

This article was downloaded by:[The University of Manchester]  
On: 19 December 2007  
Access Details: [subscription number 773564015]  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954  
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Critique Journal of Socialist Theory

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smp/title~content=t741801732>

### 1648 and All That

James Heartfield

Online Publication Date: 01 December 2007

To cite this Article: Heartfield, James (2007) '1648 and All That', Critique, 35:3, 445 - 455

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/03017600701676886

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03017600701676886>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# 1648 and All That

James Heartfield

*Benno Teschke's The Myth of 1648 aims to be a Marxist criticism of the Neorealists' theory of international relations, challenging their ahistorical reification of the concepts of sovereignty and anarchy. Specifically, Teschke seeks to show that the 1648 treaty of Westphalia is nothing like a modern negotiation of nation-states, but is in fact an archaic contract between absolutist monarchs. Teschke's argument that the sovereign states of 1648 were pre-capitalist does not stand up, and he manufactures an otiose theory of absolutism to disguise that fact. His over-formal method imposes a rigid ideal of sovereignty before which the real history of emerging sovereign states will always be found wanting. Teschke ends up a bigger champion of the capitalist state than the Neorealists he criticises.*

*Keywords: Sovereignty; 1648 Treaty of Westphalia; Absolutism; Historical materialism; Origins of capitalism; Nation-state*

In his award-winning book, *The Myth of 1648*, Benno Teschke aims to show that, far from being the paradigmatic moment of international relations, establishing the balance of power, sovereignty and power politics, the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia was a pre-modern event negotiated between feudal dynasties.

Teschke's express purpose is to undermine the claims of the school of Neorealism in international relations (IR) theory, as represented by Kenneth Waltz, accusing it of 'affirmation of anarchy as a transhistorical given'.<sup>1</sup> Other schools of IR, whether constructivist, historical-sociological or Marxist, are presented as 'the subsequent intellectual trajectory of historicizing IR theories', marked by 'a successive theoretical emancipation from the conceptual strictures of Neorealism'.<sup>2</sup> But as we shall see, despite his desire to take issue with the tenets of Neorealism, Teschke does unintentionally end up with a sterling defence of some of those key tenets, namely the balance of power and sovereignty.

---

<sup>1</sup> Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso Books, 2003), p. 16. *The Myth of 1648* was awarded the Isaac Deutscher memorial prize in 2003.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Teschke's argument is framed in terms drawn from Karl Marx, and is, he says, a *historical materialist* account, presenting a rather circuitous chain of reasoning for anyone who does not share that starting-point. Schematically, Teschke's argument is this: modern international relations are relations between states under the capitalist mode of production; at the time of the Treaty of Westphalia, Europe was feudalist, not capitalist; feudalism is not modern, therefore relations expressed in the Treaty of Westphalia are not modern, and not a model for contemporary international relations, except through the error of conflating different historical eras. A sceptic, of course, could depart at any point in the argument, objecting that if capitalism and modern concepts of sovereignty are not contiguous, then perhaps the mode of production is not decisive. But even within historical materialism, Teschke takes issue with at least one major school of Marxist IR: the world-systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein, and in passing takes some side-swipes at what he calls the capital-logic school, making his dismissal of 'Marxological disputes over the correct readings of his writings' seem somewhat petulant.<sup>3</sup>

Teschke's strong claim is for *historical specificity*. This, as we have seen, is where he takes issue with leading Neorealist Kenneth Waltz, who wrote that 'the logic of anarchy obtains whether the system is composed of tribes, nations, oligopolistic firms, or street gangs'.<sup>4</sup> Teschke tends to make the case for historical specificity in passing, but a good account can be found in Karl Korsch's *Karl Marx*.<sup>5</sup> As Jindrich Zeleny explains, the Marxist principle of historical specificity envisages more than quantitative changes in the distribution of values within categories, such as the rise and fall of great powers, but also the qualitative transformation of the categories themselves, such as whether social organisation takes the form of powers at all.<sup>6</sup>

Teschke makes good use of the principle of historical specificity, criticising the particular account of emergent capitalism made by Immanuel Wallerstein. Teschke rightly argues that Wallerstein's dating of the origins of the capitalist mode of production to the 'long 15th century' stretches credulity.<sup>7</sup> Wallerstein's inspiration, the historian Fernand Braudel, dates the origins further back, to the European 13th century.<sup>8</sup> Teschke roots out the *reductio ad absurdum* of Braudel's theory, quoting a passage from *The Perspective of the World*: 'I have argued that capitalism has been potentially visible since the dawn of history', which stretches the very concept of capitalism so much as to make it useless.<sup>9</sup> As Teschke says, 'the theoretical implication is a deep-rooted immobility at the heart of history'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> Waltz, 'Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory', *Journal of International Affairs*, 44 (1990), pp. 21–37, quoted in Teschke, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), pp. 24–56.

<sup>6</sup> Jindrich Zeleny, *The Logic of Marx* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 12—though Zeleny, of course, is talking of property forms, not international relations.

<sup>7</sup> Teschke, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> F. Braudel, *The Perspective of the World* (London: Collins, 1984), p. 620; quoted in Teschke, op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>10</sup> Teschke, op. cit., p. 129.

It is with a certain trepidation, however, that we follow Teschke into the arcane topic of the 'origins of capitalism' debate, which has been running for 30 years now, exacting a preposterously high price of admission (a working knowledge of the history and sociology of the Middle Ages) for remarkably little edification.<sup>11</sup>

However, notwithstanding Teschke's well-made points against Wallerstein and Braudel for their premature dating of the origins of capitalism, his own dating of the origins of the modern state system (contiguous with the origins of capitalism in Teschke's argument) seem alarmingly recent. On p. 146, Teschke dates the transformation to the modern era as coming in the 19th century; on p. 12, he proposes a 'long period of transformation' lasting 'from 1688 to the *end of the First World War*'; on p. 5, he asks whether the peace treaty at Versailles is not the true birth of the modern era; and on p. 126, he argues that the 'overwhelming majority of European states remained dynastic-absolutist up to the period between the mid-19th century and the Treaty of Versailles'.

In that Teschke identifies the birth of the modern with the birth of capitalism, and grounds his theory of capitalism in the theory of Marx, without wishing to indulge in 'Marxological disputes over the correct readings of his writings', it is worth looking at what Marx says on the question: 'Although we come across the first beginnings of capitalist production as early as the 14th or 15th century, sporadically, in certain towns of the Mediterranean, the capitalistic era dates from the 16th century'.<sup>12</sup> That would, of course, put the peace of Westphalia, 1648, firmly in the 'capitalistic era'.

Of course, it is entirely possible to dismiss some of Marx's specific propositions, even as 'illusions and prejudices', while still believing that 'the supremacy of Marx's overall contribution to the general theory of historical materialism scarcely needs to be reiterated'.<sup>13</sup> By the same token, though, Marx was at liberty to insist on the independence of his thought from those who called themselves Marxists: 'All I know is that I am not a Marxist', he told Engels.<sup>14</sup>

The confusion arises for the most part in the characterisation of the era of *mercantilism* (in economic policy) and *absolutism* (in state formation). Marx tends to treat this as the early period, or emergence of capitalism (with some important caveats), whereas Teschke, following Perry Anderson and Sussex University's Justin Rosenberg, treats it as a distinct mode of production, or even as an extension of the feudal mode of production. Mercantile capital does indeed emerge before capitalism proper, just as Teschke says, depending not upon revolutionising production, but on buying cheap and selling dear. He is right that its profits depend upon political

<sup>11</sup> See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974); Paul Sweezy, Maurice Dobb, H. K. Takahashi, Rodney Hilton and Christopher Hill, *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: Arena, 1976); Robert Brenner, 'Postscript', in *Merchants and Revolution* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 638–716; Trevor Henry Aston and Charles Harding English Philpin, *The Brenner Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974 [1867]), p. 669.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Correspondence 1846–1895*, edited by Dona Torr (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1941), p. 472.

constraints upon trade, namely royal charters, granting monopolies, thereby restricting access to the business, and keeping profits on trade artificially high. On a small point, though, Teschke underestimates the importance of the revolution in shipping, and the way that the sea-borne proletariat were a model for the factory-based one that followed.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, though, the emergence of mercantile capitalism, alien as it was to the more developed form of industrial capitalism, was still that component of medieval society that projected beyond its original ground. Marx called merchant capitalism 'primitive accumulation', which Teschke takes to be just a subordinate component of feudalism. Marx coined the term 'primitive accumulation' as a rejoinder to the mystifying concept of 'original accumulation' found in economic textbooks of his day, arguing that capital funds came about through frugality. Marx shows that the original funds for investment, primitive accumulation, were instead plundered from the new world (as gold), from Africa (as slaves), or from Asia (as spices), but always through extortion and violence.<sup>16</sup> But for Marx, primitive accumulation is accumulation all the same: 'capital arises out of circulation and posits labour as wage labour'.<sup>17</sup>

Associated with the underestimation of the importance of primitive accumulation for the emergence of capitalism is Teschke's overestimation of the dynamic of the political form of *absolutism*. For Teschke, absolutism is 'a social formation in its own right'.<sup>18</sup> Teschke concedes that serfdom had already been abolished in France in the era of absolutism, but because there is no generalised wage labour he feels obliged to conjure up a third mode of production, the absolutist, to fill the gap between feudalism and capitalism. But he dismisses without justification Marx's explanation that the absolutist state was a hybrid form that stood between the old feudal society and the as-yet undeveloped capitalist order.<sup>19</sup> For the most part, though, this is only due to Teschke's mulish formalism, which refuses to see capitalist society unless every feature is present for him to tick off his checklist. In fact, the explanation for the distinctively centralised state form, its separation from the nobility, was precisely that it was already responding to the mercantile interests that were generating its revenues.

Teschke insists that he is doing honour to Marx's intent in insisting that the modern state is coeval with the depoliticisation of the economy: 'Only after processes of surplus extraction were depoliticised could sovereignty be pooled in a public state over and above a self-regulating capitalist economy'.<sup>20</sup> Further, 'capitalism is defined by wage labour'.<sup>21</sup> And Teschke would not be wrong to insist that the developed form of capitalism grants greater insight into the structure of capitalist society than the primitive (Marx put it metaphorically: 'the anatomy of man is the key to the anatomy

<sup>15</sup> See Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's spirited history, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> See Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (New York: Capricorn, 1966), for a good account.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973 [1953]), p. 278.

<sup>18</sup> Teschke, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>19</sup> See Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Teschke, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

of the ape'—a proposition that, no longer holding in biological science, only confuses the modern reader). Teschke is wrong, however, if he insists that the developed form of capitalism should be a template against which to judge history; that would be to make a fetish of Marx's categories. It is true that in its highest form, capitalist production is independent of the state. But Teschke takes the concept of capitalist production and demands that historical reality should kneel before it. The truth is, of course, that the concept is an idealisation, which rarely, if ever, corresponds immediately to the actual existence of society. 'All theory', says Goethe's Mephistopheles, 'is grey, and green the golden tree of life'.<sup>22</sup> The digression between the appearance of things and their underlying essence is not a disproof of the theory, as Teschke seems to think, but the very reason we need theory.<sup>23</sup>

When he insists that 'capitalism is defined by wage labour' or 'feudalism is defined by serfdom', Teschke, for all his talk of the superiority of dialectics, betrays a formalistic frame of mind in which pinning down fluid reality into definitional boxes is the same thing as understanding. For Marx, by contrast, there is transition from one state to another, so that definitions are only ever approximations of what is necessarily indefinite. So, specifically, Marx writes of the development of capitalism:

As long as capital is weak, it still relies on the crutches of the past modes of production, or of those that will pass with its rise. As soon as it feels strong, it throws away those crutches, and moves in accordance with its own laws.<sup>24</sup>

Further, Marx writes of the 'Bloody Legislation against the Expropriated, from the End of the 15th Century', that while in developed capitalism 'direct force' is exceptional,

... [i]t is otherwise during the historic genesis of capitalist production. The bourgeoisie at its rise, wants and uses the power of the state to 'regulate' wages, i.e. to force them within the limits suitable for surplus value making, to lengthen the working day and to keep the labourer himself in the normal degree of dependence. This is an essential element of the so-called primitive accumulation.<sup>25</sup>

The difference between Teschke's 'dialectical' social theory and Marx's is pointed. Whereas for Teschke the use of state coercion to generate a surplus shows that this is not capitalism, for Marx it shows that this capitalism is not dynamic enough to survive without coercion as a supplement. In fact, capitalism has depended upon extra-economic means of coercion for most of its existence, not just in the period of its emergence, when it survived on plunder and slavery, but also in its dotage, when it has thrived on indentured labour in the colonies, the militarisation of labour in the long cycle of world wars, and increasingly upon the state organisation of production as government intervention and support for industry has become ever greater. The

<sup>22</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1998 [1808, 1832]) p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984 [1867]), p. 817.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, op. cit., p. 651.

<sup>25</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol I, op. cit., p. 689.

Marx quote about capital relying on crutches while it is still weak continues: 'As soon as it [capital] begins to sense itself and become conscious of itself as a barrier to development, it seeks refuge in forms which, by restricting free competition, seem to make the rule of capital more perfect, but are at the same time heralds of its dissolution and of the dissolution of the mode of production resting on it.'<sup>26</sup>

As interesting as the connections between Marx's theory of capitalist development and Teschke's theory of the peace of Westphalia are, one has to ask whether this is a semantic dispute. Does it matter *for the study of international relations* whether the capitalistic era begins in the 16th century or the 19th? Teschke would say so, I think, because he wants to say that certain features of social organisation inform relations between nations, and that these are not present in 1648 at the peace of Westphalia; and therefore those accounts of IR theory that elevate the peace of Westphalia as the originary moment of modern diplomacy are misreadings, a projection of modern concerns back onto dynastic treaties that are in fact alien to us, in such a way as to construct an ideological origin myth for modern power politics, creating an illusion of longevity that does not stand up.

But one wonders whether Teschke's rulings upon the periodisation of modernity are just semantics. So when we read that 'we must reject the term modernity in connections with early modern state centralisation', it begs the question whether rejecting the term in any way alters the fact.<sup>27</sup> If historians tend to see the origins of the modern state in Tudor court, that is because the evidence of the centralisation of the tax system is there, whether or not it satisfies the checklist of features of modern capitalism.

Teschke's own reconstruction of pre-modern society itself seems to be overburdened with forced readings of events and crudely artificial categories. Where he seeks to theorise feudal society, mercantilism or absolutism, Teschke's account suffers in comparison to those of writers who are genuinely interested in the pre-modern era for its own sake, such as Mark Bloch, Jairus Banaji, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie or, for all his sins, Fernand Braudel. Consider Teschke's one category, the peasantry, to whom Teschke quickly attributes a class consciousness (or 'peasant rationality').<sup>28</sup> By contrast, Richard Jones considers the variegated forms of serfs, metayers, cottiers, hereditary occupiers, such as ryots, and proprietors, because he wants to understand how their actual relationship to the land shapes their social position.<sup>29</sup> Where Teschke is insisting that the entire political history of medieval societies can be rendered 'amenable to a Marxist interpretation', 'in one bold stroke' no less, one ought to insist that it is not;<sup>30</sup> or at least that Marx, as pre-eminently a theorist of capitalist society, offers no special insight into pre-capitalist society, beyond a decidedly schematic account of contrasting 'modes of production'. Hammering pre-capitalist society into

<sup>26</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, op. cit., p. 651.

<sup>27</sup> Teschke, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Jones, *Literary Remains* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1964), pp. 185–201.

<sup>30</sup> Teschke, op. cit., p. 54, 146.

categories framed to understand capitalist society is about as useful as navigating your way around Paris with a map of London.

Most revealing, though, in all of Teschke's awkward construction is the way that the newly minted categories of his pre-capitalist society mirror all the features that others have associated with capitalist society. This seems peculiarly problematic in Teschke's insistence on the pre-modern character of the Treaty of Westphalia, since most of the features that he highlights as distinguishing that supposedly pre-modern era have rather precise analogues in the modern capitalist era.

So Teschke imagines he can find *geopolitical accumulation* in a nexus with pre-modern forms of rule expressed in Westphalia.<sup>31</sup> Earlier, Teschke writes about Frankish political accumulation,<sup>32</sup> following Brenner.<sup>33</sup> The use of the word 'accumulation' is curious, being more commonly associated with the accumulation of capital, which is to say the tendency for capital not just to expand but to redirect its expanded output toward new investments. Teschke means to indicate a dynamic toward territorial expansion, here expressed in, or rather moderated by, the Treaty of Westphalia. Teschke suggests that 'given the persisting logic of geopolitical expansion, it is doubtful that the system of dynastic states could ever have generated a general interest in the status quo.'<sup>34</sup> Here the echoes of Marx's theory of competing capitals seem overwhelming. Teschke now has feudal dynasties dedicated to overthrowing the status quo, driven forward by their expansionist dynamic.

Teschke goes to great lengths to construct this feudal accumulation process, all the while discovering near-perfect analogues of capitalist social relations. So the banal lords are engaged in a 'quest for profit', just as the industrialist will be in the centuries to come,<sup>35</sup> in a curious echo of contemporary marketing theory, with its distinction between business-to-consumer and business-to-business trade, Teschke differentiates 'lord-peasant' relations and 'lord-lord' relations.<sup>36</sup> Lords and peasants stand in relation to each other in the manner of opposed classes, as Teschke tells it, with the ruling class reproducing itself as a whole by the collective exploitation of the peasantry.<sup>37</sup> But it is quite alien to the feudal age to speak of classes at all. Properly, these are not classes, but estates, or *stande*. Unlike the capitalist class, the feudal aristocracy has no dynamic relationship to the organisation of production, intervening only in the distribution of the social product, after the event; nor, for that matter, is the peasantry a class in the same sense as the working class, but one that is necessarily individuated by its smallholdings.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', in Aston and Philpin, op. cit., pp. 236–242.

<sup>34</sup> Teschke, op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 73; all of this is distantly related to Marx's distinction between the relationship of capital to labour (surplus value) and that between capitals (equalisation of the profit rate). See Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's Capital* (London: Pluto, 1977), for a good exposition.

<sup>37</sup> Teschke, op. cit., p. 60.

For all of Teschke's protestations about historical specificity, his own social theory of pre-capitalist societies simply reinvents the main determinants of capitalist society, class struggle, surplus value, and capital accumulation, and rediscovers them in feudal society, with their names rather unsubtly changed. Formally, these are distinct categories, but actually they simply impose intellectual structures derived from modern capitalist society back onto the feudal past.

There is, of course, another explanation for Teschke's tendency to rediscover aspects of contemporary capitalist society back in the pre-capitalist era of Westphalia, and that is that it is not a pre-capitalist era of Westphalia at all. Rather, the way that 1648 keeps mirroring features of modern society might be that in important aspects it *is* modern, or at least shares some salient characteristics of modern society. So when Teschke tries to construct a theoretical basis for the territorial expansionism of the Westphalia signatories, it might just be that the reason his explanation ends up sounding so much *like* the expansionist dynamic of capitalist societies is that it *is* the expansionist dynamic of capitalist societies. Of course, one would expect there to be important differences between the territorial expansionism of capitalism in what Lenin called the era of modern imperialism (1880 onwards), seeking new fields of investment for surplus capital, from that in the period of absolutist monarchs, obeying a mercantile imperative to increase revenues by conquering trading posts. Nonetheless, the essential governing concept of capital, the transformation of money, into commodities and back into money again, but more of it ('M-C-M', in Marx's formula), obtains in both cases.

Teschke's curious mirroring of categories of modern capitalist society in his theory of the supposedly pre-capitalist society of 1648 is not restricted just to the dynamic towards expansion. Teschke makes great play of the originality of his theory of 'The Making of Multi-Actor Europe'. The essence of the theory is that these dynastic societies gave rise to a pluriverse, or polycentric distribution of states. Teschke insists that this polycentric Europe 'cannot be deduced from the "logic of capital" as some Marxists aver'.<sup>38</sup> And of course, one would not want to exclude empirical evidence, but it ought to be said that uneven development, the mutual attraction and repulsion of national capitals, and the manifestation of capital-in-general as many capitals, is precisely what Marxists have deduced from the logic of capitalist development.<sup>39</sup>

Most problematic for Teschke's political argument, though, is his insistence that on no account does the Treaty of Westphalia contain a theory of the balance of power, or of modern sovereignty. This is problematic because Teschke goes on to show that, despite his insistence that there is no balance of power or modern sovereignty, there are in their stead 'dynastic equilibrium' and 'absolutist sovereignty'. And yet we struggle to tell the difference, in any terms but the most formalistic, between 'balance

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>39</sup> See Rosdolsky, *op. cit.* 'National peculiarity is nothing else but the most general product of the unevenness of historical development'—L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution* (London: New Park, 1982), p. 24.

of power' and 'dynastic equilibrium' on the one hand, or 'modern sovereignty' and 'absolutist sovereignty' on the other.

First, consider the balance of power. Teschke insists, with a straight face, that between 1648 and the 19th century, not the balance of power, as everyone else thought, but instead something called 'dynastic equilibrium' governed world diplomacy.<sup>40</sup> But what is achieved by renaming the 'balance of power' as 'dynastic equilibrium', apart from sounding fancier? Teschke tells us that 'individually each dynastic actor sought to maximise wealth and territory' and that 'none of the leading absolutist-dynastic powers wanted a balance in Europe'.<sup>41</sup> But surely the balance of power does not arise because anyone wants it, but through their mutual antagonism. 'Dynastic equilibrium', according to Teschke, did 'not mean preserving an even balance of power', but rather 'it meant equality in aggrandizement'.<sup>42</sup> But in all seriousness, who was it that thought that the 'balance of power' was anything other than 'equality in aggrandizement'? Teschke acts the part of a shocked maiden aunt when he tells us that the supposed balance of power led to a dramatic decline in the number of European sovereign actors, and must therefore be instead a 'policy of predatory equilibrium and bandwagoning'. But of course the balance of power leads eventually to the consolidation of powers, just as competition is not the opposite of monopoly, but rather the spur to monopoly. It just will not do for Teschke to insist that 'international politics was not yet conceived in terms of the balance of power' but was instead an instance of 'dynastic equilibrium', since the concept 'dynastic equilibrium' does exactly the same job as 'balance of power', except that it carries a pejorative meaning.<sup>43</sup> And in any event, nobody used the words 'dynastic equilibrium' until Teschke coined them in 2003, whereas the term 'balance of power' does indeed appear in diplomatic memoirs from the 17th century and treaties from that of Utrecht (1713) onwards, appearing earliest in the memoirs of Phillipe de Commines (1447–1511) according to Martin Wight,<sup>44</sup> or in Lorenzo de' Medici's reply to Francesco Sforza's proposal for an alliance between Florence and Milan in 1454, according to Mark Leonard.<sup>45</sup>

In the circuitous route followed by Teschke's argument, he ends up defending an idealised conception of the balance of power, as a kind of multicultural utopia, as against the actual balance of power that is now—arbitrarily—renamed 'dynastic equilibrium'. Was it really Teschke's intention to defend the principle of the balance of power, in the face of its less attractive practicalities; or did he just get carried away with the curious logic of his argument?

Second, let us take the concept of sovereignty. Teschke insists that 'non-capitalist property relations . . . blocked the development of modern sovereignty' at the time of

<sup>40</sup> Teschke, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 168.

<sup>45</sup> Mark Leonard, *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), p. 26.

Westphalia. And this is demonstrated by the pre-eminence of absolutist sovereignty.<sup>46</sup> Teschke draws a firm line between modern sovereignty and his own substitute concept, absolutist sovereignty—but the difference between them seems to be trivial, at best two modalities of the same genus, Sovereignty. If capitalism is the precondition of sovereignty, then we have to conclude, with Marx, that ‘the capitalistic era dates from the 16th century’; or if the capitalistic era does not date from the 16th century, then we have to conclude that capitalism is not the precondition of sovereignty.<sup>47</sup>

Teschke attempts to draw the distinction between absolutist sovereignty and modern sovereignty in terms of the peculiar, dynastic qualities of sovereignty invested in the person of the sovereign on the one hand, with the modern ‘notion of sovereignty . . . predicated on an abstract impersonal state, existing apart from the subjective will of its executive’.<sup>48</sup> Teschke thinks that it is particularly funny to see “states” marrying “states”.<sup>49</sup> That international relations should be managed through dynastic unions exemplifies for him the pre-modern character of absolutist sovereignty. He is struck by the strangeness of marriage between states, but fails to notice that the personification of states persists to this day, a truly mysterious thing that Teschke takes for granted. States *recognise* states, states *divorce* from states, states *admonish* states, states *make reparations* to states right up to the present day, and yet Teschke is amazed that states marry states. What he fails to understand is that the modern sovereign state, which is to say territory that we credit with the characteristics of personality, is the thing that needs to be explained, and its mysteries are not dismissed by relegating this one archaic facet of the personification of the state to the pre-capitalist past.

It is the failure of Teschke’s own formalistic reasoning that he imposes a definition of the modern sovereignty onto the material and then dismisses all examples of sovereignty that fall short of his definition. Even Napoleon, that archetypal figure of modern sovereignty, is dismissed as a mere radicalisation of the absolutist state.<sup>50</sup> But Teschke has simply failed to understand that the personification of the state in the sovereign is not an archaic, but a modern, form. Cynically, it was expressed by Walter Bagehot as the difference between the efficient and the dignified parts of the English Constitution, the latter including the monarch, a personality with which the alienated mass could identify.<sup>51</sup> The modern civil constitution in all its Habermasian impersonality still remains a rationalised form of the same personified state, or it is not sovereign. Throughout the greater part of its history, of course, we find that the capitalist state exhibits extremes of individual personification, not just in the various forms of monarchy, constitutional monarchy, but also in the more modern forms of

<sup>46</sup> Teschke, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>47</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 669.

<sup>48</sup> Teschke, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2001), p. 11.

dictatorship and demotic government. Once again, despite his apparent intentions, Teschke's circuitous logic leads him to make an apology for the state, in that he excludes all of its obscurantist features, as if they were an archaic survival, rather than intrinsic to it. Did Teschke mean to defend the concept of modern sovereignty against its associations with the fits of pique, jealous defence of prestige and enduring grudges that characterise the perverse form of the modern capitalist state? It seems unlikely; and yet, strangely, that is just where his too-formal method has taken him.