

Industrial Society: The State



As told by Dr. Frank Elwell



The State: Two Forms

- ☞ In the West the state takes the form of a parliamentary democracy, usually associated with capitalism.
- ☞ The totalitarian dictatorship prevailed in the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe; that is, it prevails where state socialism is the economic form.



Parliamentary Democracy

In general, where we find highly developed capitalist societies, we find parliamentary democracy as the dominant form of polity.



Parliamentary Democracy

In its literal sense, democracy means government by and for the people. This meaning implies the absence of a ruling elite that makes governmental decisions independently of the wishes of the populace as a whole.



Parliamentary Democracy

It would be a mistake to restrict the concept to this literal meaning, since it is doubtful that any such form of government exists anywhere in the world above the tribal level of societies.



Parliamentary Democracy

- ☞ For our purposes, democracy has three principal features:
 - Elected officials
 - Parliament or congress
 - Individual rights and freedoms



Parliamentary Democracy

- ❏ Governmental officials are elected to office and presumed to be representatives acting in the interests of the people.
- ❏ Some sort of parliament or congressional structure exists as a power base at least partially independent of the power of presidents or prime ministers.

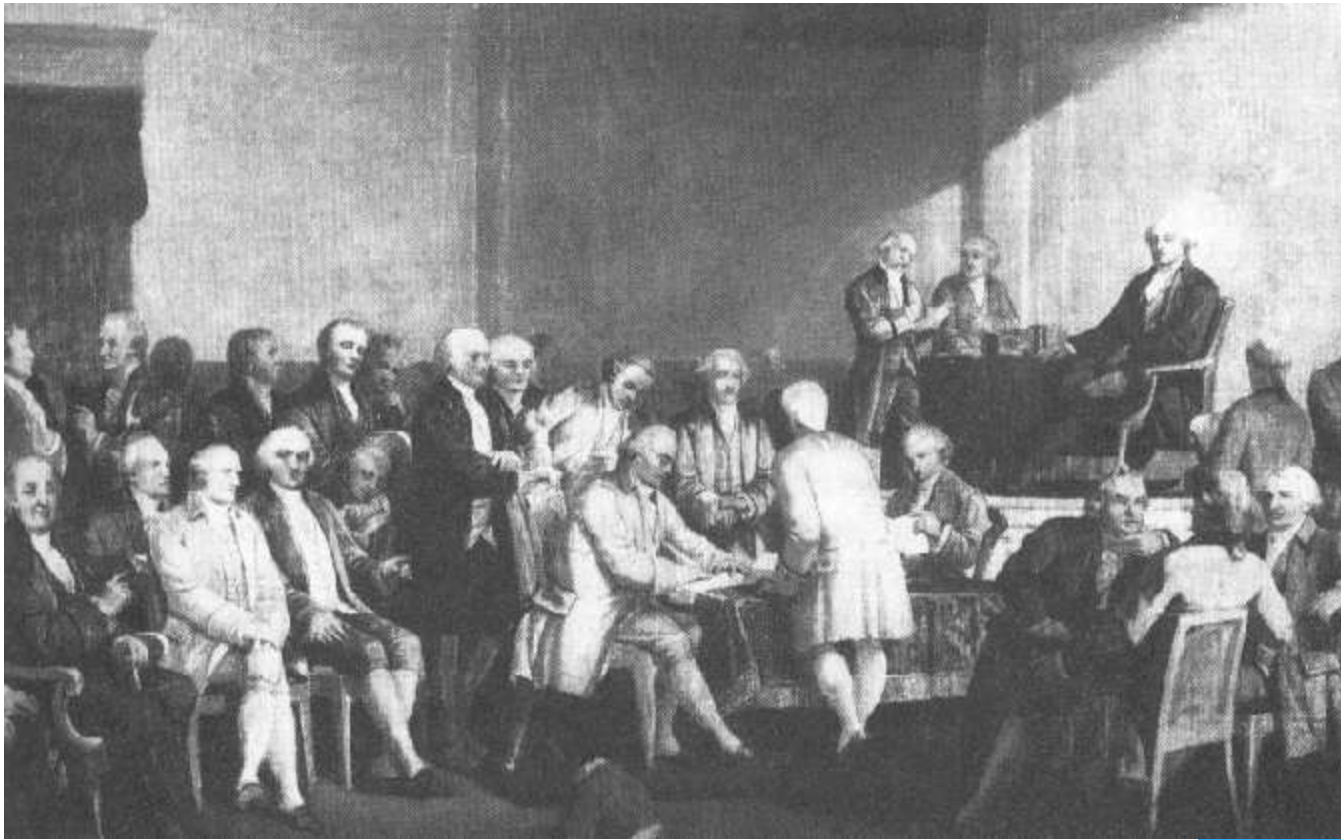


Parliamentary Democracy

Individual rights and freedoms are accorded to the people and are generally honored more often than not.



The Founding Fathers of the United States created an oligarchical republic, not a democratic republic: the Constitutional Convention, Philadelphia, 1787.



Parliamentary Democracy

- ☞ Has a true system of democracy, one in which the diverse interests of many individuals and groups are adequately represented by the state, succeeded in taking root in the west?
- ☞ Two views: pluralists and elitists.



Pluralist Theory

Pluralist theory of modern politics holds that the state in parliamentary democracies is the impartial servant of society as a whole.



Pluralist Theory

This view claims that the state rarely "takes sides"--that it is not aligned with one or more groups against others. The state is said not to favor capital over labor, men over women, whites over blacks, or one ethnic group over any other.



Pluralist Theory

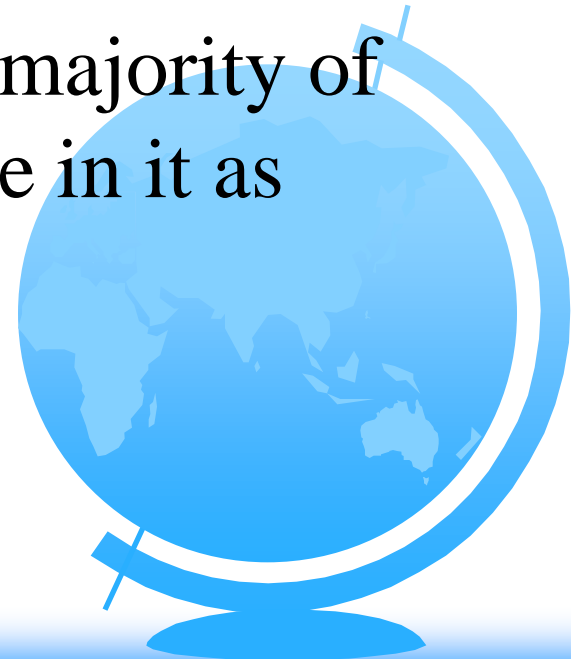
The nature of the state is such that it attempts to resolve the disputes or conflicts that arise between these various groups in a way that is in everyone's best interests.





Pluralist Theory

This is the theory of the state that is overwhelmingly endorsed by the vast majority of citizens in the Western world, regardless of the specific content of their political philosophies. The vast majority of political officials claim to believe in it as well.



Pluralist Theory

Pluralist reject the idea that any single group is capable of gaining so much power that it dominates all important forms of political decision making.



Pluralist Theory

Pluralists believe that many different groups have power in modern democracies and that when these groups do battle in the political arena they neutralize each other so that no single one gains prominence over the others. Sometimes one group wins, sometimes another, but no group wins consistently.



Pluralist Theory

Citizens thus hold power because they are represented by interest groups capable of advancing their concerns in a successful manner.



Pluralist Theory

Thus pluralists would hold that power resides in such diverse groups as the AMA, the oil corporation lobbies, the AAUP, DAR, anti-abortionists, CORE, the NOW, and so on.



Pluralist Theory

It is interesting to note that pluralists have essentially abandoned the position of an ideal democracy based on the individual and have fallen back on the idea of a democracy of groups.



Pluralist Theory

A major problem with pluralist theory is that groups differ in terms of their power.

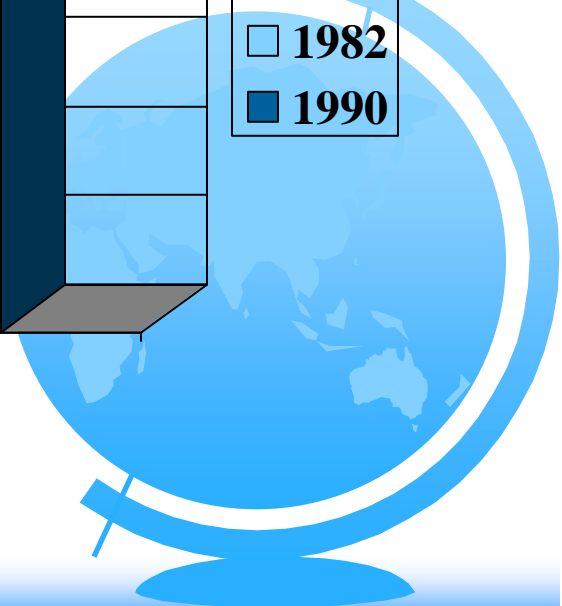
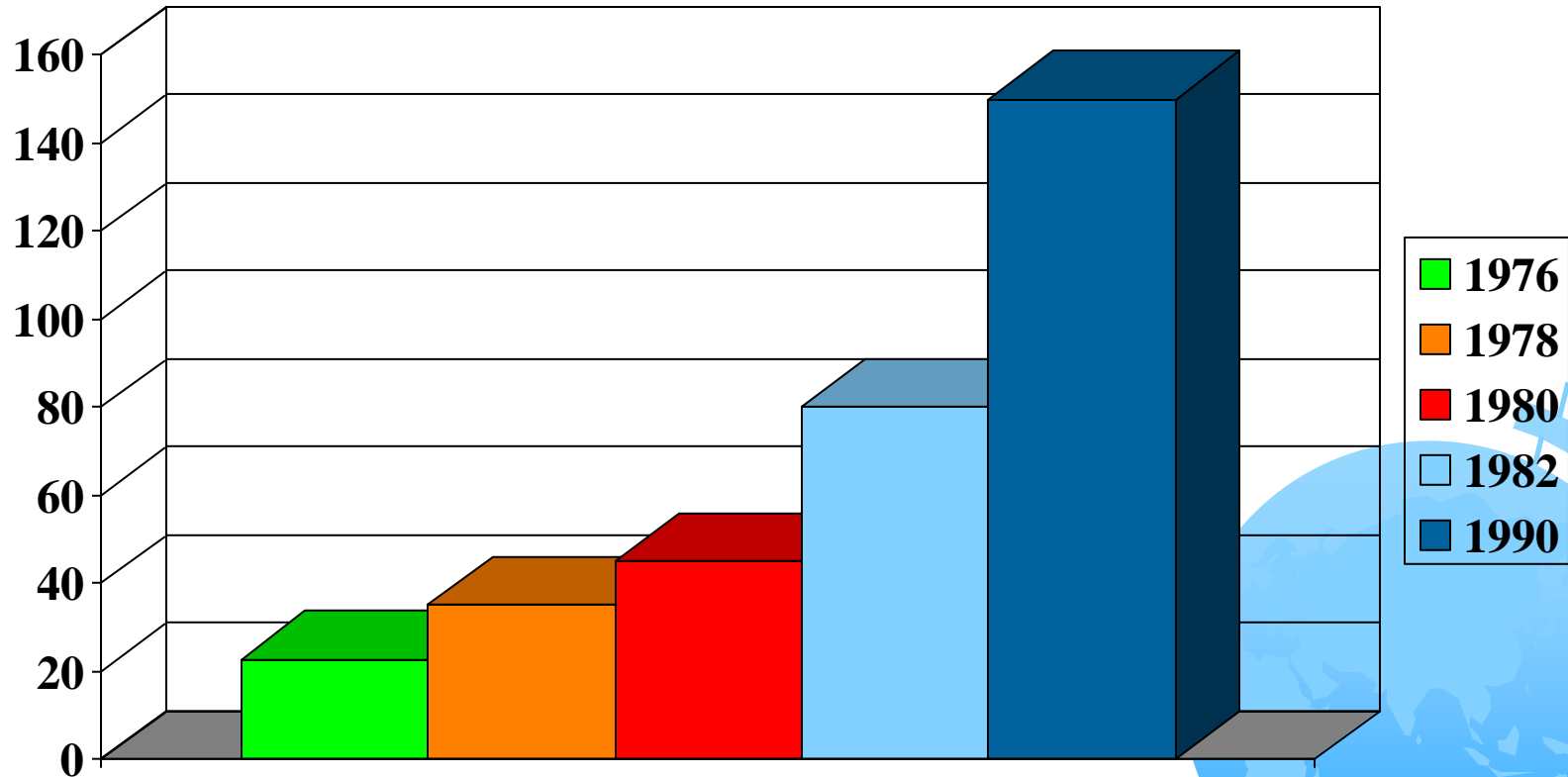


Pluralist Theory

- ☞ Some groups have more members, more efficient organization, more committed members, more wealth.
- ☞ Essentially, pluralists must minimize these differences in order to believe in group democracy.



PAC Contributions to Congress



Pluralist Theory

Many scholars have flatly rejected these pluralist claims, arguing instead for a power elite conception of the modern state.



Elite Theory

The most famous advocate of the power elite theory is C. Wright Mills, who sets forth his conception through a critical analysis of American society in the 1956 book, *The Power Elite*. Mills' theoretical insights come from both Marx and Weber.



Elite Theory

The power elite theorists argue that the power to control and direct the major activities of modern Western societies is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of persons.



Elite Theory

These persons constitute a homogenous and unified elite standing at the very top of modern society.



Elite Theory

It is their common social class background (upper class, white, urban) that gives the elite their cohesion. they go to the same prep schools, ivy league universities, belong to the same clubs and organizations.



Elite Theory

According to Mills, members of the elite are drawn from three principal areas of American life: the executive branch of government, the leadership of the top corporations, and the top brass of the military.



Elite Theory

- ☞ Such an elite has been dubbed by many scholars since Mill's day "the military-industrial complex."
- ☞ Mills sees the people at the top of these huge organizations as holding a fundamental unity of interests. Many modern elite theorists now exclude the military from full participation in the elite.



Elite Theory

It is their common social class background that creates a unity of ideological outlook among the elite--a basic social, political, and economic world-view.



Elite Theory

While Mills sees all three branches of the power elite as highly significant, he points to the top corporations as the keystone of power in American society.



Elite Theory

It is important to note that the power of the elite is based on their institutional positions, not on their personal attributes or wealth.



Elite Theory

While their class position and wealth often give the person access to key positions, it is the power of holding the top offices in the huge bureaucracies that dominate modern society that gives the elite significant social, economic and political power.



Elite Theory

- ☞ Below this power elite, Mills finds an intermediate layer of power that consists primarily of the Congress and the various interest groups that lobby it.
- ☞ While some competition for power exists at this level, the power elite ensure that no serious challenge to the foundations of its power are tolerated in this arena.



Elite Theory

Finally, at the very bottom of the power structure stands the great mass of ordinary citizens who are relatively unorganized, powerless and subject to the pervasive control of those at the top of the dominant bureaucracies.



Elite Theory

Mills views the notion that genuine democracy prevails in the U.S. as nothing more than a myth (he actually refers to it as a sort of "fairy tale").



Elite Theory

Rather than the people controlling the government for their own interests, the government is strongly controlled by corporate and government leaders who are primarily concerned with advancing their interests.



Elite Theory

Most modern day power elite theorists reject the notion of the military brass and the executive branch of the government as full members of the power elite. Rather, they see power as overwhelmingly monopolized by the capitalist class.



Elite Theory

- ☞ The Marxist view of contemporary democracy is that parliamentary democracy is a capitalist state. That is, the state is actively aligned with the capitalist class and undertakes activities to serve its interests.
- ☞ As some Marxists put it, the state "governs," but the capitalist class "rules."



Elite Theory

- ☞ Contemporary elitists have generally stressed three primary functions of the state:
 - Legitimation
 - Repression
 - Accumulation



Legitimation

The state attempts to foster a consensus among the citizenry regarding the basic economic soundness and moral integrity of democratic- capitalist society--to get the people to commit their hearts and minds to it, and to believe it is superior to other forms of society.



Legitimation

For instance, it generally attempts to insure that what is taught in state-supported schools actively encourages support for the political and economic status quo.



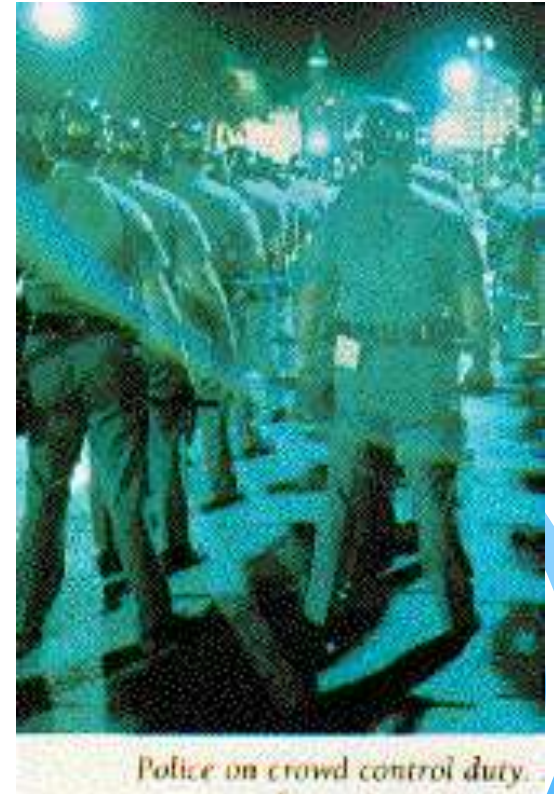
Legitimation

By requiring all students in secondary schools to take courses in civics or citizenship, and by presenting a largely favorable image of capitalism and modern democracy in those courses, the educational system is helping to foster a basic consensus.



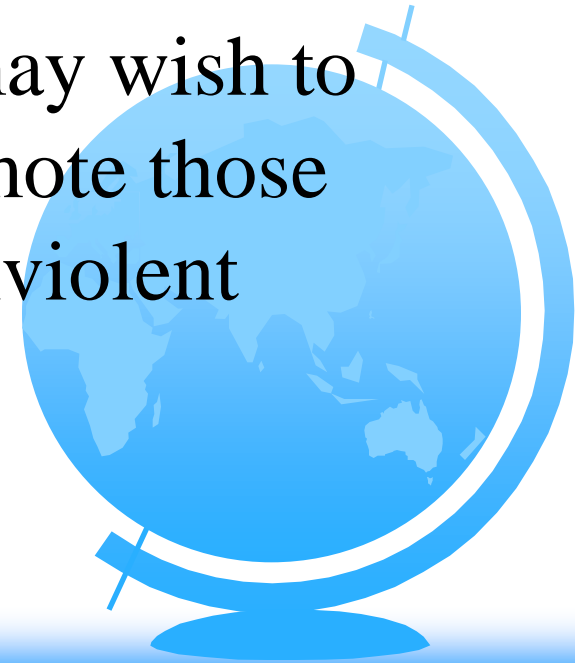
Repression

When legitimation fails, the state engages in repression. Repression involves preventing people from taking actions that would harm the state and the capitalist system in major ways.



Repression

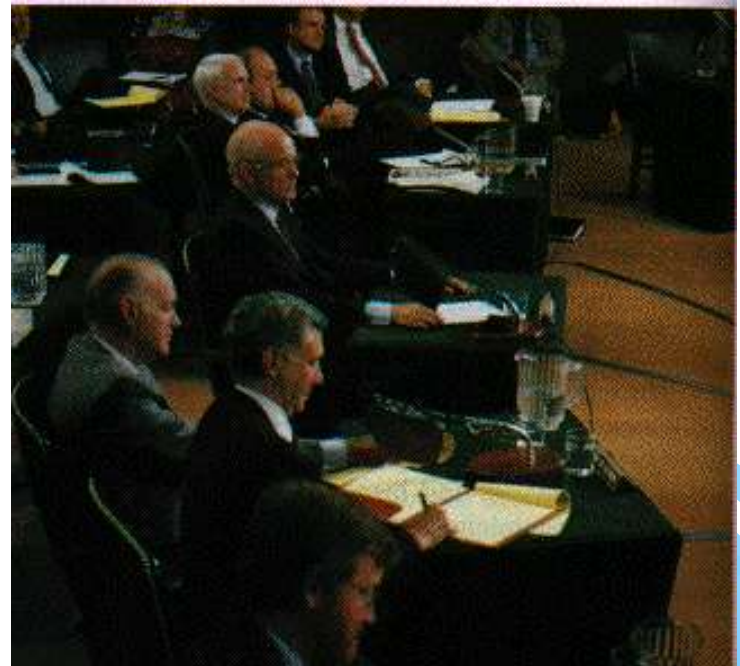
Repression need not involve violence or force, although it frequently involves such measures. Denying visas to foreign intellectuals who have views unfavorable to the capitalist system, and who may wish to enter a particular society to promote those views, is a very real form of nonviolent repression.





Accumulation

This function involves establishing policies that assist the capitalist class in its accumulation of capital.



Accumulation

Accumulation activities are numerous in modern capitalist societies. The U.S. government provided large loan guarantees to Chrysler, laws that establish major tax loopholes for corporations assist in the accumulation process.



The Capitalist State

- ❏ Power elite theorists with a Marxian bent tend to claim that the heads of corporate America are the only true elite.
- ❏ Weberians believe that the state itself is a largely independent and self-contained sphere, sometimes acting with great autonomy.



The Capitalist State

- ➡ Marxist tend to believe that the state always serves the capitalist class.
- ➡ Weberians see the state serving capitalist interests, but also having interests of its own. Weberians point to the creation of the welfare state as an example.



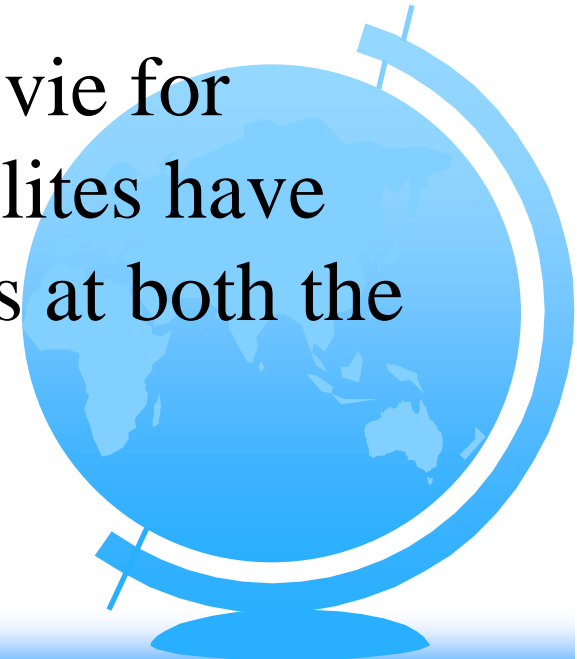
The Capitalist State

While groups other than the capitalist class do have some capacity to advance their own interest, they are seldom able to do so when the satisfaction of these interests would conflict in a major way with capitalist interests.



The Capitalist State

- ☞ The record of direct elite representation in government is overwhelming. Corporate contributions to election campaigns are also a national disgrace.
- ☞ While other interest groups also vie for government support, corporate elites have far more resources and lobbyists at both the state and federal level.



The Capitalist State

- ☞ The extent to which the state can act independently from the interests of the capitalist class varies depending on the issue at hand as well as across societies and through time.
- ☞ That it can have a reasonable amount of autonomy cannot be denied.



The Capitalist State

Examples would include the "New Deal", the EPA, the development of the welfare state, Occupational Safety and Health, and a variety of other actions the state has taken counter to the interest of the corporate elites.



The Capitalist State

However, since the dominant economic institutions of modern industrial society are private corporations, the government must follow corporate priorities.



The Capitalist State

The state is not itself the initiator of most production within the economy. The corporations do that. However, that same government is increasingly charged with arranging the preconditions for profitable production. Its funds, its power, its political survival depend on private sector performance. So do the jobs of most workers.



The Capitalist State

☞ The state promotes the economy through four actions:

- Allows the formation of oligopolies
- subsidizes technological innovation
- subsidizes industry with massive defense spending
- engages in direct intervention in the economy



The Capitalist State

The state's interest in perpetuating its own rule is, in fact, related to the health of the capitalist economy.



The Capitalist State

- ☞ Government also has a major interest in an expanding economy.
 - Greater Revenues
 - Avoid Redistribution
 - Satisfy its People



The Capitalist State

A growing economy means greater government revenue, it is through economic growth that governments are able to avoid the issue of the redistribution of wealth, and economic growth keeps people happy and passive and assures re-election.



The Capitalist State

According to Dye, the state is strongly concerned with the stability of the economy. And with its expansion or growth. And with education. And with technical and scientific advance. And, most notably, with the national defense.



The Capitalist State

The elite of industrial societies therefore all have interest in a strong and growing economy, domestic tranquility, and constantly expanding military power.



The Capitalist State

These are the national goals; they are sufficiently trite so that one has a reassuring sense of the obvious in stating them. All of these goals have their counterparts in the needs and goals of the economic institutions of our society.



Elite Interests

The interests of the elites and the interests of the nation state thus become identical.



Elite Interests

Economic elite require domestic stability to facilitate their planning. Growth brings promotion and prestige. They require trained manpower to run their plants and offices. They need government underwriting of their research and development.



Elite Interests

At each point the government has goals with which the economic institutions can identify with.



Totalitarian Dictatorship

- ☞ This form of government arose in countries that had little developed industrialism, capitalism, or traditions in democratic government.
- ☞ This form of state also prevailed where "state socialism" is the economic form.



Totalitarian Dictatorship

A totalitarian dictatorship is typified by the marked absence of those principal features characteristic of parliamentary democracy.



Totalitarian Dictatorship

Power is massively concentrated in a central agency that directs the affairs of society, individual liberties do not exist, free elections are not held. and no opposition to the government is permitted, either ideologically or in actual practice. In short, a general state of political repression prevails.

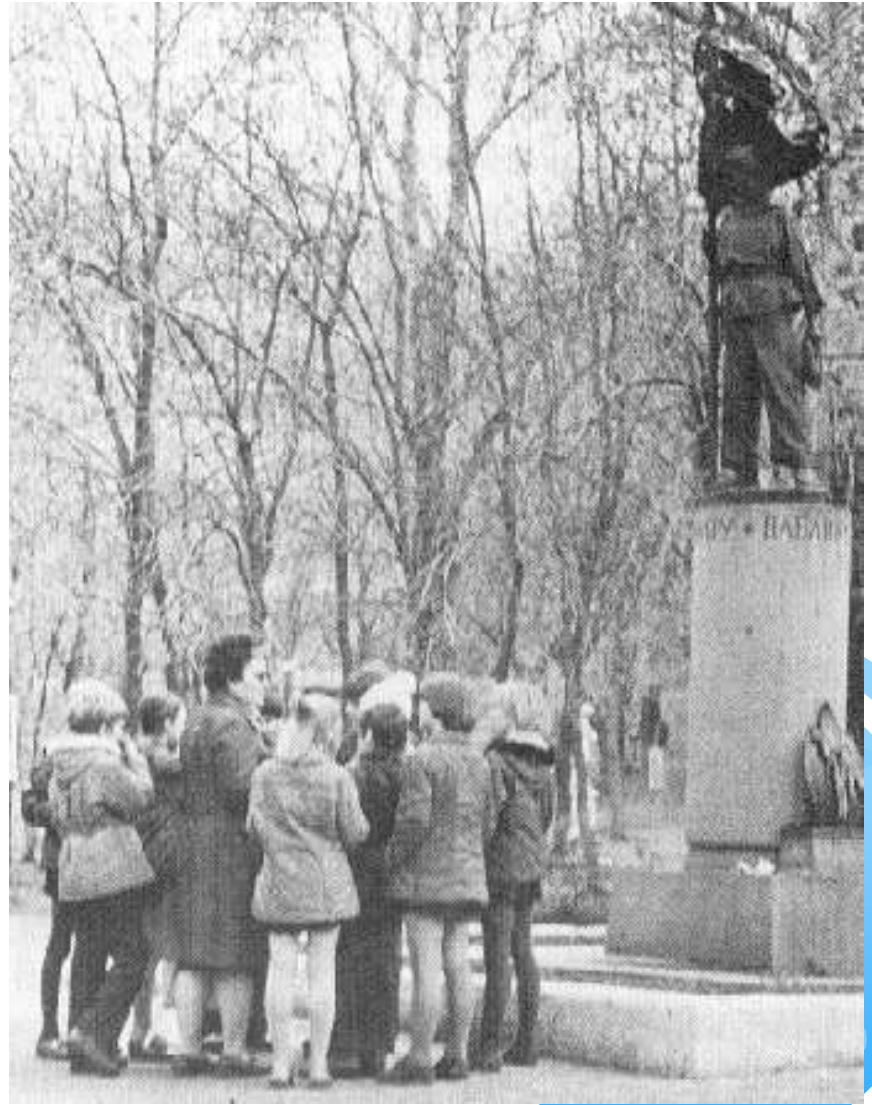


Totalitarian Dictatorship

- ☞ The Communist party had an extraordinarily high degree of ideological and organizational centralization.
- ☞ The party maintained an atmosphere of constant political vigilance; ideological unity within the party was demanded and great attention was paid to routing out both real and potential opposition.



Until the mid-1980s, Soviet children were taught to admire Pavlik Morozov, a boy who denounced his father to the authorities and later was killed by outraged neighbors because of this: adult leader of the Young Pioneers recounting the story of Morozovs “heroism,” 1985.



Totalitarian Dictatorship

Terrorist and oppressive methods were needed to achieve these goals, the result was the creation of a class of men whose power over others was the most complete known in history--the communist bureaucratic elite.



Totalitarian Dictatorship

- ☞ This bureaucratic elite maintained an administrative monopoly over the entire social order, including:
 - Economics
 - Ideology
 - Intellectual



Totalitarian Dictatorship

The party had complete control over virtually all economic activity; tolerated no ideological deviation from the party line and swiftly uses force to punish those who deviated; and tyrannized the mind by suppressing intellectual discoveries and creations that contradicted official party dogma.



In 1989, peaceful democratic revolutions swept eastern Europe: thousands of demonstrators gathered in Red Square to demand an end to Communist Party control of the government.



Totalitarian Dictatorship

In regard to the political differences between capitalism and socialism, Weber believed that socialism would necessarily lead to extensive bureaucratic centralization of power in the hands of a ruling minority.



Totalitarian Dictatorship

Such centralization would be necessary, according to Weber, as a means of managing the affairs of a socialist economy.



Totalitarian Dictatorship

- ➡ Thus, socialism would not become more democratic than capitalism, as Marx had thought, but actually less democratic.
- ➡ To this point in human history, Weber had much greater insight than Marx into the political nature of industrial societies.



Some Closing Thoughts: The State and Intensification

We have gloried in the concepts of material progress, efficiency, and wealth above all other values. And we have destroyed many of our primary institutions and traditional values in pursuit of this material progress.



Some Closing Thoughts: The State and Intensification

The materialism of our culture has been encouraged by some very powerful structural interests, most especially private industry and government. The more we consume, the greater the number of cars we buy throughout our lifetime, the higher the profits of industry.



Some Closing Thoughts: The State and Intensification

In the West, the over-riding purpose of life has become one of creating material abundance and satisfying every conceivable human desire.



Some Closing Thoughts: The State and Intensification

In doing so, we have placed man at the center of the universe, and defined the ultimate purpose of our existence as the satisfaction of all material wants.



Some Closing Thoughts: The State and Intensification

The view that unrestrained industrial growth is a cause of many of our environmental and structural problems encounters a lot of resistance in Western democracies.



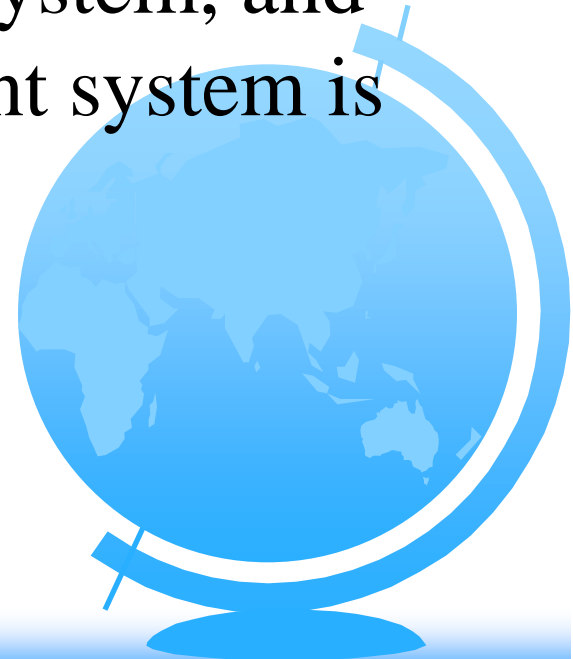
Some Closing Thoughts: The State and Intensification

It is because of the vested interest in continuing economic growth that the environmental issues of depletion/pollution have not yet been seriously addressed by industrial society.



Some Closing Thoughts: The State and Intensification

- ❏ Environmental issues are not being addressed in an ivory tower.
- ❏ It is a political struggle between those who are benefiting from the present system, and those who believe that the present system is not sustainable.



Some Closing Thoughts: The State and Intensification

And the elite, those who favor the status quo,
have far more power in the debate.

