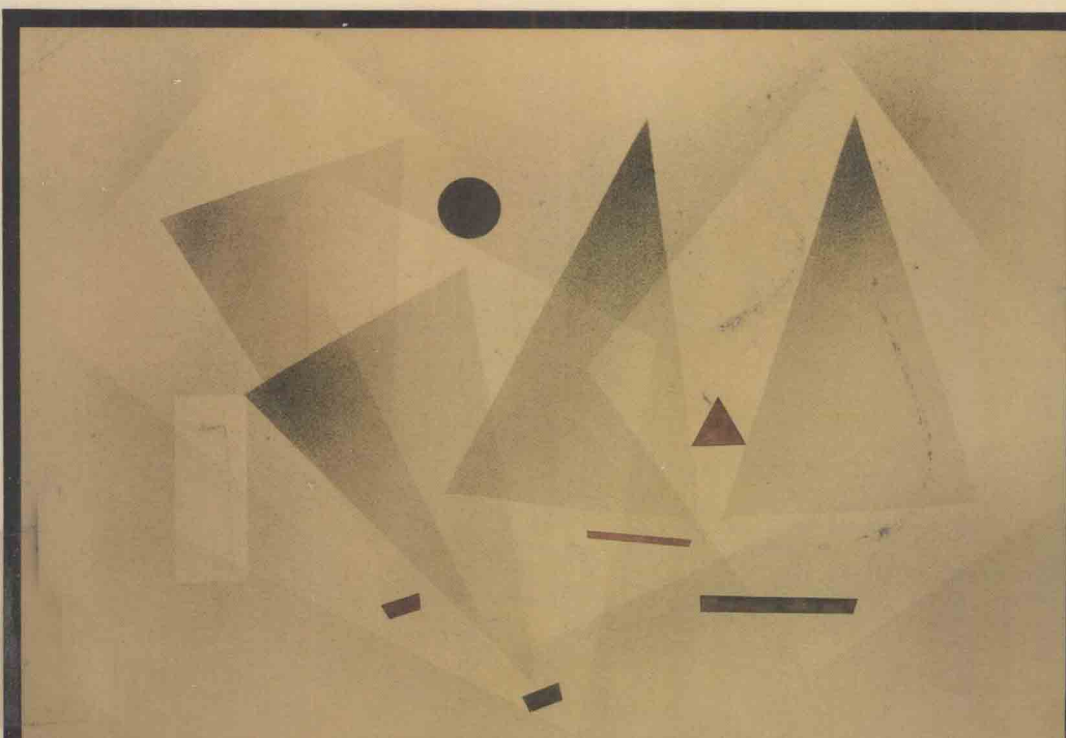


# The Capitalist State

Bob Jessop



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*Marxist Theories and Methods*

BOB JESSOP

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## Preface

This book has been an unconscionably long time in the making. My interest in theories of the state and state power dates back some twelve years or more and my interest in epistemological and methodological issues in theory construction is even longer-lived. But the immediate stimulus to undertake a theoretical investigation into recent Marxist analyses of the capitalist state came from two discussion groups in which I have been involved during the last five years: the Conference of Socialist Economists group on the capitalist state and the 'Problems of Marxism' seminar at the University of Essex. Some preliminary results of this investigation were published in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* in 1977 and I have since published several other papers on various aspects of postwar Marxist theories of the state, law, and politics. Nonetheless the greatest part of the current book is newly published here and the book as a whole draws together for the first time the principal theoretical and methodological conclusions of my various studies to date on these matters.

In general terms the present study focuses on postwar European Marxist theories of the capitalist state and its middle chapters consider three major approaches to this topic. It is not concerned with earlier Marxist analyses of the capitalist state and politics, however significant they might have been at the time in theoretical discussion and/or political strategies, unless they have also been directly influential in the development of the postwar European work considered in this volume. Among the important studies that are ignored due to this self-imposed restriction are the work of Austro-Marxist theorists such as Max Adler, Otto Bauer, Rudolf Hilferding, and Karl Renner, German Social Democrats such as Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, advocates of council communism such as Anton Pannekoek and Herman Goerter, and leading communist theorists such as Karl Korsch, George Lukacs, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leon Trotsky. How-

ever, since almost all self-professed Marxist theories seek some justification (if not the exclusive right to the mantle of Marxism) in their interpretation of the work of Marx and Engels and its continuation by such figures as Lenin or Gramsci, I devote the first chapter to a brief assessment of the contribution of the two founding fathers and also discuss the studies of Lenin and Gramsci in subsequent pages. In the first chapter I consider the work of Marx and Engels from two interrelated perspectives: its substantive content and its underlying theoretical method. In relation to the latter I argue that Marx provides the foundations for a realist scientific method in his 1857 *Introduction* and relates this to problems of state theory and political practice in his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. In order to distinguish this theoretical method from others, I refer to it as the 'method of articulation'; but it is worth emphasising at the outset that I believe this approach involves nothing more than the correct application of a realist scientific method to the field of political economy. In terms of its substantive content I deny that it is possible to distil a single, coherent, unitary Marxist theory from the various studies that Marx and/or Engels presented concerning the state and political action. Instead they offered a variety of theoretical perspectives which co-exist in an uneasy and unstable relation. It is this very plurality of viewpoints and arguments that provides the basis for the subsequent diversification of Marxist state theories.

In the three central chapters of this book I consider three recent Marxist approaches to the capitalist state. The discussion has a dual orientation. For, in addition to a critical review of the merits and demerits of the substantive arguments of these approaches, I also consider how far their proponents follow the methodological procedures specified by Marx. The order of presentation reflects this dual concern. For, although there is much to recommend in the substantive arguments of all three approaches (as well as more or less significant areas for criticism), the different methods of theory construction which are predominant in each approach are certainly not of equal merit. Thus I deal first with theories that resort to the unsatisfactory method of subsumption, proceed to theories that adopt the method of logical derivation, and conclude with theories that follow more or less closely the realist scientific method of articulation.

It is the orthodox communist theory of state monopoly capitalism that provides the focus of the second chapter. The preparation of these pages was particularly interesting because it forced me to re-think my own dismissive attitude as well as to question other, more widespread criticisms. For, although the great bulk of 'stamocap'

analysis is dull and repetitive as well as being committed to untenable forms of economic reductionism, there is sufficient interesting and original work to merit an extended treatment. It is also worth noting that there are important parallels between 'stamocap' theories in their 'monopoly-theoretical' version and American analyses of the 'military industrial complex' or the 'corporate state' in the USA; and that major similarities can be found between 'stamocap' theories in their 'capital-theoretical' version and arguments such as those of Galbraith concerning the 'technostructure' in the 'new industrial state' or of James O'Connor concerning the sources of the 'fiscal crisis of the state' (Galbraith, 1967; O'Connor, 1973). This means that, although theories of state monopoly capitalism are nowhere near as influential in countries with a weak communist movement (such as the USA, Canada, and Britain) as they are in countries where communists are a significant political force (such as the Soviet bloc, France, and Italy), many of the criticisms levelled at these theories are germane to other theoretical and political analyses which emphasise the close links between monopoly capital and the state. Finally, because state monopoly capitalism theories enjoy significant political influence in several countries but are also deeply flawed theoretically, they have provided a major stimulus to the development of other approaches which aim to transcend these limitations.

One such approach is the so-called *Staatsableitungdebatte* or 'state derivation debate'. This comprises the subject matter of the third chapter. Here I deal with the whole range of explicitly Marxist theories concerned with the logical derivation of the form and/or functions of the capitalist state. Although the main points of this approach are already familiar in Britain through the work of Holloway and Picciotto, the breadth of the debate and its recent development is less well-known. Nor is there much real appreciation of the precise methodological implications of the derivation approach among its opponents or, indeed, its proponents. More generally the substantive arguments of the *Staatsableitungdebatte* are almost wholly unknown in the USA and its methodological approach is quite alien to the empiricist tradition that dominates American Marxism as well as more orthodox, pluralist social sciences. Since there is much of real theoretical and methodological worth in this approach it is particularly important to make it accessible to a wider audience. Thus, in addition to considering the whole range of West German and British attempts at a derivation of the form and/or functions of the capitalist state, special attention is also paid to the method of derivation and its affinities with the method of articulation.

In the fourth chapter I deal with the theoretical and political work of Gramsci and the neo-Gramscian school. By far the largest part of this chapter is devoted to the contribution of Poulantzas but I also consider the 'discourse-theoretical' analyses of Laclau and Mouffe. A superficial familiarity with the early work of Poulantzas has bred a certain contempt among English-speaking readers — especially those who interpreted it in terms of the sterile and misleading 'structuralist-instrumentalist' debate with Ralph Miliband. My own presentation attempts to bring out the real structure of Poulantzas's argument and to trace his theoretical evolution. The critique of Laclau and Mouffe is necessarily provisional since the principal results of their enquiries have still to be published. But the 'discourse-theoretical' approach is so distinctive and important in its novel interpretation of Gramsci's account of hegemony and has influenced my own approach to such an extent that a provisional review and assessment is required. Both Poulantzas and Laclau and Mouffe adopt the method of articulation in at least some respects and this chapter concludes with a brief account of its application in these and related analyses of the state.

The final chapter builds on the criticisms of the above-mentioned approaches and presents a set of guidelines for a theoretically-informed account of the state in capitalist societies. It begins with an extended discussion of articulation as the most appropriate method of constructing such accounts and relates it to the realist interpretation of scientific method. The bulk of the chapter then introduces in a preliminary and exploratory fashion some protocols for the analysis of the state as a complex institutional ensemble of forms of representation and intervention and of state power as a form-determined reflection of the balance of political forces. In this way I eventually return to the concerns of the first chapter and show how the methods of research and the methods of theoretical presentation advocated by Marx have continuing validity and provide the most appropriate basis for a fresh assault on the problems of constructing an adequate account of the state.

Even this brief outline shows that at least four possible topics are ignored. Firstly there is no extended criticism of the so-called 'instrumentalist' approach which has been so influential in Marxist work as well as more orthodox investigations. In its sociological version 'instrumentalism' establishes the nature of the state from the class affiliation of the state elite; in its politological version it does so in terms of the immediate economic interests advanced by specific policy decisions and 'non-decisions'. In neither version does instrumentalism offer a coherent account of the distinctive properties of

state power nor provide an adequate explanation for its limitations. As a general approach it has been subject to extensive criticism elsewhere and it is also considered *en passant* below. Similar considerations led me to neglect the debate between 'neo-Ricardian' and 'fundamentalist' theorists over the nature and causes of state economic intervention. The basic terrain of this debate is economic rather than political and, in so far as it deals with the state apparatus and state power, it adopts an instrumentalist ('neo-Ricardian') or complex reductionist ('fundamentalist') view. Thus, although I do not deal with this debate directly, both sides are criticised by implication (for a useful review of the economic issues at stake in the debate, see Fine and Harris, 1979, pp. 3–92).

Thirdly, given that this book is concerned with postwar European Marxist analyses of the state, it might seem odd to have devoted so little space to Italian theorists. In a more general review of postwar Marxism this neglect would be unforgivable but it is justified in terms of the particular focus and ambit of the current work. For Italian contributions to Marxist political analysis are often very philosophical in character and/or strongly Italocentric in their theoretical and strategic concerns. It would certainly be desirable to discuss elsewhere Marxist solutions to the traditional problems of political philosophy, such as the nature of democracy, liberty, equality, constitutional rights, and the rule of law; and, in a work less concerned with abstract methodological issues and the general characteristics of the capitalist state, it would be appropriate to consider the attempts of Italian Marxists to update and apply the work of Gramsci to the current situation in Italy. But issues of political (as opposed to state) theory lie beyond the scope of the present text and the most original and far-reaching developments of Gramsci have occurred outside Italy (see chapter 4 below). Nonetheless I hope to settle accounts with Italian theories of the state and politics at a later date. (Meanwhile those interested in such matters should consult, *inter alia*, Altvater, 1977; Altvater and Kallscheuer, 1979; Bobbio *et al.*, 1976; *Critica Marxista*, *seriatim*; Mouffe, ed., 1979; Mouffe and Sassoon, 1977; Negri, 1977; and Sassoon, ed., 1982.)

Finally it is worth recording that I deliberately ignore American contributions to the analysis of the state. Most of these theories are heavily imbued with instrumentalism and/or adopt crude forms of reductionism and thus merit no more attention than their European counterparts. Those few analyses that escape this criticism generally owe so much to the other European approaches considered here and/or bear such marked similarities to them that a separate review is not



required. More generally it would be an interesting exercise to consider how far the absence of a well-developed 'state tradition' in Britain and the USA and the corresponding dominance of liberal, pluralist conceptions of government and citizenship has led to the extraordinary weakness of Marxist theories of the state in these countries.

In undertaking a research project of this kind one inevitably incurs a large number of intellectual and material debts. This particular study is no exception. It is impossible to mention all those who have influenced me in conferences, seminars, and personal discussion (let alone through the published word) but I am acutely aware of debts in this respect to David Abraham, Kevin Bonnett, Joachim Hirsch, John Holloway, Ernesto Laclau, David Lockwood, Sol Picciotto, Claus Offe, Nicos Poulantzas, Harold Wolpe, and Tony Woodiwiss. To Claudia von Braunmühl and Jutta Kneissel I would like to extend public thanks for their hospitality during a six-week visit to the University of Frankfurt to examine German state theory at first hand; and to Hans Kastendiek I would like to extend similar thanks for introducing me to the work of the *Prokla* group at Berlin. To the students in my seminars on theories of the capitalist state I offer my sympathies as the guinea pigs for the development of my approach over the last four years. Since the arguments presented here often differ from those held by friends and colleagues whose influence I have just acknowledged, it is particularly important to issue the usual disclaimers and stress that the ultimate responsibility for the study rests firmly with me. I would also like to thank Lawrence and Wishart for permission to use material from an earlier article on 'Marx and Engels on the State' in the book on *Politics, Ideology, and the State*, edited by Sally Hibbin and published in 1978. For those interested in such matters I did my own typing, xeroxing, collating, and so forth, and Janet Godden offered valuable advice at the copy-editing stage. My children and wife distracted me from these endeavours more than I should have allowed were I to meet the ever-retreating deadlines set by Martin Robertson and I would like to thank my publishers for their great patience and my family for reminding me that there is more to life than a concern with theories of the state. I have dedicated this book to the memory of Nicos Poulantzas whom I met for the first time some few months before his tragic death and who encouraged me to be critical in my approach to his work as well as that of others.

Bob Jessop  
12 October 1981

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviated references to texts or collections are employed:

C1	Karl Marx, <i>Capital</i> vol 1
C3	Karl Marx, <i>Capital</i> vol 3
CCC	Nicos Poulantzas, <i>Classes in Contemporary Capitalism</i>
CD	Nicos Poulantzas, <i>Crisis of the Dictatorships</i> , 2ed.
FD	Nicos Poulantzas, <i>Fascism and Dictatorship</i>
LCW	V. I. Lenin, <i>Collected Works</i> (Moscow, 1960–1970)
MECW	Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>Collected Works</i> (London, 1975–)
MESW	Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>Selected Works</i> in 3 volumes (London, 1969–1970)
PPSC	Nicos Poulantzas, <i>Political Power and Social Classes</i>
SCW	J. Stalin, <i>Collected Works</i> (Moscow, 1953–56)
SPS	Nicos Poulantzas, <i>State, Power, Socialism</i>
TSV3	Karl Marx, <i>Theories of Surplus Value</i> , vol 3

The following abbreviations are also adopted:

AK	Arbeitskonferenz
CDU	Christlich-Demokratische Union
CME	capitalisme monopoliste d'état
CMP	capitalist mode of production
ISA	ideological state apparatus
PCF	Parti communiste français
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano
PKA	Projekt Klassenanalyse
RSA	repressive state apparatus
SMC	state monopoly capitalism
SMK	staatsmonopolistischer Kapitalismus
STR	scientific and technical revolution
TRPF	tendency of the rate of profit to fall

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## Marx and Engels on the State

It is a commonplace that Marx did not produce an account of the state to match the analytical power of his critique of the capitalist mode of production in *Das Kapital*. Indeed, although this great work was to have included an extended treatment of the state, Marx did not succeed in committing it to paper. Instead his legacy in this respect comprises an uneven and unsystematic collection of philosophical reflections, journalism, contemporary history, political forecasts, and incidental remarks. It was left to Engels to develop a more systematic account of the origins and nature of the state and to discuss the general relations between state power and economic development. However, while it was Engels rather than Marx who first adumbrated a class theory of the state, the 'General' was no more successful than Marx himself in developing this insight into a complete and coherent analysis of the capitalist state.

This commonplace should not be taken to imply that Marx made no lasting contribution to political analysis. On the contrary it is as much for his theory of proletarian revolution as for his critique of political economy that Marx can be considered to have founded Marxism and continues to have an exceptional posthumous influence. Likewise Engels is as well known for his work on the state and politics as he is for his indictment of early English capitalism or his philosophy of 'scientific socialism'. Hence in this introductory chapter I intend to review the development of the historical materialist approach to the state and politics in the work of Marx and Engels and to consider how different elements and arguments are combined at different stages in their studies. Rather than attempt to distil a single 'essential' Marxist theory of the state I emphasise the discontinuities and disjunctions in their work and try to show how its very incompleteness and indeterminacy account for the wide range of so-called Marxist theories of the state developed during the last

hundred years. We begin with a brief review of the early approach of Marx to the question of the state.

### THE EARLY MARX

Since the publication of the 1844 manuscripts in 1927 there has been a lively debate among Marxists and Marxologists alike concerning whether or not Marx effected (or experienced) a radical break during the course of his intellectual development. This debate is generally focused on the basic epistemological and philosophical pre-suppositions of the *Manuscripts* and *Das Kapital* and it has been much complicated by the still more recent republication in 1953 of the hitherto unremarked *Grundrisse*. But it is also concerned with the relative continuity or discontinuity of Marxian concepts and principles of explanation in the analysis of specific topics in the domains of economics, politics, and ideology. That the two levels of debate are closely related can be seen particularly clearly in the present context from the Hegelian-centred reading of Marx rendered by Avineri, who seeks to establish the deep-seated continuity of the social and political thought of Marx by tracing the themes of his early work on Hegel's political philosophy through the vicissitudes of Marx's subsequent theoretical development (Avineri, 1968, *passim*). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the general issues involved in this debate but it is clearly essential for us to confront the particular question of continuity in the Marxian analysis of politics and the state.

This question is overlain by another. For there is also a major dispute concerning whether the Marxian analysis of politics is an original theoretical product or whether it is largely borrowed from the works of Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Thus Colletti argues that Marx had already developed a near definitive theory of state power before the 1844 manuscripts started him on the long march to his most important theoretical discoveries. In particular Colletti argues that the *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Law'* (1843) and the *Introduction* to a proposed revision of that critique (written in 1843-44) embody a mature theory which neither the older Marx, Engels, nor Lenin would substantially improve upon in the least bit. And he also argues that this so-called mature Marxist theory was heavily indebted to Rousseau for its critique of parliamentarism, the theory of popular delegation, and the need for the ultimate suppression of the state itself. From this Colletti concludes that the originality of Marxism must be sought in the field of social

and economic analysis rather than in its politics (Colletti, 1975, pp. 45–48; and for Colletti's views on the theoretical importance of Marx's social and economic analyses, *idem*, 1969, pp. 3–44, 77–102).

In contrast Blackburn has argued that the real focus of the work of Marx and Engels was political rather than philosophical or economic and that their decisive contribution was the theory of proletarian revolution. And he insists most strongly that in no field has Marxism been more original than in political theory and that Marxists either discovered or thoroughly reworked every important political concept. For the historical materialist concepts of class, party, revolution, bureaucracy, state, nation, etc., are not in the least anticipated in the work of earlier political theorists and philosophers. This leads Blackburn to a different periodisation of the development of Marxian political analysis. Thus, whereas Colletti finds a mature and near-definitive theory in the 1843 *Critique*, Blackburn argues that Marx did not even commit himself in outline to the proletarian revolution until 1844 (in the *Introduction*) and was still employing political concepts that were 'sparse and rudimentary' in the *Communist Manifesto* some four years later. Moreover, although Marx and Engels were able to develop these concepts through their involvement in the First International, their intervention in the development of the German workers' movement, and their observation of French politics (especially the Paris Commune), they could not complete their theory of proletarian revolution even if they were able to distinguish it from Blanquism and 'democratic faith in miracles'. He concludes that it was not until the events of 1905 and 1917 in Russia that other revolutionary Marxists could substantially (albeit not finally) accomplish this task (Blackburn, 1976, *passim*).

What evidence can be adduced for these radically different views of the trajectory followed by Marx in developing his political theory? In the rest of this chapter I argue that the evidence is far from consistent and unambiguous because neither Marx nor Engels presented a definitive analysis of the state and politics. Instead we find a wide variety of themes and approaches which are capable of independent (and in part contradictory) theoretical development but which are typically combined in various ways by Marx and Engels in their empirical studies of particular societies and political conjunctures. These themes and/or approaches occasionally receive an exclusive and one-sided treatment but they are generally articulated in a way that ensures their mutual qualification in a state of theoretical tension. But it is also true that we can trace a gradual transformation of these different elements and the manner of their combination so that



the Marxian theory of the state and politics undergoes substantial development from the 1840s to the 1880s. It remains ill-formulated and inconsistent throughout its development but the final version is much more adequate theoretically. But, before presenting our reconstruction of the final Marxian approach, let us first consider the early political writings.

The *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Law'* is the central work of political theory written by Marx in the period before he became a communist. It is mainly concerned with a criticism of Hegel's method of dialectical logic rather than with a direct examination of Hegel's doctrine of the state (on the latter, see the important account given in Avineri, 1972). Marx first shows how this method results in an apologia for the Prussian constitution and system of government on the thoroughly idealist grounds that it is the 'empirical existence of the truth', the self-incarnation of God in the world (Marx, 1843a, pp. 3–40 and especially 38–40). He then proceeds to examine Hegel's own prescription concerning the mediation between the separate spheres of state and civil society to be effected through the monarchy, the executive, and the legislative assembly. It is here that Marx develops a general critique of the separation of the state and civil society and argues that this separation cannot be resolved either through the rule of a universal and neutral bureaucracy or the election of a legislative assembly to govern in the interests of the people (Marx, 1843a, pp. 20–149).

Thus, although Marx agrees with Hegel that there are two distinct spheres in modern society and that civil society is a sphere of egoism or self-interest, he also denies that this separation is immanent or inevitable and that the state can transcend the war of each against all and secure the common interest of all its citizens. In opposition to the claim that the institutional separation of the state is the logical complement to the self-particularisation of the universal Idea, Marx argues that the state becomes fully differentiated only in definite historical circumstances which he identifies mainly in terms of freedom of exchange in commerce and in landed property (Marx, 1843a, pp. 16–17 and 32). And, whereas Hegel claims that the bureaucracy in the modern state is a 'universal class' whose necessary and objective function it is to realise the 'universal interest', Marx argues that the egoism of civil society implies that any concept of a 'universal interest' is necessarily a pure abstraction (Marx, 1943a, pp. 45–46). Nor does the agreed fact that the state assumes an independent material form mean that it can therefore transcend the generalised particularism of civil society. Instead the state itself becomes shot