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**A THEORETICAL RECONSIDERATION OF THE
MODERN CAPITALIST STATE: ITS HISTORICAL
CONJUNCTURE AND THE NEED FOR A
CONCEPTUAL DISTINCTION OF ITS POLITICAL
MODALITY**

Soteris Kattos



**CYPRUS CENTER FOR
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1993-2019 TWENTY SIX YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

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* The paper introduces the theoretical concept of “the political complementarity between the state and capital” as being analytically distinct from the concept of “the relative autonomy of the state”, and argues that the relations of force being conditioned by specific historical settings require theoretical differentiation.

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Introduction

We are in the era of unprecedented political empowerment of the capitalist state. The concentration and accumulation of global wealth in a tiny minority of oligarchs has reached unimaginable levels. Global poverty, neo- pauperization, migration flows and the dramatic socioeconomic shrinkage of the middle classes, reflect the hegemony of the neo-liberal doctrine and the political submission of the state and its apparatuses to the doctrine's inherent totalitarian nature. Technological progress which accelerated exponentially economic growth and development, has fallen under the political patronage of global oligarchy. The oligarchic usurpation of wealth goes hand and hand with more working hours with less pay and relevant rewards. The once dominant values of equity and fairness have been 'all of a sudden' disappeared from the public agenda and the central political scene. The cultural marginalization of the norm of distributive justice, to say the least, is a vivid manifestation of the era we live in. This political predicament has not been contested decisively, if at all, by the middle and working classes.

That is why a theoretical reconsideration of the modern capitalist state is so urgent nowadays.

The Marxian approach to the state that I follow in this brief article, builds on Gramsci, Marx and Poulantzas (without discounting Miliband's major theoretical points which are relevant to the discussion below).

Although these theorists have inspired my work, their references neither should be seen as a dogmatic adherence nor blind veneration to the Marxian theory of the state.

For these same reasons I prefer as a starting point of my theoretical discussion below - which leads to a theoretical synthesis and reconceptualization of the political nature of the state, Poulantzas's notion of the capitalist state's relative political autonomy.

The theoretical debate

The Poulantzian concept of the relative autonomy of the capitalist state has directed Marxian sociological discussion, and has been the dominant view for a long time now. The state's relative autonomy is conditioned by the overall ensemble of class relations i.e., the complexity of class struggle and the structural characteristics the domestic model of accumulation and reproductive requirements impose on the state. Poulantzas assigns class struggle primacy over state apparatuses as the dominant criterion for the degree of autonomy the state enjoys. As far as to the dominated class, the role of the state is to maintain and reproduce the domination - subordination relationship. Hence, the capitalist state's very material structure reproduces the domination - subordination relationship.

However elucidating the above, the Poulantzian approach lacks an extensive theorization of the historical conjuncture within which class struggle develops and assumes a specific political form. Undoubtedly Poulantzas refers to it, but in abstract terms or – more specifically - to a theoretical contradiction if one considers his position of assigning primacy to the relations of production (i.e. relations of economic property and possession) over the labour process. Furthermore, Poulantzas stresses the point that the relative autonomy of the state is not applicable only to a given form of the capitalist state. It concerns above all the structural core of that state. It seems that the historical conjuncture is treated in terms of 'the structural core' of the capitalist state regardless of its developmental stage and form of political domination. In other words, the relative autonomy of the state is presupposed. Even the problem that he poses that allows for a structural differentiation of the state as a function of class struggle, the notion of the relative autonomy is taken for granted, as a constitutive element of the very structure of the relations of production in the capitalist system.

One should pose the question how the state's specific historical conjuncture conditions its overall politico-ideological orientation? How on the one hand, domestic institutional arrangements produce cultural and ideological apparatuses that have engendered and reinforced submissive attitudes in the collective mind-set, and on the other, class related attitudes and behaviours are politically downplayed and socially hindered. How the social dichotomy of the capitalist structure into two mainly opposing social forces, namely capital and labour, has not been elevated into a social terrain where the politicization and polarization of society could have attained a stage of complex political superstructures. The hegemonization of the exploited i.e., labour by the bourgeoisie, have negated efforts on their part to develop class consciousness and to conceptualize class conflict as the most significant and fundamental process in society. To negate the negation, subjective interpretations of one's own position in the social division of labour and the system of social production is a necessary pre-requisite. For once the social divergence of class interests, the outcome of the capitalist division of labour, is moved from the domain of objectivity on to the domain of subjectivity, the evaluation of class from a class in-itself to a class for-itself by labour, assumes primary political importance. For now class consciousness - previously being obscured as a potential material force of labour's subjective realm - becomes a fundamental counter-force vis-à-vis capitalist hegemony. The dialectical linkage between the objective (the relations of production) and the subjective awareness of one's social position as well as of others in these relations, i.e., institutions of global economic governance, like for example the WTO, IMF, OECD, EU etc., progressively and gradually undermines capitalist hegemony, and causes a power shift within the relations of force, i.e. between capital and labour. Miliband (1983) explicitly elucidates that the "the degree of autonomy which the state enjoys for most purposes in relation to social forces in

capitalist society depends above all on the extent to which class struggle and pressure from below challenge the hegemony of the class which is dominant in such a society" (pp. 65-66).

Class struggle as the counter-force of the structural constraints capital and its model of capital accumulation and reproductive requirements impose on the political behaviour of the state, fell (and fall) short of corresponding to its restraining political influence vis-à-vis capitalist exploitation and domination. The level and complexity of class struggle becomes therefore an important determinant of the dominant political modality of the capitalist state. Poulantzas was quite right in pointing that out. The higher the level of intensity of class struggle the higher the level of politicization and polarization within the domestic structure of the capitalist state. Moreover, class struggle constitutes the primary political tool at the disposal of labour in order to improve its relative position vis-à-vis capital and, consequently, enhancing its political influence over the state.

Poulantzas (1978) rightly has noted that the capitalist state organizes the bourgeoisie's long-term political interests and reproduces the domination-subordination. Does this political imperative presuppose a substantial separation of the state from the economy? In other words, should the state in order to perform these functions possess relative autonomy? All these questions constitute a historical issue namely the emancipation of society as a whole from the fetters of the capitalist relations of production. They focus attention on the issue of class hegemony and how this hegemony is materialized and sanctioned by the state in a global capitalist society. Simultaneously, they also set the foundation for a theoretical conceptualization of the actual potentiality of its transcendence; thus, conditioning the political orientation of a nascent social force in its effort to attain ascendancy to a hegemonic status. This political eventuality is absent from other approaches. This constitutes a basic difference between the Marxian theory of the state and other approaches, like for instance, the neo-statist, classical neoliberal, corporatist and so forth. Miliband (1983) rightly taxes Poulantzas for structural super-determinism that in effect negates the very process of class struggle. Moreover, class struggle - in Poulantzian theoretical terms - appears as though its political output falls short of transcending the relations of production.

Unfolding further the above discourse, Gramsci (1971) eventuates a distinction between the "conjunctural" and the "organic" nature of the capitalist state. As capital (global and/or domestic) imposes constraints on the state originating from the conditions of production and accumulation, it is evident that these conditions require a further elaboration in terms of political superstructure i.e., the level of class consciousness. Poulantzian structuralism exhibits a limitation in addressing the problematic of the political nature of the state. Namely, the problem arises from the absence of a concrete analysis of the historical conjuncture that pertains directly to

class struggle. The condition for the political variability of class struggle - i.e. the analysis of the specific conjuncture that differentiates the intensity of class struggle - is treated "in an exceedingly formalized ballet of evanescent shadows" (Miliband, 1983, p. 39). How then is it possible to reach a realistic conception of the state when class struggle, which - according to Poulantzas - "enjoys primacy over the apparatuses", is not extensively analyzed within the context of its specific historical conjuncture.

The historical conjuncture and the theoretical reconsideration of the state

It is for this reason that Gramsci's methodological criterion of the "relations of force" can map out the historical specificity of the capitalist formation. Similarly, it paves the way for a concrete analysis of the historical conjuncture.

The need for the development of a "relations of force index" (Kattos, 1999) could accurately define the historical stage of the "relations of force", in a given historical formation. It could also undoubtedly facilitate the establishment of the corresponding variability between structure and superstructure; and eventually defining the "relations of force", i.e., its contemporary historical stage. Hence, the relative political impact class struggle has over the state could be addressed. Class struggle is not a panacea for the historical transcendence of the capitalist state. However, its exact historical-political position vis-à-vis capital could precisely reveal structural differentiations of the institutional materiality of the state. Differentiations that not only reflect changes in the relations of production i.e., changes in the very process of accumulation of capital and production of surplus value, but also changes in the very political modality of the capitalist state. Class struggle cannot be simply pre-ordained. It constitutes a concrete dialectical-political outcome derived from the specific historical conjuncture of the capitalist formation. This implies that once the "relations of force" of that particular historical conjuncture "are posed and resolved" not only condition but also unveil variations and shifts in the structural materiality of the state.

The conceptualization of the capitalist state must above all, corresponds to an analysis of the concrete historical conjuncture and not be referred dogmatically to its structural core for its conceptualization. To do that, factual evidence of the specific historical conjuncture within which the political relation between capital and labour develops and assumes a specific social (politico-economic) form is a fundamental prerequisite. It precisely defines the political impact and hence the extent of conditioning this social relationship exercises on the political modality of the state, (Kattos, 1999).

Capital imposes extensive constraints on the political behaviour of the state that produce compelling limitations of its autonomy, limitations that have not been under a persistent political challenge by labour due to its weak political consciousness. A political consciousness that has rendered class struggle politically rudimentary, and which qualitatively differentiates the political modality of the state. This condition is characterized by the relative political fusion between the state power structure and the economic power structure. This relative fusion does not exclude the possibility that at times each power structure asserts its own particularistic interests, which are contingent upon the political characteristics in a specific historical period. The modality of politics, i.e., the formulation, support and promotion of social values of a given social group at the expense of another, reveals that unlike core states where the diffusion of power at least is more conspicuous, in semi-periphery or transitional states, like the Cypriot state, it is less apparent. Networks of political communication either formal or informal between the state and the various factions of capital are facilitated with much less political difficulty in terms of the advancement of capital's interests. Capital's access to the state's decision-making mechanisms due to "lack of insulation" is achieved. This is not the case with labour. The articulation and expression of interests of the capitalist class are consolidated in an environment with much less political complexity in contrast to advanced capitalist states. The relative fusion of the state power structure and the economic power structure leads to what I call the "political complementarity" of the state and capital. And which I define as:

A political circumstance where there is an extensive overlapping between the state power structure and the economic power structure. Such a condition affects the state's decision-making apparatus in the formulation of policies supportive of these interests. In other words, there is a wide array of extensive political and economic interlocking between the state and capital that is concretized as a political condition in the form of a political alliance between the state and capital for the consolidation of its domination and exploitation over labour.

This complementarity between the state and capital which is institutionalized within the state power structure and the economic power structure, is conditioned nonetheless by the level of class consciousness (Moschonas, 1990).

The concepts of the "political complementarity" and the "relative autonomy of the state" are not mutually exclusive. Both of them are useful theoretical concepts as I attempt to produce a theoretically adequate understanding of the processes involved regarding the promotion and protection of the overall long-term political interests of capital by the state. Therefore, in order to reach more valid and accurate conclusions as to the socio-political nature of the state, the qualitative

differentiation of politico-economic structures is essential. Consequently, the analysis of class relations in the case of a state, which is in a transitory developmental stage, e.g. structural adjustment process to global capital's requirements, guided by the theoretical concept of "political complementarity" between the state and capital, is more appropriate. The introduction of the theoretical concept of "political complementarity" between the state and capital as being analytically distinct from the concept of the "relative autonomy of the state" indicates that socio-structural differentiations being conditioned by specific historical settings require a theoretical differentiation.

This paper has the ambition to take the theoretical debate a step further, building on the Marxian theoretical heritage. I have introduced into the theoretical debate - what I view of cardinal theoretical and analytical importance - the notion of the "differentia specifica" of the state. Built on Gramsci's theoretical-methodological criterion of "the relations of force" it captures the socio-political reality of the capitalist formation. Its analytical potential, unlike other approaches, facilitates the production of an accurate definition of "the immediate moment of the relations of force" (Gramsci, 1972, p. 179) that can lead to a concrete analysis of the state's historical conjuncture. This analysis, which incorporates a dialectical link between structure and superstructure, unveils specific variations in the institutional materiality of the state taking into account its historical conjuncture. True, Poulantzas (1978) has pointed out, the state represents a "material condensation of a relationship of forces" (p. 29), conditioned nevertheless by political superstructures, i.e., the level of class consciousness and the historical-political characteristics of class struggle. An analysis of the "relations of force" eventuates a distinction between the 'conjunctural' and the 'organic'. This in the final analysis contributes to the production of a precise definition of the political nature of the capitalist state.

Cyprus is a historical case in point. It exemplifies extreme institutional and economic deregulation at the expense of society and of labour. In fact the institutional disequilibrium of social and economic rights between capital and labour in favour of capital since the ascendancy to power of the reactionary-conservative Anastasiades's regime in 2013, is unprecedented.

Socio-political processes, i.e. processes of domination and subordination during transitional periods of structural adjustment of the domestic economy (read domestic model of capital accumulation) to the demands of internationalization and regional integration(cf EU adjustment memoranda) constitutes a (the) major political task of the hegemonic groups in society in order to preserve and enhance their hegemony and political control. This finds political expression in the state. This expression, i.e. how the state best organizes politically the collective interests of capital, corresponds primarily to the specific stage of

development of class relations and manifests itself in the state's political modality. Given the historical conjuncture of the state, its corresponding institutional materiality could be reflected in the form of a political complementarity between the state and capital as the fundamental political modality that organizes collectively the interests of capital. Such an approach substantively diverges from the notion of the relative autonomy of the state, a political reality that still, albeit politically wounded, (for how long nobody knows) corresponds to the historical conjuncture of socially advanced core states, perhaps with the exemption of the USA.

Concluding remarks

The current global debt crisis is a testament to this. For instance the core (north) European welfare state is gradually abandoning the universalistic welfare model and is adopting what Ryner (1999) refers to compensatory neo-liberalism. On the other hand the current debt crisis in Greece reveals the primary political role of the Greek state in implementing unprecedented austerity measures at the expense of the middle and the working classes. All these measures were taken in line with the demands of the global financial capitalist markets. The Greek state acted in a politically significant complimentary role by passing in the Greek parliament on 5 March 2010 the Economy Protection Bill which by 2018 yielded a cumulative contraction of the Greek economy close to fifty billion euros, approximately 25 per cent of its GDP and pauperized 40 per cent of the population.

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