’ totalitarianism against the working class

Why then maintain such a costly and complicated ‘democratic’ apparatus if it no longer corresponded to the needs of capital? In fact, this whole organization retained an essential function at a moment when the permanent crisis was pushing the working class toward struggles for the defense of its living conditions and towards revolutionary consciousness. That function consisted of diverting the proletariat from its class terrain, of tangling it up in the ‘democratic’ game. In this task the state benefited from the support of the so-called Socialist parties after 1914 and the ‘Communist’ parties after the mid-thirties when they betrayed the class which gave birth to them. These parties are part of the bourgeois apparatus of control and mystification which tries to lend credit to the democratic lie in the eyes of the working class. In the 19th century the proletariat had to struggle to gain the right to vote. In the 20th century in the advanced metropolises, an intensive propaganda campaign is waged by the ‘democratic’ state to corral the working class onto the electoral terrain. In some countries, Belgium and Italy for example, the vote is even obligatory.

Moreover, when the struggle for reforms has lost any meaning, the unions, which corresponded to the need of the proletariat to better its situation in the framework of capitalist society, lost their utility for the working class. But they did not disappear – the state took hold of them in order to better control the exploited class. The unions complete the apparatus of ‘democratic’ coercion by the ruling class.

But then one may legitimately ask the following question: if the apparatus of democratic mystification is so useful to the dominant class, to its state, why isn’t this mode of controlling society imposed everywhere, in all countries? It is interesting to note in this respect that the two regimes which most clearly symbolize state totalitarianism of the 20th century, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, were built on the crushing of the proletariat following the defeat of the revolutionary attempts which marked the entry of capitalism into decadence. Faced with a proletariat profoundly weakened by defeat, decimated by repression, the question of its control was posed differently for the bourgeoisie. In these conditions the democratic mystification is hardly useful and totalitarian state capitalism can appear without a mask. Moreover, precisely because, from the strict point of view of the functioning of the state machine, the ‘democratic’ apparatus inherited from the 19th century became superfluous at the beginning of the century, certain sectors of the bourgeoisie, recognizing this state of affairs, theorized its redundancy. Fascism is an expression of this tendency. The maintenance of a heavy ‘democratic’ machine is not only dispensable, but also demands an adequate economy to make it credible and a ruling class sufficiently experienced to manage it subtly. In the underdeveloped countries these factors are mostly unavailable and the weakness of the local proletariat doesn’t encourage the bourgeoisie to put such a system in place. Consequently, military dictatorships are common in these countries. In these countries the weakness of the economy is

expressed in the weakness of the local bourgeoisie, and here the army is the best fraction of the bourgeois state to represent the overall interest of the national capital and to provide the skeleton of the state apparatus. This role can also be played by militarized parties inspired by the Stalinist model, as in China.

Far from being the expression of a sort of perversion of the democratic purity of capitalism, the different dictatorships and openly totalitarian States which mark the whole history of the 20th century are on the contrary the manifestation of the **general** tendency towards state capitalism's totalitarian hold over all the economic, social and political aspects of life. They show the reality of state totalitarianism in decadent capitalism and show what is hidden behind the democratic veil of the ruling class in the developed countries. There is no qualitative difference in the functioning of those states which pretend to be democratic. The reality is simply better hidden.

In France in the thirties the same parliamentary assembly which had been elected with the Popular Front voted full powers to Marshall Petain. This was not an aberration, but, on the contrary, the clear expression of the inanity of democratic pretensions and the whole parliamentary game in capitalist decadence. Furthermore, after the war, the state which was installed by the Liberation was basically in continuity with the one which collaborated with Nazi Germany. The police, the judiciary, the economic and even political oligarchies who had been distinguished by their collaborationist zeal remained in place, except for some rare exceptions used as expiatory victims. It was the same in Italy where, like in France, some 90% of state functionaries retained their posts after the fall of the Fascist regime.

On top of this it is easy to show that our 'democracies' are never embarrassed to support or use this or that 'dictatorship' when it corresponds to their strategic needs, or even to install such 'dictatorships'. Examples aren't lacking: the USA in Latin America, or France in most of its ex-African colonies.

The cleverness of the old Western 'democracies' consists in using the most caricatural forms of the barbarism and brutality of state capitalism to mask the fact that they themselves are no exception to this absolute rule of decadent capitalism – the development of state totalitarianism. In fact, only the most developed capitalist countries have the means to maintain the credibility of a sophisticated 'democratic' apparatus, to wield it for the purpose of mystifying and controlling the working class. In the underdeveloped capitalist world the regimes with a 'democratic' appearance are the exception and in general more the product of an effective support from a 'democratic' imperialist power than the expression of the local bourgeoisie. Their existence is more often provisional, subject to the fluctuations of the international situation. It takes all the power and experience of the oldest and most experienced fractions of the world bourgeoisie to maintain the credibility of the great lie about the democratic functioning of the bourgeois state.

In the most sophisticated form of capitalist dictatorship, that of 'democracy', the capitalist state must maintain the belief that the greatest liberty reigns. Brutal coercion, ferocious repression, must, whenever possible, be replaced by subtle manipulation to give the same result without the victim seeing it. It is not an easy task and only the most experienced fractions of the world bourgeoisie can do it effectively. To do so the state must control all the institutions of civil society. It must develop tentacles everywhere.

The democratic state has not only organized a whole visible and official system of control and surveillance of society but has woven a web of hidden threads which allow it to control and survey the parts of society which it pretends are outside of its competence. This is true for all sectors of society. A caricatural example is that of

information. One of the great principles which the democratic state boasts of is the freedom of the press. It is true that in the 'democratic' countries there are many newspapers and often a multitude of different television channels. But close up things are not so idyllic. A whole administrative-juridical system allows the state to corrupt this 'liberty' and in fact the media are completely dependent on the good will of the state which has all the means to suppress a press headline. As for the main television companies, their authorization to broadcast is dependent on the agreement of the state. Nearly everywhere the essential means of information are in the hands of a few magnates who usually have a seat reserved for them in the ante-chambers of the ministries. One can imagine that if they benefit from this enviable position, it is because they have been mandated by the state to play this role. The big press agencies are very often the direct mouthpieces of the state's policies. The Gulf War illustrated this perfectly. The whole of the Western 'free press' was given the responsibility of relaying the great lies of war propaganda, filtering the news, and manipulating opinion to best serve the needs of imperialism. At this time there was hardly any difference between the 'democratic' conception of the media and the Stalinist one that is vilified so much, or Saddam Hussein's for that matter. They all churned out the most vile propaganda, and the loyal Western journalists, standing to attention, servilely checked their information with the army before publishing it – no doubt because of their concern for objectivity.

This gigantic democratic state apparatus finds its justification in the developed countries in the vital need for the ruling class to control the greatest proletarian concentrations of the planet. Although the democratic mystification is an essential aspect of imperialist propaganda for the great Western powers, it is on the social level, as an instrument for the control of the proletariat and of the population in general, that it finds its principle reason for existence. It is the need to lock society in a strait-jacket that compels the democratic state to carry out its large-scale maneuvers, using all the resources of propaganda and manipulation. One of the main occasions when the state maneuvers the heavy apparatus of democracy is the great electoral circus in which the citizens are periodically invited to participate. Elections, though they have lost any meaning as regards the actual operations of the totalitarian state, remain a powerful weapon to atomize the working class in an individualized vote, to divert its discontent onto a sterile terrain, and give credibility to the existence of democracy. It is no accident if the democratic states carry on a vigorous struggle against abstentionism and disaffection, because the participation of workers in the elections is essential to the perpetuation of the democratic illusion. However, even if parliamentary representation no longer has any importance for the functioning of the state, it is nonetheless essential that the results of the elections conform to the needs of the dominant class, so that it can make best use of the mystifying game of the parties and prevent them from being used up too quickly. Notably, the so-called 'left' parties have the specific role of controlling the working class; their position vis-a-vis governmental responsibilities determines their capacity to spread their mystifications and thus effectively control the working class. For example, it is clear that when austerity is on the agenda, as a result of the accelerating crisis, having the left in power threatens its credibility as a force claiming to defend the interest of the working class and leaves it badly placed to control the working class at the level of its struggles. It is thus extremely important for the state to manipulate the result of elections. To achieve this, the state puts in place a whole system for the selection of candidates, with rules designed to avoid surprises. But this is not the essential aspect. The servile press orients the choice through intense ideological campaigns. The subtle game of alliances between parties, with candidates manipulated for the needs of the

cause, usually makes it possible to obtain the desired result and the intended governmental majority. It is a banality today that whatever the electoral results the same anti-working class policy remains. The democratic state conducts its policies independently of the elections, which are being organized at an accelerated pace. Elections are a pure charade.

Outside of elections, which are the touchstone of the state's 'democratic' self-justification, there are many other occasions where the latter maneuvers its apparatus to ensure its control. Against strikes for example. In each struggle carried out by the working class on its own terrain it comes up against all the forces of the state: press, unions, political parties, the forces of repression, provocations by the police or other less official organisms, etc.

What basically distinguishes the 'democratic' state from the 'dictatorships', is not in the end the means employed, which are all based on the totalitarian grip of the state on civil society, but the subtlety and efficiency with which they are employed. That is particularly true on the electoral level. Often the 'dictatorships' also look for legitimacy in elections or referenda, but the poverty of their means leads to a parody of what goes on in the rich industrialized countries. But there is no fundamental difference. The parody only shows the underlying general truth. Bourgeois democracy is only the 'democratic' dictatorship of capital.

Behind the decor of the 'democratic' state

While during the ascendant period of capitalism the bourgeoisie could base its class rule on the reality of the progress that its system brought to humanity, in the decadent period not only has this basis disappeared, but all capitalism can now offer is the misery of a permanent economic crisis and the murderous barbarism of endless imperialist conflicts. The ruling class can only maintain its rule and the survival of its system through terror and lies. This development has led to deep changes in the internal life of the ruling class, crystallized in the activity of the state apparatus.

What enables the state to cope with this new situation is its capacity to impose its repressive and military force, to make lies believable, and to preserve its secrets.

In these conditions, the sectors of the bourgeoisie most able to rise up in the state hierarchy are naturally those who specialize in the use of force, in lying propaganda, in secret activity and in all kinds of sordid maneuvers. That means the army, the police, the secret services, clans and secret societies, and mafia-type gangsters.

The first two sectors have always played an important, indeed indispensable role in the state. A number of generals made their mark on the political life of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century. But in this period, they usually reached the center of the state power only in exceptional situations, in particularly difficult moments for the national capital, as for example during the Civil War in the USA. This militaristic tendency was not the main one in bourgeois political life, as the example of Louis Napoleon showed. Today, however, it is highly characteristic that a considerable proportion of heads of state in the underdeveloped countries are military men, and even in the western 'democracies' we've had such figures as Eisenhower and Haig in the USA, or De Gaulle in France.

The accession to power of high-ranking members of the secret services, however, is a typical phenomenon of the period of decadence, one which clearly expresses the current concerns of the bourgeoisie and the internal functioning of the highest spheres of the state. Once again, this fact is particularly visible in the peripheries of capitalism, in the underdeveloped world. Most often the generals who take on the

role of President were former heads of the army's secret services; and, very frequently, when a civilian figure becomes head of state, his previous career was in the 'civilian' secret services or in the political police.

But this state of affairs is not restricted to the underdeveloped countries of Africa, Asia or Latin America. In the USSR, Andropov was the boss of the KGB, Gorbachev was high up in it as well, and the current President of Georgia, Shevardnadze, is a former KGB general. Particularly significant is the example of Bush in the USA, 'the most democratic country in the world'. He was a former director of the CIA. And these are only the best-known examples. We do not have the means to make a complete list, nor is this our aim here, but it would be interesting to note the impressive number of politicians, ministers and parliamentarians who, before taking up these 'honorable' functions, gained their education in one or other branch of the secret services.

The multiplication of parallel police, of services each more secret than the other, of hidden agencies of all kinds, is a highly salient feature of social life in today's pseudo-democracies. This reveals the real nature of the needs and nature of the state's activities. It is obvious on the imperialist level: spying, provocation, threats, assassination, all kinds of manipulations - all this has become common coin in the defense of national imperialist interests on the world arena. But these are just the more 'patriotic' and 'admissible' aspects of the activities of the secret services. The occult activity of the state is even more developed on the internal level. Systematic filing of information on the population, surveillance of individuals, 'official' and secret phone-tapping, all kinds of provocations aimed at manipulating public opinion, infiltration of all sectors of civil society, hidden financing, etc - the list is a long one, and the state has recruited the manpower to do it all in secret, precisely in order to keep up the myth of the 'democratic' state. To carry out these tasks the state has recruited the dregs of society; the services of the mafia have been much appreciated and the distinction between gangster and secret agent has become increasingly vague, because these specialists in crime are quite capable of selling their skills to the highest bidder. For many years, the state has made use of the various networks of influence that existed in society - secret societies, mafia, sects - integrating them into its national and international policies, even raising them up to the higher spheres of the state. In fact the 'democratic' state does exactly what it denounces the 'dictatorships' for, but more discretely. Their secret services are not only at the heart of the state; they are also its antennae within civil society.

Parallel to this process, which has led to the ascent of fractions of the bourgeoisie whose way of life is based on secrecy, the entire functioning of the state has become more and more hidden. Behind the appearance of government, the real centers of decision have become invisible. Numerous ministers have no real power and are there to play to the gallery. This tendency reached its most cynical level with President Reagan, whose rather paltry acting talents allowed him to parade in front of the media, but who had no role at all in defining political orientations. For this there are other centers of decision, most of them unknown to the public. In a world where the ideological propaganda of the media has become increasingly important, the most essential quality for a politician is to know how to talk, to 'come across well' on the TV. Sometimes this is enough to make a career. But behind the political stage-sets erected to give the state a human face lurk a whole plethora of committees, agencies, lobbies animated by grey figures, most of them unknown to the general public, but ensuring the continuity of state policy, and thus the reality of power, without regard to the fluctuations of government.

This increasingly hidden operation of the state does not at all mean that disagreements and opposing interests have disappeared within the ruling class. On the contrary, with the deepening of the world economic crisis, divisions within each national bourgeoisie are sharpened. It's very clear that fractions crystallize around the choice of which imperialist alliances to make. But this isn't the only factor of division within the bourgeois class. Economic choices, the question of what attitude to adopt towards the working class, are other issues which give rise to debates and disagreements; also, the sordid scramble for power and influence as a means to amassing wealth is a permanent source of conflict between different clans of the ruling class, quite apart from real differences in orientation. These differences within the ruling class find their expression not so much through divisions into political parties, i.e. at the visible level, as through the formation of cliques which inhabit all echelons of the state and whose existence is hidden from ordinary mortals. The clan warfare to gain influence within the state is very severe, and yet it seldom sees the light of day. Here again, there is little to choose between the 'dictatorships' and the 'democracies'. Fundamentally, the war for power is waged outside the ken of the great majority.

The present situation of deep economic crisis, of the overturning of alliances following the collapse of the eastern bloc, has sharpened the rivalries and conflicts between the capitalist clans within the state. The various scandals, the 'suicides' of politicians and businessmen that we hear more and more about these days, are the visible manifestation of this shadowy war between the clans of the bourgeoisie. The proliferation of 'affairs' provides us with the opportunity to glimpse the real way the state operates behind the democratic smokescreen. In this respect the situation in Italy is particularly revealing. The P2 Lodge Affair, the Gladio Affair, the mafia scandals and all the scandals about corrupt politicians are an exemplary illustration of the totalitarian reality of the 'democratic' state which we have tried to deal with in this article. The concrete example of Italy will thus constitute the backbone of the second part of this article.

JJ.

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