INTRODUCTION

Inseparable from Weber’s sociology is the fatalistic assumption of the necessity of domination. At the same time, his analysis of the class structure of capitalist society is articulated specifically in terms of and at a particular level of economic action. Ralf Dahrendorf, by contrast, has abstracted the concept of authority from the totality of Weber’s work and elaborated a comprehensive theory of class structuration wholly in terms of it. It will be our contention that Dahrendorf’s social theory, while having superficially responded to the massive social changes in the capitalist world during the last two decades, as a corpus of work is flawed by its metaphysical assumptions concerning the primacy of authority relations in the dynamics of conflict group formation.

Central to Dahrendorf’s account of social reality is his persistent failure to examine the class formations which emerge from the interaction of man with nature through particular historical modes of social production. In order to demonstrate this, we will identify the misleading and erroneous evaluation of Marx’s work which pervades Dahrendorf’s analysis, and the liberal ideological influences which structure it and divert attention from the actual sources of power and conflict in capitalist society. Finally, it will be argued that Dahrendorf’s scheme cannot be adequately revised on the basis of his own
initial assumptions, as has been suggested by J. H. Turner. Rather, his contentions can only be critically assessed from a viewpoint which sees capitalism as a form of society in which the principal structural cleavage derives from the private ownership of productive property and not, as Dahrendorf holds, the possession of authority.

DAHRENDORF AND MARX: DEPARTURES INTO CONFLICT

In his influential *Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society*, Dahrendorf presents his theory of ‘integration and values’ on the one hand and ‘coercion and interests’ on the other as the embodiments of ‘the two faces of society’. He argues that two schools of sociological thought, each claiming for itself the ability to account for the problem of how societies cohere, have historically stood in conflict. Both the ‘utopian’ school, stressing value consensus, and the ‘rationalist’ school, stressing force, domination and constraint, ‘advance claims for the primacy of their respective standpoints’.

Dahrendorf asserts that both models have equal explanatory validity for the solution of different sociological problems, but proceeds to argue that recent sociological thought has been excessively dominated by integration theory. In particular, he criticises Parsons for the essentially one-sided nature of his ‘utopian’ analysis. Citing the East Berlin revolt of 1953 as evidence of an aspect of society inexplicable in terms of such theory, Dahrendorf similarly challenges the universal explanatory power of coercion theory. The two models, he suggests, constitute complementary rather than mutually exclusive aspects of social structure. The notion of a ‘Janus-headed’ society, in other words, is Dahrendorf’s methodological starting point.

His principal concern in *Class and Class Conflict* is to explain the aetiology of organised social conflict ‘on the assumption of the coercive nature of social structure’. Dahrendorf’s intention is to account for a particular set of problematic social phenomena in terms of the constraint as opposed to the utopian or consensus model. His main thesis is that the coincidence of economic and political conflict, as stressed by Marx, is inapplicable to ‘post-capitalist’ societies, but his case rests largely on a confused and