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State Theories: A Critical Analysis

RAJU J. DAS

ABSTRACT: This paper critically examines theories of the capitalist state. The state is a complex social relation with many aspects, each of which offers an entrée into the study of the state as a whole; these aspects are like windows through which one may look at the state. The various approaches can be seen as conceptual dualisms consisting of opposing one-sided aspects. This method of analysis shows how one approach develops as a critique of another. It also shows that the state is a dialectical unity. The following dualistic approaches are analyzed: instrumentalism vs. structuralism; capital determination of the state vs. class struggle determination; and state-centered vs. society-centered approaches. In spite of the existence of so many approaches to the state, there are also several tendencies toward conceptual convergence, especially between instrumentalism and structuralism, class struggle and structuralism, and state-centered and society-centered approaches.

THIS PAPER CRITICALLY EXAMINES the literature on the nature of the capitalist state. It mainly, if not exclusively, deals with Marxist approaches to the state. In Marxist theory, the state is seen as a complex social relation, with many aspects. Each aspect provides a perspective for the study of the state as a whole (see Ollman, 1982, 41); it is like a window through which one may look at the state. Viewed solely through one window – taking one aspect in isolation – the state appears as a one-sided relation.

Different approaches to the state can be seen as conceptual dualisms, consisting of opposing one-sided aspects. Taking this perception as a *method of analysis*, we can see how one approach

develops as a critique of another. The state then emerges as a dialectical unity, with many aspects. The following dualisms can be identified: instrumentalism vs. structuralism; capital determination of the state vs. class-struggle determination; form vs. content; and state-centered vs. society-centered approaches.¹ While my method of analysis is as outlined above, the *method of presentation* will be slightly different to avoid the repetition that results from the fact that these dualisms are overlapping (e.g., some views on state autonomy and capital determination are also found within the structuralist framework).

My method of presentation is as follows. The first section presents instrumentalist theory, followed in the next by a discussion of structuralist theory, which developed as a critique of instrumentalism. Both of these theories underemphasize struggle by dominated classes, and the autonomous interests of state actors; so the third and the fourth sections deal with these issues. The concept of the state as *form* as opposed to *content* of social relations will be discussed as a part of the class struggle approach, as class struggle takes place over both state form and content. The final section points out the tendencies toward conceptual convergences in the state debate.

I. THE INSTRUMENTALIST THEORY OF THE STATE

Instrumentalist theory addresses the class character of the state in terms of who controls it. According to this theory, the state is merely an instrument in the hands of the ruling class. Marx and Engels say: "The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (1976, 486). Instrumental control is exercised in many ways, "ideological" and otherwise. State personnel share bourgeois ideology and therefore act in the interest of the bourgeoisie. This is indicated in the class background and affiliation of the personnel of the state, as well as of those directly involved in their private capacities in the formulation and implementation of state policies (Miliband, 1977, 68; Jessop, 1990, 145). As Miliband says, the state personnel at the commanding heights of state branches "have tended to belong to

¹ Due to the constraint of space, I will not discuss ideological aspects of the state in any detail. On this see Poulantzas, 1968; Gramsci, 1971; Wolfe, 1974; Ollman, 1976.

the economically dominant class. And where state personnel are not bourgeois by class origin they are later recruited into it by virtue of their education, connections, and way of life" (1977, 69).

It is, however, not enough merely to be represented ideologically. It is also important that capitalists control the state materially and directly: they have legislative seats, they advise the government, sit on commissions and regulatory boards, make decisions on behalf of the state, present (even write) actual bills for legislative consideration, fund political parties, and so on (see Mollenkopf, 1975).

The State Monopoly Capitalism theory takes instrumentalist control farthest. According to this approach, competition among capitalists necessarily leads to the centralization and concentration of capital and hence to the development of monopoly capital. Monopoly capitalism becomes state monopoly capitalism as monopolies and the state are fused together. State intervention is *necessary* to offset the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, and may include the nationalization of basic industries, state provision of basic services, the creation of a large market for commodities, etc. State intervention is *possible* because the state is an instrument of the dominant monopolies, as can be seen in the class background and class affiliation of state personnel, etc.²

The merit of the instrumentalist approach, as exemplified by (*e.g.*) State Monopoly Capitalism theory and also by "power structure" research, is that it reveals the reality of instrumental control of the state, and has generated many studies of the actual relations between the state and capitalists (see Mollenkopf, 1975). By doing so, this theory also contributes to demystifying the liberal view of the state as class-neutral. Thus it has contributed to "the development of revolutionary will" (Ollman, 1982, 45). However, the concept of instrumental *utilization* of the state does not satisfactorily explain the *class* nature of the state (Poulantzas, 1978, 13). The theory has been criticized on conceptual and empirical grounds. I will first discuss conceptual criticisms.

First, the theory does not recognize that to act in the general interest of capital, the state must be able to act against the particular interest of capitalists. This means that the state must have more

2 For further discussion of the State Monopoly Capitalism school, see Poulantzas, 1978, 129; Carnoy, 1984, 128.

autonomy from direct capitalist control than this approach allows (Block, 1987b).³

Second, since there are conflicts between the interests of particular capitalists and those of capital in general, it is not clear that a particular policy formulated by a specific capitalist or group of capitalists through the instrumental use of the state would be unambiguously favorable to capital in general (Jessop, 1990, 146). In addition, with growing globalization of capital (Bina and Yaghmaian, 1991; Baker, 1978), it is increasingly difficult to associate the national state with national capital. Since capitalists can move across the globe, the instrumental use of the state in a particular country may not be strong.

Third, and most importantly, the use of state power cannot be “decisively” determined by the class background and affiliation of the state elite, since “state power reflects the interaction between the state elite and the circumstances in which it must act” (Jessop, 1990, 150; see also Giddens, 1981, 219). Thus, the most important theoretical flaw in the instrumentalist view is that it ignores structural constraints on the state.

The instrumentalist theory can also be criticized on empirical grounds. First, there is wide variation in, and hence no necessary unity among, the social backgrounds of state personnel and of economic spokespersons for the ruling class (*e.g.*, pro-capitalist intellectuals). This is especially true given that parts of the state apparatus — often the higher positions in it — can be and have been in the hands of members of the dominated class or classes (see Alavi, 1982). The bourgeoisie itself may not occupy important positions in the state; for example, throughout most of the 19th century, in capitalist Britain “the whole business of government . . . remained the guaranteed domain of the landed aristocracy,” not of the bourgeoisie (Marx, quoted in Miliband, 1977, 70). Given all this, any coherent policy in the long-term interest of the capitalist class emerging through the instrumental use of the state seems unlikely. In particular, the State Monopoly Capitalism theory, which exemplified instrumentalism, came under attack as social demo-

3 Miliband himself says that the state acts *on behalf* of the ruling class, but “does not for the most part act at its behest” (1977, 74); this is because the state enjoys a high degree of autonomy, so that it can manage what Marx calls “the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

cratic governments in Europe were elected and a crude identification of the state with the interests of monopoly capital could not be sustained.

Second, there is a low correlation between class origin and affiliation on the one hand, and views on specific political issues of interest to capital on the other (Jessop, 1990), so that as Miliband himself realizes, the class bias of the state is not *decisively* determined by the social origins of its leading personnel (Miliband, 1977, 71).

Third, it is empirically true that bourgeois-led states have pursued policies, including pro-labor reforms, that do not always have the approval of capital (*ibid.*, 71), and this shows that the state cannot be a tool of capital, acting “at its behest.” For example, Marx considered the Ten Hours Act to be a victory of “the political economy of labor over the political economy of property” (quoted in Miliband, 1983a, 16). One can argue that such reforms are mere concessions given by capital to labor, by means of the state, in order to co-opt it. But as Gold *et al.* rightly say, “even when such reforms are ultimately co-optive, to treat all reforms as the result of an instrumentalist use of the state is to deny the possibility of struggle over reforms” (Gold *et al.*, 1975, 35; see also Esping-Andersen, 1976).⁴

II. THE STRUCTURALIST THEORY OF THE STATE

In the structuralist theory, the state’s class character is examined not in terms of who controls the state – as in the instrumentalist theory – but in terms of the constraints on the state’s actions imposed by the capitalist class structure. Miliband, having admitted in his 1970 paper that he should perhaps have stressed the structural constraints on the state in his early work more than he did (57), says in his classic *Marxism and Politics* (1977) that “the question is not one of purpose or attitude [of the state elite] but of ‘structural constraints,’” because i) the socioeconomic system forms the context for the political system and state action, and ii) purpose

4 Poulantzas argues that “the political and economic struggles of the dominated classes impose . . . [reforms] on the capitalist state” (1968, 191; see also 1978, 140). That this is true is “often revealed by a hostility between the state and the dominant class,” which cannot be explained by the instrumentalist theory. Hence “the state is not a class instrument, but rather the state of a society divided into classes” (Poulantzas, 1968, 285; see also Burawoy, 1982, S17).

and attitude, etc. “are themselves greatly affected by that socio-economic context, so that what appears ‘reasonable’ by way of state action (or non-action) to power-holders will normally be in tune with the ‘rationality’ and requirements of the socio-economic system itself . . .” (93).

State action, broadly speaking, can be political and economic. So structuralist theory can be of two types: “political structuralism” (*e.g.*, early Poulantzas), and “economic structuralism” (*e.g.*, Altvater), and these emphasize political and economic functions of the state respectively.⁵ Besides, analysis of state-form (the fact that the state is separate from the society, to the extent that it is) is an important part of these two approaches. I will analyze them separately.

1. *Political Structuralism*

This approach is evident in the works of the early Poulantzas. He establishes the fact that the separation of the state from society (particularly, from the economic relations) exists by virtue of the nature of the capitalist structure: capitalism is characterized by “the separation of direct producers from the means of production” (1968, 129). This means that direct political power does not have to be exercised in order to appropriate surplus labor from direct producers. This “produces the specific autonomy of the political and the economic” (1968, 129; see also Wood, 1981).

Having established the fact of the separation of the state from the economic – this fact is indicated by the term “state-form” in the works of other writers (*e.g.*, Holloway and Picciotto, 1978) – Poulantzas explains the nature of state action: “The state is precisely the factor of cohesion of a social formation and the factor of reproduction of the conditions of production of a system” (1969, 73). Maintaining the unity of a social formation divided into classes is its “global role.” This role “corresponds to the political interest of the dominant class” (1968, 54) and conditions its other functions, including the economic (*e.g.*, creating conditions to counter the falling rate of profit; the management/reproduction of labor power) (1978, 44, 54, 187).

Crucial to Poulantzas’ concept of the class character of the state is his discussion of how the state functions differentially for differ-

5 This means that the early Poulantzas, in contrast to what most discussions of state theory suggest, does not exhaust structuralist analysis.

ent classes. With regard to the dominated classes, its function “is to prevent their political organization” (Poulantzas, 1968, 188; 1978, 127). It does this by presenting itself to the working class as representing the general interests of juridically equal citizens (*not* of members of a particular social *class*) (133).⁶ This notion of the general interest is not trickery; it is a real fact, “namely that the state . . . gives to the economic interest of certain dominated classes guarantees which may even be contrary to the short-term economic interests of dominant classes, but which are compatible with their political interests and their hegemonic domination” (190–91). Making this guarantee, says Poulantzas, the state aims precisely at the political disorganization of the dominated classes, in that the *economic* concessions indirectly prevent the dominated classes from attacking the *political* basis of exploitation by the dominant class, *i.e.*, state power.

With regard to the dominant classes, however, the state’s role is different. The bourgeoisie cannot realize its hegemony over the dominated classes because of internal divisions within it and consequent lack of political unity, the rise of organized political struggle by the dominated classes, etc. (Poulantzas, 1968, 284; see also Draper, 1977, 323). So “the state . . . takes charge of the bourgeois’ political interest” (1968, 284) and tries to organize them into a power bloc which “constitutes a contradictory unity of politically dominant classes and fractions under the protection of the hegemonic fraction” (1968, 137, 190, 239).

To perform these two types of function with respect to the dominant and dominated classes, the state has to be relatively autonomous from the dominant classes and fractions. Relative autonomy “allows the state to intervene not only to arrange compromises vis-à-vis the dominated classes, which, in the long run, are useful for the actual economic interest of the dominant classes or factions [*e.g.*, absorption of surplus]; but also . . . to intervene against the long-term economic interest of one or other fraction of the dominant class: for such compromises and sacrifices are sometimes necessary for the realization of their political class interests” (1968,

6 One implication of the state being separate from the economic is “the institutionalized fixing of the agents as juridical objects” (Poulantzas, 1968, 128). For example, an employee of a factory is decomposed politically into a “citizen” and economically into a “worker.” This makes it possible for the state to present itself as protector of general interests, conceals from the *juridical* agents their *class* character in their economic struggle, and thus helps in the disorganization of the dominated classes.

284–85). In short, relative autonomy does not reduce the classness of the state but makes it possible for the state to play its class role in an appropriately flexible way (Miliband, 1977, 87). Yet, this autonomy does not authorize the dominated classes to effectively participate in state power nor cede parcels of state power to them (Poulantzas, 1968, 288). For the state is not a thing which can be parcellized; rather, it is a relation of power.

Relative autonomy of the state is therefore necessary because it allows the state to carry out its political functions. But what makes relative autonomy possible? Relative autonomy, it is argued, is due to an equilibrium of the principal classes (see Poulantzas, 1968, 260); Engels writes that “by way of exception . . . periods occur in which the warring classes balance each other so nearly that the state power . . . acquires for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both” (quoted in Miliband, 1977, 86). But Poulantzas argues, in his response to Miliband and Laclau’s criticisms of his work, that the state *can* have a certain relative autonomy *even without* class equilibrium. This relative autonomy has “two foundations”: one in the structure, another in class struggle. “The separation of the economic and the political provides the general framework . . . for examination of the relative autonomy. . .” As he explains elsewhere: the state’s relative autonomy vis-à-vis the dominant classes or fractions is a reflection of the relative autonomy of the instances (the economic, the political, etc.) of a capitalist formation (1968, 257); it is structurally given. Its concrete form, however, depends on “the precise conjuncture of the class struggle at any time” (1976, 9).

To elaborate further, the capitalist state, in the long run, can only correspond to the political interest of the dominant class(es); this is the negative limit to state autonomy. But within this limit, the degree and form of relative autonomy (*i.e.*, “*how* relative, *how* it is relative”) depends on the precise conjuncture of the class struggle (configuration of the power bloc, degree of hegemony of the power bloc, relation between capital and labor) (1976, 10; 1968, 289; see also Miliband, 1983b, 67).

I will point out three main problems in the works of Poulantzas. First, the above discussion of relative autonomy suggests that Poulantzas subscribes to a (structural-) functionalist explanation of the state (autonomy): capital *needs* something to maintain the unity of the social formation, and particularly, of different fractions of the

bourgeoisie (1968, 284); lo and behold, a relatively autonomous state comes into being to perform that necessary function. Second, he considerably *underemphasizes* the economic functions of the state, especially in his early writings. Although he discusses some economic functions in his 1978 book, he still says that economic functions “are not the primary functions” of the state (52). Third, he does not have an adequate answer to the question, Why must the relatively autonomous state perform the functions he says it does, that is, organizing the ruling classes and disorganizing the dominated classes? Structural constraints on the state derive from the *place* of the state in the social structure; the state is constrained to be a *class-state* “by reason of the system itself.” His (political) structuralist theory is most succinctly put forth in his widely quoted 1969 article (73): “If the *function* of the State . . . and the *interests* of the dominant class . . . coincide, it is by reason of the system itself: the direct participation of members of the ruling class in the State apparatus is not the *cause* but the *effect*, and moreover a chance and a contingent one, of this objective coincidence.” If instrumental control by “members of the ruling class” is ruled out, then what are the *mechanisms* that constrain state actions? This is not quite clear. Others, particularly the economic structuralists, have tried to specify the nature of these constraints. I will now critically analyze their views.

2. *Economic Structuralism*

According to this approach, since the state is outside the sphere of productive activity, it is structurally forced to depend on the bourgeoisie for its survival.⁷ So, the state has to create conditions for accumulation and capitalist profit: not to do so is to “sanction such mechanisms as the ‘investment strike’” (Offe, 1984, 50), that can precipitate economic crisis and adversely affect the amount of “revenue.” Thus, the material concessions to the dominated classes on which the maintenance of democracy (which is the best shell of capitalism, as Lenin says; 1977, 17) depends (see Lipset in Rueschmeyer, *et al.*, 1992, 14); the salaries of state officials; the generation

⁷ But, as Marx asks, will the bourgeoisie pay the state just for nothing? He answers, “the bourgeoisie pay their state well . . . in order to be able without danger to pay [laborers] poorly . . .” (quoted in Draper, 1977, 192).

of employment without which there will be political crisis — all of these depend on accumulation. So the state has a structurally mandated need not to disrupt capitalist accumulation (Block, 1987b, 1987c; Hirsch, 1978; Offe, 1984). Poulantzas ignores this economic dependence of the state on the hegemonic class. He says that the relation between the state and the hegemonic class or fraction does *not* derive “from a direct dependence of the state ‘machine’ on this class or fraction” (1968, 297).

The economic structuralist approach is most clearly exemplified by state derivation theory, which I will examine in some detail.⁸ This theory, inspired by Marx’s *Capital*, is not only a reaction to State Monopoly Capitalism theory, which denies any autonomy to the state; it is also a critique of Poulantzas’ politicist tendency. It derives i) the needs for, and ii) the limits to, state functions, as well as iii) the form of the state (*i.e.*, its particular existence as an impersonal official form of class domination alongside and outside of the society) from the laws of motion of capitalism (Holloway and Picciotto, 1978, 19; Jessop, 1990, 35, 86, 252). I will discuss the two most important types of state derivation theory.

The works of Muller and Neuss (who started the debate), and Altvater, among others, belong to the first type of this theory. According to them, the necessity of the form of the state as a separate institution is derived from the nature of the relations among capitalists. Altvater, who seems to see capitalism only as an economic system, views the state as an ideal collective capitalist which furthers the general interests of capital. Capitalism fails to ensure the reproduction of the conditions of its existence for two reasons. First, capitalists competing with each other in pursuit of surplus value will not produce certain conditions of production including labor power because such production is not profitable (this point is also stressed by Muller and Neuss, 1978, 38, and Aumeeruddy *et al.*, 1978). So, the state must socialize the production of certain of its needs if accumulation is to take place (O’Connor, 1973, 6–9; Offe, in Keane, 1984, 14–18). Second, capitalist production driven by competition for maximum valorization of capital might threaten

8 The neo-Ricardian approach is another economic structuralist approach. It focuses on how the state influences the distribution of income between the classes, and how it intervenes in the economy to maintain or restore profit at the expense of wages. See Jessop, 1990, for a good discussion of this.

the very existence of the whole society (*e.g.*, destruction of natural resources, of the reserve of labor, etc.). In *Capital*, Marx says that the state *had* to “curb capital’s drive towards a limitless draining away of labor-power”; otherwise, the blind desire for profit would seize “hold of the vital force of the nation at its roots” (Marx, 1977a, 348; also see Wetherly, 1992). Since capital cannot reproduce the conditions of its own reproduction for the above reasons, the state performs four *functions* to preserve capitalism, says Altvater. These functions are: provision of general material conditions (infrastructure); establishing and guaranteeing general legal relations; the regulation of the capital-labor relation, if necessary by repression; and safeguarding the existence and expansion of national capital on the world market (1978, 42).

This approach rightly criticizes State Monopoly Capitalism theory, which treats state and capital as fused together, and argues instead that state functions cannot “suspend the actions and existence of the many individual capitals” and the antagonism between them. So the state is only an ideal, *fictitious* capital, not a real material total capitalist. But it wrongly assumes that the state has the knowledge and power to facilitate realization of capital’s needs, and also says little about the state as a form of *class domination* (Holloway and Picciotto, 1978, 21–22).

The second type of state derivation theory is evident in the works of, *e.g.*, Hirsch (1978). Hirsch makes several points. First, the particular state *form* is to be derived *not* from the necessity of realizing the general interest in an anarchic society marked by *relations of competition* among capitalists (as the first approach says), but from the nature of the social *relations of domination*, the exploitation of labor. Capitalism (“free” and “equal” exchange) requires that the means of force be separated from the immediate process of production – all barriers to free and equal exchange be destroyed – and “localized in a social instance raised above the economic reproduction process: the creation of formal bourgeois freedom and equality and the establishment of a state monopoly of force” (1978, 61). Second, it is *possible* for the state to carry out some general functions because of its separateness from society, and *necessary* because general conditions for accumulation cannot be created by individual capitals (66). This latter, for me, is a most central aspect, if not the only aspect, of a defensible theory of the capitalist state. Third, the state’s own

material basis depends on accumulation; this is manifest in direct holders of state power supporting accumulation. The state has to act as a class state even in the absence of any direct influence on it by the ruling class. Fourth, contradictions in accumulation resulting in the falling rate of profit provide the context for the dynamics of capitalist development and of the state. The falling rate of profit, as a manifestation of the contradictory character of capitalism, and the resultant need for counter-measures are the key to analysis of the state functions (1978, 97). Fifth, unlike other state derivationists, Hirsch doubts whether the state can act in the interest of capital at all: capitalist contradictions, which cannot be resolved in the long run, are represented in the state. Since it is separate from the sphere of production, it only reacts to accumulation crisis. Thus, as Holloway and Picciotto (1978) note, Hirsch reveals limits to the method of deriving state functions from capital's needs.

One important merit of this approach is that, by emphasizing the state's economic role, it becomes complementary to Poulantzas' structuralism, which emphasizes the state's political role. Yet it suffers from several problems. It is too often assumed that there is only one logic of capital, and hence one set of imperatives at a given point in time, and that the state *somehow* knows and meets the needs of capital. But in fact, the interests of capital are not wholly pre-given (structurally determined). Rather they must be articulated in and through what Jessop (1990) calls "accumulation strategies." These must advance the immediate interests of the different fractions of capital and must secure the long-term interests of the hegemonic fraction; this fraction must, in turn, sacrifice some of its short-term economic interests. Economic structuralism then not only ignores the scope for different accumulation strategies but also the room for maneuver available to state managers and capitalists (Jessop, 1990, 253–254).

Second, state functions (and forms) are directly explained only in terms of the needs of capital. This is a form of economic reductionism.

Last, and related to the preceding criticisms, given the contradictory needs of capital, even the most rational state structure cannot guarantee rational policies for capital (Esping-Andersen, 1976, 215), and thus the state form may problematize its functions. This is not recognized except, of course, by Hirsch. The idea that form

problematizes function is an important one. This means that the state form – the institutional separation of the state from the economy – poses limits to the state’s ability to intervene in the interest of capital (Offe, in Keane, 1984). Also, Offe argues, as the state invests more resources for realizing conditions for the reproduction of capitalism, it indirectly withdraws capital from the circuit of (productive) capital. State investment has a decommodifying effect, whereas capital is a commodity relation. Limits to the state’s ability to reproduce capitalism are also seen in what O’Connor calls the fiscal crisis of the state created by “the contradiction between the socialization of costs and the private appropriation of profits” (1973, 9).

I will now point out some merits and demerits of the structuralist approach as such. Taken as a whole structural analysis has much to recommend it. It provides, for instance, a rich discussion of i) how the relative autonomy of the state protects the interests of the dominant class; ii) the functional necessity of such a state; and iii) the constraints under which any party in power or state bureaucracy (no matter how sympathetic it is to the dominated classes) must act (Gold *et al.*, 1975, 38; Ollman, 1982, 45). Still, the structuralist approach has been subjected to many criticisms. The most important general criticism is that structuralists tend to under-emphasize (if not totally ignore) agency – not only the agency of the dominated class in class struggle, but also that of the state actors (elected/appointed officials). For example, the structuralism of the early Poulantzas “deprives ‘agents’ of any freedom of choice and maneuver” (Miliband, 1977, 73; see also Miliband, 1970, 57), when in fact, *e.g.*, “governments can and do press against the ‘structural constraints’ by which they are beset” (Miliband, 1977). This theory does not specify *how* constraining the constraints are (Miliband, 1977, 73; Block, 1987c, 83). Although the state is considered to be relatively autonomous, the emphasis is more on *relative* than on *autonomy*. So we will now discuss two more approaches to the state that take agency more seriously: the class struggle and state-centered approaches.

III. CLASS STRUGGLE APPROACHES

The relation between the state and class struggle is looked at in many different ways, leading to three important approaches. First, there

is a “political approach” in which the political importance of class struggle for the state is emphasized; second, there is an “economic approach” that deals with the relation between class struggle and accumulation; and third, there is a “structural–class struggle approach” that takes into account the relation between class struggle on the one hand and economic and state structures on the other.

1. *The Political Approach*

Here the state role is determined by the changing balance of class forces. Classes are considered as classes-in-themselves, *i.e.*, purely in economic terms. The changing balance of class forces is considered in isolation from the constraints imposed by the laws of accumulation (Jessop, 1990, 88–89). Class interests are assumed to be transformed into corresponding political outputs of the neutral state in an undistorted fashion and in an automatic way.⁹

Poulantzas, who later (1976) admitted that he underemphasized class struggle in his early work, offers a more complex version of this class struggle approach. I will discuss elements of his class struggle theory as they exist both in his early as well as in his later works. For him, state functions are reflections of a complex parallelogram of economic, political and ideological forces, rather than of the immediate economic interests of the dominant class: “the capitalist state . . . does not directly represent the dominant class’ economic interest, but their political interest. . . .” (Poulantzas, 1968, 190). Crucial to his class struggle approach is his discussion of how state policy in favor of the long-term interest of the bourgeoisie is established. The answer lies in his well-known insight, provided particularly in his later works, that the state is not a thing/instrument, nor a subject, but a relation. More precisely, the state is a material condensation of a relation of power between classes and class fractions, a relationship that is expressed in the state’s own form (1978, 128–29; 1976, 12–13); the state is always constituted–divided by class contradictions (1978, 132). This means that, on the one hand, different branches of the state, including regional ones, “are often the pre-

9 The neo-Ricardian analysis of the role of the state in *distributional* conflicts (*e.g.*, those over wages) (as opposed to those based in production relations) exemplifies this approach: state action is traced to pressures on profitability stemming from trade union struggles (Jessop, 1990, 31–32, 90).

eminent representatives [and seats] of the diverging interests of one or several fractions of the power bloc,” although subject to the unity of the state power of the hegemonic fraction (133; 142; words in brackets from his 1976 article), so that state policy emerges out of the collision of many micro-policies of the different branches representing the different fractions; it is “continually constructed of accelerations and brakings, about-turns and hesitations, and changes of course. . . . it is the necessary expression of the structure of the state” (1978, 135–36). But on the other hand, the examination of state policy cannot be totally confined to analysis of the power bloc and its constituent fractions, because state policy also depends on the relation between the state and the dominated classes.¹⁰ For state power is “founded on an unstable equilibrium of compromise”: “compromise” means that state power can take into account the economic interests of some dominated classes; “equilibrium” means that while economic sacrifices are real and provide the ground for an equilibrium, they do not challenge the political power which sets precise limits to that equilibrium; “unstable” means that the limits of the equilibrium are set by the political conjuncture (class struggle, etc.) (Poulantzas, 1968, 192; see Gramsci, 1971, 182). The relevance of the idea of an “unstable equilibrium of compromise” is particularly shown in the necessity for concessions to be given to the dominated classes, who are present in the state “essentially in the form of centers of opposition to the power of the dominant classes” (1978, 142), even against the will of the latter. This is why the state is a *condensation* of class forces, not a *tool* of one single class.

I will point out two implications of Poulantzas’ class struggle theory. First, state policy has a contradictory character, and this stems from the “contradictory measures that different classes and fractions, through their specific presence in the state, manage to have integrated into state policy” (1978, 135). Class struggle over state policies implies that there can be a gradation of *classness* in state policies reflecting class struggle. This idea is reinforced in the important contribution by Esping-Anderson *et al.*, on a typology of those state interventions that emerge in response to political class

10 The fact that state policies are subject to struggle by dominated classes receives less attention in Poulantzas’ works than struggle by capitalist fractions. More on this later.

struggles (1976). They say that the object of working-class struggle is not policies that are either pro-worker or anti-worker, but policies that vary in the very *degree* of their class bias. For example, while both minimum wage laws and adequate guaranteed income for all workers are “commodified circulation” policies, the former causes minimum disturbance to commodity relations, while the latter is clearly a greater threat to capital’s interest, since it threatens labor’s separation from the means of subsistence. So policies that are struggled over have varying *degrees of classness*.

2. *The Economic Approach*

While Poulantzas as a representative of political structuralism has dealt with the relation of the state to class struggle, Hirsch, who is known for his economic structuralist views, also addresses this issue. He claims that the theoretical derivation of functions from the laws of accumulation says nothing about whether and in what form functions result from these determinants. One has to examine how objective tendencies assert themselves through the mediation of such factors as concrete class struggles (Hirsch, 1978, 65, 83). For example, welfare policies of the state are a necessary response to the increasing political strength of workers (84).

These two approaches to the relation between class struggle and the state are not without problems. First, Clarke has criticized Poulantzas and his followers for taking what he calls a fractionalist approach when dealing with class struggle. Poulantzas neglects capital-as-a-whole (Clarke, 1978) and emphasizes the existence of particular capitals. But these particular capitals cannot exist independently of capital-in-general or of the exploitative class relation between capital and labor. Clarke complains that, for Poulantzas, capital-as-a-whole exists only politically, only through the state which organizes different fractions of capital into a whole, a bloc. So Poulantzas has “no concept of capital-in-general independent of the state” (Clarke, 1978, 46). This overemphasis on capitalist class fractions has led, in turn, to an underemphasis on class struggle between capital and labor at the level of the state. Indeed, Poulantzas writes:

The contradictions . . . reflected within the state are those among the dominant classes and fractions and between these and their supporting

classes, far more than the contradictions between the power bloc and the working class. The latter are basically expressed in the bourgeois state “at a distance”. . . (Quoted in Clarke, 1978, 47–48.)

Second, in the structuralist treatment of class struggle by Poulantzas, Hirsch and others, class struggle is seen as constrained by, and confined within, the structure. As a result there is little indication that class struggle can also affect/transform the structure that constrains it – a process that is more than merely winning some economic concessions (Holloway, 1991, 97; Wright, 1978, 21). More specifically, for Hirsch and other structuralists, the separation of the political from the economic is a once-and-for-all historical event, so that the state, once established as an institution separate from the economic, is self-reproducing (Clarke, 1978). For the structuralists, class struggle is confined within the limits defined by the structure of the state, as if the fact of the state existing as a separate institution from the economic is not under attack. As a reaction against this reification of structure and also against the functionalism of structural analysis, a new class struggle approach to the state is developing. I will now analyze this approach.

3. *The Structural–Class Struggle Approach*

Holloway and Picciotto (1977) have developed what they call a materialist (not economic, not political!) theory of the state; it may be noted here in passing that Jessop (1990) *wrongly* regards their work as a structural-functionalism of the type developed by Hirsch. Holloway and Picciotto note that the separation of the political from the economic (*i.e.*, the autonomy of the state) is both real and illusory. It is real in that it has a material foundation: the non-necessity of extra-economic coercion in the sphere of capitalist exploitation has made state autonomy possible (this point is also made by Hirsch and Poulantzas). It is illusory because of its ideological character: the autonomization of the state *vis-à-vis* the economic is part of commodity fetishization, which conceals the class character of social relations between capital and labor. This is so in the sense that the inequality within the economic relation (*i.e.*, inequality between capital and labor) is transformed into the fantastic form of political equality among citizens before the state (Holloway and Picciotto,

1977, 80). In turn, the survival of the state and therefore of capital, and the separation of the political from the economic, depend on the (outcomes of) class struggle. On the one hand, the ruling class struggles to maintain the separation of the polity from the economic by channeling the conflicts arising from the sphere of production (the sphere of substantive inequality) into the fetishized form of bourgeois political processes (the sphere of formal equality); on the other hand, the working class struggles to challenge capital politically (*e.g.*, by opposing property rights that the state protects) and economically (*e.g.*, in the struggle for higher wages).

Since the state is a form of capitalist relations, the history of the development of the state is rooted in the history of capitalist development. In particular it has to be seen in the context of i) the establishment of preconditions for capitalist accumulation (*e.g.*, the state creating conditions for the establishment of capitalism, or primitive accumulation; see Aumeeruddy, *et al.*, 1978; Bina and Yaghmaian, 1991); and ii) the history of contradictions in capitalist accumulation (Holloway and Picciotto, 1977, 81, 86). And this history, in turn, is the history of class struggle.¹¹ The major problem in the Holloway–Picciotto argument is that it sometimes tends to dilute the importance of class struggle by looking at the state only in terms of economic contradiction in the reproduction of capitalism.

Simon Clarke moves the class struggle theory even further. The *raison d'être* of the state lies in class struggle: “If there were no class struggle . . . there would be no state. . . . Thus it is the class struggle that is the mediating term between the abstract analysis of capitalist reproduction and the concept of the state” (1983, 119; see also Cohen, 1988, 9). This essential relation between the state and class struggle as posited by Clarke is also noted by Engels: there has to be a *specialized institution of coercion in the form of the state* to maintain “by force the conditions of existence and domination of the

11 For example, consider the “stage” of capitalism characterized by the appropriation of absolute surplus value. Contradiction in this stage of capitalism is indicated by the fact that inequality in the sphere of production continually undermines the appearance of equality in the sphere of circulation (capital and labor are equal as commodity owners); and this is exposed by the struggle over the working day by labor. In response to this struggle, the state tries to resolve the conflict within the sphere of *exchange* – hence some social legislation.

ruling class against the subject class” (Engels, in Draper, 1977, 245). State power as a power standing above society was necessary for the purpose of keeping the conflicts between classes “within the bounds of ‘order’,” so that conflicts might not consume the classes and the society in sterile struggle.¹²

It is not just the origin of the state, but also its continued re-production as separate from the economy, that depends on class struggle, Clarke argues, echoing Holloway and Picciotto. Based on studies of tenants’ struggles in Britain in the 1970s and on Holloway and Picciotto’s theoretical work, Clarke says that the property rights of the ruling class are enshrined in the law, which is enforced by the state; the political power of the ruling class is derived from these property rights. So when the dominated class struggles against economic exploitation, that struggle is also directed against the state that defends property rights. “The tenant experiences his or her exploitation not simply as economic, but as inseparably economic and political, with the threat of the bailiff and eviction standing behind the landlord” (Clarke, 1983, 32). This means that the economic and the political are combined in the immediate experience of exploitation and class struggle. The state reinforces the separation of the economic from the political, and that is how it responds to class struggles. For example, when tenants struggle against exploitation, the state seeks to enforce the rights of property over the dominated classes “individually through the courts, fragmenting collective resistance to the social power of property and ensuring that such power will be imposed on dominated classes individually through the ‘market,’ decomposing class forces, and recomposing them as ‘interest groups’ based on tenure categories” (Clarke, 1991, 33), so that tenants are prevented from struggling as a *class*. Whenever class struggle tends to overstep the constitutional boundaries of politics and law, and to challenge the rights of property, the state makes “economic” concessions in an attempt to re-establish the rule of money and law and to restore the separation of the two spheres; this is how the state as separate from the economic is reproduced.

12 Marx also says that “at the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened and intensified the class antagonism between capital and labor, the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labor, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism” (1977b, 540).

This means that class struggle takes place not just over policies (*e.g.*, economic benefits). It also takes place over i) the fact of the separation of the political (*i.e.*, the very existence of the capitalist state); and ii) the form of that separation (*e.g.*, how much separation – the extent to which it intervenes in the economic). But (i) and (ii) are not constant features of the state, as structuralists wrongly think. While the state reinforces/imposes the separation of the political from the economic, the dominated classes tend to fuse them together in the manner suggested above (Clarke, 1978; see also Esping-Andersen, *et al.*, 1976, 191; Nagels, 1986; Rothstein, 1990). It is true that capital and the state as structures constrain class struggle. Clarke, however, unlike Poulantzas and other structuralists, does not think that these structures are permanent; rather they are subject to, and reproduced through, class struggle.

The wage contract between individual worker and capitalist is a very solid reality if the capitalist has the power to enforce that contract, but dissolves into pure illusion if the workers are able to counterpose their collective power to that of capital. . . . [Similarly] The “majesty of the law” can inspire awe when it confronts the isolated individual, while becoming an object of ridicule in the face of collective resistance. (Clarke, 1991, 45.)

So one important point that emerges from the above is that the state’s relative autonomy from the economic is not automatically reproduced. It is reproduced in and through class struggle.¹³

This idea of a dialectical relation between the state and class struggle is well elaborated in Wright’s works, applicable to both capitalist and non-capitalist states. Wright’s insights, which are immersed in his discussion on Marxist methodology and therefore have to be carefully “gleaned,” reinforce ideas such as those of Clarke and others. I will very briefly discuss these. Wright makes two main points. First, class struggle is conditioned by social structures, including economic and state structures. The “economic structure establishes limits” within which forms of class struggle (and forms of the state as well) can vary (Wright, 1978, 17). For example, under a feudal economic structure, characterized by fusion of the

¹³ See Bonefeld, 1993, for a discussion that is critical of but also complementary to Clarke’s ideas. For lack of space I cannot discuss Bonefeld.

political and the economic, a democratic state and class struggle for socialism are not possible. A range of other struggles (grain riots, land invasions etc.) is possible. But which of these struggles will in fact take place will be determined by the state.

Second, class struggle, as influenced by economic structure and the state, in turn affects/conditions the latter. There are at least two ways in which class struggle does this. The first is transformative conditioning. To paraphrase Wright, the state which constrains/enables class struggle is at the same time transformed by class struggle (21). Class struggle by transforming the state can make it fail to reproduce the economic structure. For example, as one of Wright's collaborative works shows, successful class struggle for state legislation for *adequate* guaranteed income to all workers (an income sufficient to undermine the commodity status of labor power) can undermine capitalism (in Esping-Andersen, 1976, 202).

The second impact of class struggle on the state is mediating conditioning: class struggle mediates in the relation between i) state form (*i.e.*, the bureaucratic structure of the state) and state content; and also between ii) the state and the economic structure. i) Class struggle can condition or mediate the way the bureaucratic structure of the state determines the actual activity of the state (actual policy), so that "the identical structures of the state can produce different policies depending on the relationship of class struggle to the state." For example, when class struggle is outside the state, "bureaucratic structures may effectively select state policies which optimally serve the interests of capital." But if "class struggles occur within the state apparatus itself – when civil service workers and teachers become unionized, state employees go on strike . . . the same formal state structure can select very different sorts of state interventions" (24). ii) Further, class struggle mediates in the relation between the state and the economic structure: "The extent to which a given state structure is reproductive of economic relations may be conditioned by the kinds of class struggles in the society. Where class struggle is very intense and very politicized, bourgeois democratic structures may prove quite unproductive,"¹⁴ but "where

14 This resonates with Marx's idea that universal suffrage, which, as Giddens (1981) says, was fought for by the working class, "forces the political rule of the bourgeoisie into democratic conditions, which at every moment help the hostile classes to victory and jeopardize the very foundations of bourgeois society" (Marx, quoted in Jessop, 1990, 170).

class struggle is very economic and apolitical, the identical structures may function very reproductively” (Wright, 1978, 24–25).

As the class struggle approaches to the state show, there is a dialectical relation between the state and class struggle, and this idea is a definite advance on more structuralist approaches to the state. Class struggle approaches also give due importance to human agency, particularly to the dominated classes. There is another set of approaches to the state – state-centered approaches – that also give due importance to agency, and in this case, to state actors. These approaches emphasize autonomy of the state and state actors. I turn to these now.

IV. STATE-CENTERED APPROACHES

As I argued above, instrumentalist theory denies any autonomy to the state: the state is a mere tool. In structuralist theory, the state is relatively autonomous; it has nonetheless to function according to the political (Poulantzas) or economic (Altvater, etc.) needs of capital. In other words, the state is socially determined in these society-centered approaches. It is against this that some non-Marxist scholars have argued for a state-centered approach, which in turn, has elicited responses from Marxists that indicate a gradual convergence of ideas about autonomy of the state and of state actors.

According to the state-centered theory of the state (autonomy), the state is an institutional ensemble in its own right, independent of the society. For Skocpol, who criticizes neo-Marxist state theories for their “deeply embedded society-centered assumptions” (1985, 5), the state is an autonomous actor. This autonomy exists if “states conceived as organizations claiming control over territories and people may formulate and pursue goals that are not simply reflective of the demand or interest of social groups, classes, or society” (9). She attributes this autonomy to factors such as the state’s specific interest by virtue of its insertion into an international state system, so in the event of a threat to the state, state elites take initiatives to protect sovereignty; the state’s unique responsibilities for maintaining public order which “spur state-initiated reforms” (9); and the activities of state managers having weak ties to dominant social groups. Evidently, state managers have their own self-interests in initiating state actions.

For Mann (1984) the origins of autonomous state power are diverse. He refers in particular to the following sources of autonomous state power: i) The necessity in all societies for a monopolistic enforcement of rules, especially those relevant to the protection of life and property (195). ii) The multiplicity of functions¹⁵ that are undertaken most efficiently by a central state. This idea resonates with Douglas North's idea of the utility-maximizing state (see North, 1986, 250); these functions in turn bring the state into a relation with many different groups among which the state consequently has room for multiple maneuvers, which are a source of state power (198).¹⁶ iii) The territorial centrality of the state: unlike groups/actors in civil society, the state's resources "radiate authoritatively outward from a center but stop at defined territorial boundaries" (198). For example, unlike General Motors, which does not rule the territory around Detroit, although it rules the assembly of automobiles and life-chances of its employees, the state (of Michigan) exercises a *general* control over the territory under its jurisdiction (199); the autonomous power of the state ensues from this difference (201). By virtue of these three aspects of the state, "the state elite possesses an independence from civil society" (201). State autonomy is invested "in the person of state elites." The main point that emerges from Mann is that the state can do certain things that no other group can, and hence has autonomous power.

The statist approach, particularly that of Skocpol, has been found wanting conceptually and empirically. First statist present "state" and "society" (especially, the economy) as separate and polar opposites, whereas "state and society are interdependent and interpenetrate in a multitude of different ways. . ." (Block, 1987a, 21). Statists also deny the existence of classes and class struggles within the state (Cammack, 1989, 263–264) and outside it. An adequate state theory has to recognize its institutional specificity but must, says Jessop (1990, 25), also be a part of an adequate theory of society divided into classes. Akard has noted that "to understand the

15 The four persistent types of functions are: maintenance of internal order, military defense/aggression, maintenance of communications and infrastructure, and economic redistribution domestically and internationally (Mann, 1984, 196–197). It may be noted here that, for Mann, maintenance of internal order includes protection of life and property.

16 This idea is akin to the Marxist idea of relative state autonomy as derived from an equilibrium of the classes, as discussed above.

capitalist state, it is necessary to bring the economy back in [again]" (1986, 90). Second, and relatedly, it is assumed that state managers' actions are determined by their self interests (salary, prestige, etc.), and that the state is a source of all of these. But why does the state become their source? I will argue that the answer lies in the social determination of the nature of the state: the bureaucratic, and therefore undemocratic, nature of the state-form is a necessary feature of capitalism. This type of state-form, unlike the Paris Commune type (Marx, in Lenin, 1977, 43–44), becomes a strategically selective terrain which insulates the state from popular influence on, and surveillance over, the state, and thus facilitates the appropriation of state rents (*e.g.*, bribes), power, etc., by officials. Therefore, if the reason why the state is a source of high income and power for officials lies in the class character of the state, how can their actions and interests be *independent* of classes and of the society?

Third, and finally, the very criticism that the Marxist approach neglects the autonomy of state actors (Skocpol) can be shown to be incorrect. Consider the following. For some Marxist theorists of the state, the state itself shapes class forces and/or shapes/changes the balance of class forces so that some classes are favored at the expense of others. Sometimes the state, as Poulantzas says, can even *erect* a class into the role of a socioeconomically dominant class and thus into that of a politically dominant class (1967, 65). This is also supported by Engels, who says that "the [Crimean] war has proved that Russia needed railways, steam engines, [etc.]. . . . And thus the government set about *breeding* a Russian capitalist class" (quoted in Bardhan, 1984, 35). To argue against the criticism of statists, including Skocpol, that the Marxists do not recognize state actors' autonomy, we will examine some Marxist works — those of Miliband, Offe, and the early Block — in which defensible state-centered arguments are made.

Miliband (1983b) says that there are two sets of impulses to state action: external (class interests) and internal (those generated within the state). The latter are of two types: the self-interests of state managers, and their conception of the national interest. Since the capitalist state is a source of power, prestige, high salaries, etc. (70), it can serve the state managers' self-interests. Again, those who seek state power persuade themselves that their achievement of it

and their continued hold on it are synonymous with the “national interest,” whose service is their paramount interest. The two sets of impulses to state action – internal and external – are related, in that state managers have been imbued with the belief (this is, for me, perhaps giving too much importance to ideology) that the national interest is bound up with the well-being of the capitalist enterprise. Hence, they have been attentive to capitalist interests (71). Consequently the relation between state managers and capitalists is one of “*partnership between two different, separate forces, linked to each other by many threads, yet each having its separate spheres of action*” (72). The state is never a junior partner: the contradictions of capitalism and resultant class pressures and social tensions necessitate a more pronounced role for the state. But it has to act in the class context: “So long as a government works within it, so long does the partnership hold” (73). Against Skocpol, Miliband argues that there cannot be a state for itself, a state which is not a partner of anyone (74). It is difficult to see, he says, how there can be a state whose interests are in fundamental conflict with *all* classes or groups in the society, as Skocpol claims.

Like Miliband, Block also recognizes that state actors have their independent interests and powers. He says that “state power is *sui generis*, not reducible to class power” (1987c, 84). But this exercise of state power takes place in class contexts. State managers are collectively interested in maximizing their power, prestige and wealth, but within particular political rules of the game given by a set of political institutions; for example, in a democracy, if they maximize their self interest too much, that may jeopardize their chances of returning to power. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie or any other propertied class cannot survive without the state, so they have to seek a *modus vivendi* with state managers. This *modus vivendi* has been favorable to capital: state managers have been restrained from attacking private property and have implemented pro-capital policies.

Miliband’s concept of “partnership” and Block’s concept of capitalists’ “*modus vivendi*” with state managers are similar to Offe’s concept of “institutional self-interest,” though the latter assigns more importance to the way in which the material content of state power is conditioned by accumulation (1984, 121) than (*e.g.*) Miliband does. Offe writes:

Since state power depends on a process of accumulation which is beyond its power to organize, every occupant of state power is basically interested in promoting those political conditions most conducive to private accumulation. . . . The *institutional self-interest* of the state in accumulation is conditioned by the fact that the state is denied the power to control the flow of those resources which are nevertheless indispensable for the control of state power. (Offe, 1984, 120.)

Then, it may be argued, when and where the state itself is an owner of the means of production, as it is in many post-colonial countries, then the degree of its autonomy may be increased (see Hamilton, 1982, 27–28; Alavi, 1972).

V. STATE THEORY: A GROWING CONVERGENCE OF IDEAS

In this section, I will point out important areas of convergence among apparently divergent approaches. The foregoing discussion contains tendencies towards convergence among at least three sets of conceptual dualisms. The discussion of these will also be a means of summarizing the important achievements of state theorists discussed earlier.

First, there is a growing convergence between instrumentalism and structuralism. Consider just two examples. It was Miliband, criticized as an instrumentalist, who ingeniously interpreted Marx' and Engels' statement that the state is "but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (1976, 486); he argued that the existence of "common affairs" assumed the existence of particular ones, and hence of a fractionalization of the capitalist class; this class needed a relatively autonomous state in order to manage its common affairs, thus suggesting that the structuralist concept of relative autonomy is *embedded* in the so-called instrumentalist concept of the state presented by Marx and Engels. And it was none other than Poulantzas, the structuralist, for whom concepts of fractionalization of the capitalist class and state autonomy were important ingredients of state theory. He argued that since the bourgeoisie "sinks into fractional struggles and is unable to realize its political unity," the state "takes charge . . . of the bourgeoisie's political interests," *i.e.*, their unity and political hege-

mony over the society. But in order to do this, “the capitalist state assumes a relative autonomy with regard to the bourgeoisie” (1968, 284–285). This autonomy allows the state to “arrange compromises vis-à-vis dominated classes” and “to intervene against the long-term economic interests of one or other fraction of the dominant class: for such compromises and sacrifices are sometimes necessary for the realization of their political class interests” (285).

Likewise Miliband, who had taken a quite instrumentalist approach to the state in the late 1960s, trying to establish the class character of the state in terms of, *e.g.*, the attitudes of those by whom “the vast majority . . . has been governed, represented, administered,” recognized in 1977 that “the question is not one of purpose or attitude [of the state elite] but of ‘structural constraints’” that shape these. And while the Poulantzas of 1969 had argued that “if the *function* of the State . . . and the *interests* of the dominant class . . . coincide, it is by reason of the system itself: the direct participation of members of the ruling class in the State apparatus is not the *cause* but the *effect*,” the Poulantzas of 1978 argued that the state is divided–constituted by class contradictions, with different branches of the state being often “the *representatives and seats* of the diverging interests of one or several fractions of the power bloc” (emphasis added): apparently recognizing, therefore, the idea of instrumental control over state apparatuses. Where is then the instrumentalism–structuralism *dualism* that had created, as Piven notes, “a small flood of arguments about the nature of the capitalist state” (1994, 24).

Second, the gap between structuralist and class struggle approaches is narrowing. Poulantzas, who said in 1969 that the state is a class state “by reason of the system itself,” admitted later that earlier on he had underemphasized class struggle. In his 1978 book, he recognized the existence of class struggle against the state even *within* the state: dominated classes are present within the state as centers of resistance. Structuralists like Hirsch also argue that the theoretical derivation of state functions from laws of accumulation tell us nothing about whether and in what form state functions result from these determinants; one has therefore to examine how objective tendencies assert themselves through the mediation of concrete class struggles (Hirsch, 1978, 65, 83). While economic structuralists do not ignore class struggle, those who focus more

on class struggle also emphasize *structures* that constrain class relations: while class struggle is constrained by structures like the state, those same structures are transformed through class struggle (Clarke, 1991; Holloway, 1991).

Finally, there is an emerging convergence between society-centered and state-centered approaches. While Skocpol and others criticize Marxist approaches as society-centered and argued for a state-centered approach that gives autonomy to state actors, these arguments slowly converge with those of Offe, Miliband and Block. It is argued that state actors have what Offe (1985) calls “institutional self-interest” in promoting capitalist accumulation, which is a precondition for fulfilling their own interests, so that there exists a “partnership” (Miliband) or “*modus vivendi*” (Block) between state actors and capitalists. These concepts also sensitize those Marxists (*e.g.*, some state derivationists), who reduce state functions to capital’s needs, to the existence of a certain autonomy on the part of state actors. These three tendencies towards convergence indicate western Marxism’s apparently inexhaustible capacity to create different concepts to capture important aspects of a complex reality like the state, and then to produce a synthesis. I hope such a synthesis will produce its opposite so that, to paraphrase Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach (1977b, 158), dialectical *understanding* of the state will continue in order to help in “changing” it.

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