

INTERROGATIONS #1 with EOW comments
SOCIOLOGY 924
session 2: Class-Analytic Approaches to the State
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Sociology 924
Theories of the State
Weekly Interrogation 1

State Power and State Apparatus

In his book *What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?*, Goran Therborn draws the distinction, following Nicos Poulantzas, between state power and the state apparatus. Furthermore, he defines state power as “a relation between social class forces expressed in the content of state policies,” and says that it “is exercised through the state apparatus, or more precisely, through a system of state apparatuses” (pp. 34-35). My memo will take a closer look at these concepts.

My guess is that the idea of the state as a social relation is intended to follow Marx’s idea that capital is a social relation, and more generally that classes are social relations. Social relations are “relations of production” that persons enter into “independent of their will” rather than immutable properties of individuals. **[A small terminological point here: I wouldn’t say that social relations *per se* are “relations of production”. Relations of production are a specific type of social relation – gender relations are also social relations of production, for example.]** For example, only under capitalism do we observe privatized and commodified means of production and commodified labor power.

We can give social relations a greater degree of precision by using legal terminology to define class boundaries across different modes of production. (I believe Erik Wright does this in a recent essay.) For example, capitalists enjoy near exclusive control over their means of production, including rights to sell, purchase, use, and enjoy profits from them. But capitalists don’t have rights to own labor power—labor, yes, but labor power, no **[another minor technical point: capitalists don’t exactly “own” labor – except maybe their own labor. They have rights of control over labor, but they don’t own it]**—since this would constitute indentured servitude or slavery. On the other hand, under feudalism, merchants were often subject to arbitrary exactions and rules promulgated by the noble classes, and did not enjoy the full range of rights and powers over their goods as do modern capitalists. Likewise, serfs could not fully and freely dispose of their labor power, like modern day workers, but were obligated to perform labor or pay fees and taxes to their noble superiors purely by virtue of their status rather than by virtue of “freely” contracted agreements.

This is a long way of saying that these social relations, or more specifically the rules governing the interactions between classes or within classes, always have political, and especially legal, manifestations. **[Do you think it might be more accurate to say political dimensions than manifestations? “Manifestations” make it seem like an effect rather than an aspect.]** For example, take the doctrine of employment at will, used in United States courts of law. This legal rule says that, in the absence of a contract for employment between capitalist and worker, the default rule is that an employer may terminate an employee for good reason, bad reason, or no reason at all. Thus, an employee who feels she has been unfairly fired from her job has no recourse to the coercive powers of the state to get her job back. In this way the state acts (through its non-action, following Offe) to maintain or enforce capitalist social relations by recognizing the capitalist’s undisputed right to dispose of his means of production as he sees fit. Limitations on the capitalist’s right to fire would recognize a worker’s property right in the capitalist’s means of production. **[Two comments here: (1). There are capitalist countries in which there are severe restrictions on the capitalist rights to fire workers. workers have effective “job rights” and can only be fired for cause under fairly demanding due process. How does this fit with your characterization here? (2). What you have described is how the actions of the state reproduce capitalist relations, and perhaps how these actions are generated by capitalist social relations, but not precisely why this means the state should be described as “a” relation. Are these – in your view – equivalent statements?]**

Thus, as Therborn argues, the “state as a relation” is how the state intervenes in society, with its effects betraying the class character of those interventions. One importance of conceiving of the state as a social relation is similar to the reason Marx believed classes and modes of productions were social relations. The fact that relations between persons and property are constituted by rules and institutions forged in the struggle between classes in history, means that there is a similar possibility of changing them now. The state is not a “thing,” given or eternal, but an instituted set of relations between persons. **[Just to belabor a point: is the expression “the state is an instituted set of relations” the same thing as “the state is a relation”? Is the latter just a shorthand for the former?]** Nor is the state the result of certain inherent or immutable properties of individuals (e.g., needed to balance the preferences of self-regarding atomistic individuals), but is rather derived from historical relationships between individuals.

As Therborn also points out, the “state as a relation” says little about what kind of state is doing the intervening, and this is the point about the distinction between the state as a relation and the “state apparatus.” Conceivably, many kinds or “forms” of states could carry out the *enforcement of specific kinds of social relations*. **[I just wanted to note the expression “enforcement of a specific kind of relation” as a description of what the state does and ask – again – how this bears on the characterization of what the state is]** Why does an appointed, non-elected judge get to decide that a worker has no claim against her employer for what she believes is unwarranted termination? Why not an elected judge, a union, or even a factory committee? In fact, Therborn makes the fascinating point that, in fact, precapitalist state forms have enforced capitalist social relations. He writes, “On the eve of the English Civil War, little remained of feudal relations of production, but the absolutist Stuart state apparatus was still fundamentally feudal in the sense elaborated [in the first half of the book]” (p. 149).

Therborn’s other fascinating point is that certain forms of the state apparatus constitute a better “fit” for different social relations of production. In other words, there is the possibility that state power and state apparatus may contradict one another. Thus, there *was* an English Civil War that put an end to absolutism and permanently changed the nature of the English state. This relationship between state power and state apparatus also raises the question of how variable the differences between the two can be. This is an issue that Erik Wright deals with in his essay “Class and Politics.” Is it possible to use workplace safety committees, rather than a hierarchical bureaucratic agency, to enforce workplace safety rules (p. 103)? Using my earlier example, is it conceivable that a workplace committee of employee representatives could enforce the rules of workplace termination and dismissal? Is such a committee even compatible with the “state relation” of the employment-at-will doctrine?

#1 Keedon Kwon

1. A state-centered approach may well raise a question of how well a Marxist theory of the state can explain the trajectory and the present configurations of the Swedish capitalism. At the point of the early 20th century, for example, could a Therborn possibly predict them, even only vaguely? To use Offe's terms, has the Swedish state not gone beyond the maximum level of state intervention, especially from the perspective of American capitalists? Or, isn't it possible to say this? Capitalism has developed the ever-growing capacity of expanding preexisting sources of surplus value and finding new ones, so that the capitalist state has developed its capacity of making itself not look like a capitalist one, seemingly and substantially. Seemingly because it really doesn't look like one these days. Substantially because capitalism has enormously developed the forces of production by ever-repeating technological innovations, which enables Offe's maximum level to get high, which enables state intervention in favor of, say, labor to go high to the point unimaginable before. We don't know this will not happen again and again.

[You are proposing – I think – a pretty interesting general claim here: it is the development of the forces of production that enables the state to move outside of the “limits of possibility” defined in Offe’s negative selection filters. Whereas Marx saw the development of the forces of production in capitalism as generating a dynamic within which – ultimately – the limits on the state would become narrower (because of the induced falling rate of profit), you are suggesting that technical change expands the limits. It is an interesting argument – but we need to see more what the mechanisms would be. Basically you need to show why the problem of reproducing class relations in capitalism becomes easier or has more and more latitude by virtue of increased productivity.]

2. An interesting, though funny, difference between the feudal and the capitalist state might be that, while the former doesn't know it is reproducing the dominant order of things when it rules, the latter knows it perfectly well. In feudalism, the order of things is ordained by God or another metaphysical being and is taken to be granted. The state does what it does habitually. In contrast, the capitalist state had to struggle against a number of challengers from its very inception, so that it knew what it was doing. **[Nice point. I wonder if this self-reflexivity of the capitalist state is something which emerges right from the start or, alternatively, only develops over time? Does the rendering of capitalism as the ubiquitous only natural possibility – TINA – mean, perhaps, that this reflexivity might decline?]**

Memo #1 **Landy Sanchez**

Week 2. Comments on Class analytic approaches to the State

Therborn's and Offe's works address to not just define, but also display the class character of the State, that is, to show the specific mechanism through which the class character is established, reproduced and, in the case of Therborn, how it could be broken. Pursuing that goal, both approaches focus not in the state policies but in the actual organization of the State. Thus, to show the class character of the State it is needed to establish the connection between their internal structures and the class structure of a social formation.

I found the following issues intriguing

- a) The way in which the class character of the State is expressed
- b) The place of class struggle in shaping the political system/ arena
- c) The tasks and/or functions of Capitalist State

In Therborn's book the class character of the State is expressed as both State power and State apparatus. The former refers to "a relation between social class forces expressed in the content of State policies" p.34, meanwhile the state apparatus is the organizational structure of the State which reflects a "particular social division of labor and prevailing social class relations" p.35. To my mind, the difference and connection between both aspects is confusing. To some extent, both concepts seem to refer to different levels of abstraction: State power refers to a particular balance of power among class actors, while State apparatus refers to a crystallization of class relations that characterize a certain mode of production; but then Therborn adds that this crystallization happens "in the historical course of class struggle". So, the question is: What "dimension" of class relation express each of them? If both State power and State apparatus express class relations and class struggle, how is it possible that disjunctures appear between both, as Therborn sustains. The Therborn's answer about the independency of State apparatus from "current" state policies and class relations is obscure to me.

[These are good questions – I think there is something confusing about some of T's elaborations of the power/appartatus distinction. Of the two, "apparatus" is simpler: this is really meant to designate the organizational-technology of the state, the machinery that is used to do whatever it is that the state does. In a way it is like the "means of production" in capitalism "State power", then, is what is actually done with this apparatus: the apparatus is used to generate certain effects in the world and the effects are identified with the term "power" for Therborn. But that is a bit awkward, so it is worth discussing to be sure.]

>From my point of view, Therborn does not elaborate on those topics because he focuses on the State form (organization) that at one time express and reproduce class relations. The State apparatus reproduce the State-Society relationship, and determine the performance of State. The idea that the "form" of the State expresses its class character, is also present in Offe's work, but in his papers the question is referred as selectiveness, a "configuration of institutionalized exclusion rules" (1974, p.36) which works as mechanism to guarantee the accumulation process in capitalist societies. By looking at the selectivity of the system Offe attempts to make a methodological and theoretical point: to assess the class character of the state it is necessary to look beyond politics or class conflicts, those are, to some degree, superficial evidence (1974, p.46). What is needed is to reveal the systemic mechanisms that allow to coordinate the capitalist interest and to protect it from non-capitalist interests. Even tough I understand his point, I wonder if it's possible to

think class struggle as an element that shapes these selectivity mechanisms. **[I think that Offe would certainly agree that class struggle is one of the things which can shape selective mechanisms, especially in situations of crisis where existing mechanisms are breaking down and no longer effectively excluding policies that go against capital. But I am not sure if he would want to regard state selectivity mechanisms as entirely the result of conscious strategies of actors, or their “instrumental” insight into what will work and what won’t for their interests]** If not, the question is how the exclusion rules are established and transformed. Offe address this issue when he discusses the differences between modes of State intervention. He claims that in the allocation mode the decision rules are directly derived from politics, but this is not the case in the productive mode. In the later what is needed is a set of rules that determine public policies. Anyway, the questions remain. One of the most interesting issues in both texts (as well as Jessop’s chapter) is the attempt to present the State as a potential problem for capitalist development. By showing the contradiction in the functions, tasks and structure of the State, this appears not a functional guarantee for capitalist accumulation, but as a problematic answer.

A couple of additional comments:

a) I found interesting Therborn’s differentiation among feudal, capitalist and socialist States, but there was no reference to the variation within each of these categories. Connecting with Wright comments on class causal primacy, I wonder if it is necessary to incorporate other non-class elements to Therborn analysis, or what type of elaboration in class analytic perspective is needed to explain differences between States. **[Therborn has some discussion of the competitive capitalist state and the monopoly capitalist state (those may not be his precise formulations). But he does not really entertain the possibility of an abstract concept of systematic variation in the form of the capitalist state generated by non-class factors]**

b) In Offe (1976) the crisis management of capitalism reflects the contradiction between an increasing necessity of “external regulatory mechanism” and the dynamics that arise from this intervention, like the growth of non-market organization. To what extent the transformations of Welfare or Social States in the last decades are attempts to “correct” these contradictions? To what extent are they successful? **[This is an issue we will discuss a lot in a few weeks. While it is certainly the case that the changes in welfare states we have observed came out of crisis situations, it isn’t clear that the problems were the ones identified by Offe’s account of functional incompatibility with decisionmaking modes/logics]**

#1 Teresa Melgar

Goran Therborn's book offers a penetrating look into the manner by which a particular state's functions and structure are predominantly shaped by the imperatives of a specific mode of production in which it is embedded. I appreciate very much his incisive effort to distinguish one form of state from another, for it does take us one step further from simply reaffirming earlier formulations of the state as the instrument of class rule.

Valuable as the distinctions and assertions that he made may be, I think that it is worth re-examining them in light of a number of interesting, and for the most part, contemporary questions being raised by the exercise of state power in other countries. Here, I shall draw mainly from the Philippine experience, not because I think they are representative of other countries experiences, but because I think they may offer important starting points for re-examining the salience of Therborn's assertions.

Let me just cite two points along this line:

1) on the centrality of class as a defining element of the state apparatuses -- while Therborn allows that different state apparatuses might exhibit different levels of a class character (e.g. elements of the military in a capitalist state exhibiting feudal traits), class for him, nonetheless, remains the fundamental defining element of the character of these state apparatuses. But I would argue that there may be other elements, aside from class, which could shape the manner by which these apparatuses carry out their functions. One of these elements may be the presence of different generations within a specific class, and

the specificities of the socialization processes that these different generations went through. The Philippine Congress (legislative body similar to the US Congress) for example, may very well fit the description that Therborn offers -- it has historically been dominated by political clans who for the most part come from the landed and industrial elite in our country, and has served, in the main, as an instrument to perpetuate their class privileges. But a most interesting phenomenon is now occurring -- scions (i.e. usually 3rd or 4th generation) of the same political clans, who now occupy a significant proportion of the seats in this legislative body, have in recent years, been spearheading what are fairly progressive legislation on housing, agrarian reform, the protection of domestic helpers, poverty-reduction, and related themes. A parallel example may be seen in the military. Historically, the Philippine military as an institution, has been used as an instrument to protect the interests of the Philippine state, and by implication, the privileged classes. Yet if we look not at the institution, but at the generations that have passed through this institution, we might see differences in the propensity by which they have taken up this role. A recent study, for instance, demonstrates that the military class of 1971, which eventually comprised the core of the military hierarchy that Marcos would use to prop up his dictatorship, and which experienced the height of the military's politicization, has very stark differences and propensities concerning the used of armed violence, as compared to the Class of 1951. Batch 71 produced military men who launched repeated coup attempts in the late 80 and early 90s, (not to mention committed gross violations of human rights under Marcos' rule) and who, to this day, are prone to resort to extra-institutional routes to power. On the other hand, members of Batch 51 tended to exhibit a greater degree of military professionalism, even in their last few years in the service. In both examples, it has been argued that generational differences arising from different socialization processes may be an important factor in shaping the manner and extent by which members of the same class, within a given state apparatus, take up the imperatives of their specific class location. In the case of the scions of the political clans, their high levels of education, exposure to modernizing societies and economies, encounters with broad sections of civil society, may help explain why they seem less loyal to the feudal and patrimonial dreams of their forebears and more open to equity-enhancing reforms. **[These are really interesting points. Two comments immediately come to mind: (1). It may be that the elements you are bringing into the analysis here – the generations of the actors in congress and the military (and the associated socialization/cultural/ideological differences of these generations from earlier ones) – define variations in states at lower levels of abstraction from those used in Therborn's analysis. That is: these are variations within a set of limits defined by the more abstract structural properties of the state. (2) The issues of socialization/culture and the like play themselves out, in the examples you gave, through the subjective states of pivotal elites who fill the positions in the state. In a way, then, this concerns the relationship between ideology and consciousness and the state. Perhaps the way to think about this is that just as there is a complex set of issues about the relationship between class structure and the form of the state, there are also issues about the relationship between class and the form of ideology. Your examples, then, may reflect a loosening of the class/ideology couplet, which then affects the actions of elites within the apparatuses of the state. Anyway, interesting observations.]**

2. on why states act the way they do -- here again, I believe Therborn argues for the centrality of class and class interests in explaining why states act the way they do. But then again, states may sometimes act, not to preserve the interests of a particular class (e.g. capitalist) but simply, of one fraction of that class. This often happens when one section or fraction of the same classes manage to occupy these very instruments of state power (e.g. policy-making) or otherwise forge extremely tight linkages (e.g through bribery, corruption, mutual accommodation of interests). Thus, even as we recognize the importance of class in our analysis, it might also help to understand the processes by which one fraction of a class manages to appropriate for itself, these "instruments of class rule." Such situation could radically change the terrain in which classes and states operate, and the development of what Therborn calls the "class struggle." For instance, economic policies emanating from this state will likely benefit only the fraction who wields or is close to the reins of power and policy-making, to the detriment of the rest of the capitalist class. Consequently, sections of this "disenfranchised" capitalist class may become open to forging tactical alliances with members of the popular classes, who are striving to bring down this particular form of rule, in favor of another. A number of Southern countries, including the Philippines, once again, offer most interesting arenas in which these kinds of situations have unfolded. **[This issue will loom very large when we read the book by David Abraham at the end of the semester: he studies a case in which the conflicts among fractions of capital generated a series of stallmates that undermined the possibility of any coherent state policy in the face of severe crisis. You are right that fractions of classes can figure**

very strongly in shaping actual state policies. I think – as with the previous comment – that this might best be thought of as an analytical problem about the relationship between the nature of the actors in a political process and the structural properties of the process: the actors may be tied to class fractions but the apparatuses could still have a general class character. But it also might be the case that the apparatuses themselves have structural properties reflecting class fractions, not just classes. Global, MNC capital may generate specific forms on certain state apparatuses different from national capital, for example.]

Memo #1 Sun Jing

Despite the remarkable difference between structural approaches and contradictory functionality, I see the two perspectives share one common theme: that is, to challenge the traditional Marxist essentialism on capital accumulation and class struggle, and to seek for a less dogmatic and more contextualized theoretical construct of the concept of state.

In *Rethinking State and Society*, Bob Jessop argues that the theoretical construct of the concept of state should be multidimensional and multifaceted. Instead of making capital accumulation as THE determinant of state formation, he suggests that one should adopt a more relational approach and see how state and society mutually accommodate each other. Thus, the thesis of “bringing state back in” may further complicate the current confusion over the notion of state because it constructs a false dilemma of state-centered view versus society-centered view, while the reality is that the boundaries between state and society are permeable. An adequate theory of the state must also be part of an adequate theory of society. **[It is not 100% clear exactly what one means by a “permeable” boundary in this context. Is this a classification problem – certain apparatuses are para-statal or quasi-statal – like some NGOs or “QUANGO”s? That is, is the “permeability” just a way of talking about fuzzy categories? Or does it mean something about the movement of people and resources into and out of the state, or about the nature of the formal and informal interactions of people inside and outside of the state?]**

A multidimensional concept of state also calls for theoretical pluralism: because capital accumulation or class struggle is just one of many sub-systems that constitute a state, one needs to learn how different sub-systems interact with one another, in either conforming or conflicting ways, to constitute a state. **[The term “constitute” in statements like this can be quite slippery. I am not sure what it means to say that class struggle is a subsystem that “constitutes” a state. Does this just mean something like “a set of causal factors that shape the state?” Or do you mean that these are subsystems of the state?]** This point is especially insightful in the modern context, when various non-traditional movements can no longer be neatly labeled as the product of class struggle. A question left unanswered by Jessop is whether he meant to say that reality is open to multiple interpretations. If so, there is a further need to challenge not only the ontology of Marxism but also its materialistic methodology. **[I don’t really follow your point here: reality could be “open to many interpretations” and yet the appropriate causal explanation of the form of the state could still be grounded in materialist processes. Perhaps I am just misunderstanding your point.]**

For Claus Offe, the central notion to the construct of state concept is contradiction. To Offe, contradiction means not only competing tensions but an inherent tendency for a system to destroy the preconditions for its own survival. In other words, he is more interested in exploring how a system may eventually become its own gravedigger. **[Does he go so far as to proclaim inherent tendency for self-destruction, or just for crisis and transformation? Those are not the same.]** He contends that the context under which capitalism operates has already undergone fundamental changes: the pervasive wave of de-commodification has greatly enhanced the means of resisting what was heretofore the hegemonic power of capitalism. Class identity or wage-labor conflict may still exert a viable influence upon state and society, but it is hard to make the argument that class struggle alone determines one’s social or political identity. **[Does Offe ever say that class alone determines identity? I don’t think he does this.]** What has emerged in advanced industrial nations is a complex network of public and private relationships seeks to cope with economic or

social problems without being seen to intervene directly in processes of capital accumulation and investment. According to Offe, the future of capitalism is still doomed,. But it might be replaced by economic socialism which grows out of various nontraditional movements rather than from a violent revolution or pure class struggles.

Overall, both structural approach and contradictory functionality school call for the necessity of introducing non-economic or non-materialistic variables into a revised Marxist research agenda. They do not deny the importance of capital accumulation, but suggest that we need to devote more attention to studying the manners and the effects of capital accumulation or class struggle interacts with other subsystems of the state and society.

#1 César A. Rodríguez

Soc. 924- Theories of the State

Week 2 interrogation: Class Analytic Approaches to the State

1. As Therborn notes, models of the capitalist state can be criticized both from a logical and from an empirical point of view. They may be empirically disproved if the state forms they posit cannot be identified in practice with the capitalist class or with any other. And they may be logically disproved if there is no “real causal relation between the forms of state organization and the particular class relations to which they are linked in the model” (Therborn, p. 36). Although Offe explicitly asserts that his is not an analysis of institutional forms but rather of the relation between the state and the capitalist economy, I think that Therborn’s distinction between logical and empirical criticisms can be profitably used in assessing some of Offe’s claims in “The Theory of the Capitalist State and the Problem of Policy Formation.” In particular, I think it brings to light some of the difficulties of an argument that I found particularly problematic in Offe’s work, i.e., the idea that there is an irreconcilable tension between accumulation and legitimation in late capitalist states.

The empirical criticism, as summarized by Barrows, is well known. Social rights proved to be less resilient than they seemed in the midst of the crisis of accumulation of the 1970s, and the rise of the neoliberal state restored the conditions of accumulation oftentimes with the political support of the electorate, including sectors of the population whose social entitlements would be subsequently curtailed. However, it is at the level of logical consistency that I think Offe’s argument is most problematic, for three different reasons. First, there does not seem to be a necessary relation between capitalism and democracy, as profusely demonstrated by successful capitalist economies governed by authoritarian regimes. Thus, the tension between accumulation and democratic legitimation is a contingent phenomenon, rather than one that logically follows from the relationship between the capitalist state and the capitalist economy. **[This is a very interesting problem: is the issue that there is no inherent tension between legitimation and accumulation or that democracy is not a necessary condition for legitimation? Also, it could be the case that there is an elective affinity between (developed) capitalism and democracy insofar as capital accumulation does require a rule-of-law – predictability of legal institutions – and those are more precarious under dictatorial conditions.]** Second, it is not clear why in capitalism “the state can only function as a capitalist state by appealing to symbols and sources of support that conceal its nature as a capitalist state; the existence of a capitalist state presupposes the systematic denial of its nature as a capitalist state” and the diffusion of the illusion of the state’s protecting the “general interest” (Offe, p. 127). If, as Przeworski cogently argues, in a capitalist society all actors (including workers) have an interest in capitalists making a profit and thus the latter represent future universal interests, then the state does not have to conceal –indeed, it has to actively publicize- its commitment to continued accumulation and economic growth. Although the state does have to conceal the fact that such accumulation and economic growth benefit capitalists most, it does not need to promote a view of the common good that is inimical to accumulation, given that accumulation itself is in the interest of all. Thus, there is no necessary tension between legitimation and accumulation. **[I think you are 95% correct in your diagnosis here: the state can opening proclaim that it is fostering a good business climate, that profits need to be supported, that the rich need tax cuts to spur investment, etc. But note: in each of these cases the effort is to explicitly universalize the interests of capital, rather than to make it clear that there is a class bias in the state in the sense of a negative selection against policies/practices which hurt capitalists relative to**

workers. There is a denial that there is any biasing since it is claimed that the promotion of business isn't a bias.] Finally, the tension between legitimation and accumulation as theorized by Offe seems to hold only if the capitalist state is viewed in isolation from the interstate system and the world economy. For even if the tension held at the national level, international politics and capitalism as a global system can provide solutions to such a tension, at least for developed countries. Indeed, as has been argued frequently in light of historical evidence, imperialism can provide hegemonic states not only with additional resources to foster economic growth within their national borders but also with the kind of political legitimation that comes along military undertakings abroad based on a nationalist discourse. Thus, once the capitalist state is inserted in the international context, the tension between accumulation and legitimacy ceases to be a necessary one.

2. A point of clarification: in “Structural Problems of the Capitalist State,” Offe offers a highly suggestive agenda for empirical research on the systematic exclusion of non-capitalist alternatives by capitalist states’ apparatuses. As Offe notes, this entails explaining non-events and thus raises complex methodological questions that would have to be solved in order to empirically prove such exclusions. After reviewing eight different strategies that have been used to this purpose, he seems to rule them all out and concludes that “the historically concrete limits of a system of political power can only be perceived in political practice and can only be identified in the class conflict engaged in through actions and organizations in which collective normative options turn into empirical force” (p. 45). I find this conclusion rather puzzling and obscure. Is Offe suggesting an alternative way to tackle the demonstration of non-events? If so, what does it consist of precisely? Would a combination of some of the strategies reviewed by Offe provide an adequate tool kit to undertake an empirical analysis of systematic exclusions in capitalist states? In general, what would be a plausible strategy to do this? **[I agree that this is obscure when it is pushed. I have always interpreted this as suggesting that limits are revealed when they are breeched in crisis conditions, and that class struggle is the way this breeching takes place. One way to think about this is to treat the problem not as how does one discover the deepest limits, but rather how does one provide evidence for a hypothesis about where the limits lie, and class struggle is a way to do this. It is like using cannonballs of different weight shot against a wall as a way of testing a hypothesis of the limits of its strength.]**

3. I found the distinction between situational, institutional and systemic power as explained by Wright particularly useful in thinking about the mechanisms through which class interests are realized via state apparatuses. Indeed, one way to clarify Therborn and Offe’s claims about the capitalist nature of the state – and to establish with more precision than their texts allow where they converge and where they part ways – is to locate such claims within the above-mentioned threefold framework, i.e., to determine whether they refer to limits to state apparatuses coming from the nature of the (capitalist) game, from the rules of the game or (less probably) from moves within the game. In doing so, however, some questions arise about the precise contours of the typology – in particular, about the difference between institutional and systemic power. In what follows I set out to discuss such difference and illustrate it with examples taken from Offe and Therborn’s work.

According to Wright, “to say that [capitalists] have systemic power is to say that the logic of the social system itself affirms their interests quite apart from the conscious strategies and the internal organization of political apparatuses” (p. 100). This type of power, thus, comes from the very nature of the game, in that in capitalism everyone has an interest in continued accumulation. On the other hand, institutional power derives from the rules of the game, i.e., institutions that exclude anti-capitalist alternatives. A concrete example of such institutions quoted by Wright is the state’s dependence on the tax system, which, as both Offe and Therborn note, makes the capitalist state dependent on capitalists making a profit.

I find it difficult to draw with precision the line between systemic power and institutional power – or, to put it more simply, between power deriving from the nature of the game and power deriving from the rules of the game. Indeed, it is hard to think of the nature of a game (be it capitalism or any other) in abstract, without thinking of its constitutive rules. In other words, the nature of a game seems to be but a set of fundamental, constitutive rules – e.g., scoring goals without using one’s hands in soccer, making privately appropriated profits in capitalism, etc. Thus, some of the institutions that are characteristic of the capitalist state (and the power of the capitalist class that is based on them) as discussed by Offe and Therborn are

actually constitutive of capitalism (e.g., the protection of private property and the reproduction of wage labor), rather than components of contingent institutional settings.

Thus, an alternative way to think about the nature vs. rules of the game distinction that may overcome this difficulty is to distinguish between constitutive rules of the capitalist game –which, as Offe argues in one of his pieces, would amount to private property and wage labor–, on the one hand, and accessory rules of the capitalist game –among which would be all other institutional forms discussed by Therborn and Offe (e.g., parliamentary democracy, the tax system, etc.), on the other. This would help explain both the variability of institutions across capitalist societies and the persistence of capitalism despite such variability, in that accessory rules of the game can vary within the limits of the constitutive rules of the game. **[This is precisely the solution: basically it amounts to arguing that some rules are more fundamental than others in defining the basic dynamics of a system – like the rule “you cannot pick up the ball” in soccer vs the rule “there can only be three substitutions in a game.” The problem remains, however, that small, incremental changes in non-fundamental rules can cumulatively constitute a fundamental shift in the logic of the game.]**

Finally, in light of the above it would be interesting to discuss whether the institutional variations that Esping-Andersen and Rogers discuss (see Wright, p. 104) amount to changes in constitutive rules of the game, as the authors argue, or to changes in accessory rules of the game –and thus alter systemic or institutional power, respectively. To my mind, high-unionization and low-unionization capitalisms fundamentally alter the accessory rules of the game (e.g., political representation of labor, progressive taxation, etc.), but fall short of disrupting the constitutive rules of the game. In the Swedish case, the failure of the Meitner plan in the late 1960s to socialize corporate ownership (despite high unionization) reveals the distance between high-unionization capitalism and a system that would have changed the constitutive rules of the game.

4. A point of clarification on the same typology: the text focuses only on systemic power held by the capitalist class. It is worth discussing, however, whether in capitalism the working class also has systemic power, in that labor is both free and indispensable for accumulation. Thus, the possibility of withholding labor power gives workers systemic power within capitalism. However, as Offe forcefully argues elsewhere in his work, the conditions under which capitalist and workers can realize their systemic power are quite different –in fact, they constitute “two logics of collective action,” in Offe’s words. While capitalists can exercise their systemic power through individual decisions (e.g., by moving production to another country), workers need to organize collectively to exercise such power (e.g., through strikes). **[Very interesting point – Perhaps the real point is that systemic power is relational and thus contains both systemic power of capital and of labor. This is like the point that in a relation of exploitation the exploited have power because of their expenditure of effort-to-be-extracted. You might look at an extremely interesting paper by Luca Perrone on what he called the “structural power of labor” – basically how labor has systemic power insofar as it is strategically placed within the complex input-output matrix of capitalist production and thus the withdrawal of its labor not only hurts a given capitalist but disrupts capitalism.]**

#1 Amy Lang

Soc. 924 Theories of the State

Response Paper - Week 1

Sept. 10, 2002

The question I would like to raise about this week’s readings concerns Offe’s characterization of capitalist states in crisis. Offe (1976) argues that capitalist societies are undergoing an irreversible developmental process whereby the subsidiary political and normative systems produce phenomena that do not result in positive contributions to the maintenance and expansion of exchange relations. Increasingly, states must mediate between their own creations that do not directly facilitate the exchange of values, and the imperatives of productively contributing to the economic system. The “crisis of crisis management” results when states are unable to balance what they extract from the economy for their own subsidiary agencies

with the contribution they must make to maintaining exchange relations (or rather, a certain degree of commodification of values).

What I would like to clarify in discussion is the precise relationship between political crisis (the crisis of crisis-management) and the political system's subordination (both positive and negative) to economic imperatives. I am unclear on exactly what pushes the political system to move between relations of positive and negative subordination to the economy. What mechanisms or processes in the dominant (economic) system can we identify that would facilitate either the ascendancy of positive intervention by the state, or the state's withdrawal from participation in the economy? **[I should reread the Offe paper before engaging your questions – but I don't have time, alas – so I may be misremembering some of the arguments. But I think the issue here is basically that for a variety of reasons the state gradually engages in interventions in the economy for which it does not have the proper kind of decisionmaking machinery, and indeed cannot plausibly develop the proper machinery, namely interventions in which it becomes responsible for producing the inputs into capitalist production. Why does the state do this? Two reasons: 1) it is pushed to do this by legitimation pressures, basically to resolve problems faced by workers in capitalism, and 2) it engages in these activities because capital cannot provide all of the complex inputs it requires for advanced accumulation (eg R&D, infrastructure, training, etc.). The problem, then, is that once the state engages in these interventions it becomes harder to neutralize and depoliticize its activities, and this creates "Frankenstein" potentials – the state turning against private accumulation.]** Is the process of crisis a cyclical one where positive subordination is facilitated at one point in time and negative subordination at another? Or, is political crisis a process of increasing pressure for **both** positive intervention and withdrawal by the state? Finally, when does the ongoing crisis of capitalist states reach its breaking point? Offe's developmental language implies that at some point states will reach an ultimate crisis. But it may be more useful to examine state crises in terms of a shifting, back and forth movement between positive and negative subordination to the economy.

#1 Shamus Khan

Week 1 Response – Therborn

What does it mean to say that the state should be understood as a relation? And furthermore, how does the state as a relation make sense, given that Therborn then argues that the two distinct aspects of the state are state power – expressed in the content of state policies – and the state apparatus (later amended to be state apparatuses)? Therborn tells us, “The state should be regarded neither as a specific institution nor as an instrument, but as a relation – a materialized concentration of the class relations of a given society” (34). Here class relations over-determine the content of relations that make up the state. That is, we can imagine a complex (and perhaps at times contradictory) web of relations – race, gender, ethnic, sexual, familial, etc. – the material content of which would be embedded within the struggle over state policies and apparatuses. However, simply taking the basic case: where the state is only a materialized concentration of class relations, how are we to understand what exactly this means?

The easiest approach, it seems, is to look for the bounds of the state – that is, to look at those set of relations that can be identified as “state relations” and those that can be identified as “non-state relations” (Jessop would strongly object to such a standard, “States never achieve full closure or complete separation from society and their precise boundaries are usually in doubt” from “Putting states in their place”, pp. 342. That said, for “the state” to be a useful concept, it must have some level of distinction from other concepts. Jessop's reliance upon Luhmannian systems theory – specifically the notion of system autonomy or “autopoiesis” tacitly acknowledges this point). Therborn's definition does not help. From the Marxian perspective, there are multiple arenas where class relations are materially concentrated – arenas so numerous and diverse that understanding them all as “the state” makes such a concept analytically useless. If the state is the factory floor, the courts, the streets, our classrooms, every office, in fact, in every social space (such spaces being materialized concentrations of class relations), then the state is everything, so pervasive that really it is nothing. Therborn is probably right to argue that the state is *in* every one of these spaces, but his definition is insufficient given its lack of specificity.

Part of the ambiguity is no doubt related to Therborn's argument about the historically specific content and concerns of each state. For example, he points out that, “Under feudalism the state is ‘privatized’, whereas under socialism it is private life that is ‘made public’ (67). Abstracted arguments

about “the state” are thus incomplete insofar as the organization or technology of feudal, capitalist, and socialist states are each distinct (see 64-65, and esp. 118-119). While the content of the relation is different across Therborn’s exploration of each type of state, in each case the state is still understood in terms of the content of the class relations (and the then corresponding policies and apparatuses). Therborn continues to maintain the Poulantzas position of the state as a relation. What exactly this means is not clear to me.

[Good, clear statement of the problem in these three paragraphs – about why the expression “the state is a relation” is not very clear].

Not only is it not clear, identifying the two aspects of the state as state power and the state apparatus(es) seems to be contradictory. How can a relation produce effects in the world (for Therborn, power is not something the state “has” – but rather it is an effect producing mechanism)? How can a relation be a set of apparatuses? **[Perhaps the way to say this is not that *the state = a relation*, but rather that *the state consists of a structure of relations*. In *Class Counts* I argue that, basically, everything is relations: the study of society is relational “all the way down.” The micro-level = relations among persons; the meso-level = relations among relations among persons; etc. So maybe this is what is entailed in calling the state “a relation”: like all organizations, the state is made up of a complex structure of relations-among-relations].** In fact Therborn often talks about things that the state does, “The state *represents* class society, above all the ruling class, and it *mediates* social relation between ruler and ruled” (169). “What does the ruling class do when it rules? Essentially it ensures that its dominant positions in the economy, state apparatus and ideological superstructures **are reproduced by the state** in relation both to the other modes of production present within the social formation and to the international system of social formations” (242, my bold). Given what Therborn argues, then, it seems that the content of the state (its apparatuses and the policies through which its power is expressed) can be argued to be the product of class relations (or better still, the matrix of social relations), but it seems to make little sense to argue that the state itself is a material concentration of such relations. **[I think that most of the verbs in your citations could be interpreted as effect-generating processes rather than the actions of a unified actor-entity. To say “the state mediates relations between ruler and ruled” could mean, “the relational properties of the state generate effects which buffer the antagonism of ruler and ruled”]**

Damayanti Banerjee
Weekly Reading Interrogation # 1
09.08.02

CLASS-ANALYTIC APPROACH TO THE STATE

[General comment: You have lots of interesting and thoughtful things to say in this piece, but it is really too much like a mini-paper and not enough a question-posing interrogation. The purpose of these memos is to define an agenda for discussion centering on the texts being read for a given week, and for this it is crucial that they focus primarily on the readings and the arguments in them. Much of what you write here is about more general themes and issues, and when you engage Therborn and Offe, you do not focus in on specific points or issues. It is therefore hard to really distill a discussion agenda for the class from this.]

Jurgen Habermas in *Theory and Practice* (1974)¹ claimed that there are reasonable grounds to suppose that contemporary capitalist state is facing imminent crisis of legitimation with the disappearance of the *public sphere*. This view closely corresponds with some of the theories of state discussed in this section and deviate from some others. The section on *class analytic approach to the state* helps in initiating a systematic analysis of the state, its legitimation processes or the lack of it (as Habermas points out) and its linkages with the civil society. It also raises the following central questions in the political sociology debate: how do the structures, processes and institutions of state and civil society interrelate? Under what conditions do modern political orders face crisis or breakdown? What should be the appropriate form and limit of state activities and those of the civil society? How does democracy persist within the capitalist form of state? Is the idea of democracy progressively compromised in recent times by the intersection of national and international institutions - erasing or at the least redefining sovereignty in the process? What are the new sociological and political challenges that these entail? **[These are certainly good questions, but they**

¹ Habermas, Jurgen (1974) *Theory and Practice* (trans. From German by John Viertel) London: Heinemann

are also a bit general and not tightly connected to the specific arguments in the texts for this week. I think it is important that the questions posed in the interrogations be directly anchored in the readings, not just good overarching questions about the domain of our studies.]

To analyze these issues that foresee a structural linkage between the capitalist state, governmental institutions and political processes, the paper is divided into three broad segments. The first section provides a critical perspective to understand the ways in which institutional properties of the state can be spatially and temporally defined and therefore varying (Therborn, 1978), in an attempt to understand the functional logic underlying the structural Marxist analysis of state. The second section of the paper raises the issue of the ‘negative selectivity’ principle of the state, which points towards the reproduction and maintenance of the capitalist ideology of the state. The final section of the paper acts as a platform for the author’s engagement with conceptual gaps in state theory evident in an analysis of issues regarding the changing nature of the capitalist state and the new phase that it has entered with the collapse of the soviet model, the triumph of unfettered market forces and accelerating globalization

Embeddedness of class in the Capitalist state: some thoughts

Marx, in his analysis of social structure argued that that social actors use their respective resources in social encounters to maximize profit and contribute to the reproduction of existing social structure and the attendant unequal distribution of resources **[the expression “social actors” is a bit too general for the rest of this sentence – it is not social actors in general that “use resources in social encounters to maximize profits”, but capitalists]**. He views state as a reflection of this system of property relations and as an institution that emerges to legitimize this form of economic exploitation benefiting a particular class in the process (Lenin 1917; Bukharin 1926: 150-4; Gramsci 1971:206-76). This analysis has a functional assumption to it since it refers to the essentially class character of the state. **[I do agree with you that Therborn’s analysis has a functional quality to it, but I do not see your specific argument here for why one can deduce this from the fact that it posits a “class character of the state”. Furthermore, Therborn explicitly allows for dysfunctional (nonreproductive) effects of the state on class relations, so his analysis is not strictly functionalist.]** It, however, fails to problematize the *nature* of the state as an institution that legitimizes inequality. **[I am not sure why you say this, or perhaps not sure what you mean by “nature” of the state. It seems to me that Therborn is precisely trying to specify the nature of the state when he argues for the class character of both its form (apparatuses) and content (state power). I don’t quite see what you feel is problematic here]** While at a very abstract level, we can talk about something called the ‘state’ and juxtapose it with other forms of social and economic order, this should not lead one to conclude that the state itself is a cohesive, unified entity, one which can be defined in terms of its class character, but one that forms a set of highly complicated relations and processes. To begin with, an attempt to understand state must not only consider its spatial and temporal dimensions but also view the state as a cluster of agencies, levels and departments, each with their own sets of rules and resources. **[But doesn’t Therborn do precisely this in his multidimensional view of state apparatuses?]** In order to understand the relations and processes of the state and their place in shaping society, it is important to grasp the way the state is embedded in particular socio-economic systems, with distinctive structures and sets of institutions, together with its nature as a site of political negotiation and conflict.

Nicos Poulantzas pointed out that ‘the state should be viewed not simply as a state *in* capitalist society, rather, as a *capitalist* state². This implies that certain inherent institutional properties of the state give it a class character (Wright, 1994)³. This class bias of the state can be viewed in its policy-making decisions (An example that comes to mind is the linguistic division of the Indian nation-state by mainstream/predominant language groups in power at the Center marginalizing local linguistic segments in the process - part of my masters’ dissertation study). However, there are more elements at play here, which are situational rather than unified class-based processes. The functional logic of this perspective was questioned in Goran Therborn’s study⁴. He attempts an explanatory rather than a descriptive/historical model in his comparative analysis of the different societies- feudal, capitalist etc. He attempts to show that

² Poulantzas, Nicos (1969) “The Problem of the Capitalist State” *New Left Review* no. 58, pp.67-78

³ Wright, Erik Olin (1994) *Interrogating Inequality: Essays on Class Analysis, Socialism and Marxism* New York: Verso

⁴ Therborn, Goran (1978) *What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?* London: Verso

different types of class relations and class power generate corresponding forms of state organization, which may or may not have a class character to it. Some issues come to mind though:

- ✍ Any historical analysis needs to address the boundaries between different forms of societies that are sometimes juxtaposed and often overlapped. How does one define the character of the state for example in a capitalist society with elements of feudalism in it? Or in a socialist democratic society with elements of capitalism in it (India is a prime example)? **[Isn't this fundamentally a question of the level of abstraction at which one analyses a particular concrete institution. The level of abstraction that Marxists typically call "the social formation" investigates the ways in which distinct types of class relations (or modes of production) are combined in different institutions.]**
- ✍ Also Therborn's perspective seems to be an attempt to 'atomize' class interests. **[What do you mean by this? Therborn certainly has room for class alliances, class coalitions, class compromises, etc. I'm not sure what you are getting at.]** An in depth study of the modern capitalist state reveals strategic alignments and networks both within and between classes. How does the state negotiate these alignments and whose interest does it represent?

✍ *Contradictions in the State: from class to ideology*

Claus Offe⁵, in his critique of this functional logic attempts a methodological expansion of the theoretical paradigm of the state. He adopts a categorical position in his effort to release state theory from the straitjacket imposed by the *instrumentalist* methodological current that provided a functional logic to a structural definition of the state. His approach introduces the concept of 'relative autonomy' of the state, which allows the state to attempt a 'negative selectivity' approach which is much more contradictory and less functional. This implies that rather than representing a certain class, the capitalist state sanctions the general interest of all classes on the basis of capitalist logic (Offe, 1984, pp.123). The main problematic assumption here is the 'relative autonomy' that Offe talks about. What seems exciting about this analysis is the reference to (at least that is how I see it) the question of the *capitalist ideology* that the state represents. One needs to attempt a discussion of the perpetuation and legitimization of the capitalist ideology that facilitates the *normalization of the capitalist form*⁶ of society. (Paulo Friere's⁷ thoughts about how the state ensures legitimation by creating and actively contributing to a *culture of silence* may be an example).

The purpose of the readings was to attempt an intellectual engagement with the theories. To facilitate this process I shall attempt, in the final section to explore the impact of *capitalist ideology* on sovereignty in this era of 'development regimes'. I shall also identify the fundamental gaps between state theory and modern capitalist expansion.

Whither the State? Conceptual gaps:

'----- in fact, nations retain actual as well as legal control over their instruments of policy (sovereignty); the problem arises because these instruments of policy lose their effectiveness so that countries find themselves able to pursue their objectives but unable to achieve them' (Cooper, 1986 pp.21)⁸

A number of fundamental gaps, I believe are apparent in the relation between sociological analysis of theorizing the state and the nature of the twentieth century world- gaps which highlight a discrepancy between the terms of reference and the explanatory reach of the theory and the actual practices and structures of the state at the global level (Giddens, 1985)⁹. A few questions need to be raised to address these issues:

- ✍ How does one account for the pressures on the welfare state to relinquish its control on policy-making decisions? While there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the idea of a national economic policy has disappeared, the growing internationalization of production and finance is definitely reducing the capacity and the power of the state to control its economic future. This, I feel creates a disjuncture between the premises of the theory of sovereign state and the conditions of modern economy. (For example, Offe's position that the State has the power to retain its relative autonomy by attempting

⁵ Offe, Claus (1984) *Contradictions of the Welfare State* London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd

⁶ Emphasis added.

⁷ Friere, Paulo (1993, c.1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* New York: Continuum:

⁸ Cooper, R.N. (1986) *Economic Policy in an Interdependent World* Cambridge, Mass.,: MIT Press

⁹ Giddens A. (1985) *The Nation-State and Violence*: Cambridge: Polity Press

negative selectivity seems to me, situational and depends on the *degree of power*¹⁰ the state has in the global market).

Michael Mann (1993)¹¹ in his works argued that the military is not part of the state system. However, if we view the international political scenario of recent years, the division on grounds of hegemonic power blocs has been created on the basis of military might along with strategic and economic ones. Organizations like the NATO redefine and constrain sovereignty leading to the formation of international defense organizations curtailing nation-state sovereignty in the process. State theory analysis is yet to take this into account.

IMF and other financial institutions have contributed to massive changes in the decision-making structures of the states. For example, IMF in lieu of a loan can ask a nation-state to cut public expenditure, devalue currency and cut back welfare programs - given these economic constraints, how can state theory in this situation address the state's attempts to negotiate its national sovereignty?

The central essence of the issues raised here attempts to identify a *political space* where boundaries of institutions (and their slippages) are defined as a site for political/ economic/strategic negotiations. The purpose is also to intellectually analyze the conditions that give some the power to define this space and renegotiate the changes in the definition.

In conclusion, state sovereignty operates today in a very complex international system that challenges the cogency of the very principles of state-theory. The challenge for social scientists is to engage state theory in a manner that will help sovereignty as a concept to retain its analytical and normative force.

James Benson, interrogation, week #2

The accumulation/legitimation dualism

Claus Offe introduces part of his model of the state as a dualism. This dualism within the state involves two important functions of the state: processes that aid capitalists in their quests to accumulate capital, and processes that serve to legitimate the state as an institution. Using this accumulation/legitimation dualism, I find it possible to make further sense of Offe's model of the state, and to make sense of a recent policy event. A *capitalist* state must intervene in order to encourage the process of capital accumulation. The capitalist state exists in order to save capitalism from the narrow interests of individual producers, and to lay the groundwork for increases in market exchanges. Economic breakdowns would result if capitalist states did not intervene in modern economies in order to counteract the tendencies of individual producers. Atomized actors in an economy tend to act in self-interested ways that stifle and contradict the broader process of capitalist expansion. Thus, there is a purely economic argument for the existence of a state, given a capitalist economy. Another, more dynamic, argument for the existence of a state concerns the need for the tax revenues that support the functioning of a capitalist state. **[The previous part of this paragraph, before this last sentence, is clear and on target, but I don't understand what you are saying here. Here you state that an argument for the existence of the state is (a) the need for tax revenues that (b) support the functioning of a capitalist state. How can the need for taxes to support X explain the existence of X? And why is this, in any case, a "dynamic" argument? I agree that the capitalist state needs taxes, and that it does not produce itself, therefore it must support capital accumulation in order to get taxes, but that is not what you say in this sentence.]** Tax revenues are necessary because the capitalist state does not directly engage in the production of commodities. Thus, the capitalist state exists for the economic survival of capitalism.

However, the state cannot exist solely as a result of its benefit to the capitalist class, or even as a result of its ability to aid the overall process of commodification. The state must also secure its own existence through democratic legitimation processes. **[Why "must" the state do this? And, since many capitalist states are undemocratic, how can you attribute general legitimation mechanisms to "democracy"?)** The capitalist state maintains its legitimacy when it appears to function as the result of political elections that are free to all citizen candidates, that involve a fair representation of opposing

¹⁰ Emphasis added.

¹¹ Mann, Michael (1993) *The Sources of Social Power Vol II* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

viewpoints and strategies, and that involve the free exercise of the right to vote for all citizens. To the degree that the capitalist state can establish itself as legally constituted and democratically elected, it achieves a degree of stability. However, as the state works toward its own legitimation, through these democratic electoral processes, the state must accommodate, to some degree, the desires of the electorate. Working class and middle class voters demand, among other things, the services (such as education) that are necessary in order to gain access to well-paying and higher-status occupations. The provision of education is one way in which a capitalist state (in this case, the U.S.) can present itself to voters as acting to preserve economic opportunity for members of all classes. Significantly, the first major bill signed by the Congress of 2000 was the *No Child Left Behind Act*, an act to reform and increase expenditures upon U.S. primary and secondary education. The dualism of efforts at accumulation and legitimation clearly manifest in this bill. As a result, the bill is not really what it appears to be. The title of the bill, “No Child Left Behind,” suggests an increase in educational opportunity for currently disadvantaged groups of students. In accordance with this theme, the bill includes a cumulative 30 percent increase in Title I spending (supplementary education funding for poor students), an increase that may be sufficient to restore the cuts initiated by the Reagan administration in the early 1980’s. This increase provides a stumping point for many politicians of the two major parties. The name of the bill, and the rhetorical speeches that have accompanied it, beg for anyone to argue with the new logic of preparing all teen-agers for the new economy. Yet the actual expenditures contained in the bill do nothing to make even a down-payment on equalizing the differences between the package of educational services provided to upper middle-class primary and secondary students, and those provided to their working class and poor counterparts. Still, some conservative politicians (including those in charge of the current Administration) saw the bill as too expensive. The eventual bill that was passed included an additional 4 billion dollars in spending that was not included in the administration’s proposal. So, I see in the debate over and design of this bill the dualism of accumulation and legitimation. In this case, the core interests of the capitalists are preserved in a manner that appears to benefit the economic aspirations of the non-capitalist classes. **[Is there really any reason to believe that it is in the general interests of capitalists and capital accumulation to have these cuts? I am not sure that everything that goes against the poor is, ipso facto, to the benefit of “capitalism” or the capitalist class – it can be a matter of myopia, of instrumental manipulation for particular capitalist interests rather than the interests of the class as such.]**

From: Robyn Autry <rautry@ssc.wisc.edu>
 Interrogation 1: The Capitalist State and Social Change

General comment: What you have to say about Jessop & Offe is on target, but it would have been good if you had framed your discussion more in terms of an agenda of problems to discuss – especially some focused questions – rather than mainly as an exposition of their views. You raise an important general domain of issues about the nature of openings for progressive reform within a theory of the capitalist state, but you don’t really pose questions about this.

Common to both the class-analytic structural and contradictory functionality approaches is a concern with the nature and extent of the relation between the state and capital. Whether these two structures are mutually functional, autonomous, or co-evolved and coupled, both approaches hold that the material dependence of the state on capital shapes their relation. It is this dependence that most seriously undermines progressive social change within capitalist societies, as the state is unlikely to pursue policies that threaten its material base. Yet, both approaches leave space for the possibility of radical change or reform in capitalist societies initiated by popular movements and grounded in the contradictions of functionality and in social conflict produced by class politics. **[good statement of the common terrain of these two styles of work]**

As Offe points out, the functional conditions of state power, i.e. private production, taxation, accumulation, and the electoral process, are reconciled by the commodification of value between labor and capital. *Yet, the multiple factors create the non-universality of this exchange form, which threatens the functioning of capitalist societies in general and of the capitalist state in particular as its material base is weakened.* **[I don’t quite understand the italicized sentence. There are four elements in this sentence: (a) multiple factors create (b) the universality of this exchange which threatens, (c) the functioning of capitalist**

societies and capitalist states as (d) its material base is weakened. The linkages here are not clear: I do not see why (b) threatens (c), or why (b) leads to a weakening of the material base (d). Am I missing the point here?] The failure of these relationships stimulates reactions from the state that undermine private capital either by decommodifying labor power, i.e. through a welfare state, or by not providing market/employment-oriented activities for labor displaced by laissez-faire policies. The failure of exchange relationships to reconcile the contradictions between the advancement of capitalist accumulation and the conditions of state power, along with the state's reactionary policies, create an opening for popular civil movements to demand reform from the capitalist state to restore the conditions whereby all economic actors are willing and able to engage in commodity-based exchange.

Offe offers 'administrative recommodification' as a third alternative **[you should make it a bit clearer what the first two alternatives were – I had to look back and figure this out]**, more reflective of recent capitalist states whereby the saleability of labor is heightened through education and training, capital is enhanced through research and development, involvement in global markets, and pressures to modernize without public support or fail. Since this approach seeks to maintain each economic unit's commitment to the commodity form, it is less likely to create the conditions where popular mobilization occurs to such a degree as to successfully pressure the capitalist state for radical change.

As Jessop points out, because the capitalist state's material base is grounded in capitalist accumulation its policies and operations are biased toward those that strengthen capital. Yet, he identifies five factors that limit the state's ability to effectively intervene in the capitalist economy, ranging from its exclusion from the production process and a lack of long-term economic vision to its interventions of public provisions and conflicts of interest and priorities with capital. Not only do these factors illustrate the limits of state's interventions in the economy, they are also reflective of how popular mobilization and political pressure can be strategically coordinated to take advantage of the disconnects between the state and capital. Jessop's arguments that capitalist states are not necessarily in a position to enact policies that advance capitalist accumulation and that accumulation can occur without such policies point to another space where social change or reform are possible.

Further, the influence of class politics in the state suggest another space where progressive social change is possible in capitalist societies. As Wright points out, the impact of class on political power differs at the situational, institutional, and systemic levels. Evident within each of these levels is the potential for class-based social conflict to demand social reform within capitalist societies. The multiplicity of interests and fragmentation of the capitalists prevents their consistent and coordinated ability to take advantage of their financial resources and connections to exercise situational political power. The impact of class at the institutional level illustrates a bias in state policy toward private capital accumulation as the material base of the capitalist state. Yet, as Jessop argues the distinction between the state acting as a political actor with economic interests versus it being a real economic actor, reveals contradictions that clear a space for popular movements. At the systemic level, capital's political power is grounded in the logic of the entire social system. At this level, the well-being of all actors within the capitalist social system is rooted in the advancement of private capital and its accumulation. This does not however, eliminate the possibility of popular movements and organizations to strategically act in a manner that takes advantage of the contradictions embedded in the relation between the capitalist state and the economy.

From: "Matt Nichter" <mfnich@hotmail.com>

1) What exactly is the purpose of Therborn's distinction between 'state power' and 'state apparatus'? One payoff is that the distinction helps explain why states may fail to smoothly reproduce dominant social relationships: the apparatuses may have an ambiguous or mutually contradictory class character. But this issue is distinct from the overarching one with which Therborn says his study is concerned first and foremost: can the working class wield the existing state machinery for socialist purposes, or is the state in capitalist society essentially a capitalist state? States in capitalist societies may indeed fail to stably reproduce capitalism, but whether or not they are incompatible with socialism is another matter. **[Very good distinction: to fail to reproduce capitalism is not the same as being able to construct a**

progressive alternative. Offe's negative selection version of the capitalist thesis might be especially good for that distinction, since excluding socialist alternatives may not be sufficient to insure capitalist ones.]

2) Therborn says, "The problem of the class character of the state apparatus does not refer to the effects of state policies - which involve the analytically, though empirically closely related question of state power - but to their form and intrinsic content." But how do we determine whether the 'form and intrinsic content' of a particular state apparatus has a class character, if not by examining the behaviors/policies the apparatus generates? **[Also, incidentally, to be it is not at all clear what the expression "intrinsic content" means in this context, since "content" seems to be identified with policy/effects, and thus should be part of power, no?]**

Therborn's procedure, of course, is to compare the state apparatuses of various feudal, capitalist, and socialist regimes. But how does he determine whether a particular regime is feudal, capitalist, or socialist in the first place? The answer seems to be: a state is feudal, capitalist, or socialist if its apparatus tends to aid the reproduction of feudal, capitalist, or socialist relations of production, respectively. So despite the order of presentation in the book, it seems like the determination of which class holds state power is logically prior to the determination of the class character of apparatuses. **[Your argument here seems right. One possibility, of course, is that there is an implicit logical-deductive model of what sorts of properties of state apparatuses of type X are needed to generate the required actions needed to reproduce class structures of type X. This could mean that the analysis is not simply a generalization from empirical observations of actual regimes.]**

3) As noted earlier, Therborn says a given class can wield state power despite the fact that some of the state apparatuses through which it rules are dysfunctional for the reproduction of its dominance - that was one 'payoff' of employing the apparatus/power distinction. But this seriously threatens the comparative analysis: since any observed form of state apparatus may be functional or dysfunctional for the dominant class, how are we supposed to determine the class character of that specific state apparatus (as opposed to the overall class character of the regime) independent of its specific effects? **[I think the answer here requires that one look closely at the reasons for the dysfunctional effects or functional effects: i.e. one needs to examine the extent to which these are bound up with the relevant formal features of the state vs the actions/ideologies of political elites within those apparatuses. It could be possible to show that certain dysfunctional actions were the results of stupidity, or faulty theories on the parts of elites (eg in the early 1930s re the appropriate policies needed to get out of the Depression). This sort of detailed investigation of the causal processes involved in failures and successes might make it possible to distinguish between effects of the apparatuses and effects of the actors within those apparatuses (since the latter do not dictate unique actions of the former).]**

4) As Therborn admits, his characterization of a host of oppressive regimes as "socialist" is eminently debatable. But then the substantive results of his comparative analysis may be quite mistaken.

From: Pablo

To: Everyone in Sociology 924.

Some food for thought on Claus Offe's "Structural Problems of the Capitalist State"

Offe argues that researchers claiming that the capitalist state systematically excludes structurally possible policies and outcomes that are dysfunctional for the capitalist class, have to confront the following methodological "dilemma" - or, better, problem: "how can evidence of what is non-existent, the very thing that is excluded, be established sociologically?" (p. 40). In his paper, Offe criticizes and rejects seven possible solutions, and then proposes one of his own. I believe that most of his critiques are flawed, and that his "solution" has exactly the same limitations he has attributed to some of the alternatives he rejects. I will not fully justify this general claim here, but part of its justification follows.

Possible solution A: To compare actual policies and outcomes with the policies that were

actually proposed and rejected, and with the outcomes that would have resulted from these policies.

Offe's critique here is that alternatives not proposed to or within the state, or not formulated at all because of systematic distortions in the perception of possibilities of action, are excluded from the analysis. Therefore "any way of measuring the structural restrictedness of possibilities of action is lost" (41). However, it is still true that one can learn quite a lot about capitalist state selectivity by analyzing what is explicitly formulated, proposed and rejected. An appropriate observation would be, in this case, that there is more in the capitalist state selectivity than what we can possibly learn in this way; but this provides no justification for Offe's critique. **[I don't think Offe claims that you can learn nothing from solution A, only that you cannot demonstrate the most efficacious class-exclusion processes. He would agree that there is much of theoretical and empirical interest that survives those exclusions and gets onto the table, but I think this is not relevant to his specific point.]**

Possible solution B: To compare the actual policies and outcomes with a set of policies and outcomes considered normatively desirable by the researcher.

Regarding this solution, there are two main critiques in Offe's paper. On the one hand, he asserts that with this strategy the researcher would not be able "to clarify completely and unambiguously the objective restrictiveness of an organization of political governance" (41). On the other, he thinks that it is unable to distinguish between systematic and accidental selectiveness. Both critiques are based on flawed methodological conceptions.

Regarding the first critique, the key issue is the problem of the incompleteness of the account – Offe offers no reason to believe that the results of the analysis would be ambiguous. And, associated with this, the risk of arbitrariness: if the account is not complete, how do we know that the policies selected by the analyst as yardstick are the ones that are objectively relevant to characterize the selectivity of capitalist states? The problem with this idea is that it has to confront the following (real) dilemma. It either assumes that a scientific theory can and should provide a complete account of a domain of phenomena, in this case a complete account of everything excluded by the class-selectivity of capitalist states, or it assumes that the theoretical – and political – relevance of what is systematically excluded is given by the facts, i.e., for what is excluded itself. Offe sometimes seems to think that the former is the case, for instance when he grounds his critique of some methodological strategies in the fact that they cannot identify all the selection mechanisms that are present. But this is untenable. Every methodological strategy is limited, and every scientific theory is incomplete – in the sense that it only accounts, and rather imperfectly in most cases, for a very narrow set of aspects of some phenomena in its domain.

The important question is, and now I am dealing with the other horn of the dilemma, whether the theory accounts for the *relevant* aspects of the *relevant* phenomena in its domain. But in both cases, "relevance" comes not from the facts themselves but from human beings' pragmatic goals. Therefore, there is nothing "inadequately" arbitrary in explaining why the actual policies of the state are what they are *rather* than being other, normatively desirable policies, and in associating this explanation with the selectivity of the capitalist state – provided that it is possible to show that there is systematic selectivity involved.

Let's examine now Offe's second critique – that this solution is unable to distinguish between systematic and accidental exclusions. This is an important argument for Offe, because he repeatedly resorts to it. The problem here is that the distinction between systematic and accidental exclusions is theory-dependent. In the same sense that, at least in the tough cases, you need a good theory to distinguish between a scientific law and an accidental generalization, in the difficult cases you need a good theory to decide whether a generalized class-biased exclusion is the result of the systematic selectivity of capitalist states, or just a contingent regularity. The researcher that decides to compare the actual policies with the normative desirable ones is neither in better nor in worse situation than any other in this respect. Provided she has a theory that specifies the main mechanisms responsible for the selectivity of capitalist states, she will be able to make a – fallible, of course – claim about the status of the exclusion involved. **[You make very good points, but I think that there is still an issue here. The expression "accidentally excluded", I think, refers particularly to events that have not happened yet, but could happen if certain conditions other than the formal properties of the apparatuses in question occurred. Here's an example: before I came to Wisconsin there was no program in Marxist Sociology. A Marxist critic of Sociology could point to the department and say: I have a normative stance that says Marxism is**

important to be taught within social science and I know that bourgeois sociology is hostile to it, sets up rules and procedures, standards of “knowledge”, etc. which make it impossible to seriously teach Marxism in the Bourgeois University, etc. If one examined prelim exams, the curriculum of the department, and all sorts of other things, one might have thought that there was a real “negative selectivity” here. However, as soon as students organized to ask for the program, it was instantly permitted. Before it happened It just hadn’t happened yet. How then does one check the hypothesis before it happens? By struggle to impose the program and seeing if it meets with exclusions. But before that occurs, the evidence will not discriminate between accidental and systematic bias.]

Possible solution C: To compare actual outcomes and policies in different times and systems, under a *ceteris paribus* clause.

The *ceteris paribus* clause here is meant to ensure that different outcomes are really due to differences in policies or structural features, and not to other factors. Offe objects this time that the conditions for the rigorous application of *ceteris paribus* clauses are hard to satisfy, and he is right. But the argument is misleading. Indeed, the same difficulty exists in any domain of scientific research, especially in the social sciences. However, this obstacle has not discouraged the use of *ceteris paribus* clauses anywhere – they are bread and butter in the natural sciences, and are widely employed in the social ones, often with very good results. Moreover, it is possible to make a good case for the claim that the main methodological strategy in the buoyant field of “historical-comparative sociology” is to find ways of employing *ceteris paribus* clauses in the study of macro phenomena. Are the researchers of state selectivity particularly disadvantaged in this respect?

Offe’s second critique to this alternative is that the “types of selectivity *common* to the systems under comparison do not come to light” (44), and he seems to be making a good point. However, I think he is ultimately mistaken. Let’s see why. Offe himself has pointed out that the guarantee of private property is a key mechanism in the exclusion of anticapitalist policies and outcomes. So, it is apparent that it was possible for him to identify this mechanism of exclusion as such, despite the fact that it is a common feature of all relevant cases. And the reason is straightforward: there are conclusive theoretical arguments in favor of the thesis that the guarantee of private property is a central factor in capitalist state selectivity. Hence, why should we assume that something similar is impossible in many other – certainly more difficult – cases? On the contrary, if, on the one hand, we have good reasons to think that a particular feature of the capitalist state is responsible for certain non-events, i.e., if we have identified the corresponding mechanisms, and found good evidence that they operate the way we think they do; and, on the other, if this feature is present in all the cases we know, this should be considered as an additional reason to think that the resulting exclusions are not contingent but *systematic*. **[furthermore, one can compare the capitalist state to noncapitalist states, and especially examine the early formation of the capitalist state and see where/how such negative selectivity gets instantiated]**

Let’s examine now Offe’s own solution to the methodological problem he is interested in:

“The historically concrete limits of a system of political power can only be perceived in *political practice* and can only be identified in class conflict engaged in through actions and organizations in which collective *normative* options turn into empirical force. The class character of the State becomes evident analytically only in an *ex post* perspective, namely when the limitation of its functions becomes apparent in class conflict” (45)

Is this a plausible methodological strategy? Probably. But according to Offe’s *own* criteria, it should be rejected. Indeed, his solution has exactly the same limitations he attributes to some of the alternatives he rejects. On the one hand, it ignores the policies, outcomes, etc. that are not fought for in class conflict, but that are nevertheless systematically excluded by the capitalist state. For instance, it would ignore the alternatives “not formulated for any actor because of systematic distortions in the perception of possibilities of action.” On the other, this solution does not allow the researcher to distinguish between accidental and systematic outcomes.

924: Interrogations, Week 2
Brad Brewster

1. When doing much early reflection on the background readings I started thinking a great deal about the state as a subjectivity, as generalized other, as ideal type. For we all have a notion of the state toward which we feel and act. Indeed, I would assert, along with Clyde Barrow, that "equally important" to governmental, administrative, coercive, and ideological state subsystems is the fact that "the state is a state of mind" (Barrow:24-25). However, this is an issue of legitimacy and in attempting to address the class character of the state it was probably wise of Therborn to sheer off such issues for the sake of "political analysis proper" (Therborn:30) [see note 1].

[[[OPTIONAL: But I did have some thoughts about this legitimacy question I would like feedback on for those interested. Barrow states that "the legitimacy of the state is ultimately expressed in people's willingness to comply with decisions made by the state apparatus, and, if necessary, to risk their lives defending the common territory of the state" (Barrow:25). This is a very behaviorist notion of legitimacy. First, in light of the A-B split (that is, attitude-behavior split), is compliance (B) any measure of legitimacy (A)? Second, legitimacy, measured by a "willingness to comply," may be a compliance toward an ideal or mythical state, not the real state, as such "political myths" and "national symbols" retain much power (Barrow:122). In that case, such compliance toward the ideal state may be the source of real dissenting behavior toward the existing state apparatus. Third, what "territory of the state"? Is this "real" territory or "ideal" territory? There are differing and conflicting conceptions of legitimate territory.]]] **[comment on this: the pivot in Barrow's comment, I think, is the word "willing-ness" rather than just "compliance". The idea here is that when the state is legitimate people comply with its dictates in a specific way: not because of fear or coercion, but because they want to comply. This is compliance-as-consent in Gramsci's terms, and thus it implies something about attitudes, not just behavior. Of course the willingness may come from mythological views of "the state" rather than a realistic appraisal of what it does, but this would not undercut the relevance of the legitimacy idea.]**

2. "Different types of class relations and of class power generate corresponding forms of state organization" (Therborn:35). Would it, then, be possible to think about the state organization being 'generated' by other relations? Gender relations, for example, which I presume historically preceded class relations? Hmm, but gender relations probably did not give rise to the state, per se, but rather, according to some conceptions at least, politics emerged in step with the progressive emergence of nonagricultural social divisions within the population. "Class relations . . . generate the specific forms of state organization" (Therborn:36), for class [note 2] and politics seem co-emergent historically from this scenario of historical evolution (which I'm aware is considered one theory among others, highly contestable and contested.) **[I don't think the question of whether or not there are gendered aspects of the state – i.e. whether gender domination is, like class domination, "crystallized" in the organization of the state – is primarily a temporal question. The state can have a racialized character and a gendered character, in addition to a class character, even if the origin of the state is explained by the emergence of classes.]**

3. Therborn assumes the proletarian dictatorship comes prior to any mending of the 'rift' [3] "between 'town' and 'country' (i.e., between industrial proletariat and peasantry) still exist, as does, most importantly, the division between mental and manual labor" (44). Is this inevitably the sequence? **[I think he is just making an historically specific argument about the attempt at building a "dictatorship of the proletariat" in Russia and Lenin's analysis of this process; he is not making a logical argument based on derivations from some abstract model.]**

4. Therborn has a great amount of faith in the "self-abolition" of both the dictatorship of the proletariat (45) and the cadre leadership (62). Is such 'transitional' power relations in more danger of stabilizing and reproducing itself than Therborn anticipates? **[That sure seems like what the historical record shows!]**

[[[OPTIONAL: Incidentally, Therborn (53-63) provides one of the best conceptual distinctions between leading and managing that I've come across, including, when the task is completed, the final characteristic of a leader: self-abolition.]]]

NOTES:

[1] "Three particular traditions lie as dead weight upon this discussion. One is the focus on political legitimation inherited from Weber and the Frankfurt School . . . [This trend allows] consideration of important and substantial problems though at the price of neglecting political analysis proper" (Therborn:30).

[2] I'm using class in a loose but still Marxist sense. "The relationship between lords and serfs might be oppressive and the source of considerable conflict, but Weberians would not treat this as a class relation since it is structured around relations of personal dependence and domination, not market relations. Marxists, in contrast, see conflicts over the control of productive resources in both feudalism and capitalism as instances of class struggle" (Wright:91). I'm just allowing the concept to hypothetically drift back, way back, beyond feudalism, since, as defined above, it is applicable to any and all "conflicts over the control of productive resources," including, therefore, the hypothetical first conflict.

[3] See John Bellamy Foster's "Metabolic Rift."