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Bourgeois Revolution, State Formation and the Absence of the International

International relations always form an aspect of the social dynamics that prevail inside and across societies.\(^1\) That was one of the central conclusions of *The Myth of 1648*, in which I drew out the implications for the discipline of international relations.\(^2\)

The question, which I pose here, is whether the inverse also applies. Are the social dynamics inside societies also always bound up with international relations? That is another of my book’s conclusions which has critical implications for the classical-Marxist understanding of bourgeois revolutions and state formation – implications with which Marxism has yet to fully come to terms. It raises the wider question of the degree to which Marxism has incorporated

\(^1\) This is a revised version of the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial lecture, delivered on 9 October 2004 at Birkbeck College, University of London. I am grateful to the Deutscher Committee for the award of the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize 2003, and, in particular, to Alfredo Saad-Filho for organisational and editorial support and George Comninel for his role as discussant on the Deutscher Lectures panel. Additionally, I would like to thank Justin Rosenberg, Kees van der Pijl, Ellen Wood, Samuel Knafo, Kamran Matin, and Robert Shilliam for detailed comments on the paper. The article was written in the register of a lecture and carries its synoptic, programmatic, and provocative marks. [Editorial note: the 2003 Deutscher Memorial Prize was won jointly by Benno Teschke (for *The Myth of 1648*) and Neil Davidson (for *Discovering the Scottish Revolution*). The following issue will carry Davidson’s Lecture. In a future issue, George Comninel will review both books.]

\(^2\) Teschke 2003.
the role of the international into its own intellectual self-definition – both theoretically, in terms of its core vocabulary, and historiographically, in terms of the degree to which the international is not simply conceptualised as derivative of domestic trends, but an essential component in the overall reconstruction of the course of history. In fact, I argue here that it is the absence of ‘the international’ which accounts for many of the problems in contemporary Marxist thought about bourgeois revolutions and state formation.

I shall substantiate this claim in four steps. I start by outlining the orthodox-Marxist notion of ‘bourgeois revolution’ and how it has mutated over the years in order to preserve itself against the attacks of non-Marxist revisionist historians. Second, I will introduce the position of ‘political Marxism’ – the literature associated with the work of Robert Brenner, Ellen Wood, and George Comninel – on the English and French Revolutions. While this literature has provided a powerful renewal of Marxism and re-interpretation of European history, I suggest that political Marxism needs to be further developed, because, thirdly, I show, with reference to early-modern Anglo-French history, how ‘the international’ enters as a constitutive moment, and not merely as a contingent or residual quantity, into the social dynamics of early-modern revolutions and the developmental trajectories of state formation. The wider argument is that any understanding of country-specific co-developments of capitalism, revolution and state formation has to register the fact that these processes unfolded within and across an interstate system that centrally shaped their respective national peculiarities. I conclude by outlining the theoretical challenge this poses to Marxism and suggest a re-reading of political Marxism that is capable of comprehending the regionally spatio-temporally differentiated and geopolitically mediated development of Europe as a whole – a perspective that is fully alive to the constitutive role of the international in historical development.

‘Bourgeois revolution’: the classic conception, revisions and reformulations

For a long time, the textbook version of the concept ‘bourgeois revolution’ within Marxism, canonised in the Communist Manifesto, entailed the following four core components. First, it assumed a self-conscious and united class, the bourgeoisie, as the main agent of revolution. This class was both urban

\[^3\] Hobsbawm 1962, Soboul 1962.