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From: "The Structuralist-Marxist and Parsonsian Theories of the State" by Erik Olin Wright and Luca Perrone (unpublished manuscript) 1973

3. THE STRUCTURALIST-MARXIST APPROACH

In this part of the paper we will extensively deal with the structuralist-marxist approach.

First (3.1.), we will present a critical exposition of the basic theoretical premises of the structuralist-marxist school: i.e. their critique of the hegelian roots in marxist theory, their conception of totality and contradiction, and their reformulation of the infra-structure-superstructure relationship. Particular consideration will be given to the theoretical status of their idea of causality, and some initial critical remarks will be advanced.

Then (3.2.), we will consider the case of political power and the Capitalist State as a particular ("regional") application of the general theoretical model.

3.1. General Theoretical Issues

The theoretical departure of the structuralist-marxist school is the assertion of the radical difference and incompatibility between the hegelian and the marxian concepts of totality and contradiction (what in less philosophical and more sociological terms we might call social system, and conflict and change).

The reason for this anti-hegelian departure, (a constant preliminary statement in every major work of the school) is to be found in the widespread conception of marxist dialectic as resulting from a simple "inversion" of the hegelian system; in the theoretical deficiencies brought in marxism by such an hegelian root (historicism, economism); and eventually in the necessity for challenging these

deficiencies and recouping the specificity and scientific adequacy of an integral marxist theory of society.

3.1.1 Marxist Complex Totality vs. Hegelian Simple Totality

The famous argument of the simple "inversion" of the hegelian principles as the origin of marxist philosophy can be quickly stated:

> The whole hegelian conception is regulated by the dialectic of the internal principles of each society, that is, in Hegel's system, the dialectic of the moments of the Idea. As Marx said many times, Hegel explains material life and concrete history by a dialectic of consciousness (the people's consciousness of itself; its ideology in Marx's terms). For Marx, on the other hand, the material life of men explains their history. Their consciousness, their ideology, are then merely the phenomena (in the philosophical sense of appearance, opposed to the real essence) of their material life. While for Hegel the politico-ideological was the essence of the economic (see the Hegelian primacy of the Spiritual-Political Society — the State and everything embodied in it — on the Civil Society, or society of needs), for Marx the economic is the essence of the politico-ideological; the political and the ideological (the superstructures) will therefore be merely pure phenomena of the economic (the infra-structure) which will be their "truth".

For Hegel's "pure principle of consciousness, for the simple internal principle which he conceived as the principle of intellegibility

of all the determinations of a historical people, we have substituted another simple principle, its opposite: Material life, the economy — a simple principle which in turn becomes the sole principle of universal intelligibility of all historical determination. While the position of the terms has changed (Hegel's phenomena are Marx's essence and vice versa), the two conceptions share nonetheless the same idea of an organic totality consisting of a unique internal principle and its externalizations, in an essence-phenomenon relationship. All the phenomena of any one epoque or society are merely the externalizations ("alienations") of one moment of the development of the internal principle (Idea, or the Economy) which is the essence of those phenomena, manifesting itself in each and all of them, and expressed by each and all of them,

The structuralist-marxists call such a totality an "expressive" type of totality, aiming by this designation to underscore the following: its apparent complexity conceals an essential simplicity, in the sense that the complex of diverse phenomena (appearances) is reducible to a single and simple essence. Thus, in Hegel's analyses, for instance, the essence of Rome, pervading its whole history and its manifold institutions, is the principle of the "Abstract Legal Personality;" the essence of the modern world, equally pervasive, is "Subjectivity" (Hegel, 1967).

In the marxist case, it is no longer a question of deriving the successive moments from the Idea but from the Economy. The dialectic of history is reduced to the dialectic generating the successive modes of production, that is, in the last analysis, the different production techniques (the economist-mechanistic line of the IInd Internationale marxism). More sophisticated marxist authors, reacting against this positivistic interpretation of marxist dialectic and its deterministic consequences, shifted the emphasis to a more subjective principle of historical variation: class consciousness. This was conceived as the more or less adequate symbolization of the "human essence" as embodied in the self-representation of a class. The unity of a social formation and its institutions, then, resides in the "weltanschaung" of the ideologically ruling class. Likewise, the decline and disorganization of a social formation was understood in terms of the decay of this weltanschaung. (This tradition constitutes the historicist-humanist kind of marxism born in the '20s with the early writings of Lukacs, Korsch, Gramsci, and then continued in different ways by authors such as Sartre, Garaudy, Marcuse and so forth.)[1]

In either case, the conception of the social whole has one simple principle of unity and organization, to which all historical variation

1. Perhaps the most renowned example of the application of this perspective to political analysis is Marcuse. Since 1935 Marcuse explicitly admitted that the unity of a social formation is the world conception of the class which is ideologically ruling in that formation (see Culture and Society). Likewise, in One Dimensional Man, the basic character of today's society is explained by the absence of a) an ideologically ruling class, and b) a proletarian class consciousness and its function of global negation. It is terms of consciousness -- even in their absence -- which define the crucial characteristics of a social system.

can be reduced. Whether in the economic development or in the ideological hegemony, it is always the simple contradiction between Capital and Labor that governs history.

Marxism, according to the structuralist-marxist authors, breaks once and for all with the reductionism of this historicist or economist problematic and with its conception of the "simple unity" of an "original essence," and established complexity as its principle. "Where reality is concerned," Louis Althusser claims, "we are never dealing with the pure existence of simplicity, be it essence or category, but with the existence of 'concretes,' of complex and structured beings and processes" (1969:197). He further on specifies that the circumstances and phenomena in terms of which the supposedly pure essence develops are as important as their essence. Instead of a active-simple-essence/passive-multiple-phenomena scheme, marxism establishes the recognition of the "givenness" of the complex structure of any concrete object. In particular, the superstructures are not the mere phenomena of the "essential" economic structure, they are its condition of existence. Missing this point means condemning marxism to theoretical inadequacy.

For example, the German Socialdemocrats at the end of the 19th Century imagined that they could shortly be promoted to socialist triumph by virtue of belonging to the most powerful capitalist State, then undergoing rapid economic growth, just as they were experiencing rapid electoral growth. They obviously saw history progressing with the greatest economic development, with its contradiction reduced to the purest form -- the contradiction between Capital and Labor. So they forgot that all this was taking place in a Germany armed with a powerful State machine, in a Germany endowed with a bourgeoisie which had

long ago given up "its" political revolution in exchange for Bismark's military and bureaucratic protection and the superprofits of capitalist and colonialist exploitation; in a Germany endowed, too, with a chauvinist and reactionary petty bourgeoisie. Going back to our theoretical issues: They forgot that, in fact, the economic quintessence of contradiction was quite simply abstract. The real contradiction was between the economic substructure and its "circumstances" ("phenomena"). Such a contradiction was only discernible, identifiable and manipulable through and in those circumstances.

In conclusion, states Althusser, the Capital-Labor contradiction is never simple, but always determined by the forms and circumstances in which it is exercised. It is specified by the forms of the superstructure with their specific impact (State, dominant ideology, religion, political organizations, etc.), by the internal and external historical situation (national past, international competition, etc.) and so forth. This is what the structuralist-marxists mean when they state that the apparently simple contradiction is always overdetermined (surdeterminée): It results from the uneven combination of different factors ("instances"), each one with its own relative autonomy and effectivity, instead of one "essential" instance (economy) and its tacit identity with the other instances (i.e. the economy as the "essence" or the "truth of" the political, the ideological, etc.).

It will still be possible to observe, in such complex contradiction, the "dominance" of one aspect over the others (i.e. the dominant role of one instance over the others), but this instance will not be necessarily the economy, or any other fixed principle. Thus, Marx himself in his analysis on the pre-capitalist formations points out that, in

the feudal mode of production, it is the ideology -- in its religious form -- that holds a "dominant" function; likewise the asian mode of production exhibits the dominant function of the political instance (i.e. the political membership of the individual in the community and its heritage rights over the land are the precondition for any economic activity). An analogous dominance of the political over the economic could easily be demonstrated in more recent formations, such as monopolistic State capitalism or other interventionist forms of the capitalist State.

What the structuralist-marxists seem to advance is thus a multifaceted conception of historical causation instead of the monistic conception that since Plekhanov has often been associated with marxist theory of society.

3.1.2. The Dominant Role and the Determinant in the Last Instance

The theoretical problem that the structuralist-marxist authors have to solve at this point is how to reconcile their more realistic formulation of a plurality of instances as constituting the social whole and determining social change, with the theoretical determinacy provided by the marxian claim of the economy as the determinant principle. Is the autonomy and specific effectivity of the non-economic, superstructural instances going to replace historical materialism by a sort of methodological pluralism?

No. The autonomy of the superstructures -- the structuralist-marxists argue -- is not absolute, and their specific impact does not eliminate the primacy of the economy which, following Engel's famous

letter to Bloch, is still determinant "in the last instance."[2] To dispel the apparent paradox of an economy which is determinant in the last instance, but not necessarily always "dominant," determination in the last instance is defined as follows: The economy determines for the non-economic elements their respective degrees of autonomy/dependence in relation to itself and to one another, and thus their differential degrees of specific impact. Economy can determine itself as dominant or non-dominant at any particular time, and in the latter case it determines which of the other elements is to be dominant. Althusser (1969) expresses this determination as follows:

> It is economism (mechanism) and not the true Marxist tradition that sets up the hierarchy of instances once and for all, assigns each its essence and role and defines the universal meaning of their relations; it is economism that identifies roles and actors eternally, not realizing that the necessity of the process lies in an exchange of roles 'according to circumstances.' It is economism that identifies eternally in advance the determinant-contradiction-in-the-last-instance with the role of the dominant contradiction, which for ever assimilates such and such an 'aspect' (forces of production, economy, practice) to the principal role, and such and such another 'aspect" (relations of production, politics, ideology, theory) to the secondary role -- whereas in

2. This letter is reprinted in Marx and Engles, Selected Works, v. II, pp.488-490 (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962). The relevant passage reads: "According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx no I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure...also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form."

> real history determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised precisely in the permutations of the principal role between the economy, politics, theory, etc. (p.213)

3.1.3. The Structuralist Causal Imagery

Now we know how this determination in the last instance by the economy has to be understood, but we still need more specification as to the type of causality that links the economic base "determinant in the last instance" to the non-economic instances and their dominant or non-dominant role. Consistently with their rejection of hegelianism and economism, the structuralist-marxists claim a "new" concept of "structural causality" distinct both from the "transitive-linear" and "expressive" causal imageries typical of pre-marxist philosophy. The linear or transitive type of causality, which is found in many positivistic derivatives of marxism, is able to account for the effect of one element on another, but not of the whole on its parts. On the other hand the hegelian "expressive" causality, which accounts for the determination of its parts by the whole, does that only by reducing it to an essence of which they would be the phenomena, i.e. by simplifying the whole.

The concept of structural causality is intended to be distinct from both. From the first, because the structure is a cause present or immanent in its elements/effects, rather than exterior to them (i.e. superstructures are not generated by an external structure). From the second, because although the structure exists only in the totality of these elements/effects and their relations, these elements are functionally different and cannot be reduced to a common Leibnitzian internal

essence or hegelian principle (i.e. superstructures are not passive "phenomena" of the same "essence" -- economy).

It is difficult to find in the structuralist-marxist literature a formal definition of the positive concept of "structural causality" beyond this double negation, and we will return on the ambiguous status of the "structural causality" later in the paper. From the working definitions and analytical use that they make of structural causation, it seems legitimate to understand it as a type of functional causation,[3] where the general structure of the forces and relations of production sets limits of functional compatibility and variation on the other instances. These instances in turn develop differentially according to the type and degree of "functional support" that a) is required by the economic activity (in particular, in the capitalist formation, the extraction of surplus value); and, b) they are able to provide.

Due to the theoretical importance of this point, let us consider one of the few places where a structuralist-marxist author, M. Godelier (1970, 1972), explicitely deals with the problem of the "causality" of economy and the consequent infrastructure-superstructure relationship. In the production process of the capitalist formation, Godelier contends, the relations of production between capitalist and worker, and the latter's necessity to work for the first, seem largely independent of religious, familiar and even political ties. Every social structure (we might say functional area) seems largely autonomous; the economist can treat non-economic variables as exogenous variables, and look for

3. Following Stinchcombe (1968: 80), by functional explanation we mean one in which the consequences of some behavior or social structures are essential elements of the causes of that behavior or structure.

an "economic rationality" in itself. The correspondence between structures seems mostly an "external" one.

But in an archaic society, we have a different situation. The marxist economist can easily distinguish, say, the productive forces (hunting, fishing, agriculture and so on) but cannot distinguish them "isolated" relations of production. Or, at least, he will distinguish them in the functioning itself of the kinship relations. It is kinship relations that determine one's rights to land and products, one's obligation to work for others, to give, to receive. Likewise, they determine one's authority on the others in political, religious matters. In such society, the kinship relations "dominate" the social life.

How can kinship's dominant role and economy's determination in the last instance be understood in a marxist perspective? Such understanding is impossible, writes Godelier, as long as economy and kinship are considered as infrastructure and superstructure. In an archaic society, the kinship relations function as relations of production as well as political relations. Therefore, in Marx's terms, kinship relations are here at the same time infrastructure and superstructure; and one can suspect that the complexity of the kinship relations within archaic societies is related to the multiple functions to be met in such type of society. Also, one can suspect that the dominant role and the complex structure of the kinship relations in archaic societies is related to the general structure of the productive forces, i.e. to their low degree of development which imposes group living and cooperation among individuals in order to subsist and reproduce, group living and cooperation for which the kinship ties are the major guarantee.[4]

4. On this, see Claude Levi-Strauss (quoted in Godelier, 1972: 365-366): "The situation is quite different in groups for which the satisfaction of economic needs rests entirely on conjugal society and the sexual division of labor. Not only are man and woman differently specialized technically, and therefore depend on one another for the construction of the things necessary for daily tasks, but they devote themselves to the production of different kinds of food. A complete, and above all a regular diet thus depends on that veritable 'production cooperative,' the household...Particularly in primitive societies, where the harshness of the geographical environment and the rudimentary state of technique make hunting and gardening, collecting and gathering equally hazardous, existence is almost impossible for an individual left to himself."

In this abstract example, the economy-kinship correspondence appears no longer as an external relationship but as an internal coexistence, and yet without confusing the economic relations among kins with their religious, or sexual relations (i.e. "there is a unity of functions within the kinship relations which does not imply either their identity or their confusion. The anti-hegelian irreducibility of functions to one common principle excludes their identity but not their unity"). To the extent that in such society kinship functions as real relations of production, the determinant role of economy rather than contradicting the dominant role of kinship, is expressed therein.

Likewise, we can suppose that the development of new conditions of production in archaic societies modifies demography, requires new forms of authority, engenders new relations of production. We can also suppose that, beyond a certain limit (coinciding with what we might call the "neolitic revolution" of the productive forces), the old kinship relations will not be able to manage these new functions. The kinship relations from forms for the development of the productive forces turn into hindrances. The kinship relations will thus shift to a different, secondary role, whereas new political and religious relations bearing new

functions will take over the dominant role (e.g. primitive forms of State, new religions). Concludes Godelier:

> The functions, form, and importance of every structure have changed and this very relation between one structure and all the others constitutes the general structure itself of a given social formation. The functionally determined relation and importance of every structure determines the specific causality of every structure and the limits of their reciprocal correspondence. Constructing a theory of the differentiated development of society means at the same time constructing a scientific theory of kinship, of the political, of the ideological. It means to be able to recognize that in given historical conditions kinship is economy or that religion, as it is the case in Tibet or with ancient Incas, can directly function as relations of production. This, dogmatic marxism cannot understand because it is unable to simply think of it. (1970:109)

We might restate the causal scheme implicit in the quotation as follows:

1. A constant ("invariant") source of variation in the assumption of the continuous development of the productive forces;

2. the creation by such development of new functional exigencies (e.g. forms of authority, cooperation, and other relations of production) on the "superstructures;"

3. such functional exigencies work as a) limits on the internal development of the "superstructures" (e.g. it is impossible for the juridical superstructure to develop the principle of abstract legal personality in a feudal mode of production; or, as Max Weber showed, it is impossible for bureaucracy to develop as long as the office is considered a private economic resource and a praebendal, non-monetary economy persists), b) as selective criteria for the rotation of the "dominant role" among the "superstructures," according to the different degree of correspondence to the above exigencies (i.e. which of the "superstructures" better maintains and reproduces what we might loosely call the economic activity).

In such a scheme, the distinctive feature of the structuralist-marxist approach is point 3. It is neither the idea of the development of the productive forces nor that of the functional adaptation by "superstructures" that establishes the novelty. Rather it is the fact that such functional adaptation modifies the traditional use of the distinction between infrastructure and superstructure. It does this two ways: First, the traditional notion of one structure uniquely determining (or causing) another structure is replaced by the concept of limits. Poulantzas puts it this way:

> In terms of the relationships of structural instances, their so-called 'interaction,' which is, in effect, the mode of intervention of one structural level on another, consists of the limits within which one level can modify another. These limits are the effect at the same time of the concrete matrix of a social formation and of the specific structures of each level, which are themselves determined by their place and their function in this matrix. In this sense, the determination of one structure by another in the relationship between structures, indicates the limits of variation of one regional structure -- let's say the State -- in relationship to another -- let's say the economic -- limits which are themselves the effects of the matrix... (v.1, p.96)[5]

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5. Poulantzas further developes the concept of what he calls "limits of the second degree." These are limits on class practice imposed by various aspects of class struggle within the limits imposed by the structures of a formation. Poulantzas writes:

> Political practice...is itself inscribed within limits which are the effects of the global sphere of class struggle and of the diverse levels of this struggle on political practice. These limits are, however, the limits of the second degree, to the extent that the domaine of practices is itself circumscribed by the effects of structures as limits. (v.i, p.97)

Secondly, instead of the old image of infrastructure/superstructure implying over-assigned roles of domination and dependence; and fixed "natural properties" among a given set of instances (economy/political, ideological), we find a set of instances among which the dominant role shifts as "functional property."[6] The weight of every instance is relative to the ensemble (i.e. the specific combination of instances) in which it works. Such combination (i.e. the heirarchical system of instances) is in turn relative to the functional exigencies of economic activity and to the necessity to mediate them into socially viable and stable relationships. This conception of economic determination as mediated by other non-economic instances (better: by the whole system of instances, one of which has the dominant role) provides a tool for

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Godelier (1972) explicitly connects this notion of limit to the Marxian problem of contradiction and to cybernetics:

> The appearance of a contradiction is, in fact, the appearance of a limit to the conditions of invariance of a structure. Beyond this limit a change in the structure is necessary. In this perspective, the notion of contradiction I am putting forward would perhaps be of interest to cybernetics. This science explores the limit possibilities and internal regulation that allow any system, physiological, economic, or whatever, to maintain itself in spite of a determined range of variation of its internal and external conditions of functioning. (362)

It is interesting to note that structuralist-marxists see this link of their work to cybernetic theory. As we will see later on in this paper, it is also a partial convergence with Parsonsian functionalism.

6. Thus Poulantzas (1968: v.1,p.11), referring to the case of the political instance, states that "its status as an object of science, i.e. the construction of its concept, does not depend on its nature, but on its position and function in the particular combination that characterizes a given mode of production...In particular, it is the articulation of the instances characteristic of this mode of production which defines the scope and limits of the specific instance, giving the corresponding theory its field." (see also v.1,p.150)

assessing historical variation and causation far more sophisticated than the "vulgar" conception of a direct, immediate determination by economy on the social system. So much for economic determination and the infrastructure/superstructure problem.

To anticipate some of the critical remarks in the final part of the paper, we want to underscore the following, cursory points:

1. The overtly functionalist flavor of the structuralist-marxist statements, in particular the reformulation of the infrastructure/superstructure relationship (functionalism vs. determinism).

2. The asymmetrical character of the resulting functional system, in a double sense: a) the functionality of the structures is functionality to the economy. The functional exigencies of the economic activity at a given time are the invariant point of reference for the role of the other structures. In this sense there are no real functional exigencies specifically generated by, say, religious, ideological, political relations, etc. but only by the economy; b) such functionality to the economy is usually not equally distributed among the instances but "concentrated" on one of them, the dominant (i.e. the most crucial to the economic activity in a given mode of production). (asymmetrical vs. symmetrical functionalism)[7]

3. The invariant primacy (in the last instance) of the economy behind the "variant" dominant instances is assumed rather than theoretically elaborated. In a passage concerning this problem, Balibar simply quotes a text by Marx on the feudal regime that develops the following syllogism:

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7. On Marxism as an "asymmetrical" form of functionalism, see Stinchcombe (1968: 93ff).

a- if economic activity is to be carried out, 'extra-economic' reasons must intervene

b- but this economic activity must be carried out

c- hence the reason behind the extra-economic reason is economic

As some critics have already observed (e.g. Glocksmann 1972), there are some problems of logic and comparative nature in such assumptions. First, if the "must" in the minor premise is to lead to the conclusion, another postulate must be introduced: That all reasons, conscious or not, that a society presents for living and dying count for nothing before the fact that in order to present reasons at all, whatever they are, it must "first" live in the purely economic sense of the word. Moreover, a second postulate is necessary to establish the first: The words "live in the purely economic sense" must have a meaning in all societies; and such meaning must be distinct from that implied by other functions ("superstructures"), or else instead of the determinant in the last instance-dominant instance sequence there is pure circularity (i.e. the idea that the "superstructures" must correspond to the economic base would conceal the fact that, in doing this, the "superstructures" correspond only to themselves). Balibar, and the other structuralist-marxists, does not explicitely formulate these two postulates, even if he does imply them when he uses a phrase of Marx as justification: "This much, however, is clear, that the Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary: It is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why the dominant role was represented there by politics, here by Catholicism" (Capital 1967: v.1,p.82,fn.2).

Yet these postulates which govern the universalization of the economic determination are not theoretically explicitated. Such explicitation is

necessary for a comparative use of the theory, because while in the capitalist formations the economic function can easily be isolated from the others, in no pre-capitalist society can such a determinant instance be isolated on the basis of mere intuition, as Godelier's statements on the multifunctionality of kinship in archaic societies implicitly indicate.

3.1.4. Two Consequences: Theoretical Anti-Historicism and Anti-Humanism

To the extent that the social whole is to be regarded as an "articulated combination" (Marx's "Gliederung") of structures, the elements of this ensemble coexist in a mutual definition, such that the whole cannot be reconstituted by a temporal composition that introduces these elements in succession. Hence the rejection of a genetic, diacronic explanation of the structures, and the primacy of the syncronic analysis.

The study of the genesis of a structure can only be done if "governed" by the previous theoretical knowledge of such structure and the logical combination of its elements. So, history can only refer to the genealogy of the elements of the structure, but in no way to the genesis of the structure, where history -- formally speaking -- does not exist ("theoretical objects have no history," classical philosophy stated in a similar vein).[8]

8. See, for instance Poulantzas (1968: v.1, p.131): " [There is] no history of the genesis of a mode of production, but just a geneology of some of its elements. It is necessary to discriminate between the prehistory and the structure of a mode of production; because, while there exists a variety of effective processes which can generate these elements, once these elements are present, their combination generates the same structure." Similarly, Godelier (1972: 345): "Thus, to analyse the historical genesis of a structure is to analyse the conditions of emergence of its internal elements and the way they come into relation with one another. In its constitution, economic history presupposes that these elements and this relations are already identified, so it presupposes economic theory."

The structuralist-marxists find the first most authoritative confirmation of such position in the non-historiographic but rather theoretical-abstract order of Marx's Capital, where the capitalist mode of production is studied not so much as the historical genesis of the capitalist relations, but as an "already-given" logical structure of general elements. It is only after the theoretical understanding of these elements (commodity, exchange value, money, circulation and eventually capital) is established that the genesis of the capitalist mode of production can be approached in the famous cap.XXIV (Primitive Accumulation).[9] The logic of the combination and the internal functioning of the given complex structure (syncronic analysis) has theoretical priority over the history of its elements (diacronic analysis). In other words: The "meaning of history" does not underlie the meaning of the structure. On the contrary, it is the structures that allow us to assign significations to history.[10]

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9. On Marx's explicit subordination of the diachronic to the synchronic, see the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy: "It would be wrong and inappropriate to present economic categories in the same order that they became historically effective forces. Their logical succession, instead, is determined by their inter-relationships in modern bourgeois society, and this order is the exact reverse of what seems to be their natural order or of what corresponds to their succession in historical development."

10. The structuralist-marxist authors refer here to what historians such as L. Febvre, Labrousse, Broudel, etc., observed as the presence of different levels of history, and the different temporalities or rhythms of development of these histories. Marxist theory, argues Althusser (1970: 96), must "relate these varieties as so many variations to the structure of the whole, although the latter directly governs the production of the varieties...[Thus] there is no history in general but only specific structures of historicity, based in the last resort on the specific structures of the different modes of production, specific structures of historicity which, since they are merely the existence of determinate social formations (arising from specific modes of production), articulated as social wholes, have no meaning except as

The influence of Claude Levi-Strauss' analysis of kinship structures is very apparent in such a radical position. The structuralist anthropologists deduced real and possible kinships from an atemporal typology of exchange systems (restricted or generalized). In a similar way, structuralist-marxists try to define the basic structures of any mode of production on the basis of a small number of elements and typical relations between them (i.e. in terms of a universal and anistorical set of combinations of these elements). Referring to Balibar's major attempt to use such derivations, Althusser (1970) stresses:

> It is clear that the theoretical nature of this concept of 'combination' may provide a foundation for the thesis I have already suggested in a critical form, the thesis that Marxism is not a historicism: since the Marxist concept of history depends on the principle of variation of the forms of this 'combination.' (177)

According to this radically relational-syncronic approach, as structures cannot be thought as history, so they cannot either be thought as "subjects." The theoretical anti-historicism is explicitely escalated to a theoretical anti-humanism. Althusser (1970: 180. Also 139-40, 174-5) writes:

> The structure of the relations of production determines the places and functions occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of these places, insofar as they are the 'supports' (Trager) of these functions. The true 'subjects' in the sense of costitutive subjects of the process are therefore not these occupants or functionaires, are not, despite all appearances of 'obviousness' of the 'given' of naive anthropology, 'concrete individuals,' 'real men;' but

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a function of the essence of these totalities, i.e. of the essence of their peculiar complexity. (108-109)

> the definition and distribution of these places and functions. The true 'subjects' are these definers and distributors: the relations of production (and political and ideological social relations). But since these are 'relations,' they cannot be thought within the category subject.

Balibar (1970: 251-3) has expressed the same idea by saying that "individuals are merely the effects of different structures and that each relatively autonomous structure...engenders forms of historical individuality which are peculiar to it." Thus, contrary to the young Marx's thesis that it is men that make history, here the theoretical relevance of the human subject is definitively abolished.

The task of the structuralist-marxist analysis is then to explain by the play of the structures, their combinations and functional relationships, what in the past has been explained by the two concepts — vital in classical marxism — of history and consciousness.

3.2 Political Power and the Capitalist State

We will now turn to a particular application of the structuralist marxist general approach: Poulantzas' theory of the State and political power. After a short characterization of the political instance as determined by the various modes of production and social formations, we will present Poulantzas' particular theory of the State in a capitalist formation, its "functions" with regard both to the subordinated and the ruling classes, and a brief assessment of the specificity, uses and limits of his work as compared to the traditional marxist political theory. A broader critical comparison with non-marxist functionalist political theory will follow in the final chapter of the paper.

3.2.1 Modes of Production, Social Formation and the Economic Determination of the Political.

According to the theoretical principles we have already elaborated, the understanding of the political, as well as any other, instance does not depend on its supposedly fixed "nature" but on the function it plays in the particular combination of instances that characterizes a given mode of production.[11] It is here that the economy's determination in the last instance on the political is visible.

Let us consider Poulantzas' interpretation of the play of the economic and political instances[12] in the two major combinations

[11] See note 4.

[12] In this context Poulantzas explicitly limits his consideration to the political and the economic instances, "leaving aside for now the ideological." (1968:v.1, p. 24) Actually, as we shall see, there is no real functional distinction between the political and the ideological instances in the structuralist-marxist literature. They essentially share the same basic function of the reproduction of the social conditions of production (i.e., the integration of a social formation). See on this, section 5.2.2.

(modes of production) analyzed by Marx: the pre-capitalist and the capitalist.[13] The basic distinctive feature that Poulantzas finds in the capitalist mode of production is the (relative) autonomy between economic and political instances, whereas the precapitalist modes of production (asian, ancient, germanic, feudal) share a "mixed," "organic," "natural" and--as Marx sometimes says--"simultaneous" relationship between the two. The reason for such difference in the autonomy and specificity of the instances lies in the different structure of the modes of production, what the marxist-structuralists try to formalize as different combinations of three ultimate and invariant economic elements: the worker, the means of production, and the non-worker appropriating surplus labor. The three component elements are analytically always the same (though their concrete contents are different). The structural difference is to be found at the level of the relations between them. The production process in the feudal regime unites the labor force and the means of labor (the worker is not separate from his means of production). In the capitalist regime, on the contrary, the worker is "free" and the labor force is separated from the means of production (mechanization, heavy industry). Hence different requirements and possibilities for the relations of property and exploitation emerge.

In feudalism, because of the structural unity between the worker and means of production, an artificial distinction must be made between the "necessary" labor process (devoted to the reproduction of the labor force) and the process of surplus labor (producing surplus labor for the non-worker). Consequently, a power which is not

[13] The two major works by Marx on which Poulantzas bases this discussion are Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations (ed. E.J. Hobsbawm, London, 1964) and Capital, v. III, ch. XXXVI

directly economic--a political power--is required to impose this separation on the producers: "Thus surplus labor for the nominal owner of the land can only be extorted from them by other than economic pressure whatever the form assumed may be."[14] In other words, the relations of property (not in the legalistic sense of course, but in the marxian meaning of extraction of surplus labor-surplus value) have to separate something that is "naturally" non-separated and need therefore the direct support of an "external" (i.e., non-economic) political coercion. This accounts for the non-autonomy between the economic and the political instances.

It is thus a particular relationship between economic elements--i.e. the relationship between forces of production (the non-separation of the worker and the means of production) and the relations of production (the separation of the worker and the product of his work)--that determines in the feudal mode of production:

a) the intimate, non-autonomous relationship between political and economic instance, as the latter cannot go on "by itself," within the purely economic region, but needs "external" intervention by the political, an intervention which is essential for the extraction of surplus value;

b) the dominant role of the political over the economic instance, since, for these economic relations to exist, they have to be reproduced as relations of personal subjugation by political means.

In the capitalist mode of production, on the other hand, the worker is separated from the means of production; there is "a term by term coincidence of the labor process and the process of producing

[14] From Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, cited in Althusser (1970:221)

value" and surplus value "goes by itself to the governing classes without it being necessary to resort to the direct intervention of extra-economic pressure;"[15] The transformation of the free worker into an element of the economic capital, of labor into a commodity, from the very beginning, with no need for coercion but through the purely economic mechanisms of the labor market and wage, gives the economic instance an autonomous, self-sufficient functioning.

Again, it is a relationship between economic elements, i.e., the relationship between production process (separation) and the property or exploitation process (separation), that determines:

a) the specific autonomy of the political instance from the economic;
b) the dominant role, besides the determination in the last instance, of the economic instance that is able to carry out and reproduce the production of surplus value by itself.

Of course, the mode of production, as a specific combination of instances according to the ~~production~~ (production and) functional needs of the property relationship, is a "formal-abstract" object. In reality, only the social formation exists concretely, consisting of a peculiar, empirical and asymmetrical combination of several modes of production (e.g., in Bismark's Germany, the specific combination of patriarchal, feudal and capitalist modes of production). The forms of articulation and dominance in the social formation, even though complicated, will basically be those of the dominant mode of production (e.g. usually the economic is the dominant instance in a social formation where the capitalist mode of production is the dominant mode).[16]

[15] Ibid.

[16] There is a certain circularity in Poulantzas' reasoning here which stems from the lack of specification of independent criteria for determining what mode of production is in fact dominant in a social (cont)

3.2.2 General Function and Specific Modalities of the State in a Capitalist Social Formation.

In this perspective, the role of the political structure--the State--in a capitalist formation will not be the extortion of surplus value, but the integration of those conflictual features that such extortion brings about, both in the capitalist mode of production itself (class polarization and struggle) and in the capitalist social formation (contradictions which result from the overlapping of different modes of production).[17] The Capitalist State is then defined as "the factor of unity of a social formation." Providing unity and integration in an unstable equilibrium situation is the general political function of the Capitalist State, a function that the economy calls for but cannot provide by itself.

This general political function of the Capitalist State, continues Poulantzas, has its own specific modalities--techno-economic, ideological and political in the strict sense--according to the instances where such general function of political integration is required (e.g. education is an ideological modality; examples of techno-economic modality are public works, increasing productivity and the juridical system regulating exchange processes, etc.). Poulantzas makes an interesting attempt to systematically link the dominance

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(16 cont.) formation. He postulates that the forms of articulation of the instances of a social formation will tend to be those of the dominant mode of production, but the only criteria he gives for which mode is dominant are the forms of articulation of instances in the social formation. This kind of circularity--which occurs in several other contexts in Poulantzas' analysis--is one of the important weaknesses in his exposition.

[17] In more recent writings, Poulantzas and Althusser have no longer restricted the concept of "State" to the political instance, but have reconceptualized it as a complex system that is composed of both repressive (i.e., political) and ideological apparatuses. The meaning of this reconceptualization will be made clear in section 5.2 below.

or non-dominance of the political instance at the societal level with the dominance of one or another of the modalities (or "sub-instances") at the State level. The dominant role of the economic modality within the general political function of the State would indicate that, in the general articulation of instances in the social formation, the political instance has the dominant role: i.e., it is necessary that the State intervene into the economic activity (e.g., asian mode of production, or modes of production superceding liberal capitalism, such as State monopoly capital). Where on the contrary the political modality prevails, the economy can go on by itself without State intervention, etc., and this in turn shows that the economic instance is likely to have the dominant role (besides of course the determination in the last instance, e.g., in liberal capitalism).

Against the social-democratic theories distinguishing in the Welfare State a class-biased "political" function from a "good" or at least neutral "social" function, Poulantzas insists that all these modalities are aspects of the same general political function of the Capitalist State, insofar as they are intended to provide unity and integration to the capitalist formation.

3.2.3 Structural Traits of the Capitalist State

After showing <u>what</u> general function and specific modalities have to be performed by the State, Poulantzas tries to explain <u>how</u> the specific structure of the modern State carries out such functions. The fundamental and distinctive trait of the Capitalist State is seen in the fact that its subjects are not defined as agents of production distributed in social classes, but as "citizens," "abstract individuals," "political persons."[18] From this basic distortion of class relations

[18]Poulantzas defines social classes as "the global effect (cont)

generated by the politico-ideological "superstructures," several formal consequences derive in the structure of the State:

a) <u>The popular-classless legitimacy of the State</u>. While pre-capitalist States publicly institutionalized class subordination in a system of caste and statuses,[19] the capitalist State has no explicit presence of class domination in its institutions. Instead, its very foundation is the "general will" of a people of formally free and equal citizens-individuals, whose political participation manifests itself in the universal vote. The State is the embodiment of such general will and universal interest.

b) <u>The universalistic-normative character of the juridical system</u>. While the feudal rule was grounded on a variety of particularistic privileges, modern law consists of abstract-formal norms grounded on the universal principles of freedom and equality. No concession is formally made to the particularistic interests of any given group.

c) <u>Relative autonomy and specific unity of the State</u>. The above traits lead to a certain emancipation of the State apparatus from direct and immediate control and pressure by social classes--against the vulgar-marxist conception of the State as the mere instrument of the ruling class; and to an institutional unity that prevents public institutions from being fractioned and divided among social classes or interest groups as a plurality of economico-political power centers (as was the case in feudal pre-capitalist States where the economy and the political were not autonomous).

[19]See, for instance, G. Balandier, <u>Political Anthropology</u> (Vintage:1970), ch. 6

(18 cont.)of the structures on the sphere of social relations." The central point which he stresses is that classes should not be defined merely as the effects of the economic instance alone, but the distinctive combination of instances that constitute a mode of production and a social formation.

3.2.4 Functional Consequences on the Subordinate Classes: The Isolation Effect

The transformation by the politico-ideological "superstructures" of agents of production (social classes) into juridico-political subjects has the major effect of concealing to the agents of production their class relations and their possible political organization, and makes them live in fragmented and atomistic relations. This is what the classics of marxism mean when they contrast the economic struggle ("individual," "local," "partial," "isolated," etc.) with the political struggle characterized by class unity.

Such "isolation" and "privatization" of the agents of production by non-economic instances (ideologico-political superstructures) is the specific way of counteracting the socialization and class unity increasingly induced by the economic instance (mechanization, heavy industry, etc.), by creating instead private economic competition on one hand, and formal-abstract unity and political representation on the other. Thus the Capitalist State becomes the "unity" (the representative of the "general interest") of those isolated, privately competing, and abstract individuals that the State itself (or, in general, the politico-ideological superstructure) has generated.[20] "The State," Poulantzas writes (v.1, p. 140), "represents the unity of an isolation that is mostly the effect of the State itself."

[20] Poulantzas shows at length, here, that in the classical theory of political democracy, from Montesquieu through recent authors such as Burdeau, Leibolz and Eisemann, it is the classless concept of "the people," together with that of sovereignty originated by the Absolutist State, which legitimates the centralized organization of the Capitalist State and the corresponding decline of local powers.

The prevention of the political organization of subordinate classes is the specific function of the capitalist State, the function that largely accounts for its specific structure and forms of legitimacy. This political disorganization is accomplished by:

a) isolating the agents of production from the class to which they belong;

b) formally representing the isolated individuals in the abstract body of the "nation" and the people."

Pre-capitalist States limited the political organization of the subordinate classes by the institutional establishment of the class of slaves, serfs, etc., in a public statute, i.e., by overtly institutionalizing the class domination. The Capitalist State exercises this function by a more sophisticated mechanism involving ideology and political representation, ie., by the mystification of social differences instead of their justification by "religion," "nature," etc.[21]

3.2.5 Functional Consequences on the Dominant Classes: Power Coalition and Hegemony

As we have seen, the general political function of the State is to maintain the unity of the capitalist social formation, a formation that structurally (i.e., at the very level of the combination of the economic elements) implies a separation between worker and non-worker and the domination of the latter over the former. We have also seen the universalistic structure and legitimacy that the State has to

[21] Rather than the non-ideological character of pre-capitalist States, what is here implied is the difference in the type of ideology involved: moral-philosophical in the slave society, religious in feudal society, and juridico-political in bourgeois society (what Weber associated with the rise of a cast of specialized jurists). The specific character of bourgeois ideology is that it aims at a) eliciting active consensus by the ruled classes and b) presenting itself as a scientific technique as opposed to utopias, participation in the sacred, etc. By thus concealing its ideological character, it may be defined as "second degree ideology." (On this point see Habermas, Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, p. 100)

assume in order to fragment and neutralize the disruptive tension inbuilt in the system (i.e., the political organization of the workers).

Such universalistic structure and legitimacy of the State implies that the political domination of the economically dominant class has to shape itself in the form of universalistic, general interests. The interests of the ruling class have to appear as the general interests of the people and the nation, the only source of legitimacy for the modern political instance.

The ability of a class to operate such universalization of its own interests marks its passage from economic to political domination. This political ability of the bourgeoisie, that historicist marxism (especially Lukacs and Gramsci) associated with the economically ascending parabola of the bourgeois class and with the eventual fixation by this class of a set of instrumental political institutions (Parliament, State apparatus, etc.), is questioned by Poulantzas.

By a thorough analysis of Marx's political writings and a comparative examination of the bourgeois revolutions in Western Europe, Poulantzas argues that the bourgeois class has never exhibited any unified, naturally hegemonic political consciousness. Quite the contrary, the bourgeoisie is a structurally fractioned class, a class whose internal divisions (commercial, industrial and finance fraction, let alone landed property) are rooted in the very constitution of capital and the extended reproduction process.[22] This internal fractioning of the bourgeoisie is intensified by the greedy pursuit of individual, private interests even within a given class fraction. In addition, the presence of other classes (generated by other modes of production coexisting in the same social formation, e.g., landed aristocracy and petty producers) which have been drawn onto the

[22]See especially Capital, Vol. III, parts IV and V.

the political scene by the universal franchise, and, of course, the ascent and political struggle of the working class, have made it even more difficult for the bourgeoisie to rule through its own political parties. It is the relative autonomy of the State, Poulantzas argues, that has replaced direct rule by the dominant class, and which has made the political domination of the bourgeoisie possible in spite of its pervasive incapacity to rule directly.

Because of the heterogeneity of the bourgeois class, and the existence of other "dominant" classes during periods of transition, Poulantzas rejects the old dichotomous vulgar-marxist imagery of one simple ruling class. Instead we have a power coalition (le bloc au pouvoir) consisting of several class fractions or classes. Consistent with the structuralist-marxist paradigm, the power coalition also contains one class with a "dominant role" (hegemony) over the others. Rather than explain this dominance simply as a conformity to the totality-with-dominance schema, Poulantzas tries to give a more complex explanation in terms of the structural unity of the State. He argues that the particular unity of the institutionalised power of the capitalist state makes it impossible for state power to be divided among a plurality of classes or fractions, each controlling a "part" of the state.[23] There must always be, therefore, one hegemonic

[23]According to Poulantzas, the separation of powers (legislative, executive, judicial) does not contradict the unity of the power of the State, because, again, there is always one dominant powe (at the present time the executive) in which the real legitimacy and basis of the hegemonic class are grounded. The dominance of one of the "powers" over the others reflects, according to Poulantzas, different forms of legitimacy (more or less restricted to parliamentary publicity, political parties, information, etc.; more or less based on charisma and personalization of power, etc.). All of these varied forms of legitimacy occur within the same basic type of Capitalist State. In particular, the present dominance of the executive correspondes to the difficulty that the monopolistic fraction (hegemonic) has in organizing consensus in the legislature and to the general decline in importance of bourgeois political parties. This decline in bourgeois representative institutions (legislatures, parties) is the result of an internal problem of legitimacy rather than any risk of the take-over of these institutions by the non-dominant classes.

class or class fraction that ultimately holds the State power in its unity. The interests of the other classes of the coalition are represented in the State insofar as they are "crystalized" by the hegemonic class.[24]

The crystalization by one class or class fraction of the interests of the whole power coalition is not due to any "more advanced" class consciousness, "totalizing" power and the like, such as the historicist analyses implied. According to the specificity and asymmetry of instances in a given social formation, power can be "decentrated" among various classes. So one class may be economically dominant without necessarily being politically dominant (e.g., bourgeoisie in pre-1688 England, when aristocracy held its political power in spite of the 1640 revolution), or ideologically dominant without being economically or politically dominant, etc. One class may have the power to realize its economic interests (e.g., tradeunionism) without the power to realize its political interests; or it may have political power without "corresponding" ideological power (e.g., the effective functioning of "illegitimate" political structures) and so forth.

The dominant class is thus the class which is dominant at that level or instance that is dominant in a given social formation. This class' power in the "dominant" instance is functionally necessary for

[24] The concepts "hegemony" and "power coalition" both lack any real concreteness in Poulantzas' analysis. He never provides any substantive criteria for knowing which classes or class fractions belong to the coalition and which are hegemonic within it. They become abstract categories merely identifying the class interests served by the State, rather than concrete categories identifying social forces which impinge on the State. If the concepts of hegemony or the power coalition are actually to explain anything, there have to be some theoretical criteria for them which are independent of what they are trying to explain (i.e., the class interests served by the state). The absence of such criteria leads to the kind of circularity mentioned in footnote 16 above.

the other classes of the coalition to hold whatever power they have in the other levels; their interests are thus "crystalized" by the interest of the hegemonic class.[25]

3.2.6 The Hegemonic Operation via the State

It is important to stress the structural, non-subjective quality of the factors for hegemony. They are:

a) the specific, hierarchical combination of instances in a given formation (functionally dependent on the combination of the economic elements--worker, means and non-worker). This hierarchical combination produces the "dominant" instance that in turn is the criterion for the "dominant power," i.e., the hegemony of one class or fraction over the others.

b) the institutional unity and autonomy of the state which means that the State will represent the one class or class fraction--the one political standpoint--that best represents the unity of the capitalist formation the State has to maintain. Such a standpoint is obviously that of the class which is dominant in the dominant instance.

These structural reasons for the hegemony, together with the "objective" meaning of the word "interest,"[26] are intended to reverse

[25] To illustrate the hegemonic role within the power coalition, Poulantzas uses the historical example of the role of the financial bourgeoisie in the French power coalition--finance, industrial capital and landlords--since Louis Philippe. This role in the English and German case was held by commercial and industrial capital respectively in the 19th century. A current case of hegemonic fraction is the monopolistic fraction in which industrial and finance capital--at least according to certain authors--are virtually indistinct. (See, for instance, Paul Sweezy, "Monopoly Capital and Corporations," Monthly Review, Nov. 1971)

[26] Poulantzas of course draws a sharp distinction between objective and subjective interests. The objective class interests are defined as "the scope of possible action" of a class, which is determined by:

(cont)

the traditional explanation of the historicist marxism, whereby it was an already politically unified and conscious class which shaped the State apparatus and used it as a passive instrument. Here the order is reversed. It is the State, as system-maintenance function, that takes over the political interests of the bourgeois class or fractions which, left to themselves, would pursue their merely economic interests and raise internal and external conflict. "To a certain extent, the Capitalist State takes over the political interest of the bourgeoisie and pursues by itself the political function of hegemony that the bourgeoisie cannot fulfill." (Vol. II, 112) And again:

> The State...is the factor of political unification of the power coalition under the aegis of the hegemonic class or fraction. In other words, it is the factor of hegemonic organization of this class or fraction, so that its specific interests can crystallize those of the other classes or fractions of the coalition...Strictly speaking, it is not a function of the State in front of classes already organized politically, an arbitration among already constituted parties. Everything happens as if the State permanently holds the role of political organizer of the power coalition. In fact, the State takes over such function to the extent that the political parties of the bourgeois class and fractions can fulfill no autonomous organizational function comparable to that of the working class parties." (Vol. II, 129)

The hegemony of a class is thus made possible by the State and is exercised through the State, notwithstanding this class' political consciousness. This critical distance of the State from the empirical

(26 cont.)a) the structural position of the class, and b) the power of other classes. It is somehow close to what Weber and later Lukacs called the "possible consciousness" of a class (zugerechneter Bewusstsein) and what more recently D. Wrong conceptualized as potential as opposed to actual power ("Some Problems in Defining Social Power," in Dreitzel, ed. Recent Sociology, 1969). Poulantzas stresses that these objective class interests do not necessarily coincide with their ideological representation by the class-subject or other classes. Power, says Poulantzas, is the capacity of realizing the objective, not the ideologically represented interests of a class. In the case of the working class, for instance, the subjectively represented interests may be much narrower than the objectively feasible interests, to the extent that working class organizations are content with trade-unionistic self-defense when more advanced strategies (e.g., self-determination) are possible. In this case, working class leaders will delude themselves that they have power--relative to the accomplishment (cont)

push and pull of the various classes and their relative consciousness and economic interests, is the precondition for the hegemonic operation: i.e., economic concessions to certain subordinate classes, in possible opposition with the short term economic interests of the ruling classes, but in full compatibility with the latter's political domination.

This hegemonic operation, involving the possibility of real economic concessions to subordinate classes in order to politically disorganize them and retain political domination, was not possible in social formations where an economic grievance (e.g., abrogation of a status, of a privilege) was at the same time a political grievance, one that questioned the system of "public powers." But the hegemonic operation is clearly possible in the capitalist formation characterized by the autonomy of the political from the economic instance and by a structure--the State--that embodies such autonomy.

It is possible, in this way, to think of economic concessions or other social "sacrifices" imposed by the State on the dominant class, in order to save the latter's long run political interests (i.e., maintain the system). This is the case of many "social policies" of the modern State. They are implicitly present in Marx's Capital, especially the pages of the first volume on factory legislation;[27]

(26 cont.) of these ideologically represented interests--while they actually do not have power--relative to the objective interests and possibilities of their structural position in the economy, etc.--and are thereby "mystified."

[27] In this particular case, however, it was a "false" sacrifice which in fact corresponded to the limited interest of capital. (See P. Sweezey, The Theory of Capitalist Development, 1962, part II.) The basic point that Poulantzas stresses is that it is possible to make real concessions to the subordinate classes which do not have immediate economic returns to the ruling class.

they are more explicitly mentioned in Class Struggle in France when Marx refers to the February Republic as one that had to present itself as "a republic surrounded by social institutions," and in the 18th Brumaire on the "social cesarism" of Louis Bonaparte. These social policies can be seen, more recently, in many functions of the Welfare State. Even though these social functions have evolved into a policy of public investments functional to the absorption of the surplus of monopolistic production, and therefore functional to the economic interests of the monopolistic fraction, they were historically imposed on the ruling classes by the State, under the pressure of the subordinate classes, and their initial implementation often raised hostility between State and ruling classes. In the long run, however, such social compromises and sacrifices by this or that fraction of the dominant classes are necessary to realize their political interests and to drain off the disruptive features implicit in the pursuit of merely economic interests: i.e., to maintain the existing social formation or mode of production.

Concluded Poulantzas: "The particular relationship between State and hegemonic class or fraction does not derive from a direct dependence of the State apparatus on this or that class or fraction; on the contrary, it is grounded on the first's autonomy from the latter and from the whole power coalition." (Vol. II, 127)

3.2.7 Poulantzas' Theory of the State and Traditional Marxism

A few remarks are due on the originality of Poulantzas' analysis with respect to the traditional marxist theory of the State.

1. Integration vs. Repression. The focus of Poulantzas' analysis is on the integrative, system-maintenance features of the State,

rather than on those repressive features that the traditional marxist approach emphasized (e.g., Lenin's The State and Revolution). The emphasis on the repressive role of the State had its own historical merits,[28] but is theoretically inadequate to account for the internal solidification of the capitalist world that followed: trusts economy, monopolistic development, integration of the bulk of the working class in large reformistic parties, etc.

What was needed was a theoretical elaboration of the notions of integration, political representation, manipulated consensus besides repressed dissent, etc. Poulantzas' theory represents an important attempt to elaborate this underdeveloped aspect of marxist theory, in a significant convergence with those attempts in non-marxist political theory to complement the Weberian definition of State as "monopoly of legitimate force" with system-maintenance functions.[29]

2. Class-Society State vs. Class State. The base for the integrative features of the State is derived from the functional needs of a given combination of instances (i.e., neutralizing the two disruptive by-products of the economic process: concentration and political organization of the workers, internal fractioning of the bourgeoisie) rather than philosophically deducted from the "Weltanschaung" of one

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[28] The merits of Lenin's analysis have been largely interpreted in terms of an anti-bureaucratic polemic against social-democratic parliamentary opportunism, at a time when the perspective of a total European Revolution seemed very reasonable and the Russian overthrow was considered the first, and to some extent unforeseen, episode of a long series. See R. Miliband, "The State and Revolution," Monthly Review, April 1970.

[29] See, for instance, Apter, "A Comparative Method for the Study of Politics," in Eulau, ed., Political Behavior, p. 87ff; Almond and Coleman, The Politics of Developing Areas, 1960, p. 12ff; and the cybernetic models of D. Easton, A Framework for Political Analysis and K. Deutsch, The Nerves of Government.

overall dominant class.

This latter approach, in terms of true/false, anticipated/delayed class consciousness (Lukacs, Gramsci) is of course more sophisticated than the leninist approach, in that it accounts for the integrative features of the State, but still is theoretically inadequate for several reasons:

a) it retains the vulgar-marxist notion of the State as a passive instrument of the will of one class, thus offering little explanation for internal conflicts often observed between State and ruling classes.

b) in the notion of the absolute cumulation of power in the hands of one ruling class, it assumes a collinear variation of the various dimensions of power (political, economic, ideological) that in fact have a relative autonomy. This in turn creates a misrepresentation of the "net" position of a class along these different instances-dimensions; for instance, the common presumption of absolute power and integration, or absolute decline and disintegration, so frequent in unsophisticated marxist analyses on the ruling class.

c) when such collinearity of different instances-dimensions is not held, class consciousness is used as a residual variable without systematic relation with other "core" variables: i.e., it accounts for the residual variation left unexplained by the "core" economic variables so sacrificing their theoretical power and making the theory non-falsifiable.[30]

Poulantzas' merit is the attempt to resolve historical variation in the combination of a few equally "objective" variables, where the

[30] For this remark on the marxist use of consciousness as a residual category, see N.J. Smelser, Sociological Theory: A Contemporary View, 1971, p. 69

role of dominance is assigned by functional criteria. The State is the instance that maintains the cohesion, and reproduces the non-economic conditions of production, of a given combination (social formation), by maintaining in the long run (i.e., the concept of political vs. economic interests) those forms of domination on which the combination is built. The result, as Poulantzas epitomizes, "is not the State of one class, but the State of a society divided into social classes." (Vol. II, 10) This conception of the State as the factor of a "moving stable equilibrium model" does not dismiss the basic marxian achievement, i.e., the power of a class derived from its position in a given mode of production; but gives it articulations and analytical possibilities that most traditional marxist formulations did not explicate (e.g., distinction between economic, ideological, political power; conflict between State and dominant classes or fractions; economic losses that can be political gains, etc.).

It seems to us that both the theoretical insistence on integration and the systemic frame of reference in which it is developed, i.e., the innovative features of this analysis, are the result of the strongly functionalist inclination of Poulantzas' marxism.

APPENDIX TO SECTION 3:

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF POULANTZAS' THEORY OF THE STATE

It is possible, using the causal diagrams presented by Stinchcombe (1968) to construct a general symbolic representation of the overall structure of Poulantzas' theory. This will be useful for our later comparison with the comparable parts of Parsons' theory of politics. We will first present separately each of the components of the total diagram, indicating the sections in the paper which discuss the component, and then present the entire map of Poulantzas' model.

I. Components of the model

1. Economic Determination in the last instance.

FIGURE 2.

discussed in section: 3.1.2; 3.2.1

explanation: The particular combination of the three invariant elements in the economic instance — worker, means of production, and nonworker — determine the overall articulation of structural instances in the mode of production. This combination sets the limits of variation that are possible for the structural instances in order for that combination to be maintained. [Note: there is a certain latent teleology in this formulation which Poulantzas never effectively eliminates].

2. Mode of Production and Class Struggle

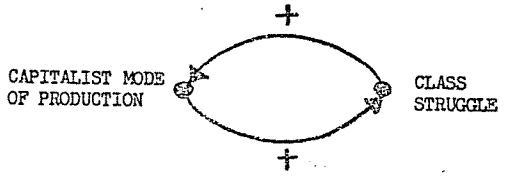

FIGURE 3.

explanation: Classes are defined as the effect of the structures of a social formation on the social relations of the formation. Class struggle naturally intensifies along a variety of dimensions (economic, political, ideological; dominant vs. subjugated classes; fractions vs. fractions; etc) in the course of the development of capitalism, and this struggle in turn becomes a causal force for changing the structures of the mode of production, eventually in a revolutionary way. (Class struggle is not, however, the only "dynamic" element in the system -- to presume that it is is part of the historicist deformation of marxism according to the structuralist marxists). This "explosive loop" constitutes one aspect of the central contradiction of the capitalist system.

3. The General Function of the State

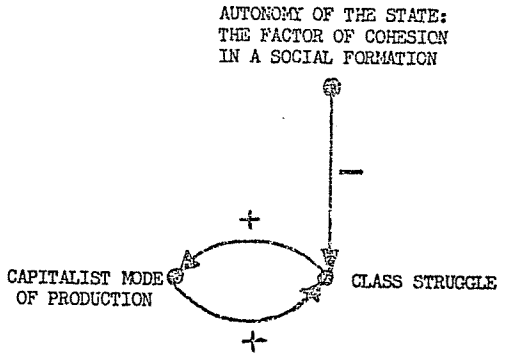

FIGURE 4.

discussed in section: 3.2.2 and 3.2.3

explanation: The most general function of the state is to act as the "factor of unity of a social formation." It is thus a negative force counteracting class struggle and as a result preventing (if the State is effective) or dampening the explosive quality of the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production.

4. Class Struggle: political effects

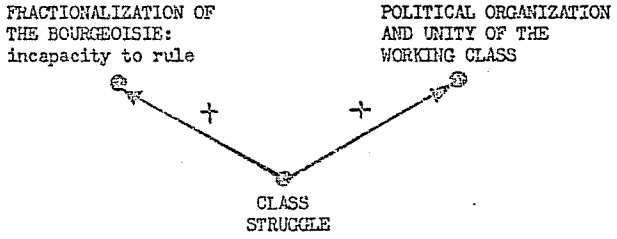

FIGURE 5

discussed in sections 3.2.2; 3.2.5

explanation: Class struggle has two central political effects: 1) It leads to the political organization and solidarity of the working class. Although Poulantzas strongly rejects the historicist restriction of "true" class struggle to the political level, he does regard the political forms of class unity and class struggle as crucial. 2) It leads to the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to rule directly on its own behalf because of fractionalization, competition, etc.

5. The Autonomous State and the Working Class: Isolation

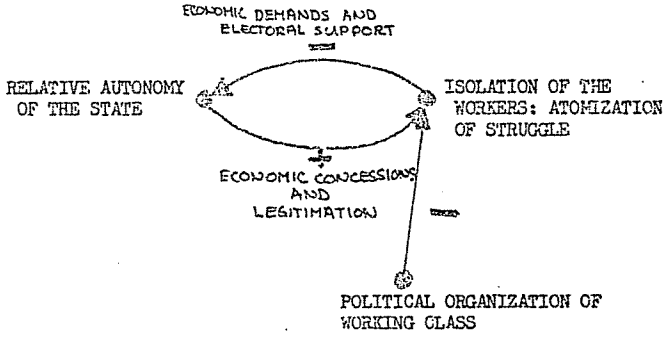

FIGURE 6

discussed in section 3.2.4

explanation: The relatively autonomous state produces economic concessions and an ideology of "neutrality," "classlessness," etc.which serve to isolate

and atomize the workers, thus at least partially counteracting the "tension" from their political organization. To the extent that this effort at isolation does not neutralize political struggle, the the working class makes "demands" on the state, which increase the production of isolating factors.

6. The Autonomous State and the Dominant Classes: Hegemony

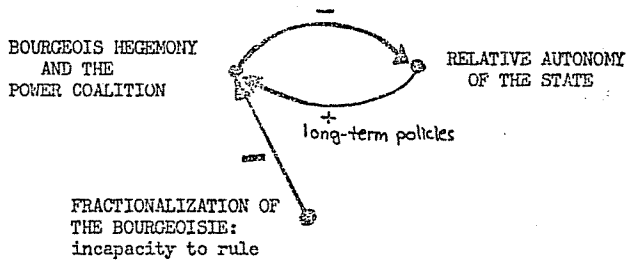

FIGURE 7

discussed in sections 3.2.5; 3.2.6

explanation: The relative autonomous state produces long-term policies which serve the "objective interests" of the dominant classes and thus counteract the "tension" caused by their essential incapacity to rule. As this inability to rule increases, the dominant classes — presumably through their organization as a power coalition under the hegemonic direction of one class or fraction — increase the selective pressure on the State to rule autonomously on their behalf. [note: there is practically no specification of this particular process of selection in Poulantzas' writing].

II. THE COMPLETE MODEL:

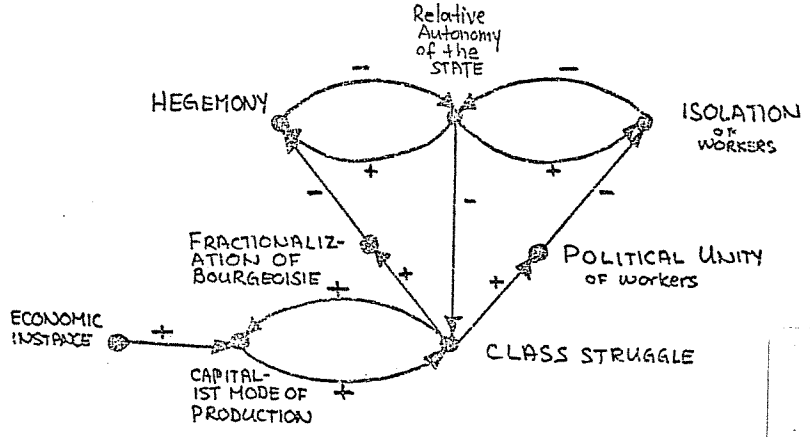

FIGURE 8

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