

#### **4. Plan for a contribution to the study of the modern State**

“Plan de la contribution à l’étude de l’État modern”, 1979, unpublished 1 page typescript. Translated by Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden.

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This brief, 1-page note is an outline of a presentation Lefebvre gave at a conference held on the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> January 1979 at a Marxist research center in Paris, the *Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches marxistes*. It is a significant piece for two main reasons. First, it provides a fascinating glimpse into one of Lefebvre’s favorite modes of intellectual engagement—public speaking, discussion and debate. Second, the substantive points made in the outline underscore several themes that became essential in Lefebvre’s work throughout the 1970s—(a) the problem of popular sovereignty and radical democracy; (b) the consolidation of the state mode of production; and (c) the restructuring of contemporary social-democratic states in western Europe. These are explored in subsequent chapters of this volume.

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I would like to draw the attention of the colloquium participants to three points:

*First.* The Marxist-Leninist theory of the withering away of the State. Everyone knows today the extent to which, during the Stalinist era, this essential theory was forgotten or distorted. Even today we omit to remember that, according to Marx and Lenin, the withering away of the State was an integral part of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

*Second:* The state mode of production. I introduced this concept to expose and explain the general tendency of the State in the current world. The old

concepts of (economic-social-political) *levels* and *instances* no longer suffice;<sup>1</sup> the enduring theory of State intervention in the economy is even more insufficient. The thesis of State Monopoly Capitalism (*C.M.E.*) needs to be updated in order to account for this tendency.<sup>2</sup> The modern State manages society as a whole and utilizes all of its resources in accordance with a strategy determined by those who hold political power. How representative these politicians are in relation to the classes remains important but is no longer fundamental. The current *mondialisation* of the State and state system is accomplished in accordance with this tendency.

*Third:* The social-democratic model in northern Europe. This question concerns France no less than the preceding one. A model of the State anticipating the concept of the state mode of production is currently taking shape in northern Europe. The State, conceived in this way, takes hold of the management of the three key sectors of economic and social life: *energy* (nuclear, petroleum, etc.) – *information* (not only the media, but new forms of information) – the principal *economic decisions* (relations of the national market with the outside world, the European market with the world market and multinational firms). Such a State allows a degree of autonomy, more fictitious than real, to local communities (*communautés locales*), businesses and regions; it can even tolerate an appearance of *autogestion*. Neoliberalism is also going in this direction, to a certain degree. Social-democratic ideology is, to my mind, only the extension and perfection of it. This ideology is itself traversed by contradictions, including within socialist parties.

These are the crucial points and I propose to develop them orally at the colloquium.

Given that these points correspond to each of the themes proposed by the programme of the colloquium, I leave to the organisers the details of deciding the moment of my intervention.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Editors' note: These are terms developed in Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, translated by Ben Brewster, London: NLB, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Editors' note: This theory, which originated with Lenin and was further developed among Soviet, East German, French and American Communists after the Second World War, contended that the state and large capital were being fused together into a single institutional ensemble. In *De l'Etat*, Vol III (129), Lefebvre refers to the work PCF theoretician Paul Boccara, *Études sur le capitalisme monopoliste d'État, sa crise et son issue*, Paris: Édition Sociales, 1973.