

# **NICOS POULANTZAS**

## **Marxist Theory and Political Strategy**

**Bob Jessop**



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# Preface

The idea for this book first took shape in early 1979 and it has been some five years in coming to fruition. I have long been interested in theories of the capitalist state in general and the work of Poulantzas in particular. I was able to meet Poulantzas for the first time in April 1979 when he addressed the annual conference of the British Sociological Association at Coventry. There I participated in one of his final interviews (see 1979I.a) and mentioned that I had been approached to write a book on his life and work. With characteristic modesty Nicos thought that it was overdoing things to devote a book to such matters but a month later he wrote saying that he had changed his mind. He declared that no author was completely contemporary with his own intellectual development and that his own work was often hard to understand. Someone who could stand back from it and write a critical interpretation would probably discover hidden aspects and implications and draw out new lines of investigation. Nicos added that he would like to reach a wider audience and hoped that my critique would be less difficult than his own work. Thus encouraged I corresponded further with Poulantzas and we agreed that I should undertake a study with full critical freedom – this was in no way to be an 'official' or 'authorised' account and no punches were to be pulled. In turn Poulantzas promised every co-operation and offered to reply to any criticisms in an interview to be included at the end of the book.

Some months afterwards, Poulantzas took his own life. The hopes of many that he would continue to make an important contribution to theoretical and political debate on the left were shattered. But his example as a committed intellectual and political comrade still lives on. Although I was unable to proceed with this work as we had planned, I have received much help from Nicos's wife, Annie Leclerc, and his father, Aristides Poulantzas. Many colleagues, friends, and comrades of Poulantzas also gave much support and

encouragement. In particular I would like to thank Christine Buci-Glucksmann and Constantine Tsoucalas for their generous help and support. I also gained much from interviews and discussions with Etienne Balibar, Pierre Birnbaum, Isidoro Cheresky, Georgos Dimitrarkis, Angelos Elefantis, Emilio de Ipola, Kostas Filinis, Nicos Mouzelis, Theodoros Pangalos, Goran Therborn, and Henri Weber. Nonetheless, given the significant theoretical and political differences among them as well as the likely divergences between their views and mine, I take full responsibility for the interpretations and arguments presented below.

Choosing an approach to a theoretical and political work which is as rich and complex as that of Poulantzas is always difficult. As my studies proceeded it became increasingly apparent that many interpretations of his work were fundamentally misleading. Accordingly this book concentrates on presenting as full and accurate an account of Poulantzas's theoretical and political development as possible. No account can really be theoretically and political innocent, of course; and I do write from the viewpoint of one who believes that Poulantzas has made a substantial contribution to postwar Marxist theory and whose own work has clearly been influenced by his various studies. It is for this reason that the substantive chapters first offer a reconstruction of Poulantzas's views and then present my own criticisms of some, if not all, of these same arguments. Hopefully readers can then form their own judgements independently of my commentaries and take the opportunity to disagree with my criticisms.

The need to set the record straight explains why I have not dealt at length with the many commentaries and criticisms of Poulantzas's work or the numerous studies which claim to apply it to specific case studies. For the account presented here is often at odds with the received wisdom about Poulantzas's work. It would have extended this book inordinately to have replied to each and every critique and I have dealt only with criticisms which help to illuminate the present study. This means that I ignored the most famous critique of all. For the debate between Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas is fundamentally misleading about the theoretical issues and political implications at stake - largely because of the complicity between both protagonists in overstating the structuralist character of Poulantzas's arguments. Hopefully this claim will be justified in my comments on *Political Power and Social Classes* in subsequent chapters. Similar considerations apply to many other commentaries and I hope that, if the current work puts an end to some lines of criticism, it will

stimulate many others. Poulantzas himself certainly welcomed ideological contestation as a key to theoretical and political progress and one can only commend this stance.

In writing this book I have received much support and advice from my own friends and colleagues as well as those of Poulantzas. For help with the documentation I would particularly like to thank Petros Stamoulis for his unstinting work in translating many articles, journalism, and interviews of Poulantzas from the Greek and for tracing some of them; George Anagnostopoulos and Grigoris Ananiadis for tracing and translating other pieces by Poulantzas; Annie Leclerc for lending me her archive of Nicos's French articles, journalism, and interviews; Christine Buci-Glucksmann and Isidoro Cheresky for providing two worthwhile articles at a late stage; and Noelle Burgi for chasing references in France when all else seemed to have failed. For help with the argumentation I would particularly like to acknowledge the many comments received from Simon Bromley, who suggested -- within one week -- both how to start and to end the book; Steven Kennedy, who made several valuable comments on the penultimate draft and whose editorial patience I hope to have rewarded with the final version; and Ruthy Laniado, whose questioning sharpened the ideas on strategy in the concluding chapter. I have also gained much from discussions with Grigoris Ananiadis, Kevin Bonnett, Anthony Giddens, Joachim Hirsch, Ernesto Laclau, Tom Ling, Harold Wolpe, and Tony Woodiwiss. The students on my courses at the University of Essex probably also heard rather more about Poulantzas than they would always have liked and gave me the opportunity to try out ideas. For other kindnesses which have helped to sustain me during this study I would like to thank Kevin Bonnett for his friendship and encouragement over many years; Petros and Angeliki Stamoulis for guiding me round Athens, conducting the Greek interviews, and offering my family their parents' hospitality; Grigoris Ananiadis and Blanca Muniz for many conversations about the Greek political conjuncture and much else besides; Noelle Burgi for hospitality whilst I was conducting interviews in Paris and Jean-Yves Pôtel for sharing her burden; and, last but not least, Suzanne Bailey for helping to see the book to completion at a crucial stage in my life.

Finally I would like to thank New Left Books and New Left Review for permission to quote from the English translations of Poulantzas's books and his critical response to Miliband and Laclau (1976a)

Pamela and Julian Jessop helped with the preparation of the final typescript and provide a constant source of inspiration. It is to them that I dedicate this book on the fifth anniversary of Poulantzas's death and in the hope that they will one day see the better future for which he struggled.

**Bob Jessop,**

**Cambridge,  
3 October, 1984**

# Abbreviation

NOTE: Throughout text italicised abbreviations always refer to book titles.

## Books by Poulantzas

<i>CCC</i>	<i>Classes in Contemporary Capitalism</i>
<i>CD</i>	<i>Crisis of the Dictatorships</i> (2nd edn)
<i>CDE</i>	<i>Crise de L'Etat</i>
<i>FD</i>	<i>Fascism and Dictatorship</i>
<i>NDC</i>	<i>Nature des Choses</i>
<i>PPSC</i>	<i>Political Power and Social Classes</i>
<i>RDN</i>	<i>Renaissance du Droit Nature/</i>
<i>RHA</i>	<i>Reperes hier et aujourd'hui</i>
<i>SPS</i>	<i>State, Power, Socialism</i>

## Other books

<i>CDR</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre, <i>Critique de Ia Raison Dialectique</i>
<i>DP</i>	Michel Foucault, <i>Discipline and Punish</i>
<i>HS</i>	Michel Foucault, <i>History of Sexuality</i>

## Other abbreviations

CERES	<i>Centre d'Etudes, de Recherche, et d'Education Socialistes</i>
CFDT	<i>Confédération française de travailleurs</i>
CMP	capitalist mode of production
CP	Communist party
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union

EADE	National Anti-Dictatorial Unity (Greek)
EDA	United Democratic Left (Greek)
ISA	ideological state apparatus
KKE	Greek Communist Party
KKE(I)	Greek Communist Party of the Interior
KPD	<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i>
PASOK	Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (Greek)
PCF	<i>Parti communiste français</i>
PCI	<i>Partito comunista Italiano</i>
PS	<i>Parti socialiste</i>
PSI	<i>Partito socialista Italiano</i>
PSU	<i>Parti socialiste unifié</i>
RSA	repressive state apparatus
SPD	<i>Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands</i>
TRPF	tendency of the rate of profit to fall

**Part I**

**Life and Early Works**

# 1

## **The Life and Times of Poulantzas**

Why Poulantzas? Why devote a lengthy book to a Greek sociologist whose intellectual production, never easy to read (let alone to understand), was limited to a mere fifteen years? Was not Poulantzas just one of the many Western Marxists of the postwar world? Was he not someone whose work was not only written in an impenetrable language but was also marred by a structuralist approach that has long been superseded? Was he not someone whose work remained at an abstract theoretical level completely devoid of any real political or strategic significance for the revolutionary movement to which he proclaimed his allegiance?

In each case the answer must be no. It is true that Poulantzas always adhered to a Western Marxist approach rather than subscribing to the Eastern Marxism of the Second and Third Internationals; but he also broke with Western Marxism in certain crucial respects. Anderson has suggested that the latter approach has been characterized not only by a concern with philosophical (especially methodological) issues but also with the problems of the superstructure (especially the cultural sphere). He also suggested that it has been divorced from the working-class movement and revolutionary practice. But, although Poulantzas was profoundly influenced by two of the leading philosophers of Western Marxism (Sartre and Althusser), he was not primarily a philosopher but a substantive theorist. Moreover, in contrast to other leading figures in Western Marxism, Poulantzas himself was not much interested in the cultural sphere (and certainly not for its own sake). Instead he concentrated on so-called superstructural phenomena much more closely tied to the alleged economic 'base': law and the state. If his language is difficult this is because it reflects (at least in part) the complexities of the problems with which he dealt. Moreover, although there were clear

structuralist aspects to his work, they became progressively less significant. And it is quite untrue that Poulantzas was unconcerned with concrete conjunctures and problems of political strategy. His theoretical studies of the most abstract determinations of the capitalist state were primarily a prelude to the strategic analysis of its concrete forms in specific regimes and situations. Indeed his work can only be adequately understood in relation to strategic questions of direct relevance to the Greek and French communist movements with which he so closely identified.

It would not be worth writing a book simply to set right a number of misconceptions about the work of Poulantzas. Many writers have been misunderstood; few deserve to have the misunderstandings corrected at book length. If I have devoted a book to Poulantzas it is for other reasons. For he was almost alone among the postwar Marxist theorists to address and answer the really crucial questions within Marxist politics. These can be seen by considering a recent critique of Western Marxism by one of its leading exponents.

Perry Anderson argues that Western Marxism has left unanswered the following key questions:

"what is the real nature and structure of *bourgeois democracy* as a type of State system, that has become the normal mode of capitalist power in the advanced countries? What type of *revolutionary strategy* is capable of overthrowing this historical form of State - so distinct from that of Tsarist Russia? What would be the institutional forms of *socialist democracy* in the West, beyond it? Marxist theory has scarcely touched these three subjects in their interconnection."  
(Anderson, 1976, p 103)

It is certainly true that Western Marxism has scarcely touched these three subjects in their interconnection. But these three subjects in their interconnection are precisely the issues which concerned Poulantzas throughout his tragically brief intellectual career. His first influential book (*PPSC*) was concerned with the real nature and structure of bourgeois democracy. His next book (*FD*) was concerned with the nature of Fascism and Nazism and the failure of the labour movement to check their rise or to overthrow them. In addition it was directly concerned with the distinction between the normal mode of capitalist power in the advanced countries and the various exceptional modes of bourgeois political domination. In his third

and fourth books (*CCC* and *CD*) Poulantzas considered the problems of revolutionary strategy in relation to the democratic and exceptional forms of the modern state in both advanced and dependent capitalist countries. And his final book (*SPS*) was concerned with the threat to bourgeois democracy in normal capitalist societies and the institutional forms of socialist democracy in the West. Not only did Poulantzas tackle each of the three subjects central to Marxist politics, he was also increasingly concerned to discuss them in their interconnection.

As if this were not enough, Poulantzas went beyond these concerns to other important issues in Marxist theory. Here again Anderson proves a useful guide. For the latter also mentioned four other failures of contemporary Marxism. It had not tackled the meaning and position of the nation as a social unit and its relationship to nationalism. It had ignored the contemporary laws of motion of capitalism as a mode of production and the forms of crisis specific to these laws. It had neglected the true configuration of imperialism as an international system of economic and political domination. And it had not confronted the nature of the bureaucratic states that arose in those backward countries where socialist revolutions had occurred. It would be too much to expect Poulantzas to have tackled all these complex issues in the same detail and with the same rigour that he devoted to the capitalist state in the West. But he did deal with each of these issues to some extent. In particular he was concerned with the true configuration of imperialism and with the nature of modern capitalism as a system of political economy. He also touched on the nation and nationalism, bureaucratic socialism and Stalinism. In short he was an unusual Western Marxist. His work therefore provides a crucial test case for the strengths as well as weaknesses of the Western Marxist tradition.

Indeed it is no exaggeration to claim that Poulantzas remains the single most important and influential Marxist theorist of the state and politics in the postwar period. This becomes especially clear when we consider his influence outside the anglophone world in such areas as Latin America and Scandinavia and in countries such as France, Portugal, Spain, and Greece. Poulantzas made major contributions to the analysis of the capitalist state, social classes, power relations, and socialist strategy. He was one of the first Western Marxists to turn away from philosophical and cultural concerns to tackle the big issues of Marxist state theory. Moreover, even where his contributions have

been superseded by more recent work, his studies have generally set the terms of debate and influenced other protagonists. If further progress is to be made in the area of state theory, it is best to stand on the shoulders of giants. Poulantzas still towers over other Marxist theorists of the state. We would be well advised to consider his work more closely.

Accordingly, in this study I consider Poulantzas's contribution to contemporary Marxist thought, his theoretical and political development, and problems that remain unanswered or unasked in his work. His premature death in 1979 meant that his work was unfinished and, indeed, in some respects, in uneasy transition. In certain areas it is difficult to establish unambiguously what his views on specific topics were at the time of his death: this is an issue that requires detailed consideration below. As a preliminary to a full account of his theoretical and political work, however, I present a brief account of his early life and political activities. The latter are particularly important because of the influence of Greek and French political realities on his changing theoretical and political views. But let us first consider his early life.

### **The Early Life of Poulantzas**

Nicos Poulantzas was born in Athens on the 21st September, 1936. His father, Aristides Poulantzas, was a professor of forensic graphology and a leading figure in the Greek legal establishment. His mother, Angeliki Kariophili, was a typical Greek matron and devoted herself to the care of her husband and children. From an early age Poulantzas showed a precocious intellect. His secondary schooling was undertaken at an experimental school, the Peiramaticon Gymnasium, attached to the University of Athens, and at the local Institut Français, where he studied for the Baccalaureate. He had already acquired fluency in the French tongue through private lessons. He graduated first among Greek students of the 'Bac' in his year and obtained 'very good' in both the general examination and the second, philosophical part.

Whilst still a student Poulantzas undertook amateur journalism for *Eleftheria* and *Radio Programme* and obtained a press card for his visit to the Salzburg festival in 1954. Among his earliest writings are a number of works on intellectuals, the Salzburg Festival, and the

achievements of Vienna in building municipal socialism. These studies not only reveal his enduring penchant for philosophical argument but also demonstrate an early admiration for socialism.

After completing his Baccalaureate in 1953, Poulantzas entered the School of Law at Athens University. He did so without taking the customary entrance examination. For, under the conditions governing the cultural exchange with France, his success in the 'Bac' enabled him to enter directly into the first year of the Law School. He went on to obtain an 'excellent' grade in the final examinations of the School in 1957. Paradoxically, having obtained his first degree, Poulantzas was then obliged to take his high school leaving certificate. For, without such a qualification (which he had by-passed in studying for the Baccalaureate), he would have been ineligible for a career in government or the law. Needless to say, he passed with flying colours.

It is worth noting here that the decision to study law was not motivated by a desire to practise law in later life. Instead Poulantzas read law because this was the only way, within the prestigious University of Athens, to continue his studies in philosophy and the social sciences. It is certainly true that the autonomous Panteios School offered a four-year degree in political science but it also lacked the academic prestige or social cache of the University of Athens. The lowly status of the Panteios and the prestige of the University of Athens were signs of the continuing underdevelopment and centralisation of the Greek higher education system in the 'fifties and 'sixties. Coupled with this were the marked authoritarianism and professorial patronage associated with the powerful system of 'chairs' and a concomitant lack of serious indigenous intellectual traditions.

Poulantzas himself noted in a contemporary essay the extent to which the youth of his time were disaffected with things Greek and looked abroad to foreign intellectual traditions and cultural movements for their inspiration. For Poulantzas and his peers France was an important reference point and he was particularly influenced by existentialism. The significance of this xenophilia for the Greek intelligentsia and the lack of opportunities for postgraduate research are reflected in the widespread Greek intellectual diaspora. Nonetheless the training that Nicos Poulantzas received in law had an enduring influence on his subsequent work and should not be ignored.

During his student years in Greece, Poulantzas was broadly sympathetic to socialism and Marxism – albeit largely on a philosophical

level. He was also involved in what would nowadays be called 'broad left' politics. In particular he belonged to a Greek student organisation that was loosely affiliated with the clandestine Greek Communist Party (KKE). He also participated in the activities of the only legal leftwing party existing at the time, namely, the United Democratic Left (EDA). This functioned primarily as a front organisation for the KKE. The principal issue around which Poulantzas agitated was the Cyprus question - a nationalist issue with broad popular support rather than a class issue as such - and he was arrested briefly for his participation in a demonstration on this question in 1955.

It was difficult for Poulantzas to develop a serious Marxist political orientation during his early years. This has origins in the general situation of Marxist theory at this time, the specific conditions affecting communism in Greece, and factors personal to Poulantzas and his social milieu. Much of the Marxist work undertaken during this period was indelibly marred by the stranglehold of Stalinism. It was only in the aftermath of Khrushchev's speech to the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 that the destalinisation of Marxist theory began on any significant scale.

Even so the KKE itself remained steadfastly committed to Stalinist views and this was one reason for its split in 1968. This Stalinism can be partly explained in terms of the official hostility to Marxist influences in Greece and the particularly strong links that existed between the party leadership and the Soviet bloc. This was linked to the conditions of clandestinity and illegality in which the KKE operated following the Civil War. This posed serious difficulties for the party in its political and educational work. More generally political life in Greece was polarised around the issues of the Civil War and this inhibited the development of normal party politics. It is only with the accession to power of the PASOK government that the ghost of the Civil War has finally been laid to rest. One indication of this political distortion is that when Poulantzas addressed a conference on Marxism as late as 1966 it was billed under the name of 'The Second Week of Contemporary Thought' rather than being directly identified as concerned with Marxism or Communism. Accordingly Marxist ideas often penetrated Greek intellectual life in the 'fifties at second-hand and through foreign channels. This was particularly clear in the vogue for existentialist approaches to Marxism to which Poulantzas also subscribed.

Besides these general factors influencing the poverty of Marxist theory in Greece, however, one should also add more personal factors. For it must also be admitted that Poulantzas did not give a high priority to political activities during his student years. He had many other commitments to academic, cultural, and romantic pursuits.

Upon graduation Poulantzas entered the Greek navy for his compulsory military service. Initially he worked within the translation service in Athens (thereby exploiting his fluency in French) but, following his absence without leave in the midst of romantic entanglements, he was transferred to duties in Crete. A law degree and military service were sufficient conditions for admission to the bar. Accordingly, after 3 years' military service, Nicos received his licence to practise law and registered with the Lawyers' Association of Athens. Although there is still (as of March 1984) a brassplate inscribed with his name and qualifications at his father's office in Athens, Poulantzas never actually practised law. For he set off almost immediately for Germany to undertake postgraduate work.

### **The First Years in France**

He had already spent time at Heidelberg on summer courses whilst a student at Athens. This reflected the importance of the German legal tradition in the Greek civil code and procedures and the influence of the Heidelberg school of legal idealism in Greek legal philosophy, legal education, and the legal profession. Now Poulantzas went to Munich to prepare a doctoral thesis. But, within a month of his arrival (in 1960), he wrote to his father that the influence of Nazi ideas was so strong that he could not stay in Germany. On this pretext he departed to study in Paris. Although he was a foreigner and faced fierce competition, he obtained a teaching assistantship (*charge de cours*) almost immediately at the University Pantheon-Sorbonne. He continued in this post until 1964, teaching the philosophy of law.

During this period Poulantzas prepared his first postgraduate thesis on 'The Rebirth of Natural Law in Germany after the Second World War'. Following the successful defense of this *mémoire de doctorat* in October 1961, he proceeded to complete his doctoral dissertation within three years. This was entitled 'The Nature of Things and Law: an essay on the dialectic of fact and value' and it consolidated a growing intellectual reputation. It represented an

ambitious and original attempt to synthesise existentialist, phenomenological, and Marxist analyses of law and to demonstrate the dialectical unity of fact and value as a basis for developing an axiology of legal values (for more detailed discussion, see below, chapter 2). These concerns grew out of his interests as an undergraduate but they were powerfully reinforced through his contacts in Paris.

Poulantzas had become fully involved in French (and not just Greek expatriate) intellectual circles and enjoyed particularly close relations with Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, and others associated with the influential journal, *Les Temps Modernes*. Indeed Simone de Beauvoir records in her memoirs how the editorial committee of *Les Temps Modernes* sought to introduce new blood into the magazine. In the autumn of 1964 a group came together comprising "the budding novelists, Annie Leclerc and Georges Perece; the poets Velter and Sautereau, who wrote in collaboration; a professor of law, Nicos Poulantzas, who was writing important works on political economy; a number of students, particularly some who were studying philosophy ... many of these (students - B.J.) were disciples of Althusser" (de Beauvoir, 1974, p 135). For the next two years Poulantzas contributed regularly to the magazine on topics in the field of law, politics, and philosophy. He also began contributing to the French legal journal, *Archives de Philosophie du Droit*. Later he served as a deputy editor of the *Archives* from 1966 to 1969. This was linked with his appointment as an *attaché de recherche* in the field of law at the Centre national de la Recherche Scientifique from 1966 to 1972.

It was also during this period that Poulantzas married the 'budding novelist', Annie Leclerc. They met for the first time in 1963 and were married on the 6th December, 1966. Their daughter, Ariane, was born on 2nd July, 1970.

Although his initial training was in law and legal philosophy, Nicos Poulantzas began to re-orient his studies towards the capitalist state as a whole and not merely its legal aspects. In developing his approach he drew not only on jurisprudence but also on French philosophy (initially the work of Sartre and Goldmann and, later, Althusser) and Italian Marxism (including the della Volpe school and, most significantly, the work of Gramsci and his postwar interpreters in the communist journal, *Critica Marxista*). He was also influenced by the work of British Marxists (especially through the journal, *New Left Review*, and two of its editors, Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson). This

transition period is reflected in the diverse publications of Poulantzas between 1965 and 1968. In addition to his studies on the philosophy of law and the juridico-political aspects of the state, Poulantzas also wrote on the structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser, the Gramscian notion of hegemony, the historicist Marxism of British state theorists such as Anderson and Nairn, and the relevance of Marxist theory to Greece (especially in the light of the Greek coup d'état in 1967).

To the extent that Poulantzas had a clear political attitude during his formative years in Greece and France it was broadly Marxist-Leninist. He emphasised the role of the proletariat and the leading role of the vanguard party and he also advocated a frontal assault on the state in order to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. But he always rejected Stalinism and it is far from certain that he subscribed to Marxism-Leninism in a dogmatic manner. Moreover, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, Poulantzas became increasingly disenchanted with the doctrinaire and dogmatic aspects of Marxism-Leninism and moved progressively towards a left Eurocommunist or Austro-Marxist position.

Some first hints of his realignment within the ranks of the communist left can be seen in his contributions to the 'Second Week of Contemporary Thought' (held in May, 1966) in Athens. In his two contributions on the state and on social classes, Poulantzas was already developing a critique of orthodox Marxist-Leninist theses on state monopoly capitalism, the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the character of social classes. Poulantzas's realignment became even more evident in his reflections on the nature of hegemony and the character of popular-democratic alliances (for more detailed accounts, see chapters 3 and 6). Politically the realignment was revealed in Poulantzas's split with the KKE (the orthodox, Stalinist wing of the KKE, which came to be known as the Greek Communist Party of the Exterior because the bulk of its leaders were exiled in Eastern Europe) and his association with the 'Bureau of the Interior of the Central Committee of the KKE', otherwise known as the Interior Party. This split between the two wings of the Greek Communist Party was formalised in 1968 and reflected their contrasting attitudes on various crucial issues. Most notable were the denunciation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 by the Interior Party and its condemnation of the Soviet rapprochement with the Greek military dictatorship in the

interests of Soviet naval policy in the Mediterranean (cf. McInnes, 1975, pp 123-4). There were also significant disagreements over alliance policy for domestic struggles.

It is within the ranks of the Greek Communist Party of the Interior that Poulantzas developed his own distinctive views on politics until his death in 1979. It is essential for an adequate understanding of his theoretical development that his changing views are related to his involvement in Greek politics. But it must also be noted that his involvement was highly marginal. He was always to the left of a leftwing communist party that had only minority support among communists (let alone the Greek population as a whole) and he intervened in communist party affairs from outside Greece. Nonetheless Poulantzas was deeply concerned with many issues of Greek politics even from his marginal position. In particular we may cite the Greek coup d'état in 1967; the split within the KKE; the continuing debate about the character of the military regime in Greece and the appropriate strategy to be adopted towards it; the subsequent collapse of the Greek military dictatorship in 1975; the problems of linking the anti-dictatorial alliance with the anti-imperialist, anti-monopolist struggle for democratic socialism; the reform of higher education in Greece after the collapse of the junta; the nature of PASOK as a social democratic party. Moreover, in the Greek general election of 1977, Poulantzas allowed his name to appear on the list of the Interior Party. Given the limited support for the KKE(I) and the nature of the list system of proportional representation, there was no chance that Poulantzas would have been elected. In any event he did not campaign and his candidature is best seen as a formality. But it is significant that he was prepared to lend his name to the Party in this way at a time when he had clear disagreements with its political line. I trace the consequences of these political involvements in later chapters (see especially chapter 9).

It is difficult to establish exactly when Nicos Poulantzas became a card-carrying member of the Greek Communist Party. He was certainly involved in a pro-communist student organisation as early as 1953/4 but was not organised within the KKE as such. One report suggests that he joined the KKE clandestinely on completing his military service in 1960. But the consensus is that he only joined the KKE in his first years in Paris - either later in 1960 or in 1961 - and that he was active in party circles in Paris in 1963/4. This occurred under the influence of Greek friends as well as personal conviction. At

the same time he was also involved in the EDA until 1966. But the decisive factor in his political mobilisation in the Greek communist movement was the military coup d'état in 1967. He was a founding member and consistent activist in the anti-dictatorial committee of Greeks in Paris. Both in his party journalism under the pseudonym of Skyrianou and in practical political work Poulantzas attempted to influence the theoretical analysis and strategic orientations of the KKE from the viewpoint of the left. Most accounts suggest that he was active not only in the intellectual sphere but also in the ordinary work of the Paris branch of the KKE(I). He was at his most active in the years 1967 to 1969 after which he became more involved in French politics. But the collapse of the military dictatorship in 1974 once again stimulated close practical concerns with Greek politics. Indeed it must be recognised that his personal and professional integration into the French intellectual community and his absence from Greece during the crucial years of the dictatorship meant that his actual political influence within the Greek communist movement was limited.

It would not be unfair to say that Poulantzas reacted to events in Greece rather than anticipating (let alone precipitating) them. Indeed, given the censorship in Greece under the junta and the importance of direct personal involvement inside Greece (especially when normal party politics were underdeveloped), things could not have been otherwise. Thus Poulantzas was surprised by the coup, the failure of the working class movement to overthrow it, the nature of the junta's collapse, and the scale of the KKE(I)'s defeat in the 1977 general election. In addition he tended to react to Greek events with French eyes. This can be seen in his assimilation of the Athens Polytechnic uprising in April 1973 to the events of May 1968 in Paris or his advocacy of a union de la gauche for Greece as well as France. Hence we should understand the links between his theoretical evolution, political practice, and Greek reality as highly mediated and intelligible only within a broader intellectual and political climate formed by events in France.

Poulantzas first received significant recognition as a state theorist with the publication of his work on *Pouvoir politique et classes sociales*. He had already received acclaim as a legal philosopher with the completion of his doctoral dissertation. His text on state theory appeared a few days before the occupation of the Sorbonne in the May events of 1968 and sold several thousand copies to the students

involved in this struggle against the French state. But his standing in the anglophone world was only established by the famous Poulantzas-Miliband debate that was initiated in 1969 by Poulantzas's review of Miliband's book on *The State in Capitalist Society*. In this critique Nicos Poulantzas is at his most structuralist and the resulting debate actually misrepresents the basic thrust of his work. At the same time he took the opportunity to correct his analysis of the state in so far as it had underestimated the role of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and the need for 'cultural revolution'. This rare example of self-criticism reflects the impact of the May events that, together with the Greek coup d'état in the preceding year, had a crucial impact on his intellectual, theoretical, and political development.

Intellectually these events led indirectly to his movement to Vincennes to teach sociology. The University of Paris VIII was established as an Experimental University Centre in the wake of the May events in a bid to decentralise and modernise the university system. He was among the first two or three people to be invited to take up an appointment in the department of sociology and subsequently played an important role in its intellectual development. In teaching this subject Poulantzas was able to develop his growing interest in problems of class analysis and class alliances - problems originating in his educational work for the socialist trade union federation, the CFDT, and his political work within the Greek anti-dictatorial movement.

Theoretically it led to his reappraisal of the structuralist moment in his thought and an increasing appreciation of the role of class struggle and the ISAs. Poulantzas was associated with the Althusserian circle at the École Normale Supérieure in the Rue d'Ulm and helped to popularise the structuralist approach in political analysis. For many years Poulantzas regularly met and discussed theoretical and political problems with Althusser on a close and personal basis. But he did not belong to the core of the Althusserian group. This consisted largely in Althusser's students whereas Poulantzas was already an established intellectual figure with a developed theoretical position. Nor was Poulantzas ever fully committed to the Althusserian structuralist position. Instead he was attracted by its apparent justification for an anti-economist, anti-historicist, anti-humanist analysis of law and the state as well as its realist Marxist epistemology and methodology. But he drew on other theoretical traditions to develop his substantive

arguments within the general Althusserian approach. In this sense it is more appropriate to see Althusserian structuralism as a bridge or staging post in his movement away from existentialist Marxism to his own distinctive version of Marxism. That he had been seeking such a bridge is evident from his earlier and less well-known appreciation of the positions of the positivist Marxist school inspired by della Volpe in Italy (see chapter 3).

Politically the May events encouraged a flirtation with Maoist themes and strategic ideas. There were already significant Maoist elements in Althusser's approach to the dialectic but the May events encouraged greater interest in mass struggle and cultural revolution. More generally there was a widespread fascination among many diverse political forces with Maoism in the post-May and post-Czechoslovakia conjuncture of the late 'sixties and early 'seventies. There are clearly some Maoist themes in *Fascism and Dictatorship* and in Poulantzas's critique of the mistaken urban, insurrectionary, and workerist strategy of the KKE in the Greek Civil War (see below, chapter 9). In subsequent work Poulantzas would continue to emphasise the importance of the *mass line*, the development of class alliances to resolve contradictions among the people, and the need to dissolve the distinction between mental and manual labour. But he never deserted the mainstream European communist movement to support the fringe Maoist or spontaneist groups which claimed the membership of many of the original band of Althusserian students. Finally we should note that Poulantzas was much more actively involved in practical political work after the 1967 coup and the May events. He undertook political work in the anti-dictatorial movement, educational work in the socialist trade union movement, theoretical work in the struggle for left unity in France, and ideological work in the struggle against irrationalism among the French intelligentsia.

## **The Concerns of the Seventies**

These shifts are reflected in his second and third major publications - *Fascisme et dictature* (1970) and *Les classes sociales dans le capitalisme aujourd'hui* (1974). His work on fascism is ostensibly concerned with Nazism and Italian fascism as examples of the exceptional state but it is also much concerned with questions of political strategy towards fascist movements and exceptional regimes. The latter

concern is clearly connected with his opposition to the Greek military dictatorship, which, along with almost all regimes in Greece since the Metaxas dictatorship established in 1936, had been described as fascist. It is also connected to more general arguments that there was a tendential fascisation of the advanced capitalist state and that the Gaullist state was a particularly clear example of this tendency. Poulantzas rejected these arguments concerning the Greek and French states alike and insisted upon a more differentiated analysis of exceptional regimes and the developmental tendencies of the normal, democratic state. At the same time he was clearly exercised by questions of political strategy towards exceptional regimes - both to prevent their emergence (something the Comintern had failed to do when faced with Italian and German fascism) and to accelerate their collapse (a burning issue for the Greek left).

It is also worth noting that his concern in *Fascism and Dictatorship* with the baleful influence of the Comintern (and indirectly the Soviet Union) on the policies of the KPD (German Communist Party) towards Nazism was part of a more general concern with the theory and practice of the Comintern. Thus, around 1971, Poulantzas organised a research group to collate the views of the Comintern on different issues. Indirectly this involved a critique of the class nature of the Soviet Union and the influence of Stalinism in European communist parties. Eventually only *FD* and a volume on education (Lindenberg, 1972) were published. The project was abandoned because Poulantzas was convinced by his friends that studying the history of communism was an academic exercise without real impact on the political struggle (Lindenberg, 1983, p 44).

Instead Poulantzas turned to more urgent questions of political practice. For during the early 'seventies Poulantzas gave much more attention to the question of class alliances and democratic alliances. This was connected with the question of the Greek dictatorship but equally concerned the more general problem of the anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist struggles of the left. In this context his work on *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* represents a sustained critique of the views of orthodox communist parties (especially the PCF and KKE) and modern sociologists on questions of imperialism and class structure. He was particularly concerned with the impact of internationalisation on the bourgeoisie and with the class nature of the petty bourgeoisie. In dealing with the former issue he was especially

interested in the implications of American hegemony for an anti-imperialist alliance led by French monopoly capital; and, in the latter respect, he was concerned to establish that the petty bourgeoisie rather than the peasantry were the most important allies of the proletariat in struggling for democratic socialism in France. At the same time this work begins to develop an account of the interventionist state and the economic role of the capitalist state. This represents a significant advance on his understanding of the state in *Political Power and Social Classes*.

Poulantzas's work on fascism had an important political impact on the intellectuals who formed a significant section of the KKE(I) and on Latin American intellectuals and students living in Paris. For both groups the question of fascism and 'exceptional' regimes was pressing and so were the questions of internationalisation and dependence. During this period Poulantzas also extended his contacts with the communist movements in Spain and Portugal. It was events in the latter country as well as in his native Greece that precipitated the next major shift in his theoretical and political orientation.

In 1974 the Greek junta collapsed and the military dictatorship in Portugal was displaced. The nature of the collapse in Greece was quite contrary to Poulantzas's expectations and led him to change radically his views on political struggle and the state. At the same time the prospects for a democratic transition to socialism in Portugal based on a broad popular-democratic mass movement was exciting considerable interest in France (much more so than parallel developments in Greece or Spain). In a sense Portugal provided a living laboratory for competing theories of transition and socialist struggle. Certainly Poulantzas showed great interest in these issues. He extended his contacts with members of the communist and socialist parties in all three countries and became involved in the debate over the democratic transition to socialism.

It is in this context that we must locate Poulantzas's next major work, *La crise des dictatures* (1975), which marks a significant shift in his state theory and approach to political strategy. In particular he came to see the state as riven by internal contradictions rather than as monolithic. He also argued that revolution need no longer be understood as involving the classical situation of dual power in which a monolithic state was overthrown by a counter-state based on workers' soviets. Instead Poulantzas suggested that a transition to socialism could be initiated through *struggle within the state* to exploit

its internal contradictions combined with *struggle at a distance* from the state to sustain popular pressure on its activities. This does not obviate the need for a revolutionary political party (or parties) to direct the struggle nor the need for a *radical transformation of the state* to consolidate power. But it does involve a significant shift in the party's strategic orientation and its post-revolutionary role.

These views are further developed in a postscript (written in 1976) to the second edition of his book on the crisis of the dictatorships. This reflects on the failure of the left to maintain its hegemony over the process of democratisation in Portugal and particularly emphasises the errors involved in the ultraleft attempts to smash the existing state apparatus rather than use it in support of the emerging democratic forms at the grass-roots. It also offers some thoughts on the implications of bourgeois hegemony over the democratisation process in Spain and Greece.

The collapse of the military dictatorship in Greece provided Poulantzas with the opportunity to return to his homeland in 1974. Indeed he was invited to participate in a 12-member study committee established by the Greek Ministry of Education during the "seventy days' government of 1974" to investigate the organisation and functioning of advanced education institutes in Greece. It is in this year that Poulantzas first made a direct impact on Greek political life through journalism and his participation in the KKE(I) at home. Nonetheless he remained to the left of his party and his influence was still restricted. He also lectured on the theory of the state during 1975-76 as a visiting professor at the Panteios School in Athens and, in addition, contributed articles and interviews to the popular press.

In terms of his intellectual career in Paris we should also record that Poulantzas began teaching at the postgraduate School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences in 1974. He continued to teach at Vincennes and was active in its defense when Vincennes came under attack from the right in 1978-79. It was also during the middle 'seventies that he began to engage with the work of Michel Foucault (especially after the publication of the latter's *Surveiller et Punir* (hereafter 'DP') in 1975) and the arguments of the *nouveaux philosophes*, whose ideas erupted into public life in 1977. Poulantzas himself records that his students at Vincennes were very interested in the relationship between Foucault's approach and more orthodox Marxist analyses (1979h). More generally, of course, Foucault himself was fashionable everywhere in Parisian intellectual circles. Most important for Poulantzas

were Foucault's studies of power and the disciplinary effects of institutions beyond the state. This is reflected in his last major work on *State, Power, Socialism* - in which he took up some of Foucault's ideas but also launched a very critical attack on his general position. Poulantzas also reacted strongly against the more general trend among *nouveaux philosophes* to denounce the Soviet Union as one giant totalitarian prison camp whose development is an inevitable product of Marxism.

### **Un Cri de Mélusine**

This does not mean that Poulantzas was uninterested in the question of totalitarianism. On the contrary it was an issue that troubled him increasingly (especially in the tragic aftermath of the Vietnamese defeat of American forces and the development of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia). It is for this reason that he came to re-evaluate the importance of political liberties and the critical role of intellectuals in relation to their own political parties in any democratic transition to democratic socialism. His concern with the relation between intellectuals and parties was further reinforced by the role of the PCF in breaking up the Union de la Gauche in the autumn of 1977. He reacted strongly against this and, in association with Régis Debray, tried to secure a reversal of the PCF's peevish and negative stance. However, although he became increasingly agitated by the totalitarian trends in actually existing socialist societies, he also rejected any simple-minded equation of Marx with the Gulag. He argued instead for the continuing vitality of Marxism as the scientific basis of a totalising (but not in itself omniscient and omnicompetent) perspective on societies. He also stressed the increasing urgency of a democratic transition to democratic socialism before the socialist movement was engulfed by authoritarian statism in the West as well as the East.

With the expansion of the French Left and the prospects of a Left government in France in the late 'seventies, Poulantzas became active in the struggle for left unity. In particular he was active in widening the ideological front of socialist struggle within the left as well as against the irrationalism of the *nouveaux philosophes*. At this time there was also some discussion of the nature of the socialist party, PASOK, in Greece; and Poulantzas, for one, advocated a rapprochement between socialist and communist parties in Greece. In general Poulantzas

argued that an alliance between parties should not involve a suspension of ideological disputes on the left. Instead it should involve a widening of open, democratic confrontation among different ideological positions. The fruits of this stance can be seen in the publication in 1976 of a collective work (itself a rare event in French intellectual life) on *La crise de l'état*. Herein a wide range of socialist and communist intellectuals presented their various accounts of the crisis of the contemporary capitalist state in France. This volume appeared within the framework of a projected series of Marxist texts for the Presses Universitaires de France under the editorship of Poulantzas and intended to provide an intellectual forum for debate within the French left. A further aspect of this ideological offensive was the obvious concertation of interviews and interventions surrounding the publication of *La crise de l'état* in a broad range of leftwing and popular journals.

This initiative was followed in 1977 by the formation of a group of twelve French intellectuals of diverse leftist political affiliations and views. Those involved were Poulantzas, Claudine Barret-Kriegel, Pierre Birnbaum, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Katherine Clement, Regis Debray, Robert Fossaert, Alain Joxe, Daniel Lindenberg, Didier Motchane, Jean-Marie Vincent, and Henri Weber. They called their group 'Mélusine' (after a mythical French noblewoman who was half woman and half serpent). It may well be more than a coincidence that un cri de Mélusine is a *cry of despair* and that the mythical Mélusine was doomed to wander as a spectre until doomsday. The group itself was formed in an effort to socialise their struggles for left unity in different terrains. It was motivated less by the desire for intellectual hegemony on the left than by the need to exchange ideas, pool information, develop a common perspective, and coordinate struggles on a wide range of political and ideological fronts. Indeed, following the defeat of the left forces in the 1978 elections, it was more defensive than offensive in character.

The principal fronts on which Poulantzas and Mélusine were involved were fivefold. Firstly, they engaged in battle against the irrationalism of the *nouveaux philosophes*. The latter had made a significant impact in Parisian intellectual life in 1977 and propounded many arguments fundamentally hostile to Marxism. Their major doctrines have been succinctly summarised as follows:

"that Marxism is in some way responsible for the terror of the Soviet camps; that the state is the central source of social and political

oppression, and that therefore any politics directed towards the seizure of state power is dangerous and vain; that science always operates within and reinforces relations of power or, to raise the stakes a little, that 'reason' is inherently totalitarian; that since any political ideology will eventually be used to justify crimes against humanity, the only 'safe' form of political action is a militant defence of human rights" (Dews, 1979, p 129).

The growing influence of these views made an effective reply imperative. Since none of the Mélusine group subscribed to the new philosophers' positions, this front was entirely external (e.g., 1976i, 1977f, 1978c, 1979a, 1977I.h, 1978I.g).

Secondly, the group was involved in the debates of CERES (Centre d'Études, de Recherches, et d'Education Socialistes) - the marxist intellectual powerhouse of the Parti Socialiste. These debates concerned the national bourgeoisie and its relation to the hegemony of American capital, the role of self-management and the state in a transition to democratic socialism, the appropriate relationship between political parties and the new social movements, and the centrality of the working class and organisation in the workplace. Didier Motchane was a leading member of the CERES and Mélusine's discussions on these issues were particularly lively. In turn Poulantzas himself also contributed to the discussions and publications of CERES and the PS (e.g., 1976g, 1977b, 1977I.b, and 1978I.c). Thirdly, they were critical of the debates within the PCF on state monopoly capitalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The communist members of Mélusine were all to the left of the PCF on these issues and this front was also conducted outside the group. Poulantzas was also active in the debates and publications of the PCF during this period (e.g., 1976I.c, 1976I.d, 1976I.g, 1977I.c, 1977I.e, and 1977I.i).

Fourthly, they got involved in the debates of the PSU (Parti Socialiste unifié) on the potential for the democratisation of the state. Alain Joxe represented this tendency in the group and Poulantzas appeared at meetings of the PSU to discuss this issue. Fifthly, they considered the arguments of the extreme left on questions of socialist strategy and the need to replace parliamentarism with council communism. The extreme left was represented in Mélusine by Vincent and Weber - both then members of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, a Trotskyist organisation, and colleagues of Poulantzas at Vincennes. Here again Poulantzas intervened to present his own theoretical and strategic positions in order to surmount

divisions on the left (e.g., 1977I.f). However, despite Mélusine's open, pluralist politics in its internal affairs, its members failed to reach agreement on the various substantive issues it debated and it eventually disintegrated.

Further evidence of this concern for left unity and the transcendence of its internal divisions can be found in Poulantzas's last major work, *L'État, le pouvoir, le socialisme*. This is a somewhat eclectic work and bears many marks of a transitional study. It is not at all difficult to discern openings to many of the groups with which Poulantzas had earlier disagreed on his right as well as his left. In certain respects it represents a powerful and ambitious attempt to synthesise his own theoretical positions with those of the PCF and socialist groups as well as with the emergent new social movements. It also represents an opening to those under the intellectual sway of Foucault. As befitted a work of ideological contestation and political front building, this book was greeted with a full and open debate within various leftist journals and papers.

After the publication of *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas continued to campaign for his distinctive views on state theory and the transition to socialism. At the same time he became increasingly interested in the problem of totalitarianism (motivated among other factors by the tragic sight of the 'boat people' fleeing from Vietnam) and in the nature of corporatism and social democracy. He was also active in the continuing struggle for left unity on an international as well as French scale and was turning to the anglophone world as a sphere of political and ideological intervention.

Nicos Poulantzas committed suicide on October 3rd, 1979, at the age of 43. He left a widow, Annie Leclerc, and a nine-year old daughter, Ariane. There is little agreement as to the reasons behind his suicide and there is no point in pursuing them here. It is particularly sad to note how the victories of the Socialist Party in France and PASOK in Greece - movements with which Poulantzas had some sympathy and behind which he wished to see the communist movements of France and Greece mobilised in elections and more generally (albeit not unconditionally) - occurred so soon after his death. In general Poulantzas believed that social democratic government would not (and, indeed, could not reverse the trends towards authoritarian statism and make a decisive step towards democratic socialism. But he also made an exception for countries where socialist parties had no tradition of being a 'party of government'. Thus it is interesting to

speculate how far Poulantzas would have approved of the changes wrought by the Mitterrand and Papandreou governments. Personally I doubt that they would have shaken his call for a new, left Eurocommunist (or, perhaps, Austro-Marxist) political strategy. It is his theoretical and political movement towards this conclusion that concerns us below.

### **An Approach to the Work of Poulantzas**

There are many ways to approach Poulantzas's theoretical and political development. In this book I focus on his principal intellectual sources and his main political involvements. I argue that Poulantzas's contributions to Marxist state theory depended on his location at the confluence of three contrasting theoretical streams. These streams were French philosophy, Italian politics, and Romano-German law. Poulantzas merged them in a unique manner within the overarching framework of Marxist political economy. I also argue that Poulantzas's originality depended on his attempts to understand and influence the course of political events. Of particular importance here, as I have already indicated, were political developments in Greece and France. In the former case his principal concern was to understand the Greek military dictatorship, the conditions leading to its overthrow, the absence of working class hegemony in the democratisation process, and the prospects for moving from an anti-dictatorial alliance to an anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly alliance. Concerning France his interests ranged from the rise of authoritarian statism to the problems of left unity around an anti-monopoly, democratic socialist programme. Moreover, by adopting positions in the political class struggle in both countries, he could effect a synthesis among these three theoretical traditions. For it was in working through the problems of class alliances for a democratic socialism that their mutual implications became apparent.

At the same time I argue that his threefold intellectual debt produced significant tensions in Poulantzas's work. The three sources identified above were continually adapted and modified under the impact of his participation in political struggle. But they are by no means easy to reconcile and tensions remain with each successive stage in his theoretical, political, and philosophical development. The most integrated period of his thought occurred when Poulantzas

worked within an existentially-marxist framework. For he had not yet discovered Italian Marxism and considered its implications for Marxist philosophy or communist politics. Once he flirted with the della Volpe school and then embraced the Gramscian approach, however, tensions were introduced into his analyses that continued to work themselves out for the rest of his life. The subsequent shift from an Althusserian structuralist philosophy to a more relational, Foucauldian approach was particularly significant in helping Poulantzas to realise the full potential of the three sources. I consider the creative tensions involved throughout the following critique.

This creative tension holds as much for the gaps and theoretical problems in Poulantzas's work as for its more positive aspects. For his theoretical innovations are not the only resultant of the complex interaction among French philosophy, Italian politics, and Romano-German law. So are the principal problems in his work. This is most evident in its exaggerated concern for political issues and corresponding neglect of economic determinations and the specificity of the ideological. For there is a potential for 'politicism' in all three of his intellectual sources and combining them powerfully reinforces the politicist potential of each. This politicism took different forms at different times but it was always present. We shall see that this holds for other problems as well.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Having sketched some brief biographical details and outlined one approach to his work, we can now proceed to give a detailed account of his theoretical and political development. The following chapters are neither strictly chronological nor yet strictly thematic in approach. One or other aspect is stressed according to the issues under investigation. In the next chapter I deal with the early Poulantzas in his 'existentially-marxiste' phase and his brief period of transition to a hybrid Althusserian and Gramscian approach. This phase is relatively self-contained and Poulantzas himself chose to suppress it as misguided and insignificant for his later development. Although his own assessment as to its misguidedness is largely correct, this early phase is nonetheless significant. For it leaves important residues in his later work in several areas.

It is the later work that demands the most attention. Thus chapter

3 deals with the basic framework of Poulantzas's regional theory of the political; the next chapter deals with its principal developments; and chapter 5 discusses the movement from a regional theory to a relational theory of politics. Succeeding chapters then deal with his changing views on social classes, class alliances, parties, and social movements (chapter 6); ideology and ideological class struggle (chapter 7); the nature of exceptional states and anti-dictatorial struggles in fascism and military dictatorships (chapters 8 and 9 respectively); and his views on the decline of capitalist democracy and the prospects for democratic socialism (chapter 10). Having concluded the detailed review of Poulantzas's work, I then return to the three sources of Poulantzas's theoretical and political work and the motive force behind its development (chapter 11). Finally I consider his overall contribution to Marxist theory and politics and the problems that remained unresolved at the time of his death.

## 2

# Existentialism, Marxism, and Law

Neither in his undergraduate studies in Greece nor in his postgraduate researches in Germany and France did Poulantzas fully encounter all three sources of his mature work. Even as a student for the Baccalaureat, Poulantzas became involved with French philosophy. Both his father's profession and his own first degree work exposed him to legal questions. But Italian politics was still a shadow on his intellectual horizon and would remain so for some years after he left Athens. In this chapter I examine the background and nature of his early work on the philosophy of law before Poulantzas became acquainted with Gramsci's politics. This occurred around the same time that Poulantzas established contact with the Althusserian circle. The combination of these events marked an important theoretical and epistemological shift in his work. Because it constitutes a relatively self-contained philosophical corpus and displays little continuity with his subsequent analyses, the early work of Poulantzas is almost wholly unknown and, it must be admitted, Poulantzas himself chose to disavow it. But there is no sound reason for us to ignore this work. Indeed, as I hope to show, although he renounced his 'erstwhile philosophical consciousness', these legal studies exercised a continuing subterranean influence on Poulantzas.

### **French Philosophy and Western Marxism**

The particular school of French philosophy with which the early Poulantzas engaged was existentialism and he found its chief proponent in Jean-Paul Sartre. This influence was reinforced by the fact that Sartre himself had been moving since the end of the Second World War towards a rapprochement between existentialism and

marxism. At the same time there was a more general rediscovery by French social theorists of the works of Marx. This movement and rediscovery were both part of the development of a 'Western Marxism' markedly different from the theoretical traditions of the Second International and the Comintern. Whilst the latter traditions focused on the economic laws of capitalism, the nature of the capitalist state, and problems of revolutionary strategy, the 'Western Marxists' examined man's alienated existence within capitalism, the nature of bourgeois culture, and problems of method and philosophy (cf. Anderson, 1976). The 'Western Marxist' approach developed from the early 'twenties onwards under the influence of the defeat of the revolutionary movement in the West. Its most notable early proponents were Ernst Bloch, Karl Korsch, George Lukacs, and the Frankfurt School.<sup>1</sup>

The influence of Western Marxism remained very weak in France until the end of the Second World War. Here the dominant intellectual traditions were classical rationalism and Bergsonian mysticism and there was little space within a chauvinist and provincial intellectual culture for foreign influences (cf. Lichtheim, 1966, pp 81-86). The chief exception was found in the commitment of leading communist cadres to the 'Eastern Marxism' of Lenin and Stalin but even they were obliged to confront a powerful indigenous rank-and-file revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Military defeat in 1940 and liberation in 1944 helped to break down this intellectual xenophobia and there was an upsurge of interest in other intellectual currents after the Second World War. Along with a growing interest in the work of Hegel, phenomenology, psycho-analysis, and German sociology, there was also a major upsurge of interest in existentialism and marxism. The interest in existentialism was due largely to the impact of Jean-Paul Sartre (especially his major work on *Being and Nothingness*, 1943). The interest in Marxism was due to the prestige accruing to the PCF for its role in the French resistance and to the contemporary French fascination with the work of Hegel and its reflection in the philosophical studies of the young Marx (cf. Descombes, 1982; Kelly, 1982; Lichtheim, 1966; McClellan, 1979; and Poster, 1975).

The more or less simultaneous growth of interest in existentialism and 'Western Marxism' in France encouraged a dialogue among their

proponents. Moreover, in so far as they shared certain themes that also set them both apart from the orthodoxies of Marxism-Leninism, there was obviously some scope for rapprochement. The common themes of these philosophical traditions are related to their common concern with the human subject as the author of social relations. Thus, whereas 'Western Marxism' was humanist, historicist, and anti-economistic in orientation, existentialism was concerned with the free-willed individual, the historical constitution of societies in and through human action, and the relations between freedom and determinacy. The major driving force in this rapprochement was Sartre himself and it is through his relation to Sartre that we can best understand the theoretical development of the young Poulantzas.

Sartre placed freedom at the centre of human existence. Indeed, in *Being and Nothingness*, he asserted that there is no difference between the being of man and his being free (Sartre, 1943, p 30). For Sartre, existence precedes essence. It is through the exercise of free will in choosing a personal project to transform the social and material world that man creates himself and thus develops his essential individuality. Given the ontological grounding of freedom, man must choose to be free. Failure to choose freedom is an act of bad faith. It implies that one has adopted inauthentic values. This existentialist humanism was counterposed to the dehumanising materialism of orthodox Marxism. During the late 'forties, indeed, there were acrimonious debates between Sartre and the 'Eastern Marxists'. These still reverberated in French intellectual and political circles in the 1950s. But Sartre himself was now moving towards a synthesis of existentialism and 'Western Marxism'. This led to the publication of *The Problem of Method* in 1957 and culminated in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in 1960.

In *The Problem of Method* Sartre discussed some methodological problems in social enquiry. Whilst recognising the importance of Marxism in locating events in the total historical process, Sartre suggests that it is *a priorist* and eliminates the particularity of these events. He demands not only a concern for the *external* context of events but also for their *internal* specificity. In particular Sartre argues that existentialism can illuminate the uniqueness of the individual and that 'sociology' can reveal the specificity of different fields within the social whole. The true dialectical method involves demonstrating the joint necessity of the internalisation of the external and the externalisation of the internal. As an existentialist Sartre

claims this can be achieved by showing how these moments are mediated through individual projects or praxes. Thus, in addition to calling for analyses of the dialectical relations between the internal and external moments of different social structures or social fields, he also calls for a 'progressive-regressive' method which continually moves backwards and forwards to establish the relationship between the objective and subjective, capitalism and workers' experiences (Sartre, 1957/1963, pp 56-7, 66, 82, 96-7, 126-7, 170-1, and *passim*).

In the *Critique* Sartre gave more emphasis to the marxist pole of his rapprochement. Sartre insisted on the validity of the dialectical method of dialectical reason in the human sciences. He opposed this to a mechanistic materialism that explains the development of phenomena purely in terms of their external causes. In contrast with the analytical reason of such a dialectics of nature that treats social phenomena as if they were phenomena of the physical world, Sartre stresses the importance of studying *totalisation* rather than static totalities and argues that only *dialectical reason* can comprehend that process. He also argued that the observer had to involve himself in the project(s) of those observed. Value-free knowledge based on analytical reasoning was impossible and the observer had to grasp totalisation from within history.

These arguments were then applied to Sartre's structural, historical anthropology. The historical moment of this approach was grounded in his earlier existentialist philosophy and emphasised the mediating role of the project, of human creativity, in the totalisation of social relations. Sartre discussed the dialectical circularity involved as individuals moved through different stages of organisation, from isolation or atomisation (seriality) through various forms of coordination, ranging from fusion into groups up to full institutionalisation. Within this complex, dialectical movement, however, the *series*, with its isolation, passivity, and atomisation, is treated as the characteristic form of social relation in alienated societies. The structural (or sociological) moment emphasised the complex interrelations among different levels of experience and attributed to each level its own specificity. Among the structures he considered were material production, law, and the state. In conclusion Sartre insists that the complexities of the social whole mean that it cannot be understood in terms of a mechanical, monistic materialism according to which the base determines the superstructure. Only a concern for the dialectical totalisation of history will reveal this. Thus

the dialectical reason advocated by Sartre is anti-economistic, historicist, and humanist in much the same manner as 'Western Marxism' more generally.

### **Poulantzas's Preliminary Studies**

Poulantzas's early analyses of law are firmly grounded in the debate between existentialism and marxism and attempt to take it further. His interest in law is not that of a legal practitioner but that of a philosopher. His philosophical project is to synthesise existentialism and marxism; and his principal concern is to transcend the dualism between fact and value to provide an axiological basis for political practice. He hoped to develop an axiology of projects, i.e., criteria for choosing among projects according to their contribution to the development of human freedom. This concern is already apparent in a preliminary study on 'Ethics and History' (1961b). This considered the classical dualism of the ethic of intention and the ethic of result as reflected in the work of such 'Western Marxist' theorists as Sartre and Lukacs, Merleau-Ponty and Max Adler, Garaudy and Gorz. It took the form of a resume of a projected critique of the determinist ethics of orthodox Marxism and the development of an existentialist, humanist ethics of political action. Although this project was never completed, it nonetheless anticipated many of the arguments of his doctoral dissertation. In this sense it reveals the extent to which Poulantzas was already critical of orthodox, Stalinist Marxism.

For our purposes the main conclusions of 'Ethics and History' can be summarised in the following five arguments. Firstly, existentialism and marxism have a common ontological basis in so far as both argue that existence precedes essence. This can be seen in the importance of the *project* in existentialism and *praxis* in marxism. Secondly, despite certain tension and ambiguities over the classical dualism of intention and result, both approaches ultimately adhere to an ethics result. For existentialism, free will is authentically exercised only when it affirms and advances individual liberty; and, for orthodox marxism, one must do what is historically necessary from the viewpoint of the temporarily ascendant, progressive class. Thirdly, in so far as they share this commitment to an ethics of result, both approaches also pose the issue of the relation between fact and value,

between liberty and necessity, and between these two relations.

Poulantzas then criticises those attempts to establish the unity of fact and value that depend on determinist arguments. These include Max Adler's mechanical ascription of norms to individuals as an automatic reflection of historical necessity; Lukacs's derivation of the moral superiority of proletariat from its objective character as the only 'universal' class, i.e., the only class which can act as the bearer of the interests of mankind as a whole; or Gorz's argument that the proletariat is superior because it is necessarily more 'active' than other classes in struggling against alienation. In each case Poulantzas argues that these arguments cannot provide the basis of a marxist 'axiology'. For they reduce 'freedom' to compliance with an externally given, objective necessity.

This means, fifthly, that a non-determinist approach to the unity of fact and value must be adopted. This should provide an internal account of the common genetic origin of fact and value in the practical projects of individual or class subjects. This has already been shown for the individual level by existentialism. It can also be established for the historical level of class action. One should start from the original freedom of the individual and argue that individuals will in the long run freely opt for a fundamental historical project oriented towards an authentic, non-alienating (hence socialist) future. Thus Poulantzas concludes that "it is because man is originally free that his history is a project towards his liberty" (1961b, p 48).

These ideas are developed in Poulantzas's doctoral dissertation. This is particularly concerned with the nature of law as a site of the unity of fact and value. Before embarking on his dissertation, however, Poulantzas first wrote a thesis on 'The Rebirth of Natural Law in Germany after the Second World War' (1962, hereafter *RDM*). Here he claims that the rebirth of natural law doctrines represented a reaction by German jurists to the extreme positivism of law in the Nazi period (cf. Friedmann, 1967, pp 155-6). Poulantzas argues that this insistence on the normative link between law and justice cannot be attributed in any simplistic fashion to the impact of working class demands or to working class struggles. For there was a period of relative 'quietude' in the class struggle after 1945. Moreover there was a radical reaction throughout society (not just within the working class) against the values of the Third Reich (*RDM*, pp 3-4, 11, 12-14n).

In this context Poulantzas then considers two approaches to the relationship between fact and value in natural law doctrines. He considers idealist approaches, whether of a neo-Kantian or culturalist kind; and, secondly, realist approaches based on the concept of the *Natur der Sache* or 'nature of the thing'. In the context of legal theory, this concept refers to the need to translate real (extra-legal) phenomena, which often have their own immanent values, into legal institutions and norms. Thus social changes must be reflected in legal change (cf. Friedmann, 1967, pp 203-5). The major part of Poulantzas's *mémoire* comprises a critical review of different jurisprudential theories of natural law (*RDN*, pp 16-158). It does so within the framework of an account of how theories are restructured through the progressive adaptation of old elements to new exigencies so that old concepts gain new connotations and/or through the survival of old methodologies within a new conceptual scheme. In the latter case the resulting 'chévauchement' or interweaving of theoretical structures is said to result in internal incoherence. Here Poulantzas cites the uneasy juxtaposition of idealist and realist elements in most of the theories he considers (*RDN*, pp 7-10, 148-9, and *passim*).

Poulantzas is particularly critical of the intrusion of idealist elements into the realist approach based on the 'nature of things' and the incoherence that results. But he also argues that this approach can be developed fruitfully and without incoherence if it is combined with the insights of French rather than German existentialism. For, while the latter is distrustful of all social relations as inauthentic, the former can provide a sociological account of authentic values (*RDN*, pp 149, 153-5). This conclusion provides the starting point for his dissertation.

These two works on 'Ethics and History' and the 'Rebirth of Natural Law in Germany' are essentially preliminary studies. Thus we should suspend judgement on them until we have outlined the main arguments of the doctoral thesis itself. But it should already be noted how Poulantzas moves easily within the parameters of 'Western Marxism' and existentialism and also how he is already critical of orthodox (or 'Eastern') Marxism for its determinism. In relation to the three sources of his thought, it is also interesting to note that, although the concept of 'Natur der Sache' was applied to law principally in Germany, Poulantzas chooses to interpret it within the framework of *French* philosophy. Let us see how these preliminary studies are developed.

## The Nature of Things

English-language commentaries have located Poulantzas's contributions to legal philosophy in the phenomenological tradition (e.g., Friedmann, 1967, p 207; Sinha, 1976, p 857). But his own writings make it clear that Poulantzas rejects the phenomenological approach in favour of an existentialist-marxist analysis of law inspired by Sartre. The role of existentialism in this analysis is to found an ontology of human action in which there is an implicit unity of fact and value. The role of marxism is to found a sociology of base-superstructure relations and thereby locate the place of law within the social whole. And the role of Sartre is to provide the method of dialectical reason that permits a coherent synthesis of existentialism and marxism. These themes can be explored through a brief summary of Poulantzas's thesis.

In *La Nature des Choses* Poulantzas offered an ambitious analysis of law in a novel and original existentialist-marxist framework. This analysis was based on (i) an ontology of man-in-the-world who was always-already-in-association-with-others and (ii) a sociology grounded in the distinction between infra- and super-structure. In this context it was oriented to the specificity of the different regions within these two main levels and to their interrelations. This attempt was quite self-consciously 'anthropological' or humanist in intent. It was justified in terms of the dialectical unity (or structural totality) of fact and value immanent in the nature of things. Indeed Poulantzas directed his arguments against those philosophies and sociologies of law that start out from the neo-Kantian antinomy of fact and value. To these approaches he counter-posed the claim that the unity of fact and value is immanent both in individual action and in collective praxis. This emphasis on the dialectical unity of fact and value as an immanent property of the real world derives in turn from the concept, then current in German and French legal theory, of the *Natur der Sache* or *nature des choses*. In developing this concept in a marxist direction Poulantzas argued that there is *naturally* an immanent link between the factual and the ideal in human action, that the material site of this immanence is the dialectic of labour and needs, and that, in this dialectical link, labour is primary (for this clarification, see: 1964b, pp 249-50). In *NDC* Poulantzas develops this theme in two ways.

First Poulantzas uses this concept in an existentialist-marxist framework intended to capture the *social* character of "man-in-the-

world". This approach stands in marked contrast to the more usual phenomenological analysis with its focus on the individual actor or agent seen as isolated rather than as social in character. Secondly he combines this analysis of the ontological substratum of human action with an account of its sociological and historical overdetermination. This enables Poulantzas to break with the eternalist, atemporal, ahistorical generalities of phenomenology and, we might add, of the existentialist theories propounded by Sartre before his rapprochement with Marxism.

Poulantzas argues that "the methodology of a discipline cannot be distinct from a primordial ontological consideration of the very *object* of this discipline" (*NDC*, p 175). Accordingly he begins his account of law with a general ontological investigation of individual action and collective praxis and then applies this to the particular domain of law. The ontological substratum of all levels of action and praxis in a society is said to be the activity of 'man-in-the-world': not an isolated man but a 'man-in-association-with-others'. This allegedly implies the unity of fact and value because man can only exist and act by virtue of values embodied in projects; in turn these values only exist because man must exist, must look towards an as yet unrealised but valued future. This general ontology has important axiological implications and, in developing these, Poulantzas follows Sartre closely. Because man is ontologically free, he must choose liberty as the only authentic expression of his nature; and, because man is always already social (an argument developed within existentialism by Merleau-Ponty and accepted by Sartre), this liberty must be one that takes account of the liberty of others.

It might be objected that these axiological principles are just as abstract and general as Kant's categorical imperative and its application to law. For Kant argued that "law is the aggregate of the conditions under which the arbitrary will of one individual may be combined with that of another under a general inclusive law of freedom" (cited in Friedmann, 1967, p 159). Poulantzas concedes this and argues that his principles acquire concrete and particular meaning through their overdetermination (to use a later, structuralist concept) at the sociological and historical level. This is where Poulantzas's approach is particularly distinctive. For he attempts to combine an ontology of law with a coherent sociology of law and to do so within a marxist perspective.

Poulantzas first argues, however, that his general ontology has

important implications for legal ontology in two areas: interpersonal relations and the relation of men to things. Thus he argues that legal obligations to others are ontologically rooted in the relation of *moi-autrui*. This refers to the mutual implication of the individual actor and other actors in the world and the mutual presupposition of their liberties and labour. Likewise he argues that property relations are rooted ontologically in the collective satisfaction of needs through objects that satisfy socially grounded, socially mediated needs for the individual and/or the community. These arguments do not justify an emphasis on *individual* liberties or the legal necessity of *private* property. The social and historical fact that bourgeois societies stress individual rather than collective liberties is not necessary on ontological grounds. Nor is the fact that they stress private property rather than public property. Indeed there is no reason to suppose that these legal institutions and norms must be universal or eternal. Individualism is mediated through the social and historical contextualisation of the general ontology. Likewise private property is only one possible form of relation between men and real objects (*NDC*, pp 105-52). With these arguments Poulantzas completes his presentation of the ontological substratum of social relations in general and legal relations in particular.

Poulantzas then attempted to transpose these views to the terrain of sociology. This requires a two-pronged approach. It requires a sociological account of society as a structural totality based on the unity of its infra- and super- structures; and, within this context, dialectical reason must be applied to the specific mediations and intercalations which endow the juridical system in modern, capitalist societies with its particular form. Here Poulantzas argues that law can only be studied adequately through the notion of structure as the product of the totalising, (re-)structuring activity in and through which men realise both facts and values. Moreover, this structure must be examined in terms of the *étagement* (stratification) that occurs *within* the infrastructure and superstructure as well as *between* them. Poulantzas argues that each level has its own particular properties and reciprocal influence within the social totality. He also notes that the structure of the whole society is determined in the last instance by the economic level. This role falls to the economic level because it is only here that the primary needs of man can be satisfied. Finally Poulantzas agrees with Sartre and Goldmann that social scientific objectivity is only possible in so far as the observer identifies

with historically progressive values. It cannot come from giving a purely causal, deterministic account according to the canons of analytical reasoning (*NDC*, pp 167-85, 212-38).

In this way Poulantzas established the epistemological and methodological foundations of his sociological analysis. This involves a dialectical account of the modern legal system. He identifies the four main features of modern law as abstraction, generality, formalism, and 'réglementation' (i.e., codification and reversibility through a system of rules providing for the legitimate transformation of the law and prohibiting illegitimate change). Poulantzas stresses that these four properties must be understood both as internal attributes of modern law and as an externally determined effect of the economic base. Only through locating them in this dialectical fashion can one avoid a purely internalist *Normlogik* as well as simple economic reductionism. The internalist approach is exemplified par excellence in Kelsen's pure theory of law as a deductive science of legal norms derivable from a basic *Grundnorm* (see below). But Poulantzas is also critical of attempts to explain any given legal rule or juridical principle as the reflection of an immediate infrastructural need. He argues that, although a given law, juridical institution, or legal rule may sometimes correspond immediately to economic imperatives, this always represents a limit case. Even then it must still be integrated into the legal system as a whole and conformed to the specific formal characteristics of the modern legal system (*NDC*, pp 251-79).

These formal characteristics are ultimately determined from the outside through the economic imperative confronting capitalist society (especially in its monopoly stage) of calculation, anticipation, and stability. But between the infrastructure of capitalist society and the specific forms that the legal system takes inside the superstructure there are significant mediations. Here Poulantzas follows Lucien Goldmann in focusing on the crucial mediating role of the *vision du monde* (*Weltanschauung* or 'world-view') of the dominant economic class. For this provides the overarching superstructural reflex of the economic activities occurring at the base in a given conjuncture. Such worldviews are said to constitute the foundations for the unity of apparently disparate juridical structures. For their unity derives not only from common formal properties but also from the fact they share a substantive ideological content (*NDC*, pp 289-94).

In this context Poulantzas claims that the legal structure of modern, capitalist society is unified through its integration into a totalising worldview. But this worldview finds its particular

juridical expression in general legal principles and in the priority given to the juridical concept of public order. The nature of these principles and the meaning of public order change as capitalism evolves. This can be seen in the contrast between the emphasis on individual liberties and free will associated with the 'nightwatchman' constitutional state of 19<sup>th</sup> century France and the *étatisme* of modern France in which individual liberties are subordinated to economic planning and state intervention (*NDC*, pp 295-342).

Finally, Poulantzas applies his general axiological principles to the particular situation of modern, capitalist societies. Here he argues that only those legal values are valuable or authentic which promote socialisation and social liberties, i.e., which promote socialism and undermine capitalism. Poulantzas explicitly rejects legal positivism ('an order is an order') with all its overtones of the defence at the Nuremberg trials. For he argues that not all legal facts in their unity with values are equally valuable. In other words, whilst continuing to argue that the realm of law reveals a unity of fact and value, Poulantzas denies that all legal institutions and norms are equally valuable from the viewpoint of man's social existence. He argues that the practical liberty of man in and through the practical liberty of others (*autrui*) is only possible at the level of the human community:

"this practical liberty would comprise a relation of reciprocal recognition of men *qua* real-subjects. This would occur through the realisation and objectivation of their being as they engage in a common endeavour of material and spiritual labours to conquer nature and create a 'human' world. I have also argued that the structure of these societies gives rise to phenomena which constitute *in fact* the *very negation* of the axiological indices grounded in the structural totality of fact and value, in human existence and social praxis" (*NDC*, p 347, my translation).

Above all, argues Poulantzas, this is evident in the alienation of man in relation to his labour, in relation to others, etc., in the reification of social relations, in the reduction of 'being' to 'having' rather than 'doing', and so forth. In turn this alienation and reification are rooted in the specific organisation of the market and division of labour characteristic of capitalism (*NDC*, pp 343-52).

The axiological implications of this argument are evident. Thus Poulantzas concludes that:

"a juridical universe is valuable, a social and economic system acquires a positive axiological significance for the foundation of juridical values, *in so far* as it constitutes, historically, a move away from the human struggle against the facts which alienate and reify man towards the creation of a 'human' universe, where man could create his own sense of worth (*dignité*) and realise his species being. It is valuable to the extent that it reflects directly and immediately the historically given possibilities (at a given moment and in regard to the future of man) of abolishing a universe of alienation and reification. Thus it is valuable to the degree that it constitutes a step in man's conquest, in the light of the circumstances and development entailed in the infrastructure and superstructure, of his own humanity" (*NDC*, p 348, my translation).

In this sense Poulantzas worked within the framework of natural law theory but he locates it within a new existentialist-marxist framework. This relativises the meaning of natural law in terms of the long-term evolution of human society. It thereby ensures that his natural law doctrine does not involve an a priori, essentialised historical approach. Natural law is thus related to the nature of things in the social world, i.e., to the fact of the perpetual discovery by man of his own nature in a totalisation process that is secured through the practical pursuit of a valued future. Accordingly Poulantzas concludes that the nature of things can also be understood as a nature of becoming (*nature du devenir*) (*NDC*, pp 348-9).

### **Other Early Philosophical and Legal Studies**

Whilst working on his doctoral dissertation Poulantzas also published a number of reviews and articles dealing with various epistemological, philosophical, and substantive issues in the field of law. A full list of these studies is given in the bibliography. In his reviews Poulantzas returns to the problem of the unity of fact and value, the nature of things, and the role of existentialism and marxism in solving this problem (e.g., 1962, pp 310-12; 1963b, pp 295-6). He also addressed the problem of the nature of things (1964b) and the question of juridical ontology (1964c). Both these articles recapitulate key arguments from his dissertation. Rather than go over familiar ground we will concentrate on those articles dealing

with methodological problems in the marxist theory of law and the state.

In 1963 Poulantzas published some critical notes on phenomenology and existentialism and their implications for legal theory. He notes how phenomenological theorists of law insist on its irreducibility, the *a priori* character of legal concepts, the phenomenological 'reality' or materiality of legal ideas, etc. Accordingly they focus on the internal structure of law. But these strengths are also weaknesses. For phenomenology cannot locate law in the social totality, cannot understand the changing content of law, and cannot comprehend the unity of fact and value. A Sartrean existentialism can overcome these problems. It provides the means to study the interdependence of law and other social structures, to relate law to the changing social activity of man in the world, and to found an axiology of law. But even the most advanced existentialist views of law (e.g., those of Maihofer) run the risk of *sur-ontologisme*, i.e., of treating the generic, species being of man as the sole basis of legal norms rather than as a general substratum beneath the specific social and historical conditions that directly determine legal facts and values. This conclusion points to the need for a rapprochement between existentialism and marxism (1963a, *passim*).

In an important study published at this time Poulantzas criticised other marxist approaches to law for their economism and/or voluntarism. Thus he suggests that the work of theorists such as Stuchka and Pashukanis simply reduce the legal system to a reflection of the interests of the dominant class and the relations among commodity owners. Conversely theorists such as Reisner and Vyshinsky merely offer a description of legal norms decreed by the state and treat the latter as a sovereign legal subject with its own rationality (1964a, pp 275-78). To these unsatisfactory approaches Poulantzas counterposes his interpretation of Marx's own approach. He argues that Marx examined the articulation of base and superstructure and attributed to each level its own internal structuration and reciprocal influence within the dialectical totality formed by a human community (1964a, pp 278-82).

In this context Poulantzas suggests that the infrastructure has a real, material influence on the social whole, whereas the superstructure has a real, ideal (or axiological-normative) influence. He claims that Marx analysed the specificity of the superstructures of law and the state in capitalism in terms of commodity production and

exchange; and that he also examined the correspondence between these economic relations and the laws of property and contract in the modern legal system as it was mediated through the fundamental reality and value (*réalité-valeur*) of an individualistic voluntarism. This value system or worldview (cf. the approach of Goldmann) is reflected in the formal, abstract equality and liberty of capitalism and in the reification of social relations. Law has a definite reciprocal role in the structural whole because it provides the framework of calculability and forecasting (*prévision*) necessary for monopoly capitalism to operate (1964a, pp 283-90).

Poulantzas went on to argue that an adequate development of this analysis must follow the principles of the internal-external dialectical method. It must consider not only the internal logic of the four main principles of modern law (abstraction, generality, formalism, and 'réglementation') but also examine the external determinations of this system. Internally it is necessary to investigate how the juridical system reveals a specific axiomatisation, hierarchisation of powers, and logical coherence such that superior norms validate inferior norms (cf. Engels to Schmidt, 1890; Kelsen, 1945, and *seriatim*). Externally it is necessary to show how this system is related to the exploitation of oppressed classes through the repressive power of the state. Continuing this dialectical method it is also necessary to show how each juridical norm or institution that is engendered by economic imperatives at the base is then integrated into its distinctive place in the legal universe and thereby overdetermined by the legal order as a whole (1964a, pp 290-4).

In this article Poulantzas also considers the state in its aspect of public law, i.e., as a juridical order with its own hierarchy of institutions and practices regulated according to their respective competences and the separation of powers. Here again Poulantzas adopted the internal-external dialectical approach. He suggests that the state must be seen not only in terms of its specific institutional structures and values as mediations of class power in the political region but also in terms of its class character as determined by the nature of the dominant economic class:

"From the internal viewpoint the state presents itself as the axiological-normative order of rules and juridical institutions taken as a whole (state-organisation); from the external viewpoint, the state presents itself as the repressive force which, through the

rules and juridical institutions comprising it, aims at class exploitation (state-organisation as instrument" (1964a, p 297).

This approach has clear implications for political strategy. Thus Poulantzas argues that the conquest of power by the working class requires the *democratisation* of the state considered internally - so that its internal, formal, but mediated, links with capital can be broken; and it requires its *dictatorialisation* considered externally, i.e., its use as an instrument of power over the bourgeoisie. In this sense there are two sites of popular-democratic struggle that the working class must contest if it is to break out of its subaltern status. It must establish a dictatorship *over* the bourgeoisie and democratic power vis-à-vis the people (1964a, p 299).

Finally, having noted above that Poulantzas attempts to synthesise existentialism and Marxism in developing his own distinctive account of the nature of things, it is worth recording that Poulantzas by no means wholly accepted the Sartrean approach to a rapprochement between these schools. For, in the same year that his dissertation was published, Poulantzas presented a short, critical review of Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and its implications for law. He defends Sartre's approach as representing an important advance on other Marxist advocates of a 'humanist anthropology'. For he praises Sartre's twin emphases on the mediations between the individual and the social group and on the ontological connections between the external, material world and human praxis. He also suggests that Sartre's analysis of the 'statutory group' (i.e., a group organised around a pledge and enjoying its own regulated order) grounds the specificity of the juridical level as an axiological-normative relation. Thus it does not reduce law to brute force and/or force sanctioned in moral or religious terms (1965a, pp 96-7).

Yet Poulantzas is also critical of Sartre. In particular he attacks him for taking as his point of ontological departure the individual praxis of the solitary man rather than the economico-social structures of society at a given stage of development. This allegedly leads Sartre to link law and the state to certain general ontological co-ordinates. This is inconsistent with the analyses of the mature Marx. The latter give a key role to new concepts such as mode of production, forces and relations of production, social class, class struggle, base and superstructure, ideology, etc. Lacking such concepts, Sartre merely provides an account of the presuppositions of all possible forms of

law or state. He must treat variations therein as an after-thought rather than as integral elements in the development of societies. He cannot provide an account of a specific, historically determined legal system or state. In the final analysis, therefore, Sartre's approach is ahistorical (1965a, pp 86-93).

Poulantzas argues that this is reflected in a persistent ambiguity in Sartre's work. Thus the state is founded once on a particular economico-social structure at the base and then on a universal, ahistorical, ontologically given mode of sociality (e.g., the opposition between master-slave or between fraternity and terror). Poulantzas concludes that Sartre's approach entails a 'sur-ontologisme' (or 'overontologism'). For ontological analyses constantly duplicate and overlap (recouvrent) economico-social analyses (1965a, pp 104-5, 106n).

This critique depends on arguments drawn from Louis Althusser. This is especially clear in the importance Poulantzas now attaches to the works of the mature Marx as opposed to the young Marx. But Poulantzas still stakes out the main ground of his critique in terms of his own dialectical, anthropological, ontological method. This critique thus bears all the marks of a transitional piece and it provides an appropriate bridge to the criticism of Poulantzas's early work.

## **A Critique of the Early Poulantzas**

Within his chosen field of analysis the early work of Poulantzas in the philosophy and sociology of law marks an important advance. Thus Michel Villey, the doyen of legal philosophy in postwar France and someone who favoured an Aristotelian or Thomist solution to the axiological problems addressed by Poulantzas, is happy to acknowledge the originality and significance of his 'existentialo-marxist' approach to the unity of fact and value (Villey, 1965a, pp vii-xi, and 1965b, pp 169-70). Likewise, Wolfgang Friedmann, the eminent legal theorist and a proponent of sociological jurisprudence rather than marxist analyses, described Poulantzas's dissertation as "probably the most ambitious and comprehensive attempt to make the concept of the *nature des choses* the link between phenomenological and existentialist approaches to life and law" (Friedmann, 1973, p 356).

It is particularly ironic, therefore, that Poulantzas proved to be his

own harshest critic. For in later years Poulantzas consigned his dissertation, so to speak, to 'the gnawing criticism of the mice' and refused to countenance its republication. He charged it with historicism and humanism and disowned it in favour of a more structuralist analysis. Accordingly it could prove interesting to consider not only the merits (if any) of Poulantzas's early work but also to use it to illustrate the criticisms he later makes of historicism and humanism.

There is little doubt that Poulantzas made an important, if today largely unrecognised, contribution to legal philosophy. Certainly a number of commentators of varying theoretical persuasion have offered positive assessments of Poulantzas as a phenomenological and/or existentialo-marxist theorist. His work should be located in relation to two trends in postwar thought. Firstly it is linked to the revival of natural law doctrines after the Second World War as a reaction to the positivist tradition's failure to provide moral or juridical grounds for disqualifying Nazi law. This revival was particularly marked in German legal theory. Secondly it is related to the philosophical rapprochement between existentialism and 'Western Marxism' in postwar France. The first trend provided the general problem in legal theory that Poulantzas tackled - the axiological bases for distinguishing between good and bad law. It also provided the phenomenological concept of the 'nature of things' as a particular solution to this problem. But it was the second trend that provided the key to Poulantzas's distinctive attack on the unity of fact and value and its relevance to the field of law.

The dualism of fact and value certainly poses problems for legal philosophy. For it either leads to neo-Kantian doctrines of 'just law' founded on pure reason and having minimum content, little historical specificity, and no institutional substance; or else it leads to a positivist or realist approach which deprives law of justice and value, destroying its normative force, and reducing it to its formal and/or substantive qualities in particular contexts (cf. Villey, 1965b, p 169). Poulantzas attempts to break through this impasse and provides a plausible, if ultimately unacceptable, axiology of law. Its plausibility stems from his use of marxism to provide a social dimension to existentialist anthropology as well as his use of legal sociology to round out his legal ontology.

Thus Poulantzas does not adopt as his starting point the activities of the isolated individual responding to situations of individual scarcity. Instead he situated existential action, through which man makes

himself, in terms of *socialised* labour and *socialised* needs. Likewise his analysis of the *nature of things* from a phenomenological viewpoint is closely articulated with a concern for the historical development of the legal system and its articulation with other areas of the social whole. This stands in marked contrast with other work in the phenomenological tradition that shares the ahistorical and eternal character of neo-Kantian theories of just law. Thus, within his chosen framework, Poulantzas is able to make various telling criticisms of the dominant approach. In particular he criticises it for its asocial, ahistorical nature and its concomitant inability to deal adequately with changes in law and legal systems. But it is also clear that in developing such criticisms Poulantzas places himself on the terrain of the existentialist and phenomenological traditions. This means that he can only effect theoretical *displacements* within an approach that remains fundamentally *flawed*.

There are also important advances to be noted in Poulantzas's contribution to the sociology of law. In particular the use of the so-called 'internal-external' dialectic derived from Sartre appears to produce useful results in analysing the modern state and modern law. Sartre himself does not explicitly call for the 'internal-external' dialectic employed by Poulantzas; nor does Poulantzas directly refer to the 'progressive-regressive' method recommended by Sartre. This reflects the different concerns of the two theorists. Whereas Sartre was concerned with the complex links between the objective and subjective, collective and individual, moments of a conjuncture, Poulantzas was concerned with the complex links between different structural levels in a social formation. But there is certainly some warrant for Poulantzas's claim to derive his 'internal-external' dialectic from Sartre. In both *The Problem of Method* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre refers to the need to study the internalisation of the external and the externalisation of the internal as part of an overall dialectical analysis (Sartre, 1957/1963, pp 126-7, 1960/1978, pp 71-6 and *passim*). And Poulantzas himself suggests that his new approach applies Sartre's method of dialectical reason in contrast to the formal and apriorist 'analytical reason' of modern jurisprudence (1966a, pp 154-7). Let us see how this dialectic operates.

One of the most pervasive and fascinating influences within modern legal theory has been the neo-Kantian positivism of Hans Kelsen (and the so-called 'Vienna School') with its concept of a purely

internal *Normlogik*. This argues that an effective legal order must be hierarchically unified under a fundamental legal norm (*Grundnorm*) and backed up by effective coercive sanctions. It also declares the state and law to be identical and insists that in any one society only one sovereign, compulsive legal order is possible. Indeed Kelsen argues that in any real, 'sociological' state there will be many authorities, multitudinous relations of domination, numerous acts of commanding and obeying; only the unity of the legal order justifies us in considering the state as a single system of domination. For the same reason Kelsen denies that the state is a subject that exercises power - its power is simply that of a valid and effective legal order. At best he is prepared to concede that the machinery of state ('the bureaucratic apparatus') is the material personification of the broader, formal legal order within a nation-state. He also suggests that the division between public and private law is ideological and simply serves to dissimulate private law as located beyond politics (Kelsen, 1945, pp 18-22, 45, 110-35, 181-3, 187, 194, 202-5, 255, and *passim*).

Poulantzas accepts that this formal, logical account of law holds for the *modern* legal system. He denies that it is valid for all legal systems (see especially, Poulantzas, 1966a, pp 154-7). Thus he attempts to locate this *Normlogik* historically without denying its effectivity. He is able to explain the development of a legal system with a distinctive, formally rational, *rechtsstaatlich* character in terms of its correspondence to a distinctive mode of production. At the same time he can give an account of the specific role that the modern legal system with its distinctive juridical logic plays in shaping the operation of law, economy, and civil society. In this way Poulantzas is able to break with the unresolved problem of Kelsen's pure theory of law, namely, the source of the *Grundnorm* from which all other principles can be derived through a process of legal reasoning. For, whilst recognising the distinctive 'internal' structure of the modern legal system, he can also produce an 'external' account of its determination.

But Poulantzas's early analyses of law and the state are still heavily imbued with a *normlogisch* approach. This is most obvious in his account of the four main traits of modern legal systems and his apparent reduction of the modern state to a sphere of public and administrative law. Even when he breaks with existentialism and moves towards structuralism Poulantzas still maintains certain themes from Kelsen. Thus *PPSC* derives the unity of the capitalist

state from the unity of its sovereign legal order. Likewise he denies that the state itself or its 'bureaucratic apparatus' exercises power. Instead Poulantzas defines state power in terms of the class in whose interests the effective juridico-political order operates; and he treats the 'bureaucratic apparatus' as the personification (or *Träger*) of the political order (see chapter three below). And in later work Poulantzas also argues that the distinction between private and public law is ideological. Only in *SPS* did Poulantzas treat the state as a contradictory unity of legality and illegality and note that the state systematically infringes its own legality (see chapter five below).

Poulantzas does not restrict his analysis to the formal, internal juridical structure of the state. He also considers its external determinations. But, although the early Poulantzas goes beyond a purely *normlogisch* approach, he often resorts to functionalism and/or to idealism to account for the position of law and the state within the capitalist society as a whole. The functionalism is apparent in the concept of the capitalist's needs to calculate the effects of law on his opportunities for profit (*besoin de calcul de prevision*). This concept is introduced without any real attempt to establish how these needs emerge and are mediated. The idealism is apparent in his resort to the notion of a worldview that informs or pervades the whole social formation and provides its point of ideological unification (e.g., 1962, p 314; *NDC*, pp 295-306). In the modern state this worldview is shaped by a juridico-political ideology akin to that described by Engels as the 'juristic world-outlook' (Engels, 1886, *passim*). This approach provides some mediation between the economic base and the different levels or regions of the superstructure. But it remains problematic. For it implies that the social whole is unified through a world-outlook that can be considered apart from specific institutional practices and strategies.

A further theoretical problem arises because Poulantzas places himself on the terrain of existentialism and phenomenology in developing the concept of the nature of things. For, as Poulantzas himself points out in his critique of Miliband's attempt to develop a Marxist theory of the state through a critique of pluralism, "by employing the notions of the adversary to reply to him, one legitimises them and permits their persistence" (1969a, p 70). Thus, as Poulantzas himself was among the first to note, his early studies are heavily imbued with historicism and humanism (1967b, p 160n; cf. *SPS*, p 86n). Indeed such an approach was the *sine qua non* of his

attempt to develop a dialectical solution to the unity of fact and value as a basis for a philosophy and sociology of law. Without embracing humanism and historicism it would have been impossible to engage in such an enterprise.

Humanism is evident in the fundamental theoretical concept of *praxis* adopted both by Sartre and Poulantzas. Both theorists focus on the individual or collective actions of men that proceed from the exercise of free will and enable men to create themselves and values *ex nihilo*. Although one may prefer Poulantzas's attempt to locate existential action in terms of socialised labour and socialised needs, it does not escape the charge of essentialism that can be levelled against Sartre. For, despite Sartre's insistence that existence precedes essence, i.e., that there is no pre-constituted, essential human nature which man must realise and hence that man makes himself through his own, idiosyncratic choice of projects, both he and Poulantzas presuppose an anthropological essence. For both theorists argue that men can make inauthentic choices due to the intervention of their socially conditioned environment and situation. Such choices are inauthentic because they deny men's essence as isolated individuals or socialised members of a community and thereby express their alienation from a true state of individual or collective liberty. The very idea of inauthenticity casts doubt on the existence/essence distinction and suggests that an essentialist problematic of the subject is at the root of this approach.

The idea of inauthenticity also reveals the historicism of Poulantzas's early work. For the concept of 'valeurs valables' or authentic values presupposes a rationality or teleology in history which enables one to judge the validity of values from some future reference point which is pre-given. Indeed Poulantzas makes this assumption quite explicit in his account of the preconditions of objectivity in the social (as opposed to natural) sciences (*NDC*, pp 187-204). Without such teleological, historicist assumptions, of course, Poulantzas's approach would result in moral relativism or nihilism since there would be no grounds for preferring one legal system over another (cf. Villey, 1965b, p 174; Sinha, 1976, pp 857-8). Conversely, if the future were absolutely and objectively predetermined and independent of human choice, it would result in an axiological fatalism since certain values would necessarily surface from the unity of fact and value (Poulantzas, 1961b; cf. Sinha, 1976, pp 857-8). Perhaps it is for this reason that Poulantzas adopts only a tendential, probabilistic approach to

teleology and supplements it with a humanistic essentialism (1961b and *NDC*). In this context his teleology is characteristic of hegelianised, western marxism. It relies on an interaction between base and superstructure effected through the role of productive forces as the motor force of history; in turn these productive forces develop under the power of human praxis oriented to the satisfaction of economic needs. This reveals the close articulation that exists between humanism and historicism in his work and shows how they form the fundamental presuppositions of the entire theoretical enterprise.

The problems with such a humanist, historicist approach were emphasised in Poulantzas's own work soon after *NDC* appeared. He suggested that humanism reduces Marxism to a philosophy of labour in which man makes himself and reduces social relations (including class relations) to interhuman, intersubjective relations. In turn historicism adopts a unilinear, teleological account of historical development and sees history as the product of a single, central, explanatory principle. In its most typical Marxist form it involves an ideological, unscientific anthropology of homo economicus; it relates the development of the economy as an economic space to 'material needs' – needs which are always evolving but still provide an unchanging epistemological principle for delimiting the economic; and often leads to technological reductionism in the sense that social change is explained in terms of changes in the forces of production which meet these 'material needs'. Moreover, in all its forms, argues Poulantzas, historicism leads to the conception of the social whole as a circular totality, in which different levels are engendered through a single, central subject or instance and which thereby simply express the nature of this subject under various phenomenal forms and appearances (*PPSC*, p 237, 240-2; cf. 1967b, pp 147-9).

## **Concluding Remarks**

The early works of Poulantzas can be considered as falling into two main areas: philosophy and sociology. In the field of philosophy he pursued the chimera of establishing the dialectical unity of fact and value as a basis for an axiology of legal relations and institutions. Thus he elaborated a complex set of epistemological, ontological, and axiological arguments within the framework of an existentialist-marxist position. This located him firmly within the tradition of postwar

French philosophy and, within these limits, he made a number of interesting theoretical advances. But he subsequently abandoned this particular philosophical approach and moved towards a structuralist position. Nonetheless, as I have already noted, certain themes from Sartrean existentialism are incorporated into his later work (see below and chapter eleven). In addition it should be noted that Poulantzas has always been concerned with questions of methodology and epistemology. He may have abandoned existentialism but his use of it was certainly premised on an enduring concern with the scientific status of his theories of law and the state.

In the field of sociology Poulantzas developed an interesting account of the modern legal system and the modern state *qua Rechtsstaat*. He also tried to account both for their specific organisational principles, their overall functioning, and their determination within capitalist societies. In so doing he drew both on Romano-German law and French philosophy to provide an 'internal-external' account in the manner of Sartre. Thus his account of their internal determinations was inspired by the 'Vienna School' and legal analysis more generally. It is also worth stressing here that Poulantzas's account of their substantive class character and its external determinations was apparently indebted to Sartre. Indeed one could say that Sartre anticipates many of Poulantzas's key arguments about the state. For Sartre clearly identifies its role in transcending the internal divisions within the dominant classes, emphasises the links between its institutional unity and its position as the site of sovereign power, notes how this unity depends on the seriality (isolation, mutual separation) of the dominated and dominant classes alike, refers to the heterogeneity (institutional separation) and autonomy of the state in pursuing the national interest, and observes how the state's role in maintaining the established order also serves the interest of the dominant classes (Sartre, 1960/1978, pp 635-42; cf. Poulantzas, 1965a, pp 100-101). These arguments are similar to those later presented in *PPSC*. This is particularly clear in Poulantzas's views on the state's role in forming a power bloc, the importance of the 'isolation effect', the relative autonomy and class unity of the state, and the state's role as a factor of cohesion (see chapter 3).

Nonetheless these early 'sociological' works do not present a detailed 'regional' account of the bourgeois state itself. Poulantzas certainly began to elaborate crucial arguments about the relative autonomy of modern law, the specifically capitalist institutional

forms of law and the state, their role in the institutional mediation of political class domination, and the importance of juridico-political ideology in modern societies. But he also focused on the 'internal-external' determinations of *law* in capitalist societies and dealt only indirectly with their implications for the state. Accordingly these arguments were not brought to fruition.

The decisive break in his work on the state had to await two shifts. Firstly, there was a philosophical shift from existentialism to structuralism. For, although his arguments on law and the state are to some extent independent of his approach to philosophical problems, they could only be fully developed by going beyond existentialism. Poulantzas himself noted the extent to which his early philosophical and legal analyses were marred by their common commitment to humanism and historicism. Only by breaking with these commitments could Poulantzas exploit the *normlogisch* approach (and legal theory more generally) and integrate them with his Marxist sociology of law and the state. But, secondly, there had to be a shift in primary concerns away from philosophy and the law to a primary concern with the political 'sociology' of the state. In these respects two separate and, indeed, somewhat antagonistic, influences are crucial: the French philosophy of Althusser and the Italian Marxism of Gramsci. For Althusser provided the *philosophical* means to break with the 'sur-ontologisme' of Sartrean existentialism and thus to go beyond a humanist and historicist account of the capitalist state. And Gramsci provided the *substantive* concepts to locate Poulantzas's emerging ideas about law and the state in the context of capitalist societies. Thus the decisive intellectual origins of *PPSC* are not found in Poulantzas's early training in law - which remains a constant. More significant by far are the shift in French philosophy and the introduction of Italian Marxism into Poulantzas's work.

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## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Gramsci is unique among pre-war Western Marxists can safely be ignored in this context.

**Part II**

**Theories of the  
Capitalist State**

# 3

## **Towards a Regional Theory of Politics**

Mark Poster remarks that, 'just when existential Marxism emerged, there was an abrupt shift in the French intellectual mood towards structuralism' (1975, p 306). This break occurred largely during 1965-67 and one of its expressions was a structuralist Marxism initiated by Althusser. Poulantzas was an enthusiastic participant in this shift and was obviously influenced, if not fully converted, by the Althusserian School. Indeed, whilst his own existential Marxist doctoral thesis was published in 1965, by 1967 he had completed the preparatory work for *PPSC* with its structuralist inspiration. But it was not just an epistemological break that Poulantzas underwent during this period. His main field of interest also shifted from the philosophy of law to the political sociology of the capitalist state. In studying the latter he also drew significantly on the work of Gramsci and other Italian Marxists.

### **First Thoughts on Hegemony and the State**

During this crucial transitional period Poulantzas was influenced by developments in Italian political theory and philosophy as well as changes in the French intellectual mood. Indeed Poulantzas himself suggests that contemporary French Marxism was retarded compared with Italy and adds that it was della Volpe, Cerroni, Colletti, and Rossi who laid the foundations for a positive, scientific Marxism (1969c, p 8). His interest in their work was grounded in the emerging theoretical and political crisis of Stalinism and its repercussions within France. Theoretically this crisis was expressed in heated debates concerning humanism, economic determinism, marxist dialectics, the relationship between Marx and Hegel, the distinction

between science and ideology, structures and their genesis, and the fundamental determinants of the capitalist mode of production. Politically it was expressed in a re-appraisal of orthodox Marxist-Leninist strategies and their supposed application in the theory of 'state monopoly capitalism' that influenced the French Communist Party. In this context Poulantzas sought to distance himself not only from existentialism but also from Stalinism. In doing so he turned initially to the epistemological approach of the Della Volpean School and to the substantive political insights of Gramsci. This turn is already evident in his 1964 essay on law and the state - which draws on della Volpe and Cerroni as well as existential marxism (see pp 00-00 above). It is even clearer in subsequent remarks on hegemony and the capitalist state.

Poulantzas begins 'Preliminaries to the Study of Hegemony in the State' by summarizing the orthodox Marxist approach. This is supposed to see the state as an essentially repressive instrument that is manipulable exclusively and at will by a single, economically dominant, unitary class subject (1965b, pp 863-5). In opposition to this instrumentalist-voluntarist approach Poulantzas insists on two points. Firstly, he argues that the state must be treated as a specific structural ensemble with its own effects on the reproduction of a society-divided-into-classes. And, secondly, he argues that classes are not endowed with an abstract, unifying consciousness but are actually constituted as political forces through the state itself (1965b, 866-9).

In presenting his own account of the state Poulantzas adopts an 'external-internal' approach. He considers its external determination by the dominant mode of production and examines the internal determinations grounded in the state's institutional structure. Thus the difference between pre-capitalist and capitalist states derives from their respective relations of production and the latter's contrasting implications for the organization of political conflict. But it is the nature of hegemony as the unique organizing principle of the capitalist state that determines its precise form and function.

Pre-capitalist relations of production were mediated through the 'natural' ties of producers to a hierarchised community. Social relations assumed a mixed, 'economic-corporate' character and generated mixed, 'economic-corporate' conflicts of interest. In pre-capitalist societies, in other words, there was no clear separation between the economic, political, or social spheres. Conversely

capitalism rests on the individual 'freedom' of producers. This entails an opposition between the particular *private* interests of individual producers in the economic sphere and their common *political* interests in an orderly framework for exchange relations. In turn this is associated with the institutional separation between the private sphere of civil society and the public sphere of the political.

These differences are reflected in differences in the structure and functions of the state. Thus Poulantzas argues that pre-capitalist states were based on the monarchical principle or divine right and openly exclude exploited classes from full participation in the political sphere. In contrast the capitalist state is characterized by popular sovereignty and the secular responsibility of the state to the 'people'. As formally free and equal individuals the 'people' participate in politics as *citizens* through universal suffrage rather than in their capacities as *producers*. In turn this means that the 'economic-corporate' state of slave-holding or feudal societies (or, indeed, bourgeois societies in 'exceptional' times) relied on force to impose the immediate private economic interests of the dominant class. Conversely, the 'hegemonic' bourgeois state must guarantee (at least in a formal and abstract manner) the universal, general interest of all its citizens. It does this by mediating politically among the competing 'private' interests of its citizens and counterposing them to their general, 'public' interest (1965b, pp 870-6).

Thus capitalist societies have a quite specific dynamic. The autonomisation of economics from politics means that the former is dominated by surplus value and exchange as the direct aim and motive of production. Conversely the autonomisation of politics from economics permits a distinctive, *sui generis* mode of political class domination. Under capitalism the separation of the economic and political institutions involves more than a specialized coercive apparatus set apart from the people. It actually involves excluding *extra-economic* coercion from economic organization. This is crucial because the state can then operate as a universalizing instance outside and above the economic realm. Political struggle thus revolves around control of this universalizing instance and requires the dominant class to portray its specific interests as those of the nation as a whole. Thus politics is constituted as the field of hegemony (1965b, pp 880-2).

This analysis implies that the modern state cannot conform unequivocally to the immediate economic interests of the dominant

class(es). For the universalizing instance also offers guarantees to the economic-corporate interests of the dominated class(es). This contrasts with the situation in the pre-modern state. There the interests of conflicting classes are subject at best to marginal, mechanical compromise and political power is fragmented among different groups. But the capitalist state must have a definite institutional unity and a certain measure of autonomy. Without these properties it could not impose *short-term economic* sacrifices on the dominant class(es) to secure their *long-term political* domination (1965b, 882-4). Intellectuals and ideological class struggle are very important here because all social relations in capitalist societies appear as relations of consent underpinned as necessary by resort to constitutionalized, legitimate violence. More generally Poulantzas argues that the modern state must be analyzed as a contradictory unity of direction-domination, organization-coercion, in all areas of social relations (1965b, 885-93).

Poulantzas does not restrict the notion of hegemony to the political relation between dominant and dominated classes. He also applies it to the relations within the dominant classes. He argues that the bourgeoisie is divided into competing fractions with conflicting interests. This means that it cannot secure its general interests simply through a mechanical game of compromise and/or purely tactical alliances. Instead it must be unified through the hegemony of a specific fraction of capital that can advance the particular interests of all fractions.

But this analysis raises the problem of how the power bloc comes to be unified. Poulantzas explicitly rejects two possible explanations. He denies the argument of state monopoly capitalism theories that a relatively unified power bloc emerges through the imposition of the economic-corporate interests of the dominant fraction on other fractions and classes. He also denies that it could be secured through a state that comprised no more than a disparate ensemble of dislocated powers and counter-powers and therefore could not organize and lead a bourgeois power bloc (1965b, 1048-58). Instead Poulantzas seeks an explanation in the specific institutional structure of the state. For a unified power bloc can only be created where the state possesses its own unity and relative autonomy and these properties are engendered through the structural organization of the state itself (1965b, 1061-66). Thus Poulantzas argues that the state plays a major role in organizing

hegemony within the power bloc as well as in mobilizing the active consent of the dominated classes.

## **Italian Politics and French Philosophy**

We have seen that many of the key substantive arguments of Poulantzas's subsequent theory of the capitalist state are presented here before he embraced Althusserian Marxism. Why did Poulantzas later come to develop these arguments within the framework of structuralist Marxism? There are two aspects to an explanation. Firstly, why did he reject the epistemological and political analyses of the Della Volpean School? And, secondly, why did he come to accept a structuralist approach? These aspects are clearly related. Poulantzas himself remarked that that he increasingly found the della Volpeans unsatisfactory on various issues involved in the crisis of Stalinism (1967d, p 8). Conversely he found Althusser's answers more convincing – the latter's collection of essays, *For Marx*, and the collective work on *Reading Capital* were both published in 1965. In particular Poulantzas accepted Althusser's claim that the distinction between civil society and the state, which underpinned his own work and was directly borrowed from the della Volpean School, was unscientific; and he agreed that Gramsci's concept of hegemony was contaminated by historicism. More generally Poulantzas accepted the epistemological claims of Althusserian structuralism and thus shared in the general shift in the French intellectual mood.

This new approach emerges in Poulantzas's work in the two years following publication of his first thoughts on hegemony and the state. This work includes a strangely ambivalent appraisal of Althusser's structuralism. On the one hand, Poulantzas argues that Althusser's work provides for a definitive break with Sartre's historicist thematic of praxis as well as with the structuralist approach of Levi-Strauss with its effective denial of any historical development. In particular he welcomed the concept of 'structure in dominance' as the key to analyzing the complex structure of social formations. Althusser had introduced this concept to differentiate the Marxist account of totality from both Hegelian essentialism (in which each part is an equivalent expression of the same essence) and a crude 'base-superstructure' economism (in which non-economic elements are mere epiphenomena of an autonomous economic base). He saw the

social totality as constituted by different levels (each with their own relative autonomy and reciprocal effects within the whole) whose unity is secured by the dominance of one level (not necessarily the economic) over the others and whose dominant level is determined in the last instance by the overall character of the relations of production (Althusser, 1965, pp. 200-17).

On the other hand, Poulantzas criticized Althusser for failing to develop the crucial concept of 'structure in dominance' so that the relations between the economic and the political can be analyzed rigorously. As it is Poulantzas felt that Althusser could well be led into an empiricist pluralism of different levels or else into an *a priori* privileging of the political moment as the site of all class struggles (1966c, pp. 1960-9 and 1974-81). This criticism is certainly correct. In addition it is worth noting that Hindess and Hirst have vigorously and rightly contested the overall utility of this key structuralist concept on the grounds that it is really another form of essentialism (Hindess and Hirst, 1975, pp. 123-45).

Despite these reservations Poulantzas happily exploited Althusser's critique of humanism and historicism and the concept of 'structure in dominance' in his own work. Thus his contributions to the 'Second Week of Contemporary Thought' in Athens took up his earlier discussion of hegemony and recast it in Althusserian terms. They also adumbrate his subsequent discussion of the complex structural determination of social class relations (1966d, 1966e). Elsewhere Poulantzas criticized Anderson and Nairn for adopting an historicist and subjectivist account of hegemony in their work on the British state. He called instead for a separate, regional theory of ideology (1967a; see Chapter 7). The same reliance on Althusser's critical method can be found in his comments on the theoretical object of *Capital* and his suggestion that the concept of 'structure in dominance' is the key to understanding Marx's approach to historical and economic analysis (1968a, pp 236-47). Finally, in an influential article on the Marxist theory of law, Poulantzas criticizes orthodox Marxists for their economism and/or voluntarism. Thus Pashukanis and Stuchka are criticized for treating private law as a simple epiphenomenon of the economic base; and Reisner and Vyschinski are slated for interpreting law as the incarnation of the will of the dominant class. Poulantzas prefers to treat law as a specific region within a complex 'structure in dominance'. In other words, without questioning the ultimately determining role of the economic, law should be treated as having its own structural principles and specific

effects on social reproduction (1967b, pp 145-9 and 159-60; cf. *PPSC*, pp 256-7).

Thus we see Poulantzas in transit from an existentialist to a structuralist Marxism. *En route* he undertook a brief detour through Italian Marxist philosophy but remained committed to the more general, Gramscian approach of Italian politics. Poulantzas used Althusser's arguments in two ways. Firstly, he criticized the dominant Marxist approaches to law, the state, and ideology. Secondly, he invoked Althusser to justify his own attempt to produce regional theories of the political and ideological. But, even if he had wanted to do so, Poulantzas could not draw on Althusser in developing his substantive arguments. Neither Althusser nor his close associates in the *cercle d'Ulm* had as yet tried to specify Marx's views on the state and/or to present an original account of its relative autonomy and specific functions in capitalism. Thus, although he derived his basic epistemological and theoretical method from Althusserian Marxism, Poulantzas had to turn elsewhere for the sources of his regional theory. Here he engaged in a critical 'reading' of the Marxist classics and also reworked his own, earlier arguments. In particular Gramsci's account of hegemony - now purged of its alleged historicism - provides a crucial theoretical resource. In this way Poulantzas moved towards that creative synthesis of French philosophy, Italian politics, and Romano-German law that is first presented in *PPSC*.

### **Methodological Foundations for a Regional Theory**

In introducing *PPSC* Poulantzas clearly locates it within the Althusserian problematic. He refers at once to the basic epistemological propositions of Althusser's approach and develops his ideas on dialectical and historical materialism to justify a separate theory of the capitalist state. Thus *PPSC* is described as an attempt to produce a complex hierarchy of concepts for analyzing the political superstructure of the state in the CMP, i.e., to produce a *regional* theory of the state in a particular mode of production. Poulantzas argues that this cannot be achieved through a simple logical derivation of progressively more concrete concepts from the most abstract concepts. Nor can it be achieved through the simple subsumption of more concrete concepts under the most abstract as so many particular instances of the latter. Instead it requires a complex work of theoretical elaboration with due regard for the precise

location and function of various concepts. Above all these must be clearly related to the movement from abstract to concrete and to the particular theoretical object (e.g., the political region) on which they bear (*PPSC*, pp 11, 13, 16-17).

Poulantzas suggests that a scientific study of the capitalist type of state requires three inter-related theoretical developments. Firstly, there is the historical materialist *general theory* of modes of production, class-divided societies, states, and politics - all viewed in isolation from specific modes of production. Secondly, there is the *particular theory* of the CMP that determines the exact place and function of the state and politics in the overall structural matrix of capitalism. And, thirdly, since the state is institutionally distinct within capitalism (and can therefore constitute a *sui generis* object of investigation), there is the *regional theory* of the capitalist state and politics (*PPSC*, pp 12, 16-18, 142).

Unfortunately Poulantzas does not discuss the problems involved in developing and connecting these different concepts. At best we are provided with the answers implied in his own order of exposition. But this is far from complete. For Poulantzas merely sketches the general theory of modes of production presented by Althusser et al., in *Reading Capital* and argues that *Capital* itself provides the particular theory of the CMP and the regional theory of its economic level (*PPSC*, pp 16, 20-1, 25-33; cf. 1968a, pp 243-7). This leaves him free to concentrate on the general theory of the state, social classes, and power and on the regional theory of the capitalist state. Even here, as befits his rejection of any simple logical unfolding of concepts from some abstract starting point, Poulantzas does not systematically construct his concepts. Instead they are introduced as and when required. The concepts themselves are variously derived. Generally they stem from his 'reading' of the political writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Gramsci; but others are introduced through a critique of more recent Marxist and/or pluralist theories. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this approach but Poulantzas does not always establish how these concepts fit together in his complex hierarchy of determinations.

## **State Power and Social Classes**

Poulantzas devotes the first part of *PPSC* to the general theory of politics, classes, and state power. Because he cannot yet introduce

concepts relating to particular modes of production and their corresponding forms of state, this general theory must focus on the fundamental class character and functions of the state and politics. Moreover, since he believes that classes are determined by the overall matrix of economic, political, and ideological structures rather than by economic structures alone, Poulantzas deals with the state and politics before discussing classes. He suggests that the state is defined by its general function as the factor of cohesion or unity in a class-divided society. It is not defined by specific institutions. Indeed the exact place of the state (i.e., its particular form, its institutional structure, and its boundaries) and its particular functions (as overdetermined by the general function) vary according to the mode of production and/or society under consideration.

Pursuing this 'class-theoretical' approach Poulantzas advances three further general propositions. He suggests that the state reflects and condenses all the contradictions in a class-divided society and thereby constitutes the terrain for the most all-embracing political struggles. He argues that political practices are always class practices. And he claims that state power is always the power of a definite class to whose interests the state corresponds. But none of this means that the state should be seen as a mere tool of the dominant class. Instead Poulantzas is arguing that, in so far as the state successfully performs its general function in managing class contradictions and thereby securing social cohesion, it will maintain the political preconditions for the survival of the dominant mode of production. Moreover, because its general function is to maintain cohesion and manage the equilibrium of compromise among classes in struggle, state power cannot be manipulated by one class or fraction to the exclusion of others. Overall, then, Poulantzas treats politics as a distinctive class practice which is concerned to maintain or alter the balance of class forces engaged in struggle on the terrain of a particular form of state (*PPSC*, pp 37-119).

It is in this context that Poulantzas develops his regional theory of the political under capitalism. His analysis of the CMP itself is rather cursory and depends on a global contrast between pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production. He argues that the economic and political regions of the CMP are unique in their relative institutional separation or autonomy. This can occur because extra-economic compulsion is excluded from the direct organization of capitalist production and because exchange relations mediate and validate economic organization. The economy is therefore freed from direct

political coercion and operates under the dominance of market forces. Likewise, because extra-economic force is no longer directly involved in production or exploitation, the state can monopolize and constitutionalize force and also specialize in its generic political function of maintaining social cohesion.

These features of the economic and political regions have crucial implications for any analysis of capitalism. This does not mean that they are completely autonomous. The economic region still has political preconditions and the state still performs economic functions. But their institutional separation and functional specialization do mean that they can be treated as autonomous and distinctive objects of scientific analysis. Indeed Poulantzas claims that Marx demonstrated this in *Capital* for the economic region and economic science and he himself aims to do the same for the political region and political science. He also suggests that the autonomy of the political region justifies the exclusion of other determinations in discussing the capitalist state. Indeed, since the latter represents the global *political* interests of the power bloc rather than the immediate *political* interests of its various class (or fractional) elements, one must proceed from *sui generis* political concepts rather than from the economic categories of capital accumulation (*PPSC*, pp 17, 21, 29-32, 46, 50-1, 127, 129-31, 143n, 190, 226-7, 282).

In developing the *particular theory* of the capitalist state Poulantzas necessarily begins with the place of the political within the CMP. But this serves only two limited purposes. It establishes the general articulation between the relations of production and the constitution of economic agents as subjects in the juridico-political sphere (*PPSC*, pp 124-30). And it establishes the invariant structural limits within which various forms of state and regime can develop as capitalism moves from one stage to the next and/or as the balance of class forces shifts (*PPSC*, pp 142-5, 147-53, 309-10). Having established these points, Poulantzas focuses on the dynamic role of the class struggle and the specific institutional structures of the state. Thus the rest of *PPSC* concentrates on the state's relation to class practices (especially political struggle) and on its internal organizational principles. Moreover, within the general limits imposed by the matrix of the CMP and its periodization, primacy is given to the different fields of class struggle and, above all, to the struggle for state power (*PPSC*, pp 75-7, 135-7, 143, 148-51, 187-8, 309).

## The 'Isolation Effect', Class Relations, and the State

Poulantzas argues that the structural matrix of the CMP involves an institutional separation of the different fields of class struggle. In turn this permits their mutual dislocation and thereby poses the problem of how different struggles should be unified and directed. Nonetheless, 'to the extent that the political superstructure is the *overdetermining* level of the levels of the structure by *concentrating* their contradictions and by reflecting their relation, the political class struggle is the *overdetermining* level of the field of class struggles ... the nodal point of the process of transformation' (PPSC, pp 76-7; cf. 75-77, 83-4, 89-93, 275). Accordingly Poulantzas concentrates on the political class struggle and pays particular attention to how the state organizes and disorganizes different classes.

Poulantzas argues that the juridico-political region has crucial effects on the class struggle. For it constitute the agents of production as individual juridical subjects rather than as members of antagonistic classes. Thus economic agents do not experience capitalist relations as class relations but as relations of competition among mutually isolated individuals and/or fragmented groups of workers and capitalists. This 'isolation effect' extends to the entire field of economic relations in capitalist societies and permeates classes (e.g., the peasantry or petty commodity producers) that belong to other modes of production (PPSC, pp 130-1, 213-4, 275-6, 310). The same effect occurs in the field of political class struggle. For law and juridico-political ideology duplicate the 'fracturing' of the 'private' sphere in constituting the public as mutually isolated, individual 'citizens' and/or political categories. But Poulantzas adds that the 'isolation effect' in the private and public spheres is coupled with something we might term the 'unifying effect' of the capitalist state. The latter presents itself as the strictly political (i.e., non-economic), public unity of the people-nation considered as the abstract sum of formally free and equal legal subjects. Thus the capitalist state is related to socio-economic relations as these are refracted through the 'isolation effect'. In other words, class relations are constitutively absent from the organization of the capitalist state and its actions aim to secure cohesion and unity among individuated citizens. The individuals of civil society are formally free and equal, the state is the formally sovereign and

'class-less' embodiment of their unity (*PPSC*, pp 125, 133-4, 188-9, 213-6, 223-4, 276-9, 288, 291, 310, 348-50).

But the manner in which this cohesion and unity are realized is necessarily overdetermined by the need to reproduce class domination. Thus Poulantzas argues that the capitalist state has two contrasting but complementary functions to perform. Firstly, it must prevent any political organization of the dominated classes that would threaten to end their economic isolation and/or social fracturing. And, secondly, it must work continually on the dominant class fractions and/or classes to cancel their economic isolation and secure the unity of the power bloc and its hegemony over the dominated classes (*PPSC*, pp 136-7, 140-1, 188-9, 284-5, 287-9). This dual political task is achieved through the organization of a unified power bloc under the leadership of a specific class (fraction) and the successful presentation of its global political interests as those of the population as a whole. In turn this involves the continual negotiation of interests in an 'unstable equilibrium of compromise' (to quote Gramsci) and requires real (albeit limited) material concessions to the 'economic-corporate' interests of subordinate classes (*PPSC*, pp 137, 190-1). None of this is easy to achieve. Indeed Poulantzas suggests that the principal contradiction affecting the state revolves around its need to function as a class state at the same time as it excludes the class struggle as such from its centre (*PPSC*, p 189).

This brief summary indicates how Poulantzas has recast his preliminary remarks on hegemony within a structuralist Marxist perspective. He has abandoned the distinction between civil society and the state and he no longer sees the antagonism among private interests as grounded in the egoism of *homo economicus*. But he transposes the former distinction into the juridico-political distinction between 'private' and 'public' and he interprets individualism as an 'isolation effect' likewise produced through the juridico-political region. Other refinements include the so-called 'general theory' of politics, classes, and the state and the specification of the 'particular theory' of the structural matrix of capitalism in greater detail (but with less clarity) than the analogous account in the preliminary remarks. But the central argument still revolves around the nature and role of hegemony and its institutional mediation through the capitalist state. To see whether *PPSC* really adds anything here, we must consider how Poulantzas discusses the state and class struggle.

## Fundamental Characteristics of the Capitalist State

Poulantzas is concerned with the *theoretically typical* capitalist state and not with any state whatsoever in capitalist societies. He argues that the capitalist type of state has quite distinctive administrative and representational structures. In particular he identifies the centralization of political power implied in state sovereignty, its legitimate monopoly of force, and the dominance of juridico-political ideology in political legitimation. In addition he refers to the normative institutional ensemble of democracy with its 'parliamentary representation, political liberties, universal suffrage, popular sovereignty, etc.' (PPSC, p 113). It should be noted that all these features involve legal aspects of the state and this provides further proof of the role of the juridico-political in Poulantzas's analyses.

Poulantzas draws on these analyses to consider the absolutist state. This already displayed some typical capitalist features and was therefore clearly distinct from the feudal type of state (PPSC, p 113). These features included political centralization and state sovereignty; 'the effective exercise of central power without the "extra-political" restrictions of juridical, ecclesiastical or moral order which characterized the feudal state' (PPSC, p 162); the embodiment of national-popular unity; *raison d'état* (the state's right to reject extra-political limits on its actions in so far as such actions accord with the general interest of the people-nation); the juridical distinction between 'public' and 'private' spheres and their regulation under the rule of law; and the emergence of a modern army and formal, rational-legal bureaucracy (PPSC, pp 163-5). Poulantzas also discusses the role of the absolutist state in three different cases of bourgeois-democratic revolution - England, France, and Prussia. Indeed he concludes that it was precisely the national-popular character of the absolutist state that enabled it to act against the feudal nobility. This meant it could promote the interests of the bourgeoisie before a successful bourgeois-democratic revolution transformed it into the politically dominant class (PPSC, pp 166, 168-83).

In this discussion Poulantzas implies a distinction between the historical and formal constitution of the capitalist state. Historical constitution simply involves the development of a transitional state form that consolidates the economic foundations of capitalism. The capitalist type of state is only formally constituted, however, when a fully-fledged bourgeois democratic republic is established and

performs the crucial political functions of securing hegemonic class leadership (*PPSC*, pp 157-8, 160-1, 166-7, 183). Thus formal constitution requires the development of specific juridico-political characteristics that Poulantzas regards as the institutional *sine qua non* of hegemonic class leadership. For it is only through their internal play in relation to political class struggle that a power bloc can emerge and win popular support.

Poulantzas discusses the popular-democratic republic in terms of its dual function in hegemonic class leadership. He argues that the state's separation from the economic region and its national-popular character permit it to make concessions to the economic interests of subordinate classes. Indeed, as long as they do not threaten the overall reproduction of capitalist society, these concessions may even contradict the short-term economic interests of the dominant classes. For the capitalist state does not directly represent the economic interests of the dominant classes but their political interests (*PPSC*, p 190). Thus economic concessions that further the immediate interests of the dominated classes can simultaneously advance the political interests of the dominant classes. This can occur because the forms in which the dominated classes struggle for concessions contribute significantly to their political disorganization. Moreover, to the extent that such concessions are won in the face of resistance from the dominant classes, this confirms the state's claim to represent the general interest. Viewed in this way state power must be seen in relational terms, i.e., as founded on an unstable equilibrium of compromise among class forces, rather than as the monopoly of one class (fraction) (*PPSC*, pp 191-3).

The internal play of popular-democratic institutions also helps in the organization-direction of the power bloc in the face of internal divisions among the dominant classes or fractions. Poulantzas distinguishes a power bloc from a limited tactical alliance between class forces in *one* field of struggle. For a power bloc is a long-term, organic relation that extends across the economic, political, and ideological fields. He also denies that a power bloc could be based on a mechanical division of power among different classes or fractions and/or on their simple fusion into an homogeneous and harmonious whole. Instead Poulantzas insists that rivalries and conflicts persist among the members of the power bloc and must be managed through the leadership of a specific hegemonic fraction. The latter must unify

the power bloc by transforming its own economic interests into political interests and advancing the general interest of all dominant classes and fractions, i.e., their interest in continued economic exploitation and political domination (*PPSC*, p 239).

Poulantzas suggests that the two kinds of hegemony are generally concentrated in the same class or fraction. However, whereas hegemony over the power bloc depends on the *political* place occupied by the hegemonic class (fraction) in the circuit of capital, popular hegemony depends on the *ideological* capacity to define the general interest of the people-nation (*PPSC*, p 240). But he also recognizes that these two forms of hegemony can be dislocated or unevenly developed. In all cases, however, it is the general form of the state or regime that is crucial. For the specific ties between classes and parties in particular conjunctures can vary considerably without changing the fundamental political relations within the power bloc and their determination through the general institutional structures of the state (*PPSC*, pp 314-21).

This does not mean that Poulantzas neglects more concrete levels of political analysis. Indeed he introduces several concepts for analyzing the 'political scene', i.e., the struggle between social forces organized as parties. These include concepts for analyzing class relations as well as the more obvious field of party relations (e.g., bloc of parties, party entente, electoral alliance). Thus Poulantzas distinguishes between the ruling class and the class in charge of the state at this level of analysis. The *ruling class* is the class whose political party (or parties) dominate the 'political scene' (*PPSC*, pp 246-7, 249). Likewise the *class in charge of the state* is the class (or fraction) 'from which the political, bureaucratic, military, etc., personnel is recruited and which occupies the 'heights' of the state' (*PPSC*, p 249). Poulantzas emphasizes that the ruling class and/or class in charge need not be hegemonic and, indeed, may not even participate in the power bloc or be allied therewith. This is particularly clear in the case of the petty bourgeoisie. At best the latter is an ally of the power bloc and more typically it serves only as a *supporting class*. Supporting classes can also include the peasantry and lumpenproletariat. Their support for the power bloc does not involve real political sacrifice by the power bloc and its allies but is based instead on 'ideological illusions'. It is often motivated by fear of the working class and is typically expressed in support for the current

form of state (*PPSC*, pp 243-4). In all cases he emphasizes the scope for dislocations among the different levels of political practice (*PPSC*, pp 251-2).

### **State Unity and Relative Autonomy**

Poulantzas next considers the characteristic unity and relative autonomy of the capitalist state. These aspects have an institutional foundation and are clearly interdependent. Thus the state's unity is based on the 'specific coherence of an autonomised juridico-political superstructure' (*PPSC*, p 256). For the normative institutional ensemble of democracy means that state sovereignty is linked to the sovereignty of the people-nation. An open and explicit class bias is thereby excluded from the organization and operation of the state. Thus the state can present itself as securing the general interest against all particular interests. In turn this means that the state can over-rule the dominant classes and fractions when they promote their particular interests. In thus maintaining its relative autonomy the state prevents the parcellisation of state power among different classes and fractions and thereby preserves its institutional unity.

But this institutional unity and relative autonomy actually serve 'the unambiguous (*univoque*) political power of the dominant classes or fractions' (*PPSC*, p 279). For it is through this organizational matrix that the state consolidates the power bloc, advances its general political interests, and secures its hegemony. Only when the state has a certain autonomy from all fractions can it act against the long-term economic interests of one or other fraction of the dominant class and/or arrange compromises vis-à-vis the dominated classes. Without such economic sacrifices and compromises, however, it would not be possible to secure the political class interests of the power bloc (*PPSC*, pp 255-7, 275-9, 282-5, 287-9).

Relative autonomy often depends on support from the dominated classes. Indeed Poulantzas argues that its political function sometimes requires the state to play them off against the dominant classes. Political games of this kind are facilitated in several ways. These include the institutional separation of economic and political class struggles, the political manoeuvrability involved in democratic structures, and the ideological opportunities for the state to present itself as the political representative of the dominated classes. Perhaps

the most celebrated example of this phenomenon in the Marxist canon is Bonapartism and its role as the official representative of the smallholding conservative peasantry.

It is in this context that Poulantzas argues that Bonapartism is a tendential, structural feature of *all* capitalist states. There is some justice in this controversial claim. For Bonapartism's political and ideological role on behalf of the supporting classes did help to maintain its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the dominant classes. But this grain of truth should not lead one to confuse two very different forms of relative autonomy which Poulantzas himself was always careful to distinguish elsewhere, namely, the relative autonomy typical of the capitalist state and that exceptional form rooted in a purely temporary equilibrium between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Poulantzas later abandoned this attribution of Bonapartist tendencies to all capitalist states but he continued to insist on the role of the dominated classes in sustaining their relative autonomy (*PPSC*, pp 258-62, 279-87, 302).

The political unity of the state also involves the connection between its own internal structure and that of the power bloc. Thus Poulantzas suggests that one particular branch or power centre within the state generally dominates the other centres and branches. This is the branch or centre that crystallizes both the political unity of the people-nation and that of the power bloc. The dominant branch organizes hegemony by subordinating apparatuses representing other classes or fractions and by forcing the hegemonic class (fraction) to make sacrifices to sustain its twofold hegemonic class leadership. Thus Poulantzas denies that the separation of powers characteristic of capitalist states means that power is shared out among different branches and/or class fractions. Instead the state's institutional unity is maintained through the dominance of one branch. Other branches merely act as resistances to the dominant centre of power. In this context Poulantzas is mainly concerned with the relative weight of the legislative assembly and political executive. But he also considers other power centres such as the administration, army, police, municipalities, political parties, etc. Accordingly Poulantzas concludes that the specific patterns of domination and subordination among branches and the corresponding patterns of power and resistance among class forces make an essential contribution to the organizing of hegemonic leadership (*PPSC*, pp 303-6, 310-1, 313-7).

This discussion also serves as a starting point for political periodization. Poulantzas suggests that forms of state can be distinguished in terms of the relative weight of the executive and legislature as this is overdetermined by economic and political class struggles. Monopoly capitalism, for example, involves a shift to executive dominance. This occurs because monopoly capital finds it difficult to organize its hegemony through the plural party system and parliamentary organs. This shift in dominance away from the legislature is reflected in changes elsewhere. In particular there are changes in political legitimacy and the functions of parties, pressure groups become more significant, and conflicts among various power centres within the executive become more intense (*PPSC*, pp 313-6). More concretely Poulantzas distinguishes political regimes in terms of the links between parties and the power bloc. He pays particular attention here to differences between two- and multi-party systems (*PPSC*, p 317-21).

### **Bureaucracy and Bureaucratism**

Poulantzas concludes *PPSC* with some brief remarks on bureaucracy and bureaucratism. He regards the bureaucracy (or state personnel) as a particular social category rather than as a class, class fraction, or social stratum. Thus the political unity of the bureaucracy and its role in securing political class domination are determined by the nature of the capitalist state whose agent or *Träger* it is. Neither its institutional unity nor its class function depend on the state personnel having a common class affiliation by virtue of shared social origins. This does not mean that the bureaucracy merely serves the class (fraction) in whose interests the capitalist state operates. But any limited independent political role the state personnel might play stems from its institutional position and its correlative powers of resistance rather than from its own class affiliation. Nor does it mean that the social ties of the state personnel have no political repercussions outside the bureaucracy. Indeed Poulantzas concedes that an overblown administration may transform the class(es) from which the lower echelons of the bureaucracy are recruited into significant supporting classes of the state and power bloc (*PPSC*, p 332-40, 344-6, 352-5, 357-9; for a Greek illustration, see 1975I.d and 1975I.f).

Bureaucratism is defined as the specifically political phenomenon of formal, hierarchical, rational-legal administration. Poulantzas regards it as one of the fundamental features of the capitalist type of state. He appears to argue that the distinctive institutional features of bureaucratism combine with juridico-political notions such as popular sovereignty to enable the bureaucracy to play a major role in organizing the hegemonic class leadership within the power bloc as well as over the people-nation as a whole. He writes that the bureaucracy itself 'accurately reflects the political power of the dominant classes and represents their interests in the particular economic, political, and ideological conditions of the class struggle' (*PPSC*, p 354).

This does not mean that bureaucratism is purely functional for bourgeois political domination. Indeed Poulantzas cites the inherent contradiction between the need for bureaucratic secrecy and the juridico-political principle of publicity. Likewise he cites the conflict between the functioning of parliamentary representation and the operation of the executive branch (*PPSC*, p 355). And he also notes that the state personnel can sometimes become an independent social force and disrupt the smooth operation of hegemonic class leadership. Nonetheless, even when acting as an authentic social force, the bureaucracy more often supports an exceptional form of the capitalist state rather than a transition to socialism. For it can have no long-term interests or class power of its own and is therefore likely to throw in its lot with capitalism (*PPSC*, pp 357-9).

These thoughts bring *PPSC* to a somewhat abrupt conclusion. In subsequent work Poulantzas develops many of its key arguments and extends his analysis in new directions. In doing so he gradually eliminates the elements drawn from Althusserian structuralism and, at least until *SPS*, neglects the political role of legal institutions and juridico-political ideology. But he pays correspondingly greater attention to the political dynamic of hegemonic class leadership and gives more emphasis to the class struggle. His later work also develops new themes. Above all it considers the economic as well as political role of the state, the nature of exceptional regimes as well as the democratic republic, and the implications of imperialism for the modern state. These themes are also increasingly linked to problems of political strategy.

## Structuralist Marxism and Politicism

We can now offer a provisional critique of Poulantzas's first serious attempt at a regional theory of the political. Poulantzas clearly believed that structural Marxism justifies a distinctive regional theory that stresses the *sui generis* nature of the state and politics in capitalist societies. He justified a separate regional theory of capitalist ideology in similar terms (see chapter seven). But Poulantzas actually misinterpreted the implications of the Althusserian problematic and thus provided an inadequate basis for these regional theories. It is one thing to suggest that there is a relative institutional separation of different regions in the CMP. It is quite another thing to claim that each region can be analyzed entirely in its own terms. Poulantzas does not really advance this claim and actually insists on the ultimately determining role of the economic. But, in concentrating on a distinct regional political theory and neglecting the regional economic theory and the particular theory of the CMP as a whole, Poulantzas certainly runs the risk of ignoring the economic and ideological determinants of politics. In turn this could lead to an overly political (*surpoliticieste*) account of the state.

This is particularly ironic because Poulantzas himself drew attention to exactly the same danger in his early critique of structuralist Marxism. He argued that Althusser lacks any clear scientific conception of the economic region, the relations between dominance and determination in the last instance, and the different terrains and targets of economic and political class struggle. In particular he suggests that Althusser treats economics as the site of unconscious laws rather than economic class struggle and considers politics as the site of class struggle to transform the 'current moment' at all levels of a social formation. Thus Althusser runs the risk of introducing politics as the motor force of economic change. In turn this would make politics both dominant and determinant (1966c, pp 1975-9).

In *PPSC* Poulantzas attempted to avoid this risk. He is careful to distinguish between the economic and political regions, to establish the dominance as well as the determination of the economic region within capitalism, to emphasize that the economic region is the site of economic class struggle as well as economic laws, and to identify the specific terrain of political struggle (*PPSC*, pp 29, 32, 38, 43, 59, 85-93, 102). Thus much of the first part of *PPSC* involves an implicit critique of Althusser's initial version of structural Marxism. Yet

nowhere in *PPSC* does Poulantzas analyze the connections between the economic and political regions (as opposed to their relative autonomy) and this failure prepares the ground for his own politicism. Indeed, whereas politicism was only a *potential* danger in Althusser's approach because he did not fully specify his concepts, it becomes a *reality* for Poulantzas precisely because of the way in which his concepts and their connections are specified.

Poulantzas considers the economic as both dominant and determinant in the CMP. This encourages his treatment in *PPSC* of the economic region as an effectively self-contained, self-reproducing unity. Certainly there is nothing in his admittedly gestural specification of the dominant role of market forces or the ultimately determining role of the law of value to suggest that political factors are essential to the internal operation (as opposed to external environment) of the economic region. This leads him to treat state intervention as the intrusion of the political into the economic and to see it as a response to political rather than economic factors. Moreover, because the ultimately determining role of the law of value is only related to the economic region itself (despite his argument that the CMP should be understood as a complex structure of economic, political, and ideological elements), it is possible for Poulantzas to ignore how economic factors might also affect the internal operation of the political region. Thus he overlooks both the economic constraints on the exercise of political power and the role of financial (as opposed to legal) controls in securing the institutional unity of the state.

Because he endowed the state with its own institutional structure and strictly political functions, it might seem that Poulantzas considered the political region to be a self-contained, self-reproducing unity. In many respects this is so. But he also argues that the state is the point of condensation of all the contradictions and conflicts in society and that it performs a global function in managing societal cohesion. In this sense the political region has a more general significance and political class struggle can be presented as the motor force of change throughout society. In short, to the extent that Poulantzas presents politics both as a *sui generis* regional subsystem and as the overdetermining factor in capitalism more generally, his work is bound to exaggerate the autonomy of the political and to overstate its global role in comparison with economic and ideological factors. His use of juridico-political theory and Gramsci's work on

hegemony reinforce this emphasis. Together they enable Poulantzas to realize to the full, albeit unintentionally, the politicist potential of Althusser's structural Marxism.

### **Juridico-political institutions and class practices**

Juridico-political theory has a major role in *PPSC*. Indeed legal concepts are crucial in defining the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist state. Thus Poulantzas identifies the political region in terms of the juridico-political instance of the state and even expresses difficulty in distinguishing between the legal order and the state (*PPSC*, p 42n). He then derives its institutional unity from the indivisibility of state sovereignty; its relative autonomy from its incarnation of the general, national-popular interest in opposition to particular, private interests; its legitimation from its adherence to the rule of law, constitutionalization of violence, and accountability to public opinion; and its totalitarian potential from the fluidity of the juridical distinction between 'public' and 'private' (*PPSC*, pp 123, 133-4, 162-4, 219-22, 227,270,276-9, 281-3, 228-9, 291-5, 303-5, 311, 357). He also distinguishes between normal and exceptional states in terms of whether or not they possess the normative institutional ensemble of representative democracy with its 'institutions such as parliamentary representation, political liberties, universal suffrage, popular sovereignty, etc.' (*PPSC*, p 123). Likewise different forms of the normal state are distinguished in terms of the relative weight of the legislative and executive branches and the major forms of normal regime are distinguished in terms of their different systems of party representation (*PPSC*, pp 308-21). It should also be recalled that the state's organizing role in securing hegemony depends on the juridico-political 'isolation effect' and its associated concept of 'popular-national' unity. Indeed, so important does Poulantzas consider juridico-political ideology in capitalist societies, that he describes it as the dominant 'region' in the dominant ideology (see chapter 7).

This emphasis on the institutional structures of the state is quite consistent with structural Marxism. For Poulantzas argues that the matrix of the dominant mode of production determines the precise place, particular form, institutional structure, and boundaries of the state. He then demonstrates how the matrix of the CMP both

facilitates and necessitates a national-popular, democratic, constitutional state as its normal form. This argument is reminiscent of his earlier work on law with its methodological criterion of the 'external-internal' dialectic (see chapter two). In both cases Poulantzas discusses both the *external determination* of the place of law and the state in capitalist societies and the *internal logic* of their organization and operation. And in neither case does he adequately integrate these two modes of analysis to produce a complete account. Thus *PPSC* deals with the place of the state and its internal logic but ignores how economic constraints and forces overdetermine this logic.

At the same time the analysis of institutional structures is also consistent with the emphasis on political class struggle. For Poulantzas insists that 'these institutions must be considered according to their impact in the field of class struggle, since the power concentrated in an institution is a class power' (*PPSC*, p 115). This does not mean that institutions themselves actually determine class antagonisms nor does it mean that they actually exercise power (*PPSC*, p 115; *FD*, p 63; *CCC*, pp 25-6). Nonetheless, although social antagonisms are grounded in class relations, class relations can be affected by institutions. For institutions can influence the forms in which class antagonisms are manifested as well as the capacities of different classes to pursue their interests. Likewise, even though institutions do not, strictly speaking, have any power, they do constitute centres for the exercise of class power (*PPSC*, pp 115-6, 315-6; *CCC*, pp 25-6; *SPS*, pp 39, 41, 45). Accordingly Poulantzas examines the institutions of representative democracy in terms of their threefold impact on political class relations. He considers how the state shapes the forms of political class struggle (isolation effect, general interest, hegemony); its impact on the political capacities of different classes (organization of the power bloc, disorganization of the popular masses); and its character as a strategic terrain over which class forces struggle for advantage in the exercise of state power. In this sense institutional analysis provides a crucial mediating link between the abstract structure of the CMP and the concrete field of class struggle.

The class struggle itself is analyzed almost exclusively at the political level. Thus Poulantzas ignores the problem of how different fields of class struggle are articulated or dislocated in specific conjunctures. Poulantzas is well aware of the uneven development of class struggle and dislocations across different fields of domination

and hegemony. But he puts so much emphasis on the overdetermining role of political class struggle that he rarely discusses such unevenness and dislocations. In addition he puts so much weight on class forces that he ignores the issue of how non-class forces intervene in the political class struggle. Thus, apart from referring to the transformation of the bureaucracy into an authentic, independent social force, Poulantzas effectively denies the role of non-class forces. It is only in the late 'seventies that the rise of new social movements forces this problem onto Poulantzas's theoretical and political agenda (see chapters 6 and 10).

### **The Triple Structure of the Regional Theory**

It should be evident that Poulantzas drew on three different theoretical traditions that are deployed at different stages in his analysis of the state. This raises crucial questions about the consistency of his regional theory. In particular it seems to lead to different modes of explanation according to the level on which a given problem is posed. Stuart Hall has argued that Poulantzas's attempt in *PPSC* to combine structural Marxism with an emphasis on the fundamental role of class struggle set up a tension in his work between 'structure' and 'practice'. This means that 'there is a double framework to every question – each element appearing *twice*, once as the 'effect of the structure', once as the 'effect of the practice' (Hall, 1980, p 62). If anything, Hall understates the problem. In many cases we are confronted not with the duplication of explanations, but with explanations in triplicate.

This emerges particularly clearly in Poulantzas's various accounts of the characteristic unity and relative autonomy of the capitalist state. Thus Poulantzas first offers an account in terms of the structural matrix of the CMP. He argues that 'the unity of power characteristic of the state, related to its role in the class struggle, is the reflection of its role of unity vis-à-vis the instances; and its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the politically dominant classes or fractions is the reflection of the relative autonomy of the instances of a capitalist formation' (*PPSC*, p 257). But he also discusses this issue in terms of the juridico-political structures of the state. Thus he suggests that 'state power constitutes a distinctive unity in so far as its institutions are organized so as to constitute the people's and nation's unity'

(PPSC, p 278, modified translation). He adds that this institutional unity is the precondition for the state's relative autonomy vis-à-vis the dominant classes and fractions (PPSC, pp 277, 282, 288, 289). These arguments are supplemented in turn by explanations at the level of political class struggle. Thus Poulantzas writes that 'the unity of the capitalist state stems from the fact that it represents the political unity of the people-nation and that it constitutes the unity of the power bloc *under the protection of the hegemonic class or fraction*' (PPSC, p 303, emphasis added). He also describes how this depends on the politico-ideological practice of the hegemonic class or fraction as it '*polarizes* the specific contradictory interests of the various classes or fractions in the power bloc by making its own economic interests into political interests and by representing the general common interest of the classes or fractions in the power bloc' (PPSC, p 239).

However, although these explanations appear in triplicate, there is less tension and inconsistency among them than Hall seems to suggest. For the explanations actually refer to different explananda. The explanation in terms of the structural matrix of the CMP is concerned with the overall *necessity* for a particular form of state in capitalist society. It suggests why the capitalist state must be relatively autonomous (in the sense of institutionally differentiated) from the economic region and why it must have a distinctive form of unity as the overall factor of cohesion in a class-divided society. Likewise the explanation in terms of the real institutional framework of the state is concerned with the general *possibility* of the political class unity and relative autonomy of the capitalist state. It identifies the particular institutional features of the juridico-political system that *enable* the dominant class(es) to secure political hegemony. But it does not guarantee this hegemony. Indeed it is remarkable how often in this context Poulantzas distinguishes between the *institutional* unity of the state and its *class* unity and recognizes that institutional unity is not a sufficient condition of class unity. This is reflected in the way that Poulantzas couches his explanations. Thus he asserts a direct link between the centralized, bureaucratic, and sovereign character of the representative state and its *institutional* unity. But he recognizes only a tendential, facilitating link between these institutional characteristics and political class unity (e.g., PPSC, pp 188, 230, 239, 262, 277, 282, 289).

For a complete account of the class unity and relative autonomy of the capitalist state, therefore, we must move to the level of class

practice. The explanation in terms of political and ideological class struggle is concerned with the actual *realization* of the political class unity and relative autonomy of the capitalist state in particular regimes and conjunctures. It is in this context that Poulantzas argues that

"the unity and relative autonomy peculiar to the capitalist state vis-à-vis the dominant classes and class fractions and their *degrees* and *concrete form* can therefore be studied only in this combination of forms of state and forms of regime: and this is so, in so far as they are closely tied to the concrete modalities of party representation, to the form of political organization of the power bloc" (*PPSC*, pp 318-9; cf. 1976b, quoted below, pp 00-00).

In other words, it is only at the level of concrete conjunctures that relative autonomy and class unity can really be understood.

Thus Poulantzas did not work only with the concepts of 'structure' and 'practice'. Such concepts are certainly present in his work and generate severe difficulties in his analysis of social classes (see chapter six). But they are much less prominent in his explanation of the political region. The latter involves three basic levels of analysis and different sorts of explanation and explananda for each level. Thus it would be quite wrong to suggest that Poulantzas combines a rigid structuralist Marxism with a subjectivist account of class struggle. This would certainly involve an insurmountable division between the structuralist notion of involuntary *Träger* of social relations and the voluntarist notion of free-willed subjects who make their own history. But Poulantzas himself employs an institutional analysis to mediate between abstract structural matrices and concrete class struggles. The concepts of structure and practice are thereby transformed and, at least in principle, made complementary.

### **Further Difficulties in the Regional Theory**

We have now reviewed some basic aspects of Poulantzas's first extended work on bourgeois political class domination. In general I have argued that Poulantzas manages to integrate his three different theoretical influences with some success. But this argument must be

qualified in several respects. For Poulantzas shares, to a greater or less extent in each case, many of the theoretical deviations characteristic of Western Marxism. More idiosyncratic, however, is his politicism. Indeed Poulantzas combines his three sources in a manner that powerfully reinforces the politicist tendencies inherent in any attempt to construct a distinctive regional theory of the political.

In introducing *PPSC* Poulantzas argues that concepts must be located in terms of the movement from abstract to concrete and in terms of their particular theoretical object within this movement (pp 11, 13, 16-7). Poulantzas is usually careful to do this. Thus *PPSC* moves from the structure of the CMP as 'the *organizing matrix* of institutions' (*PPSC*, p 115n) through the specific juridico-political ensemble of the capitalist state to the field of political class struggle. *But this is a movement from the abstract to the concrete solely along the plane of the political.* This leads Poulantzas to neglect the linkages between the political and other regions at each level of abstraction.

Thus Poulantzas tended to ignore the articulation between the economic, political, and ideological regions within the basic 'structure in dominance' of the CMP. He tends to ignore the connections between the institutional ensemble of the state and the various institutions or power centres in the economic and ideological spheres of society. And he tends to ignore the linkages between economic, political, and ideological class struggles in particular conjunctures. In each case Poulantzas provides a one-sided account of the nature of capitalist societies and places an excessive emphasis on the political moment at the expense of other determinations.

In later studies Poulantzas attempts to re-integrate the different moments of social relations. Thus later work deals with the displacement of dominance between the economic and political regions of the CMP; the role of the ideological state apparatuses and the nature of the state economic apparatus; and, most concretely, the different fields of class struggle in fascism and military dictatorships. These new concerns are closely related to the threefold structure of the regional theory outlined in *PPSC*. Subsequent work also breaks with this basic outline and manages to provide a more interesting account of the different moments of the social formation. This is most clear in Poulantzas's reformulation of class determination and his more general relational approach to social analysis (see chapter 6).

But neither the modifications to the original regional theory nor the more radical break initiated by his relational approach mean that Poulantzas was able to break decisively with his politicist tendencies.

This does not exhaust the problems with *PPSC* or later studies. For Poulantzas's work also suffers from formalism (especially in arguments at the abstract level of the structural matrix of the CMP), functionalism (the presupposition that institutions are functional for capital), essentialism (the attribution of an essential class nature to representative democracy as the theoretically typical form of the capitalist state), and class reductionism (the denial or neglect of non-class forces). In addition there are major difficulties with some of the most fundamental concepts in his overall approach to the state. This holds for such crucial Poulantzasian notions as the relative autonomy of the state as well as for more general Marxist concepts as class struggle or hegemony.

However, since Poulantzas attempts to overcome these problems in his later work, these further difficulties will only be considered when the relevant changes have been outlined below. The next chapter presents the principal refinements and extensions that grow out of the regional theory in *PPSC*. These changes particularly concern the economic role of the state, the distinction between normal and exceptional states, and the most recent form of normal state. Once these modifications have been discussed we can offer a more complete and compelling critique of issues such as relative autonomy, class unity, and hegemony. Likewise the question of class reductionism is best considered after we have presented Poulantzas's changing views on the structural determination of social classes and the nature of class forces and social movements (see chapter 6). Since the charge of formalism has often been levelled against Poulantzas's account of ideology as well as his political analyses, we deal with this issue in connection with his regional theory of ideology and ideological class struggle (chapter 7). The question of functionalism is similarly reconsidered when we deal with the complementary problem of 'dysfunctionalism' in Poulantzas's analysis of military dictatorships (chapter 9). Finally, the problem of essentialism is best reviewed in the light of Poulantzas's attempts to resolve the crisis of Marxism through the integration of Foucauldian perspectives (see chapters 5 and 11). An overall assessment of the remaining problems in the analyses of class unity, relative autonomy, and hegemony is given in chapter 5.

## Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have been concerned to present the basic methodological and theoretical arguments in *PPSC*. I have deliberately ignored refinements and developments in Poulantzas's later work. Instead we have tried to explore some of the implications of Poulantzas's long-term commitment to the development of a distinctive regional theory of the political in societies dominated by the capitalist mode of production. The shifts in theoretical, political, and philosophical position that occurred after *PPSC* certainly modify the initial arguments in significant ways. But there are also major areas of continuity - not least the enduring politicism of Poulantzas's approach throughout its twists and turns.

By way of concluding this chapter, I would like to emphasize four themes. First, it is essential to examine Poulantzas's regional theory in relation to his realist epistemological and methodological commitments. Without an appreciation of the distinction between general, particular, and regional theories and the movement from the most abstract to the most concrete levels of analysis it is impossible to locate the different assumptions, concepts, and principles of explanation in his work. This is particularly important because Poulantzas was the first postwar theorist to break with the flawed methodologies of the dominant traditions in Marxist state theory. Thus he rejects the subsumptionism of state monopoly capitalism theory and Marxism-Leninism more generally for *subsuming* real-concrete phenomena under the most abstract concepts and simply treating them as so many particular instances of a general principle. He also rejects those attempts at logical derivation (or *Ableitung*) that assume that it is possible to *deduce* real-concrete phenomena from the most abstract concepts. And he is likewise critical of *empiricism* because it considers facts to be the raw material of thought and fails to locate them within a broader, rigorously defined theoretical framework (*PPSC*, pp 13, 145-6). It is only by relating Poulantzas's arguments to his own epistemological and methodological approach that the undoubted complexity and originality of his thought can be understood.

Second, despite his reputation as an Althusserian Marxist, Poulantzas never subscribed fully to the Althusserian position. It would clearly be wrong to argue that Poulantzas merely 'flirted' with an Althusserian style in the same way that Marx claimed to have

coquetted with Hegel in writing *Capital*. But it would also be wrong to argue that *PPSC* is a fundamentally Althusserian work. I have already noted that Poulantzas was among the first to criticize Althusser's theoretical position and I have also argued that he tried to avoid the difficulties to which he felt Althusser's position might give rise. In this respect Clarke (1977) is wrong to suggest that Poulantzas went back on his earlier criticisms of Althusser and, in writing *PPSC*, became an Althusserian structural-functionalist *tout court*. Thus Poulantzas was careful to distinguish between the economic and political regions, to establish the dominance as well as the determination in the last instance of the economic region in the matrix of the CMP, to emphasize that the economic region is the site of economic struggle as well as economic laws, and to identify the special terrain of political struggle. In each case he had earlier criticized Althusser for failing to do so (see above, pp 00-00). In this context it is also worth noting that Althusser refused to publish *PPSC* in his own editorial series and that it appeared without his *imprimatur* in another series with the Maspero publishing house. This said it would clearly be foolish to deny that structural marxism is one element in Poulantzas's overall theories of the capitalist state and ideology. But it is just one element and not the most important.

Third, whilst structural Marxism provides the epistemological justification and the theoretical matrix for Poulantzas's regional theory, its principal substantive arguments derive from the careful articulation of juridico-political institutional analysis with the theoretical insights of Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci about political class struggle in capitalist societies. This reflects the influence of the three sources of Poulantzas's thought. For it is only through the introduction of Italian politics and Romano-German law that Poulantzas was able to exploit structural Marxist philosophy in developing his state theory. In combining the insights of Gramsci and the lessons of his legal training within a broadly Marxist-Leninist framework, Poulantzas was able to make important advances in the underdeveloped field of Marxist state theory. In so doing he anticipated later West German analyses of the form of the capitalist state and subsequent analyses of the relational nature of power.

Fourth (and last), we should note that *PPSC* itself had a restricted theoretical focus. For it was concerned only with the general form and the global political functions of the theoretically typical capitalist state. It also took for granted the hegemonic class leadership of the

bourgeoisie and the smooth functioning of the state in securing social cohesion. But *PPSC* did prepare the theoretical ground for later work on exceptional forms, economic functions, and political and ideological crises. Theoretically this later work grew naturally out of the arguments in *PPSC*. But new political concerns and involvements also motivated it. It is only by going beyond the general, global arguments of *PPSC* that Poulantzas was able to specify his new strategic arguments. For this reason we should treat *PPSC* as an important but nonetheless flawed work.

# 4

## Developing the Regional Theory

In many respects the arguments in *PPSC* were retained in subsequent work. Thus the introduction to his final book, *SPS*, reproduces many themes from his earlier text. But Poulantzas also developed these arguments to different degrees and even abandoned some of them. In this chapter I consider five key areas where his ideas went well beyond those of *PPSC*. The first area involves the fundamental structural matrix of capitalism and concerns the articulation of the economic and political. Then I consider how Poulantzas relates the changing economic role of the state to the political class struggle. A third area concerns Poulantzas's views on economic and political crises. In turn this has implications for the juridico-political level. For it is in this context that one must examine the distinction between 'normal' and 'exceptional' states. Finally, proceeding from this distinction, I examine Poulantzas's views on authoritarian statism.

### **Economic Determination and Political Dominance**

In *PPSC* Poulantzas argues that the typical matrix of the CMP involves a distinctive 'relative autonomy' (or institutional separation) of the economic and political regions. He further argues that the economic region of the CMP is not only determinant in the last instance (as it is in all modes of production) but is also dominant. Essentially this means that extra-economic coercion is excluded from the social relations of production and these are organised instead through the economic imperatives of the law of value.

Poulantzas argues that this distinctive matrix emerges with the 'real subsumption' of wage-labour under capitalist control. For 'real subsumption' involves not merely a formal wage contract and the

capitalist's provision of means of production but also the actual organisation and direction of the labour process by capital rather than wage-labour. This decisive step is supposed to occur with the transition from simple cooperation based on manufacturing to large-scale industry based on machinofacture. As well as subsuming wage-labour under effective capitalist control, this transition establishes the determining role of productive capital in the overall circuit of capital. This contrasts with the determining role of commercial capital in the manufacturing period and becomes a constant feature of capitalism throughout its successive stages (*PPSC*, pp 32, 127, 129, 159; *CCC*, pp 32, 63, 92, 96, 111-2, 125, 134-5; *SPS*, pp 174-9).

Capitalism does, nonetheless, involve stages. For, once the typical matrix emerges and productive capital becomes determinant, changes in the latter obviously entail changes elsewhere. The most significant changes in this respect occur with the shift from the dominance of 'absolute surplus-value' in capitalist production to that of 'relative surplus-value'. For, whereas 'absolute surplus-value' can only be increased through prolonging the working day and/or intensifying effort, 'relative surplus-value' derives from increasing productivity for a given duration and intensity of labour (*CCC*, pp 63, 111-2, 125, 134-5; *SPS*, pp 174-9). This distinction enables Poulantzas to demarcate two stages of capitalism: competitive (or liberal) and monopoly (or imperialist). He claims that the shift from competitive to monopoly capitalism displaces dominance from the economic to the political (*PPSC*, pp 55-6, 91, 150, 211, 345; *FD*, pp 20-1, 74-5, 303, 313; *CCC*, pp 42, 45, 81, 100-1, 165-8; *SPS*, pp 166-8).

This displacement is associated with major changes in the economic role of the state. Poulantzas argues that the liberal state is principally concerned to secure the so-called general external conditions of capitalist production and exploitation. These comprise such conditions as the appropriate legal and monetary framework for capital accumulation. In his early writings he also argued that the liberal state is typically excluded from organising the labour process and influencing the immediate conditions of exploitation. Thus the liberal state acts primarily as a nightwatchman or gendarme and its economic role is largely one of strict non-intervention. This means that the basic dynamic of accumulation in the competitive stage derives from the economic class struggle over the working day and

from the role of market forces in mediating the law of value. It also means that, for the first time in history, there can be purely economic crises (*PPSC*, pp 32, 55, 129, 153; contrast *CCC*, pp 99-100, on the irreducibility of the liberal state to a pure night-watchman).

During monopoly capitalism 'intensive exploitation' based on 'relative surplus-value' becomes important. This is linked with growing socialisation of the capitalist system, which means that significant areas of economic activity can no longer be left to the anarchy of the market. At the same time an increasingly significant role is played by the 'tendency of the rate of profit to fall' (or TRPF). These changes require state intervention to make labour-power more productive, to compensate for market failures, and to counter-act the TRPF. Thus increasing intervention occurs in education, manpower training, health, housing, public transport, collective services, etc.; and also in activities such as scientific research, technological innovation, and industrial restructuring. In some contexts there is also a partial or total socialisation of private sector losses. This is achieved by means of state subsidies and/or the nationalisation of crucial but unprofitable economic sectors. However, since this typically redistributes profits without altering the total amount of surplus-value, it is less beneficial to capital than directly productive activities. Finally, through the state credit system, monetary management, and budgetary policy, the cycle of production is increasingly integrated with the spheres of circulation and (collective) consumption (*FD*, p 303; *CCC*, p 100, 116-8, 125, 166-8; *SPS*, pp 165-70).

The displacement of dominance does not alter the fundamental matrix outlined in the particular theory of the CMP nor does it challenge the assumption of the general theory that the 'economic' is determinant in the last instance. Thus it does not mean that the economic and political regions have fused nor that the state has become part of the economic 'base'. At most Poulantzas concedes that displacement modifies the form of separation of the economic and political regions of the CMP and then stresses that the growth of economic intervention still depends on their mutual separation (*CCC*, p 168; *SPS*, pp 166-7). Indeed he argues that the state can only intervene as a political force to reproduce labour-power and/or to mobilise counter-tendencies to the TRPF to the extent that it is not directly subject to market forces and the demand for profits. Thus the state must be effectively excluded from direct control over the key sites where (monopoly) capital is allocated and wage-labour is

exploited. But he also argues that the state's exclusion from the productive core of capitalism means that it must always react to the symptoms of economic crises rather than act directly on their causes. This places clear limits on the effectiveness of state intervention and implies that the economic is still ultimately determinant (*PPSC*, pp 152-3; *CCC*, pp 101-2, 105, 161, 167-8, 168n; *SPS*, pp 165-70, 191-3).

Nonetheless the displacement of dominance does transfer significant areas of economic activity from the field of private decision-making and market forces into the realm of governmental policy-making and state intervention. This is associated with the displacement of dominance from the legislature to the executive within the state system. In particular it involves the reorganisation, extension, and consolidation of the state's economic apparatus and its emergence as a privileged centre of power for the hegemonic fraction of monopoly capital. It is also accompanied by the displacement of dominance from juridico-political to economic and technocratic themes within the ideological region. Finally, Poulantzas also argues that the growth of state intervention implies a rearrangement of the state's various functions. In competitive capitalism the state's economic functions were subordinate to its global political role. But these functions are indispensable to monopoly capitalism and actually come to dominate the state's global role as the factor of social cohesion (*PPSC*, pp 55-6, 128, 210-1, 313-5, 345; *FD*, pp 20, 98, 302-3, 313; *CCC*, pp 42, 62-3, 99-102, 116-8, 165-8, 172n; *SPS*, pp 166-8, 173-7, 212).

### **Economic Intervention and Class Struggle**

Poulantzas denied that state intervention can be explained purely in terms of an abstract 'capital logic' or universal laws of motion of the CMP (*FD*, pp. 39-42; *SPS*, p. 52). Not only did he stress the role of economic class struggle (for example, over absolute and relative surplus-value) but also the struggle for hegemony. This involves the management of political relations between dominant and dominated classes as well as those within the power bloc. State intervention affects not only specific fractions of capital but also the popular masses. For the state helps to increase the rate of exploitation, reproduce labour power, and promote collective consumption.

Poulantzas argued that such economic policies are an integral part of its political strategy. Welfare measures, manpower training, collective consumption, and similar 'social' policies are sooner or later inserted into a pro-capitalist strategy. Thus they are used to reproduce and deepen the social division of labour (including that between mental and manual labour) and to reinforce the disciplinary 'police-political management and control of labour-power' (*SPS*, p. 186). In short, even where such measures are more or less directly the result of popular struggles, they can still be made to serve capitalist reproduction through their insertion into a state system whose institutional forms are favourable to bourgeois domination (*PPSC*, pp. 50-1, 192-4; *FD*, pp. 167, 193-6; *SPS*, pp. 185-9).

The crucial role of economic and political struggles helps to explain the incoherence of economic policies and the impossibility of any 'rational kernel' in capitalist planning. Indeed the state's economic role has become so vital for accumulation in the imperialist stage that it is trapped in a double-bind situation. If the state intervenes to manage economic crises, it creates new economic difficulties. But, if it attempts to withdraw or refuses to intervene, the economic crises simply assume new forms. Moreover, since economic intervention is overdetermined by political struggles, economic crises are also translated into political and ideological crises (*FD*, pp. 86-8, 95, 98, 134-5, 167, 191-7, 257, 280-4; *CCC*, pp. 75, 148, 154-5, 163-4, 169-74; *SPS*, pp. 132-7, 143-4, 163-79, 182-9).

Thus Poulantzas argued that there is a definite rigidity in the economic activities of the interventionist state. It can no longer avoid the adverse economic effects of intervention through refusing to intervene. In itself this would precipitate economic difficulties because of the resulting failure to secure crucial political preconditions of monopoly accumulation. Thus economic functions follow a logic of their own which could undermine monopoly capital's need to win political and ideological hegemony. In particular the subordination of the state's economic functions to the interests of monopoly capital supposedly casts doubt on the state's claims to represent the national-popular interest. Likewise its reliance on ad hoc, discretionary intervention casts doubt on the legitimacy of state actions in so far as these are still justified in terms of their compliance with the rule of law. Poulantzas suggested that these problems can be resolved in part by emphasising economic (especially technocratic) themes rather than juridico-political values in the dominant ideology. But he still

concluded that the current stage of capitalism entails a generic problem of hegemony within the power bloc and over the popular masses (*PPSC*, pp. 211-13, 215, 221, 310-14; *FD*, pp. 252, 254, 327; *CCC*, pp. 169-74, 238-9; *CD*, pp. 120,130; *SPS*, pp. 55, 57, 169-79, 191, 205, 213-14, 218-19, 221 and 245).

Finally we may note that Poulantzas also analysed the limits to state intervention in the economic region. He located these limits in three key areas: first the institutional separation between the economic and political regions of the CMP; second, the institutional form of the state; and, thirdly, the effects of class struggle. Let us deal with each in turn.

The principal limit is found in the general exclusion of the state from the productive core of the capitalist economic - especially where intervention would harm monopoly interests. This means that it cannot deal directly with the real causes of economic crisis. Instead it is confined to a largely supportive and/or reactive role. Thus the state is obliged to engage in ineffective a priori forecasting and related attempts to provide conditions favourable to valorisation whilst remaining excluded from control over valorisation itself and/or to react a posteriori to the repercussions of the circuit of productive capital in such secondary spheres as circulation, distribution, consumption and monetary flows. This puts clear limits on capitalist planning. The state's exclusion also makes it materially dependent on taxes that fluctuate with the productivity and profitability of capital and whose rate and flow therefore lie beyond its ultimate control. In turn this makes it difficult to plan state revenues. This is reflected in the recurrence of fiscal crises of the state (*CCC*, pp. 168-74; *SPS*, pp. 132-3, 140-5, 190-4).

These basic limits are reinforced by the rigidity of the economic state apparatus and the state system more generally. Thus Poulantzas related the prodigious incoherence of economic policies to specific features of the state's internal operation. In particular he referred to administrative inertia, the practice of 'muddling through', bureaucratic ponderousness, the mutual opposition among different branches and power centres, and the paralysis resulting from the reciprocal use of veto powers (*SPS*, pp. 185-9).

Finally, in addition to these elements of bureaucratism, the class struggle also has effects. For conflicts within the power bloc and/or between dominant and dominated classes are reproduced within the state system. This can be seen in resistances inside the state itself to the

policies favoured by the hegemonic fraction and its privileged power centres. In turn this means that the policies pursued by the state always reflect the 'unstable equilibrium of compromise' among contending class forces (CCC, pp. 168-74; SPS, pp. 132-3, 140-5, 190-4).

## **Economic and Political Crises**

Poulantzas was always careful to distinguish between economic and political crises and to recognise their distinctive qualities and dynamic. Indeed he argued that the institutional separation of different regions under capitalism entails a relative autonomy of different forms of crisis (CDE, p. 25; cf. PPSC, p. 32). But this does not mean that economic and political crises are totally unrelated. It does require particular attention to their complex articulation, dislocations, and mutual repercussions. Thus, in addition to his comments on economic crisis, Poulantzas also presented a distinctive, regional account of political crisis.

This concern emerges clearly in his trenchant criticism of the economic catastrophism of the Comintern (FD, pp. 37-52; cf. CDE, pp. 21-2). Here Poulantzas criticised the Comintern's persistent reduction of fascism to an effect of economic crisis and its view that capitalism would inevitably collapse because of the contemporary economic crisis. In contrast Poulantzas argued that this economic crisis was important only in so far as it circumscribed the conjunctures of the class struggle and contributed to 'the emergence of the political crises to which fascism corresponds, political crises which are not determined solely by the character of the period, and which may well occur in other periods too' (FD, p. 53).

This highlights the problem of defining the distinctive qualities of (non-revolutionary) political crises and their role in determining specific forms of capitalist state and regime (FD, p. 59). Poulantzas himself suggested that 'the essence of a political crisis which can lead to the emergence of an exceptional state lies in particular characteristics of the *field of the class struggle - the field of "social relations"*' (FD, p. 63; cf. CDE, p. 28). Political crises must be related first to political class relations and only secondarily to specific political institutions. Poulantzas then suggested that political crisis essentially consists in a crisis of hegemony within the power bloc. This occurs when no class or fraction can impose its 'leadership' on the other

members of the power bloc, whether by its own political organisations or through the 'parliamentary democratic' state. In turn this is typically related to a general crisis of hegemony over the whole society (*FD*, pp. 72, 100-1, 124-5).

Crises of hegemony are clearly reflected in the political scene and within the state system. They are linked with a crisis of party representation, that is, a split between the different classes or fractions and their parties (*FD*, pp. 73, 102, 126). In turn this affects the purposes of representation and the state's own organisation and operation (*FD*, p. 74; *CDE*, p. 28). For there are attempts to by-pass political parties and influence the state directly; and different state apparatuses seek to impose political order independently of decisions coming through the established, formal channels of power (*FD*, pp. 74, 102-3). This can undermine the institutional and class unity of the state even where it continues to function (*FD*, p. 334). Splits can also occur between top echelons in the state system and lower ranks (*FD*, p. 334). Likewise the state can lose its monopoly of violence (*FD*, p. 335).

These features can be illustrated from the institutional crisis that preceded fascism. Its features included:

The crisis of party representation; the instability of the government, resulting from the instability and lack of hegemony; the duplication of the political parties by parallel power networks, varying from pressure groups to private militia; the resurgence of the role of the 'executive' and the repressive State apparatus, and the increasingly important role of the police; the deterioration of the juridical system ('order') and the direct infiltration of the judiciary by fascism (*FD*, p. 334.)

The institutional crisis of the state also provokes an ideological crisis that is expressed politically in a legitimation crisis (*CDE*, p 30). Political legitimation reflects the way in which the dominant ideology functions in the 'direction' (hegemonic leadership) of the dominated classes and especially in their relation to the state. Poulantzas argues that the dominant ideology contains a particular region which concerns the state's role as the guarantor of national unity, the state-nation relation, the relation between state and liberty, the nature of citizenship, etc. (*PPSC*, pp 123, 195, 216, 224-8, 277, 291, 311-13; *FD*, p 302; 1977*I*.i, pp 150-2). Thus a legitimation crisis involves, first, a crisis of this region of the

dominant ideology and its implications for the relation between the masses and the state. In addition the state itself can only function if its structure and activities are articulated to the dominant ideology. Bureaucrats, judges, police, and other functionaries can only perform their specific role towards the masses if the dominant ideology circulates within the state apparatus in a precise manner - justifying their activities in terms of a discourse of public service, general interest, maintenance of national unity, social order, etc. (*PPSC*, pp 348, 353-4; *FD*, pp 317, 327). Thus a second aspect of a legitimation crisis concerns the state's internal 'ideological cement'. It is reflected in fractures and fissions within the state system (*FD*, pp 78, 317, 334-5; 1977I.i, pp 151-2). In turn this can lead to an increased resort to open violence, surveillance, the withering of law, the redeployment of the judicial and police apparatuses, etc., to provide a new form of legitimation (*FD*, pp 316-28; *SPS*, pp 236-7).

Finally, because of the crisis of political hegemony, the dominant ideology undergoes crisis too. Not only is it attacked by the popular masses but it no longer functions as a 'cement' for the power bloc (*FD*, pp 76-7, 103-7, 127-30). This crisis also affects the state. For the ISAs are closely linked to the dominant ideology and also experience crisis (*CDE*, p 29).

Poulantzas develops these issues in *La Crise de L'État*. Here he argued that crises are neither accidental and dysfunctional, nor permanent and catastrophic. The generic elements of crisis are constantly reproduced within capitalist societies but crises themselves involve the condensation of these elements to form a distinct conjuncture (*CDE*, pp. 21-2). This does not mean that crises break out instantaneously. They develop according to their own distinctive rhythms and can reveal peaks and troughs (*CDE*, p. 28). Thus the generic elements of political crisis are inherent in the very reproduction of institutionalised political power. But this does not mean that there is a permanent political crisis nor a permanent crisis of the state. Instead one must examine the genesis of particular crises and their distinctive rhythms in each case (*CDE*, p. 23).

Poulantzas denied that economic crises are automatically expressed in political or state crises. All three types are relatively autonomous (*CDE*, p. 25). But the economic and political regions are not completely independent and involved in purely external relations.

Indeed their relationship under monopoly capitalism means that economic crisis is now expressed more directly and organically in political crisis; and political interventions can become factors of economic crisis (CDE, p. 34). Nonetheless, even when economic and political crises occur in the same period, there is no necessary correlation between them. The political crisis that produced Nazism, for example, peaked when the economic crisis was waning. Conversely the May events preceded the French economic crisis. And, in Chile under Allende, political crisis precipitated an economic crisis (CDE, p. 27). Poulantzas reserves a special term for crises that affect all social relations rather than one particular region. These should be called 'organic' or 'structural' crises (CDE, p. 26).

Analyses of political crises must focus on political class relations rather than institutions. They affect not only the power bloc but also the popular classes and state personnel. In discussing its impact on the power bloc Poulantzas repeated many arguments from *FD* (CDE, pp. 41-2). He added that political crisis also affects the supporting classes in particular. Thus classes such as the petty bourgeoisie and rural classes emerge as authentic social forces. Their own political organs assume greater political significance and the state apparatuses that previously represented and regimented them become less effective. They also question the dominant ideology and its role in their own ideological sub-ensembles (CDE, pp. 433-44). Political and institutional crises also affect the state personnel. This is reflected in growing politicisation and polarisation, splits between top echelons and lower ranks, growing demands concerning the economic-corporate interests of different branches, and increasing expression of the distinctive ideologies of various apparatuses (CDE, pp. 45-7). Overall these changes open up significant possibilities of new class alliances for the working class.

But crisis alone explains little. Whether a political crisis produces this or that type of state or regime depends on class strategies. In this sense it is important to relate crises to the modalities of class struggle. Thus fascism emerged because a political crisis coincided with an offensive step by the bourgeoisie and a defensive step by the working class (*FD*, pp. 78-82, 107-8, 130-1, 139-47). Thus class struggle is not only relevant in explaining the genesis of political crises. It also determines whether these crises are resolved through the restoration of democracy or the construction of an exceptional state.

## Normal and Exceptional States

In *PPSC* Poulantzas discusses absolutism and also offers some incidental remarks on Bismarckism, Bonapartism, Nazism, and totalitarianism. But he is essentially concerned with the 'normal' form of capitalist state, i.e., the bourgeois democratic republic. Moreover, although he sometimes distinguishes between liberal and interventionist states, problems of periodization are generally ignored. Poulantzas continued to argue that democracy is the normal form of bourgeois state. Indeed *SPS* repeats the question originally posed in *PPSC*, namely, 'why in order to assert its political domination, does the bourgeoisie dispose of the quite specific state apparatus which is the capitalist state - the modern representative State, the national-popular class state' (*SPS*, p 49). But Poulantzas also paid increasing attention to exceptional forms of the capitalist state (particularly fascism and military dictatorship) and to the post-liberal state (the interventionist state and its authoritarian statist successor). These themes are grounded in *PPSC* but new elements are also added. Here I deal with Poulantzas's general account of normal and exceptional states and postpone discussion of his historical analyses until later chapters. Authoritarian statism is discussed in the next section.

For Poulantzas, the definitive features of the capitalist type of state are democratic institutions and hegemonic class leadership. This determines his account of the exceptional state. He argues that normal states correspond to conjunctures in which bourgeois hegemony is stable and secure; and that exceptional states emerge in response to a crisis of hegemony (*PPSC*, p 293; *FD*, pp 11, 57-9, 72, 298, 313; *CD*, pp 92-3). Thus, while the moment of consent dominates that of constitutionalized violence in normal states, exceptional states involve increased resort to physical repression and an 'open war' against dominated classes (*PPSC*, p 226; *FD*, pp 152, 316, 318, 330; *CD*, pp 9, 92, 129). This general distinction is reflected in several institutional and operational differences between the two forms of state.

First, the normal state has representative democratic institutions with universal suffrage and competing political parties. In contrast, the exceptional state suspends the electoral principle (with the possible exception of plebiscites and/or referenda closely controlled from above) and also eliminates the plural party system (*PPSC*, pp 123, 230; *FD*, pp 324-7; *CD*, pp 42, 91, 114).

Second, in the normal state, the transfer of power occurs within constitutional limits and is subject to the rule of law. This means that power is transferred in a stable and predictable manner. In the exceptional state, however, strict legal regulation is suspended. This helps to impose the constitutional and administrative changes that are entailed in the proposed solution to the hegemonic crisis (*PPSC*, pp226-7, 311; *FD*, pp 320-4; *SPS*, pp 87-92).

Third, the ideological state apparatuses in the normal state typically have 'private' legal status. Thus they enjoy a significant degree of autonomy from official government control. In contrast, Isis in the exceptional state are generally subordinated to the repressive state apparatus and deprived of real independence. This serves to legitimate the increased resort to coercion and helps overcome the ideological crisis that accompanies a crisis of hegemony (*FD*, pp 314-8; *CD*, pp 113-4).

Fourth, coupled with this increased coordination between the ISAs and the RSA, there is a decline in the formal separation of powers within the RSA itself. This occurs through the infiltration of subordinate branches and power centres by the dominant branch and/or through the expansion of parallel power networks and transmission belts cutting across and linking different branches and centres. This results in a greater centralisation of political control and multiplies its points of application within the state. In turn this serves to reorganise hegemony, to counteract internal divisions and short-circuit internal resistances, and to secure flexibility in the face of bureaucratic inertia (*FD*, pp 315-6, 327-30; *CD*, pp 50, 92, 100-1; *SPS*, pp 87-92).

Poulantzas argues that representative democratic institutions facilitate the organic circulation and reorganisation of hegemony because they help to ventilate class and fractional conflicts. In this way democratic institutions inhibit major ruptures or breaks in social cohesion and, a fortiori, in the system of political class domination. But it is possible for political and ideological crises to develop which cannot be resolved through the normal, democratic play of class forces. Democratic institutions must be suspended or eliminated in such cases and the crises resolved through an open 'war of manoeuvre' which ignores constitutional niceties. But the very act of abolishing democratic institutions tends to congeal the balance of forces prevailing when the exceptional state is stabilised. In turn this makes it more difficult to react to fresh crises and contradictions through those routine and gradual policy adjustments that could

establish a new equilibrium of compromise. Thus Poulantzas concludes that the professed strength of the exceptional state is superficial. For it actually disguises brittle qualities. These make the exceptional state vulnerable to a sudden collapse in the face of growing contradictions and pressures. In contrast, the apparently weak democratic state bends under the strain. It therefore proves more flexible in organizing political class domination (CD, pp. 30, 38, 48-50, 90-3, 106, 124).

Poulantzas nonetheless distinguished among the different forms of exceptional state in terms of their capacities for political manoeuvre. He suggested that an exceptional regime can develop a certain flexibility to the extent that it accomplishes three tasks. First, it must build a political apparatus to concentrate and channel mass support. Ideally this should embrace not only traditional supporting classes (such as the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie) but should also mobilise the working class through a trade-union type apparatus. Second, it must duplicate transmission belts and parallel power networks to infiltrate and interconnect the various branches and power centres in the state system. This should facilitate rapid changes in the distribution of power in response to the behind-the-scenes struggles among competing class and fractional interests and thereby help to form new equilibria of compromise. Third, it must instil an ideology that permeates the dominated class(es) as well as the dominant class(es) and thus acts as the 'cement' of the social formation (PPSC, pp. 105-6, 128-9, 251-6, 329-31; FD, pp. 195-7, 328-30; CD, pp. 71, 83-5, 124).

If these features typify the most flexible regimes, the least flexible reveal the obverse features. Thus 'brittle' regimes lack any specialized politico-ideological apparatuses to channel and control mass support and are thereby isolated from the masses. They display a rigid apportionment of state power among various distinct political 'clans' entrenched in each apparatus. And they lack an ideology that can forge the necessary institutional unity of the state system and establish an effective national-popular cohesion. All this results in a muddle of inconsistent policies towards the masses as the exceptional regime attempts to neutralize their opposition. It also leads to purely mechanical compromises, tactical alliances and settling of accounts among 'economic-corporate' interests among the dominant classes and fractions. In turn this intensifies the internal contradictions of the state apparatus and reduces its flexibility in the face of economic and/

or political crises (CD, pp 49-50, 55-7, 79-80, 83-4, 91-4, 112-13, 120-1, 124-6).

Whereas fascism illustrates the most flexible type of exceptional regime, the least flexible type is illustrated by military dictatorship. Moreover, although Poulantzas did not discuss it to the same extent, Bonapartism would appear to be halfway between these extremes. Thus Bonapartism not only lacks a mass party comparable to fascism but is actually associated with a decline in the representational role of parties in favour of executive predominance. On the other hand, it does consolidate a mass base through the mobilization of peasant and petty bourgeois support and it also installs a distinctive ideology articulating this support to the interests of the power bloc. Moreover, although it is not a 'normal' form of state and corresponds both to a crisis of hegemony and a representational crisis, Bonapartism still manifests a marked degree of centralism organized around the unifying role of the bureaucracy (*PPSC*, pp. 79, 107-8, 180, 243-4, 258-61, 282-3, 302, 320, 357-9; *FD*, pp 87, 113).

Poulantzas clearly recognized important differences among exceptional forms of state and appeared particularly impressed by the flexibility and manoeuvrability of fascism. But he also insisted that no exceptional regime can secure the sort of flexible, organic regulation of social forces and the smooth circulation of hegemony that occur under bourgeois democracies (*CD*, p. 124). Accordingly, just as the movement from a normal to an exceptional state involves political crises and ruptures rather than following a continuous, linear path, so the transition from an exceptional to a normal form will also involve a series of breaks and crises rather than a simple process of self-transformation. In turn this places a premium on the political class struggle to achieve hegemony over the process of democratization. Indeed Poulantzas insisted that the class character of the normal state will vary significantly with the outcome of this struggle (*CD*, pp 90-7, 124, and *passim*).

### **'Authoritarian Statism'**

In discussing the transition from military dictatorship to a democratic state in Greece, Poulantzas cautioned his party comrades against the naïve belief that a liberal parliamentary regime could be established. He argued that this is an outmoded form of democratic

government and that the best that could be expected was an authoritarian statist regime with some modicum of accountability. In turn this meant that some of the illiberal features of the military dictatorship were typical of the current state of capitalism rather than deviations from contemporary democratic norms (1976c). In his later work Poulantzas returned to this problem and tried to develop a systematic account of this new form of state.

He identified this new form as 'authoritarian statism'. Its basic developmental tendency is described as 'intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with radical decline of the institutions of political democracy and with draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called 'formal' liberties' (*SPS*, pp. 203-4). More specifically, Poulantzas argued that the principal elements of 'authoritarian statism' and its implications for representative democracy comprise: first, a transfer of power from the legislature to the executive and the concentration of power within the latter; second, an accelerated fusion between the three branches of the state – legislature, executive, and judiciary – accompanied by a decline in the rule of law; third, the functional decline of political parties as the leading channels for political dialogue with the administration and as the major forces in organizing hegemony; and finally, the growth of parallel power networks cross-cutting the formal organization of the state and holding a decisive share in its various activities (1979Ib, p. 132; *CDE*, pp 55-7; *SPS*, pp. 217-31).

These changes are a permanent, structural feature of the modern state. They correspond to a peculiar sharpening of the generic elements of political and state crisis accompanying the long-term economic crisis that is supposedly besetting the entire current phase of the CMP. Among the most important crisis-tendencies in this phase Poulantzas cited: the politicization of working-class resistance to capital's attempt to resolve the economic crisis; the politicization of the new petty bourgeoisie because of the deepening of the social division of labour within the ranks of intellectual labour itself; the decomposition of the traditional alliance between the bourgeoisie and the old and new petty bourgeoisie; the ideological crisis accompanying the growth of new social movements on erstwhile 'secondary' fronts; and the sharpening of the contradictions within the power bloc because of the tendential division of labour between the comprador and interior fractions of capital (*SPS*, pp. 210-14, 219, 221).

Moreover, whether the state disengages or intervenes to moderate one crisis-tendency, it aggravates these tendencies elsewhere. Thus the state's ability to moderate the 'wilder' aspects of capitalist crises (as evident in the 1930s) requires it to assume direct responsibility for the purgative effects of crisis. This can threaten its legitimacy and stability. This occurs because it has become much more difficult for the dominant fraction to sacrifice its short-term economic-corporate interests in order to promote its long-term political hegemony. Yet failure to act against economic crisis-tendencies leaves them free to undermine capital accumulation. Likewise, the growing involvement of the state in hitherto marginal areas of social life has politicized the popular masses – especially as it is difficult nowadays to justify austerity, cuts, recommodification, etc., in the name of 'social policy'. This allegedly produces a legitimation crisis and thereby encourages the masses to confront the state directly. In turn such anti-statism threatens its stability. But any failure to intervene in these areas would undermine the social reproduction of labour power. The growing role of the state in the internationalization of capital also provokes problems for national unity. This is especially clear in its impact on less developed regions and national minorities (*SPS*, pp. 141-2, 154-3, 210-14, 219, 221, 245-6).

The permanence of these crisis-tendencies means that the authoritarian statist response must be seen as a normal form of the state rather than as exceptional. For Poulantzas argued that exceptional regimes are always temporary and occur in response to specific conjunctures. It is true that authoritarian statist tendencies may be enforced by the emergence of crises 'of' (as opposed to 'in') the state. This phenomenon can be seen, according to Poulantzas, in France, Portugal, Greece, Spain and Italy. This does not involve a real break in the development of the state: it merely accentuates normal features of the current stage (*SPS*, pp. 206, 214; 1979Ib, pp. 138, 131).

Certain exceptional features can nonetheless be found in close association with the dominant 'normal' features of the modern state. In particular, there emerges a reserve repressive para-state apparatus, parallel to the main organs of the state. This serves in a pre-emptive capacity to police popular struggles and other threats to bourgeois hegemony (*CDE*, p. 56; *SPS*, pp. 186-7, 210, 212; 1979Ib, pp. 129-30). More generally, the various exceptional elements characteristic of all forms of state are now crystallized and orchestrated

into a permanent structure running parallel to the official state system. The inspiration for this idea probably stems from the so-called 'para-state' of Court and Army that ruled Greece for so long behind the façade of formal democratic government (1974If, 1975b, 1975Ic, 1975Id, 1975Ie; cf. Tsoucalas, 1969, pp. 42, 47, 148-52, 170-8). But this duplication of the state seems to have become a generic structural feature of authoritarian statism. It involves a constant symbiosis and functional intersecting of the two (normal and 'exceptional') structures under the control of the commanding heights of the state apparatus and the dominant party (*SPS*, pp. 208, 210, 245; cf. 1979Ib, p. 132).

In discussing authoritarian statism', Poulantzas focused on the 'irresistible rise of the state administration'. The administration seals itself off from the representational role of parties and legislative assemblies. It also blocks the direct access of elected deputies as advocates of the national interest over against the views of officials. Instead the administration is increasingly organized as a centre for the direct expression of monopoly interests and presents them as the real embodiment of the national interest. This involves a massive politicization of the administration and poses dangers of fragmentation behind a formal façade of bureaucratic hierarchy and unity (*SPS*, p. 236). Moreover, at the same time as monopoly capital gains privileged access to the state, the state is so organized that popular interests are excluded from its field of perception. But these interests still break through in the form of contradictions inside the administration itself (even though, presumably, they are not recognized as such) (*SPS*, pp. 226-9).

Poulantzas related this 'irresistible rise' mainly to the state's growing economic role as modified by the political situation. For state intervention means that law can no longer be confined to general, formal, and universal norms whose enactment is the preserve of parliament as the embodiment of the general will of the people-nation. Instead legal norms are subject to ever more elaborate specification by the administration with respect to particular conjuncture, situations, and interests. Indeed, even the initial formulation of laws has passed almost entirely from parliament to the administration. Thus the shift from particularistic regulation occurs at the expense of the rule of law (*SPS*, pp. 218-19). This change is not simply the product of economic imperatives calling for detailed intervention. It also reflects the permanent instability of monopoly

hegemony within the power bloc and over the people. Thus, in addition to its economic effects, the decline of the rule of law also affects the political sphere. This can be seen in the increasing emphasis on pre-emptive policing of the potentially disloyal and deviant rather than the judicial punishment of clearly defined offences against the law (*SPS*, pp. 219-20).

There is also a strong tendency towards fusion of the legislature, executive, and judiciary – each of which enjoyed at least a formal autonomy in the liberal state (*PPSC*, pp. 303-7, 310-15; *CCC*, p. 173; *CDE*, pp. 55-6; *SPS*, pp. 222-5; 1979Ib, p. 132). Thus the institution of parliament has become a mere electoral ‘registration chamber’ with very limited powers. The state administration, on the other hand, becomes the principal site for elaborating state policy. Indeed, under the aegis of the political executive, the bureaucracy is becoming the leading actor in policy formation. Real power is rapidly becoming concentrated and centralized at the summits of the governmental and administrative system. In fact real power is increasingly focused in the office of a president or prime minister. Because this office stands at the apex of the various administrative structures it gives the appearances of a purely personalistic presidential-prime-ministerial system. But the latter actually condenses many contradictory pressures and operates as a mechanism of adjustment among conflicting class forces (*SPS*, pp. 221-4, 227-8, 233, 238; cf. *PPSC*, pp. 311-14).

Alongside these administrative changes, there are also important changes in the party system. Here Poulantzas focused on the parties in power. These are defined as ‘parties which seek to participate, and do participate, in government according to a pattern of regular alternation that is organically fixed and anticipated by the existing state institutions as a whole (and not just by constitutional rules) (*SPS*, p. 220). He suggested that there is a loosening of the ties of representation between governing parties and power bloc. This occurs because monopoly capital finds it difficult to organize its hegemony through the parties in parliament and therefore concentrates its attempts at influence on the administration. Their interests are increasingly mediated through the lobby system on a reformist, economic-corporative level (*PPSC*, pp. 313, 313-14n, 320; *FD*, p. 171; *SPS*, pp. 221-3). Thus the parties no

longer fulfil their traditional functions in policy-making (through compromise and alliances around a common party programme) and in political legitimation (through electoral competition for a national-popular mandate). Instead they have become little more than transmission belts for official decisions and differ among themselves merely in the aspects of official policy that they choose to popularize (*SPS*, pp. 229-30, 237). In turn political legitimation has been redirected through other channels. These involve plebiscitary and manipulative techniques that rely on the mass media rather than parties; and they are dominated by the executive (*SPS*, p. 229).

Nonetheless the activities of the state administration continually run up against limits inherent in its own political structure and operation. These limits are particularly clear in the internal divisions between different administrative coteries, clans, and factions and in the reproduction inside the state system of class conflicts and contradictions. In turn this poses the problem of how the administration is to be unified and homogenized to ensure its effective operation on behalf of monopoly capital. In exceptional states, this is accomplished through a political apparatus (such as the fascist party, the army, the political police) that is distinct from the administration. In the theoretically normal form of representative democracy, it is achieved through the organic functioning of a plural party system located at a certain distance from the central administrative apparatus (*SPS*, pp. 231, 232-3; cf. *PPSC*, pp. 318-20, 335-7, 345-6, 348, 353-5; *FD*, pp. 316-17, 332, 340-1, 353; *CD*, pp. 33, 104-7). But how can this be realized under authoritarian statism?

Poulantzas suggested the need for a dominant mass party that can function as a parallel network and thereby ensure the strict political subordination of the entire administration to the summits of the executive. This 'mass' party acts as a political commissar at the heart of the administration and develops a growing material and ideology community of interest with key civil servants (*SPS*, pp. 233-6). At the same time this party must transmit the state ideology to the popular masses and reinforce the plebiscitary legitimation of authoritarian statism (*SPS*, pp. 236-7). The development of this sort of highly unified and structured mass party is most likely to occur when there is a long period without alternation among the governing parties. But, in the absence of such a 'mass party', its functions can be satisfied through a single inter-party 'centre' dominating the alternating parties of power in a plural party system (*SPS*, pp. 232, 235-6).

If this argument seems to contradict Poulantzas's earlier suggestions that political parties have become merely transmission belts for the administration, it is because he did not clearly distinguish between their role in the representation of public opinion and their role in the politics of power. In this respect it would be better to describe the dominant mass party (*sic*) as the dominant *state* party. This would serve to highlight further the alleged confusion between the party and the state.

The irresistible rise of the state administration in metropolitan capitalism cannot prevent a further sharpening of the generic elements of political and state crisis. This can be seen in the increasing politicization and associated leftward polarization of the bureaucracy in opposition to the rightward thrust of the dominant 'state party'. This tendency is most evident among lesser officials by virtue of their close ties to the new petty bourgeoisie and/or their front-line role in confrontations with the popular masses. A second problem derives from the dominant role of the state administration in organizing hegemony. For, in contrast with the flexible reorganization of class forces possible through an organic plural party system, the administration proves somewhat rigid and jerky in managing the unstable equilibrium of class compromise. Finally, Poulantzas referred to the development and impact of mass struggles precipitated by new forms of state intervention. These popular movements are typically located at a distance from the state but are quite capable of provoking major dislocating effects within the state itself (*SPS*, pp. 240-7).

Thus the rise of 'authoritarian statism' involves a paradox. It clearly strengthens state power at the expense of liberal representative democracy but it also involves a definite weakening of its capacities to secure bourgeois hegemony. This provokes demands for an extension of direct, rank-and-file democracy. In turn this presents both dangers and opportunities to the left in its struggle for a democratic socialism (*SPS*, pp. 241, 263-5; and see chapter 10).

### **A Critique of the Regional Economic Theory**

Poulantzas employed a threefold approach in analysing the economic as well as the political region. He first establishes the basic structural matrix of the CMP within which a relatively autonomous economic region is both determinant and dominant. In this context he also considers the changes in this matrix that accompany the transition

to monopoly capitalism. Secondly, he deals with the specific institutional structure of the economic region with special reference to the circuit of capital and changes in the social relations of production. Whereas the specificity of the typical capitalist state derives from its juridico-political organisation as a national-popular, democratic state, the specificity of the capitalist economy derives from the manifold implications of the value form. Here Poulantzas pays particular attention to the reorganisation of the social relations of production involved in the rise of monopoly capitalism (see: *CCC*, pp 58-65, 109-55). Thirdly, Poulantzas considers the specificity of the economic class struggle over valorisation and exploitation.

Poulantzas is careful to relate all three levels of the economic region. For, in presenting his views on dominance, Poulantzas recognises the danger of mistaking a correlation for an explanation (*PPSC*, pp 151n, 318). He continually stresses the need to relate changes in economic intervention to the class struggle. This explains the importance he attaches to the changing weight of absolute and relative surplus-value in economic exploitation and the changing conflicts among different fractions of capital. But these forms of struggle can only be understood in terms of the specific institutional organisation of capitalism. This mediates the analysis of matrix and struggles.

Whilst recognising the distinctiveness of the capitalist economy, Poulantzas does not treat it in an economistic manner. For he also connects the economic and political regions at each level of analysis. Accordingly he considers the displacement of dominance between the economic and political regions; the mutual implications of state intervention for the valorisation of capital and the reproduction of labour-power as well as for the structure of the state system; and the overdetermination of economic class struggle by the struggle for political and ideological domination (*PPSC*, pp 44-56; *CCC*, pp 21, 24-5, 27, 32, 81, 97-9, 107, 167-8; *SPS*, pp 35, 163, 185-9). Thus he refuses to see the economic and political as hermetically sealed regions and thereby also begins to break with the overly politicist account of the state presented in *PPSC*.

This has clear implications for capital accumulation and the state's economic role. For capital accumulation cannot be studied purely as an economic phenomenon nor can the state's role be seen as purely technical and class-neutral. Both are firmly located within the economic, political, and ideological struggle for class domination and

hegemony. This approach is already evident in *PPSC* where Poulantzas argues that both the technico-economic and ideological functions of the state are overdetermined by its global political function as the factor of cohesion in class-divided societies (*PPSC*, pp 50-1). It is more fully developed in his analyses of the interventionist state for which the economic function has become increasingly dominant.

Initially Poulantzas drew on structuralist Marxism to describe the economic region of the CMP. This is evident in concepts such as the structural matrix of the CMP, its various regions, the index of dominance, the displacement of dominance, dislocations, non-correspondence, overdetermination, class practices, and Träger. In particular he drew on Balibar's structuralist Marxist theory of modes of production and the transitions between them (Balibar, 1967, pp 212-47, 273-308). Thus he described the matrix of the CMP in terms of the specific combination of the invariant economic elements and relations that distinguish it from other modes of production (see chapter 6). But even his early accounts gave greater weight to the economic class struggle than was characteristic of the Althusserian approach. In particular he rejected the idea that the economic was the site of unconscious economic laws that operated independently of the class struggle or were influenced only from the outside by political and ideological struggles (see the critique of Althusser in Poulantzas, 1966a, and of Balibar in *PPSC*, pp 88-9).

Even with these qualifications the structuralist influence generally obscures rather than clarifies Poulantzas's analysis. Indeed Poulantzas himself admits that he initially treated the economic and political regions as distinct and mutually impermeable and was consequently unable to grasp the nature and functions of economic 'intervention' by the state (1976a, p 18; cf. *CCC*, pp 167-8; *SPS*, pp 26-7, 166-7). This is well illustrated in the inconsistencies and ambiguities involved in his discussion of the displacement of dominance. It was only when Poulantzas abandoned a structuralist Marxist approach to the CMP that he really began to understand the state's economic activities. Only then could he begin to develop Capital's arguments about the value form and economic class struggle as well as the economic implications of Gramsci's views on hegemony (*PPSC*, pp 25-7, 30-2; *CCC*, pp 18-9; contrast *CCC*, pp 62-4, 94-7, 109-27, 132, 210-23, and *SPS*, pp 166-94).

Poulantzas's regional economic theory is unnecessarily complicated because he uses the same words to describe phenomena at

different levels of analysis. This applies to such phrases as 'determination in the last instance' and 'displacement of dominance' and, much more seriously, to the concept of 'economic'. In the general theory of modes of production this last concept refers to the overall process of production considered in isolation from its political and ideological overdetermination. In this context 'economic determination' signifies that the index of dominance (or relative weight) of the economic, political, and ideological regions is determined by the relations of production. In the particular theory of the capitalist mode of production 'economic' refers to the specific organisation of production under the dominance of the law of value. Likewise 'economic determination' now refers to the determinant role of the cycle of productive capital within the circuit of capital as a whole.

Thus the claim that the economic is both determinant and dominant in the CMP applies concepts from the general theory to the particular case of capitalism. All it means is that the overall structure of capitalist production entails its organisation under the dominance of the value-form (as opposed to the dominance of extra-economic coercion within the economy). This argument is quite commonplace and hardly requires to be expressed in Althusserian language. Indeed Poulantzas had already presented it in his preliminary remarks on hegemony before he adopted the structuralist Marxist paradigm (1965c).

More problematic is the frequently advanced claim that the transition to monopoly capitalism displaces dominance from the economic to the political region without, however, changing the basic matrix of the CMP (*PPSC*, pp 55-6, 91, 150, 211, 345; *FD*, pp 20-1, 74-5, 303, 313; *CCC*, pp 42, 45, 81, 100-1, 165-8; *SPS*, pp 166-8). 'Economic' and 'political' cannot mean the same here as they do in either the general or the particular theory. Poulantzas is clearly not arguing that the growth of monopoly once again grounds economic exploitation in extra-economic coercion and therefore replaces capitalism with a new mode of production. Nor can he be arguing that it replaces the law of value as the dynamic of capital accumulation with the organisational role of the state. Thus both words must have further meanings at the institutional level of analysis.

Poulantzas himself does not specify these meanings. The most plausible interpretation is that 'economic' refers to the role of market forces in their liberal form of *laissez-faire* and free competition and that 'political' refers to the socialisation of production and exploitation

through the agency of the state. Thus the displacement of dominance probably refers to changes in the respective roles of market and political forces in the institutional mediation of the law of value. This interpretation is consistent with the meaning of 'displacement' in structuralist Marxism, namely, a break in the development of a system such that a given set of functions comes to be performed through a qualitatively different set of agents or forces. This 'discontinuous transformation' (sic) involves changes in the elements as well as their relative weight or dominance (Balibar, 1967, pp 243-7).

In this sense the displacement of dominance involves the reorganisation of the circuit of capital such that the allocation of investment capital and the exploitation of wage-labour are dominated by state involvement rather than *laissez-faire* and by 'state monopoly competition' rather than free competition. This involves substantive changes in the 'economic' and 'political' elements alike. Thus new forms of competition affect the sphere of market forces and the state's activities are now dominated by its economic functions and the economic state apparatus. The resulting transformation is also discontinuous because it does not evolve gradually out of the preceding stage and radically reorganises the whole social formation. But it can also be presented as a displacement of dominance within the CMP because the fundamental matrix remains unaltered. The state is still excluded from the productive core of the capitalist economy and the circuit of productive capital still determines the overall dynamic of accumulation. This preserves the ultimately determining role of the economic region and means that state intervention cannot eliminate the contradictions of capitalism.

This leaves a problem in accounting for what is often termed 'simple monopoly capitalism'. Although Poulantzas sometimes distinguished between the 'simple monopoly' and 'state monopoly' phases of imperialism (e.g., *PPSC*, pp 55, 91, 150, 152-3, 155, 193, 211, 345), he stressed the continuity in the state's economic role across these phases in contrast with the discontinuity between the liberal and imperialist stages of capitalism (*FD*, p 20). Later he conceded that a fundamental break had occurred but did not then consider the state's role in the simple monopoly phase (*SPS*, p 166; cf. *PPSC*, p 155). However Poulantzas defined what is conventionally termed 'simple monopoly capitalism' as the phase of transition to monopoly capitalism (*FD*, p 21; *CCC*, pp. 45-6). He

also claimed that the state's role in a transitional phase is 'enlarged' compared with its role once a new stage has been consolidated (*FD*, pp 20-1). This means that the state's role in this phase cannot be assimilated to its role in state monopoly capitalism. But it is far from clear what meaning Poulantzas might have attached to 'economic' and 'political' in this context.

The problems considered above reflect the predominantly descriptive, impressionistic, or intuitive character of these concepts. Poulantzas failed to transform them into genuine theoretical categories and thereby rendered them ambiguous and inconsistent. In turn this reflects his reliance on the structuralist metaphysics of instances (cf. Laclau, 1977, pp 72-9).

Eventually Poulantzas abandoned the idea that the economic, political, and ideological were distinct regions of the CMP and treated them instead as analytically distinct moments of the capitalist relations of production. The economic moment concerned valorisation and exploitation; the political moment concerned the forms of managerial authority; and the ideological moment concerned the form taken by the mental-manual division of labour. This new approach involved a clear rejection of the structuralist analysis of capitalism as a 'structure in dominance' with three separate instances. It thereby provided a more satisfactory matrix for analysing the state's role in constituting and reproducing capitalist relations of production (*SPS*, pp 26-7, 54-63).

Yet, despite this theoretical shift, Poulantzas still refers to the displacement of dominance from the economic to the political. This perpetuates his ambiguities, confusions, and obscurities on the changing character of the CMP. But this concept is the last significant residue of structuralist Marxism in his economic analysis and it is clearly (albeit only implicitly) transformed by its insertion into a new theoretical framework. This relational approach also fundamentally alters his analysis of class determination and class position (see chapter 6) and is associated with changing attitudes towards certain theoretical and political positions of the French Communist Party.

### **Poulantzas and State Monopoly Capitalism Theory**

In writing *PPSC* Poulantzas had clear political as well as theoretical objectives. He was criticising the orthodox communist theory of state

monopoly capitalism (or 'stamocap') and its implications for the state and political strategy. This critique was sustained in subsequent work and extended to the economic and class theories entailed in 'stamocap' analyses. In general he argued that these analyses were marred by an economic view of social relations, an instrumentalist account of the state, and a reformist political strategy (*PPSC*, pp 273, 273n; *FD*, pp. 83, 97; *CCC*, pp. 48, 82, 102-8, 117, 139-40, 157-164, 169-170, 183, 197-8, 303-4; 1976a, p. 81; *SPS*, pp. 19, 52, 128, 172-3, 183).

The strength of this critique can be illustrated through a brief summary of the main arguments of 'stamocap' theory. It argues that capitalism develops through successive stages that have culminated in a stage of state monopoly capitalism. State intervention has now become a normal and, indeed, dominant element in reproducing capitalism. Indeed some versions claim that the state has become part of the economic base and that the law of value has been replaced by the primacy of politics in the dynamic of capital accumulation. Moreover, whereas the state once acted as a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie, it now intervenes on behalf of monopoly capital to the total (or near total) exclusion of other fractions of capital. Indeed the state and monopolies have fused into a single mechanism of economic exploitation and political domination. In turn this means that the proletariat should be able to mobilise a large anti-monopoly alliance embracing not only other popular classes but also fractions of capital itself. This prepares the ground for a popular, democratic transition to socialism. But it also encourages monopoly capital to preserve its dominance by replacing the old bourgeois democratic republic with more authoritarian government (for an extended review of 'stamocap' theories, see Jessop, 1982, pp 32-77).

In opposition to these views, Poulantzas denied that the state is an instrument and/or can be monopolized by particular class fractions. Instead it is relatively autonomous from the dominant classes and fractions and organises them into a power bloc under the hegemony of one fraction. He also denied that the state is part of the economic base, that it can eliminate or regulate capitalist crises, and that the economic is no longer determinant. Likewise he argued against 'stamocap' views that there is a natural anti-monopoly alliance embracing all the wage-earning classes as well as parts of the bourgeoisie. Instead he insisted on the continuing differences of class

interest between the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat and vehemently denied that capital could ever belong to a socialist bloc. He also criticised the electoralist illusions and frontist tactics of the communist parties and insisted on a fundamental assault on the state and effective grass-roots political mobilisation (on class, see chapter 6; on anti-monopoly strategy, see chapters 8, 9, and 10).

It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to note that Poulantzas later moved towards state monopoly capitalist positions. This is evident in several areas. His most recent work suggests that a qualitatively new stage has emerged in monopoly capitalism and is characterized by massive state intervention. Previously he had argued that the only decisive break occurred between liberal and monopoly capitalism and that since then there had merely been a gradual accretion of state economic activities (1977Ij, p. 3; *SPS*, p. 166; 1979Ia, p. 200). He argued that whole areas of the valorization of capital and the reproduction of labour-power are now directly inserted into the state and that this insertion occurs principally to the advantage of monopoly capital (*CCC*, pp. 46, 62, 81, 102, 125, 134, 148-150, 155, 158, 168, 172; *SPS*, pp. 136, 191, 225). He also adopted the PCF thesis that the state plays a major role in the devalorization of unprofitable monopoly capital through nationalization and state subsidies (*CCC*, p. 167; and *SPS*, pp 175-177; on this thesis, see Jessop, 1982, pp 50-3, 68-9).

In addition, Poulantzas suggested that monopoly capital has subsumed non-monopoly capital under its economic domination and is currently the only member of the power bloc able to establish hegemony. He even claimed that non-monopoly capital can no longer act as an autonomous social force (*CCC*, pp. 148-9, 160n, 160-1, 168). In this context Poulantzas further argued that the dominance of the state's economic functions threatens to undermine monopoly hegemony and so widens the space for compromises between the 'people' and non-monopoly capital as well as for popular alliances embracing the petty bourgeoisie (*CCC*, pp. 155, 333-5; *SPS*, p. 211). In turn this leads monopoly capital to dismantle traditional democratic forms and to construct authoritarian forms in the attempt to compensate for the permanent, generic crisis of hegemony (*SPS*, *passim*).

This remarkable convergence does not mean, of course, that Poulantzas shared the economism, instrumentalism, and reformism of orthodox stamocap theory. For the basic thrust of his work is

antagonistic to these theoretical and strategic deviations. Thus Poulantzas paid increasing attention to the nature of political and ideological hegemony, the relative autonomy of the state as a structural ensemble and strategic terrain, and the importance of revolutionary struggle within, against, and outside the state. The more he distanced himself in these respects from stamocap theories, therefore, the more easily he could embrace certain substantive arguments from stamocap theories. This could have been particularly attractive politically as well as theoretically at a time when Poulantzas was actively involved in the Union de la Gauche. For integrating such arguments with his own views deprives them of their economic, instrumentalist, and reformist overtones and endows them with new theoretical and strategic implications.

### **The Analysis of Political Regimes**

We now turn briefly to Poulantzas's analyses of normal and exceptional regimes and authoritarian statism. The early versions of these analyses presuppose the basic matrix of the CMP and the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist state (see above). Later versions are based on his account of the social division of labour and the 'institutional materiality' of the capitalist state (see chapter five). But there are fundamental theoretical difficulties in all versions.

First, one cannot help noting the implicit functionalism in Poulantzas's analyses of the 'normal' state and the implicit 'dysfunctionalism' of his account of 'exceptional' regimes. For Poulantzas assumes that the democratic state is functional for capital whereas exceptional regimes are too 'brittle' to survive. Yet the benefits of 'normal' forms of state are merely asserted and proof is then sought in the alleged contra-indications of 'exceptional' regimes. This procedure becomes increasingly inadequate as Poulantzas develops his relational approach and thereby throws doubt on the causal principles that allegedly underpin this functionality.

In his early work concepts such as relative autonomy, class unity, and hegemony were so defined that they appeared to offer clear theoretical guarantees that the national-popular, representative state would function as a capitalist state. Indeed, in his more extreme structuralist moments, Poulantzas more or less insisted that actually did so. But he usually introduced a certain contingency in

this regard through reference to concrete conjunctures of the class struggle. His later work identified contingencies at more abstract levels and thereby called all functionalist guarantees into question. In particular Poulantzas dissolved the structuralist principles of relative autonomy and state unity into conjunctural phenomena; and he no longer presupposed hegemonic class domination but insisted on a generic crisis of hegemony. Faced with these concessions one is left wondering whether democratic government is really more functional for bourgeois domination than dictatorship and, if so, how this might be more effectively demonstrated.

Poulantzas places particular emphasis throughout on the role of hegemony in securing bourgeois political domination and also distinguishes between 'normal' and 'exceptional' regimes in terms of hegemonic crises. This places a major explanatory burden on the principle of hegemony. But, relative to the weight placed upon it, this principle is seriously underdeveloped. Poulantzas provides some indicators of a crisis of hegemony but it is still unclear from these contra-indications exactly how hegemony is secured and reproduced. Here again we see the problems created by a failure to transform a descriptive, impressionistic, and intuitive concept into a clear theoretical category. Poulantzas provides some indications as to how this might be achieved but they are never adequately specified or substantiated (see chapter 5).

These difficulties are accentuated in Poulantzas's account of 'authoritarian statism' as the current normal form of state. It actually comprises both normal and exceptional features but Poulantzas does not demonstrate that these are articulated under the dominance of the normal elements. Poulantzas also insists that authoritarian statism leads to a decline in representative democracy (the allegedly normal form of the bourgeois state) without specifying how it substitutes new forms of democratic participation and so maintains the democratic framework. All the evidence he adduces points to a long-term decline in democracy and not to its internal transformation. This is probably related to his neglect of new forms of political representation (such as liberal corporatism based on function within the division of labour) in favour of an eclectic account of the decline of their traditional, parliamentary form and the growth of authoritarian state control over the people. Likewise it is probably related to his neglect of the specific forms of ideology (e.g., authoritarian populism) through

which the hegemony of monopoly capital might be re-asserted in the face of crises in the liberal and/or technocratic ideological matrices of yesteryear (cf. Hall, 1980).

Moreover, whilst his own methodological and theoretical principles require Poulantzas to demonstrate how the development of 'authoritarian statism' entails a *break* or *rupture* in the political process (since it involves a transition to a new state form), he admits that it results instead from the gradual *accentuation of tendencies* coeval with monopoly capitalism and hence also characteristic of the interventionist state. The self-same continuity with the preceding phase of capitalism is evident in his explanations of the new state form in terms of the increasing economic role of the state and/or the permanent instability of the hegemony of monopoly capital. In short, even if we accept the basically descriptive account of 'authoritarian statism' as a normal form, it remains unclear how far Poulantzas can offer a distinctive explanation for its emergence and future development.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The principal developments within the regional political theory first outlined in *PPSC* have now been considered. From a limited concern with the theoretically typical state regardless of its periodization according to different stages of capitalism Poulantzas moved on to consider both its normal and exceptional forms and its economic and political periodization. In addition he no longer took for granted the stability of hegemony and considered the different forms of political crisis that could characterise the bourgeois state system. In developing these views Poulantzas gave greater weight to institutional factors and to the class struggle.

Nonetheless he still maintained the basic threefold methodological approach outlined earlier. This is evident in his continuing concern with the changing structural matrix of the CMP and his new found concern for the specificity of the economic region and its associated forms of class struggle. Moreover, although he later abandoned structuralist Marxism in considering the matrix of the CMP, he still prefaced his account of the state with an analysis of the relative autonomy of the economic and political regions in capitalism (*SPS*, pp 14-20, 25-7).

### **Developing the Regional Theory**

This analysis involved much greater concern with the social relations of production in all their complexity and it was reflected in a new approach that we now turn to before drawing our final conclusions on Poulantzas's various theories of the state.

# 5

## **From a Regional to a Relational Theory?**

In his last book Poulantzas set himself several theoretical and political objectives. He was clearly concerned with the growth of authoritarian statism in almost all developed countries (including those in the Soviet bloc) and the prospects for democratic socialism as a feasible alternative in some European countries. He described both issues as important and urgent and considered them to be closely related (*SPS*, pp 7, 39, 206-7, 246-7, 265). Before Poulantzas discussed these crucial issues, however, he presented some basic theoretical guidelines and arguments. Most of these can be found in his earlier work but some are presented for the first time in *SPS*. In particular he now develops his own relational approach to the 'institutional materiality' of the state and also engages in a partial and critical rapprochement with Foucault's work. Accordingly the present chapter considers the extent to which these new elements are consistent with Poulantzas's earlier regional theory and to what extent they constitute a decisive theoretical break in his work.

Unfortunately much of *SPS* takes the form of a critique of alternative positions. Thus, rather than being presented in a simple, didactic, and logical manner, Poulantzas's own ideas often emerge only indirectly and through contradistinction. This makes *SPS* unnecessarily complex and convoluted but it is also an extraordinarily rich and provoking text. In certain respects *SPS* is also a provisional and transitional work. It certainly does not represent the culmination of Poulantzas's lifework. Poulantzas modified his views significantly in later articles and interviews and distanced himself even further from orthodox marxism. Thus this chapter considers both *SPS* and subsequent contributions to a relational theory.

## New Methodological Considerations

In the 'Introduction' to *SPS* Poulantzas outlines the general approach that will inform his analysis of the capitalist state. As always he rejects instrumentalist and voluntarist approaches to state power but he presents his own approach in a new light. Poulantzas does repeat certain general principles from *PPSC* and subsequent works but he presents them differently and links them into a much more explicit relational perspective. In particular he argues that political class domination is inscribed in the material organization and institutions of the state system; and that this 'institutional materiality' is grounded in its turn in the relations of production and social division of labour in capitalist societies (*SPS*, p 14). He then unfolds some implications of this approach.

In discussing the relations of production and the social division of labour Poulantzas draws on his analyses in *CCC* rather than *PPSC*. For he focuses on the interpenetration of the economic, political, and ideological moments of the social division of labour rather than the structural matrix constituted by the economic, political, and ideological regions of the capitalist mode of production. Thus he argues that the production process is based on the *unity* of the labour process and relations of production organized under the dominance of the latter. These relations are not purely economic (let alone merely technical) but also involve specific political and ideological moments. For politics and ideology are not limited to reproducing the general, external conditions in which production occurs: they are also present in the heart of the labour process as constitutive moments of the social relations of production. This means that the relations of production are expressed in specific *class powers* organically articulated to the more general political and ideological relations that concretize and legitimize them. It also means that the process of production and exploitation reproduces relations of politico-ideological domination and subordination (*SPS*, pp 26-7).

Clearly, in presenting his new, relational approach, Poulantzas no longer employs Althusserian categories. But he still castigates any assumption that the economy or the state are immutable, transhistorical fields of social relations with unchanging boundaries and functions. For the economic and political regions 'are *from the very beginning* constituted by their mutual relation and articulation – a

process that is effected in each mode of production through the determining role of relations of production' (SPS, p 17). This rules out any general theory of economics or the state and indicates the need for particular theoretical analyses of specific types of economy or state. Poulantzas also repeats that the relative institutional separation of the state in the CMP entails a distinct object for analysis. This is now redefined as 'nothing other than the capitalist form of the presence of the political in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production' (SPS, p 19). Accordingly this distinctive presence is the new focus for Poulantzas's regional theory of the capitalist state and its relation to social classes and class struggle (SPS, pp 14-22, 25-7; cf. PPSC, pp 13, 17-8, 22).

One other advance on earlier positions should be noted. Poulantzas had long argued that there could be no general theory of the state. Now he adds that there can be no general theory of the *transition* from one state form to another, including that from capitalism to socialism. In particular Poulantzas denies that Marxism can provide an infallible formula, purged of all deviations, to ensure an effective transition to democratic socialism. This denial is based on epistemological considerations concerning the inevitable gap between theory and practice and it is directed at targets to the left and the right. For Poulantzas seeks to refute both the orthodox marxist-leninist demand for a dictatorship of the proletariat and the *nouveaux philosophes*' equation of Marxism with the Gulag (SPS, pp 22-5).

### **The State, Class Powers, and Struggles**

After these brief methodological remarks Poulantzas considers the general nature of the capitalist state. He emphasizes that it involves more than the exercise of repression and/or ideological deception. It does more than negatively delimit and protect the rules of the economic game and/or inculcate 'false consciousness' among subordinate classes. For it is actively involved in constituting and maintaining the relations of production and the social division of labour; in organizing hegemonic class unity within the power bloc; and in managing the material bases of consent among the popular masses. In short, the state's role in reproducing class domination is a positive one and by no means reducible to the simple couplet of repression-ideology.

Poulantzas continually stresses the state's positivity and ubiquity in constituting and reproducing the relations of production. For it is 'the factor which concentrates, condenses, materializes and incarnates politico-ideological relations in a form specific to the given mode of production' (*SPS*, p 27). This means that the state is everywhere. Indeed, Poulantzas argues that 'we cannot imagine any social phenomenon (any knowledge, power, language or writing) as posed in a state prior to the State: for all social reality must stand in relation to the state and to class divisions' (p 39). Thus every social reality must be conceived as maintaining constitutive relations to the state (p 40). This involves class and non-class relations alike. For the state intervenes in all relations of power and assigns them a class pertinence and enmeshes them in the web of economic, political, and ideological powers of the dominant class (p 43).

In developing these views Poulantzas has several targets. Most obviously he criticizes Althusser for reducing the state system to the RSA and ISAs and ignoring its positive role. Equally clearly he is confirming Foucault's criticism of more traditional juridico-political approaches to state power for their one-sided emphasis on the negative, prohibitive, and repressive features of the state. But Poulantzas is also criticizing two other influential approaches. He is attacking the *nouveaux philosophes* for their argument that the state is the origin of all power, domination, and oppression and that it is impossible to resist its embrace (e.g., Glucksmann, 1977, and Levy, 1977). And he is criticizing the libertarian views of Clastres, Lefort, and Castoriadis. In their different ways these theorists suggest, according to Poulantzas, that social power is primary and that the state is a mere appendage which reinforces a *pre*-political domination (e.g., Clastres, 1977; Lefort, 1979, and Castoriadis, 1975).

Poulantzas replies to these positions by reasserting some basic postulates of Marxist theory. Thus, in opposition to the *nouveaux philosophes*, he emphasizes that the cornerstone of power in class-divided formations is class power. This is grounded in economic power and the relations of production rather than the state. Moreover, since class relations are relations of struggle, they resist integration into apparatuses and escape institutional control. Conversely, in opposition to libertarian theorists, he insists that the state is directly involved as a constitutive and original feature of class and non-class relations alike. Indeed, notwithstanding the ultimately

determining role of the relations of production, political power is primordial. For changes in the character of state power condition every other essential transformation in both class and non-class relations. Moreover, because both class and non-class struggles escape state control, state power is always provisional, fragile, and limited. This makes the struggle for state power the crucial struggle for democratic socialism (*SPS*, pp 43-5).

### **The Capitalist State and the Social Division of Labour**

Poulantzas relates the distinctive form of the capitalist state to its foundations in capitalist relations of production. These must not be understood in the narrow sense of exchange relations (as happens in the case of the della Volpean school criticized in *PPSC* and again in *SPS*, pp 50, 63) nor in the more general sense of purely economic relations with their own distinctive laws of motion or 'capital logic' (*SPS*, pp 51-2). Instead the social division of labour must be grasped in all its complexity. This means looking at the articulation of production, distribution, and exchange under the dominance of the social relations of production. But it also means looking more generally at the division between mental and manual labour - which extends far beyond the economic region and penetrates the state and ideological region as well.

The division between mental and manual labour takes a distinctive form in capitalism owing to the total dispossession of the direct producers from the means of production. Among other things this results in the separation of intellectual elements from direct labour (reducing it to its capitalist form of manual labour), the separation of science from manual labour at a time when the former becomes a directly productive force in the service of capital, the growing role of scientific technique and technocratism as modes of legitimating the exercise of power, and the development of organic relations between specialized intellectual labour and political class domination (*SPS*, p 55).

Poulantzas argues that the state is directly involved in constituting and reproducing the mental-manual division. Indeed he claims that the state itself is the distinctive material embodiment of intellectual labour in its separation from manual labour (*SPS*, pp 55-6). This can be seen in the relation between *knowledge* and *power* within the

capitalist state. Thus the state establishes a distinctive national language and forms of writing and is also involved in reproducing the mental-manual division through such institutions as education. In general these links, which occur in the RSA as well as the ISAs, serve to exclude the popular masses from full and effective participation in political power (*SPS*, p 56). Particular intellectual skills are required for participation and official discourse and bureaucratic secrecy obscure the realities of political power. In addition these links provide the institutional and ideological matrix within which state-enrolled intellectuals and functionaries can unify the power bloc and secure its popular hegemony (*SPS*, pp 57-62).

### **Citizenship, Law, and Nation**

Poulantzas also considers three other aspects of the 'institutional materiality' of the capitalist state. These aspects of political class domination concern: the individualization of the body-politic, the role of law as the mode of organized public violence, and the bourgeois forms of nationhood and the nation-state. Poulantzas argues that the state 'atomizes' the 'body-politic' into individual juridico-political 'citizens' whose unity it then represents as a 'national-popular' state. His argument here goes well beyond that in *PPSC*. For Poulantzas accepts that Foucault can add something to his own arguments about the 'isolation effect'. For this is not merely a product of specific juridico-political institutions and ideologies but also derives from those institutional practices that Foucault defines as 'disciplines'. These are specific mechanisms of social control which operate in multiple, dispersed micro-sites, involve specific forms of scientific knowledge, establish individual and societal norms, survey and manage the deviations around these norms, and elaborate flexible tactics for social control (Foucault, *DP*, pp 135-230).

However, *pace* Foucault as well as *PPSC*, individualization is actually rooted in the relations of production. This can be seen not only in market-oriented 'competition' but also in the capitalist labour process itself. For, although capitalist production is actually 'public' or social in character, it is organized as a system of 'private' labours (*PPSC*, pp 130-1, 133, 137, 213, 275; *SPS*, pp 65-5). This is particularly clear in the impact of the mass production line and Taylorism; and in the way in which capitalist forms of space and time

reinforce the 'isolation effect' in the economic region and in the state's bureaucratic organization. Thus, although 'disciplinary normalization' is certainly important, it merely confirms the individualization already rooted in capitalist production (*SPS*, pp 64-9).

In this context Poulantzas develops his earlier arguments that totalitarianism is an ever-present threat in capitalist states. For the distinction between the 'private' and 'public' is officially constituted in and through juridico-political discourse. Indeed, subject to any resistance from the popular masses, it can be modified by withdrawing 'private' rights, imposing new obligations, and redefining the 'public' sphere (*PPSC*, pp 290-5, *FD*, pp 314-5, *SPS*, pp 69-75). Thus, far from being an alien or purely accidental phenomenon, totalitarianism is grounded in the basic 'individualization' of capitalist societies.

Second, Poulantzas deals with the role of law as the 'code of organized public violence' (*SPS*, p77). Once more he extends and modifies earlier arguments. He had already noted that law sanctions capitalist relations of production and exploitation through their juridical representation as rights attached to private property, organizes the sphere of circulation through contract and commercial law, and regulates the state's economic intervention (*PPSC*, pp 53, 163, 214, 228; *FD*, pp 320, 324). Likewise he had discussed the role of law and juridico-political ideology in securing the institutional unity of the state as well as in providing the matrix for the 'isolation effect' and its corresponding 'unifying effect' in the political class struggle (*PPSC*, pp 216, 226-7, 332, 247-50; *CCC*, p 186; *FD*, pp 320-30). And he had also noted that the dominant position of juridico-political ideology (at least in liberal capitalism) legitimate political domination in terms of legality and adherence to the rule of law as well as framing the struggle for ideological hegemony (*PPSC*, pp 195, 211-5, 221-3, 310-2, 356-7; *FD*, pp 76-8, 143-7, 151, 240-3, 302, 306-9; *CCC*, pp 286-9).

Most of the arguments are repeated in *SPS* but greater weight is now given to constitutionalized violence. Thus Poulantzas writes that

'state-monopolized physical violence permanently underlies the techniques of power and mechanisms of consent: it is inscribed in the web of disciplinary and ideological devices; and even when not directly exercised, it shapes the materiality of the social body upon which domination brought to bear' (*SPS*, p 81).

This emphasis serves once again to distinguish Poulantzas's approach from that of Foucault. The latter argues that the modern state is concerned with the management of life through 'norm-setting' disciplinary techniques and he rejects a repressive view of state power. But Poulantzas stresses that the state is still directly involved in managing death (in institutions ranging from armies to hospitals) and that violence underpins all forms of political power (*SPS*, pp 81-2).

At the same time Poulantzas argues that the monopoly of violence modifies the forms of class struggle. This no longer takes the form of a permanent civil war involving periodic and regular armed conflict; instead it moves towards syndical, electoral, and other forms of organization against which open violence is less effective. These new organizational forms develop within the 'isolation effect' and thereby serve to reproduce bourgeois political domination. Yet they presuppose the right to contest and resist state power and so also serve to limit bourgeois domination (*SPS*, p 82).

Thus law should not be seen as pure negativity and repression. It provides the dominated classes with real rights and liberties through which to pursue their economic-corporate interests. In this way, it helps to organize consent (*SPS*, pp 82-4). Moreover, in setting up abstract, general, formal, and strictly regulated norms of private and public conduct, it also stabilizes social relations, permits forecasting, regulates state power, and dampens political crises (*SPS*, pp 90-1).

This said, Poulantzas nonetheless insists that the capitalist state should not be seen as a pure *Rechtsstaat*. For it also performs actions which are not subject to legal sanctions; can change the law subject to limits set by class struggle; and often infringes its own legality in the name of the higher interests of the state (*raison d'état*) (*SPS*, pp 84-6). Thus the capitalist state employs illegality as well as legality to secure political class domination (*SPS*, pp 85-6).

Third, and finally, Poulantzas considers the state's role in constituting and reproducing the capitalist forms of nationhood and nationalism. Nationhood is a crucial element in the institutional matrix of the capitalist state. Historically the latter tends to encompass a single, constant nation; and modern nations have a corresponding tendency to establish their own states (*SPS*, p 95). Thus it is important to explore the national modality of the bourgeois state.

The state has a key role here. For it establishes a specific spatio-temporal

matrix within which the territorial identity and socio-cultural tradition of the nation are crystallized. Although Poulantzas grounds modern notions of time and space in the organization of capitalist production, he also argues that the modern state systematizes these conceptions and extends them to the political field. Thus he discusses the state's role in demarcating frontiers, integrating the national space within these boundaries, unifying the internal market thus constituted, and homogenizing the 'people' living within the national territory. At the same time Poulantzas notes that, once these frontiers, internal markets, and nations are constituted, they become the nodal points for the transnationalization of production, territorial wars of redivision, and even genocide (*SPS*, pp 99-107, 117). Poulantzas also refers to the state's role in constituting time and historicity. In particular he notes how it establishes temporal norms and standards of measurement, tries to master the different temporalities and rhythms of social development, represses the traditions of subordinate nations, monopolizes the national tradition, charts the nation's future, and so forth (*SPS*, pp 107-15, 119).

For both spatial and temporal organization, Poulantzas stresses that the state always modifies the supposedly 'natural', pregiven elements of nationhood. Thus it always integrates elements such as economic unity, territory, language, tradition, etc., into the basic spatio-temporal matrix of capitalism. Indeed Poulantzas is careful to contrast the spatial and temporal organization of capitalist societies with those in ancient and feudal systems and to trace its implications for the divisions between nations, between civilized peoples and barbarians, and between believers and infidels respectively. In this respect he emphasizes that the modern nation is always a product of state intervention and should not be considered as pre-political or primordial (*SPS*, pp 94, 96-103, 108-110, 113).

Poulantzas also stresses that conceptions of time, space, and nationhood are overdetermined by class struggle. There are bourgeois and proletarian variants of the capitalist spatio-temporal matrix and also contrasting class versions of the nation. Thus the modern nation is not the creation of the bourgeoisie alone but actually reflects a relationship of forces between the 'modern' social classes. It is still pre-eminently marked, however, by the development of the bourgeoisie. Indeed, even when capitalism is undergoing *transnationalization*, bourgeois reproduction is still focused on the nation-

state. Thus the modern nation, the national state, and the bourgeoisie are intimately connected and all are constituted on the same terrain of capitalist relations. Poulantzas concludes that 'the modern nation is written into the state, and it is this national state which organizes the bourgeoisie as the dominant class' (*SPS*, p 117).

Overall, then, Poulantzas extends his argument that the capitalist state functions as a system of political class domination by considering four of its most general features. Whereas *PPSC* immediately focused on the theoretically typical form of the capitalist state, *SPS* first considers those institutional features that characterize both its normal and exceptional forms. These features comprise: (a) its embodiment of intellectual labour separated from manual labour and its concomitant incarnation of the link between power and knowledge; (b) its contribution to 'individualization' as a form of disciplinary control and normalization and, secondarily, as a matrix for struggles over hegemony; (c) its institutional form as a contradictory unity of legality and illegality, based on its constitutionalized monopoly of violence; and (d) its institutional form as a national state. Each of these features is allegedly rooted in capitalist relations of production and/or the social division of labour. For Poulantzas is keen to emphasize that the state is directly involved in constituting and reproducing relations of production. Likewise each feature is said to be overdetermined by the class struggle. For Poulantzas is also keen to argue that class struggles have primacy over institutions and always tend to escape their control (*SPS*, pp 35-120).

### **The State and Political Class Struggle**

Poulantzas recognizes that a theory of the capitalist state cannot be developed merely through relating it to the social division of labour and the class struggle in general. For this runs the risk of reducing all its forms to an indifferent 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie' (*SPS*, p 158). Instead the capitalist state must be considered as a *sui generis* political phenomenon and related to the specificities of political class struggle in different conjunctures (*SPS*, pp 123-6). Thus Poulantzas next discusses how political class struggle is reproduced and transformed within the state apparatus so that bourgeois political domination is secured.

In general terms Poulantzas repeats the arguments first extensively

developed in *PPSC*. Thus he defines the principal political roles of the capitalist state as organizing the power bloc and disorganizing the popular masses. But he goes beyond his initial arguments in both respects and also qualifies his comments on the role of the state personnel. In particular he now gives greater weight to class conflicts and contradictions and to the particular strategies pursued by different classes, fractions, and categories in the struggle over political class domination. In this sense Poulantzas emphasizes that the state is neither a monolithic bloc nor simply a sovereign legal subject. It must be understood as a strategic field formed through intersecting power networks that constitutes a favourable terrain for political manoeuvre by the hegemonic fraction (*SPS*, pp 136, 138). It is through constituting this terrain that the state helps to organize the power bloc.

The state is also involved in disorganizing the masses. It prevents them from forming a unified front against the state and links them severally to the power bloc through its management of material concessions. In particular it mobilizes the petty bourgeoisie and the rural classes in support for the power bloc (either directly or through their support for the state itself) so that they are not available for alliances with the proletariat. It should be noted here that different fractions in the power bloc adopt different strategies towards the popular masses. This is reflected in their preference for different state forms with different social bases and/or in attempts to mobilize the popular masses behind their own fractional struggles (*SPS*, pp 140-2). Moreover, even when the popular masses are physically excluded from certain state apparatuses, these are still affected by popular struggles. This occurs in two ways. Popular struggles can be mediated through state personnel, who have different class affiliations at different levels of the state system. This can be seen in the discontent within the police, judiciary, and state administration in contemporary France. Popular struggles can also be effective at a distance from the state. For they have clear political implications for the strategic calculations of fractions within the power bloc. This is well illustrated by the circumstances surrounding the collapse of the military dictatorships in Greece, Spain, and Portugal (*SPS*, pp 143-4).

Overall this ensures that popular struggles traverse the state system from top to bottom. This does not mean that the popular masses have their own *power centres* within the state in exactly the same way as

the different fractions of the power bloc. For this would suggest that there was a permanent situation of 'dual power' *within* the capitalist state such that it represented the political class power of labour as well as capital. Instead Poulantzas claims that the popular masses merely have *centres of resistance* within the state. These can be used to oppose the real power of the dominant class but not to advance their own long-term political interests. Lastly, he notes that the popular masses can also pressurize the capitalist state through their activities in establishing movements for rank-and-file democracy, self-management networks, etc., which challenge normal liberal democratic forms of representation (SPS, pp 144-5).

Finally, Poulantzas also considers the distinctive role of the state personnel themselves. He notes that the dominant ideology can help to unify the functions of the state system. But he also argues that it cannot eliminate the internal quarrels and divisions that occur within the state owing to the differential class affiliation of the state personnel. Nonetheless, since the state personnel allegedly live their revolt through the dominant ideology, they rarely question the social division of labour between rulers and ruled or between mental and manual labour. Hence they are not inclined to support rank-and-file initiatives and self-management. Instead they would seek to maintain the continuity of the state apparatus during any transition to democratic socialism - not simply to defend their own 'economic-corporate' interests but also because of their more general statolatry, views about the national interest, etc. This means that the socialist movement must deal 'gently' with the state personnel during the transitional period when it is necessary to radically reorganize the structures of the state system (SPS, pp 154-58).

### **The State as a Strategic Terrain**

In SPS Poulantzas emphasizes the extent to which class struggles are reflected in internal divisions, fractures, and contradictions among and within each and every branch of the state system. Its different apparatuses, sections, and levels serve as power centres for different fractions or fractional alliances within the power bloc and/or as centres of resistance for different elements among the popular masses. In turn this is reflected in the prodigious incoherence and

chaotic character of state policies when seen from the viewpoint of what Foucault calls the 'microphysics of power' (*SPS*, pp 132, 135-6, 229; cf. *FD*, pp 329-30; *CD*, pp 49-50, 84). Nonetheless Poulantzas argues that the state's organization as a strategic terrain ensures that a general line is imposed on these diversified micro-policies (*SPS*, pp 135, 136).

This general line emerges in a complex fashion from the institutional matrix of the state and the clash of specific strategies and tactics. It is not reducible solely to the effects of an institutional system of 'structural selectivity' since this is always characterized by class contradictions and conflicts. Nor is it reducible to the more or less successful application of a coherent, global strategy established at the apex of the entire state system (*SPS*, pp 135-6). Only the interaction of matrix and strategies accounts for the general line.

The structural selectivity of the state consists in a complex set of institutional mechanisms and political practices that serve to advance (or obstruct) particular fractional or class interests. Included here are: selective filtering of information, systematic lack of action on certain issues, definition of mutually contradictory priorities and counter-priorities, the uneven implementation of measures originating elsewhere in the state system, and the pursuit of *ad hoc* and uncoordinated policies concerned with specific conjunctural problems affecting particular branches or sections of the state system (*SPS*, pp 132-4, cf. 1977, p 75; *CE*, p 40).

Thus the state system is characterized by complex, cross-cutting, decentralized, non-hierarchical, and antagonistic relations among the different branches of the state system. Yet Poulantzas also insists that 'the state does not constitute a mere assembly of detachable parts: it exhibits an *apparatus unity* which is normally designated by the term centralization or *centralism*, and which is related to the fissiparous *unity of state power*' (*SPS*, p 136). This clearly poses problems in explaining the institutional and class unity of the state. We must ask how such micro-diversity culminates in the macro-necessity of a unified system of bourgeois domination.

Unity cannot be explained, as Poulantzas recognizes, in terms of constitutional and administrative law. Even if spheres of competence were strictly delimited and a precise hierarchy of formal authority were defined, this would not affect the real structures of power (*SPS*, p 134). Thus Poulantzas turns instead to the latter structures. He explains institutional unity in terms of the dominance of the branch

or apparatus that represents the interests of the hegemonic fraction. This occurs in two ways. For the hegemonic fraction can establish the dominance of the state apparatus which already crystallizes its interests; and any apparatus which is already dominant can be transformed into a privileged centre of its interests (*SPS*, p 137).

Poulantzas then accounts for the class unity of the state in terms of the political practices that are pursued by the dominant apparatus. It is not due to any formal, juridical unity that might be established through legal codes. It depends instead on the capacity of the dominant apparatus to shift real power around without due regard for constitutional formalities. Thus the dominant apparatus will duplicate subordinate branches, establish its own 'parallel power networks', penetrate the personnel of other apparatuses, short-circuit decision-making elsewhere in the state system, reorganize the traditional hierarchies of power when appropriate, and switch the relays and circuits of power to suit the global interests of the hegemonic fraction (*SPS*, p 137; cf. *CE*, pp 41-2). This can be accomplished in various ways and the dominant 'mass' party (sic) plays a crucial role here in authoritarian statism (*SPS*, pp 232-40). But these mechanisms must be examined in relation to state strategies and tactics.

Sometimes the state does openly formulate and express (albeit through an opaque and diversified official discourse) the strategies and tactics required for political class domination. But the most appropriate strategy more often emerges only *ex post* through the collision among mutually contradictory micro-policies and political projects formulated in different parts of the state system. Thus, although the general line of the state's policy is 'certainly decipherable in terms of strategic calculation', it is 'often not known in advance within (and by) the state itself' (*SPS*, pp 136, 33). It should not be seen as 'the rational formulation of a coherent and global project' (*SPS*, p 136; corrected translation) and, indeed, 'it is not always susceptible to rational formulation' (*SPS*, p 33). In this sense Poulantzas resorts, if not to a purely *structural* causality à la Althusser, then to a *strategic* causality which explains state policy in terms of a process of strategic calculation without a calculating subject.

Thus Poulantzas argues that the unity of political class domination must be explained through the strategic codification of power relations. The state is

'a strategic field and process of intersecting power networks ... traversed by tactics which are often highly explicit at the restricted level of their inscription in the state: they intersect and conflict with one another, finding their targets in some apparatuses or being short-circuited by others, and eventually map out that general line of force, the state's policy, which traverses confrontations within the state' (*SPS*, p 136).

No power can be exercised on this field without a series of aims and objectives. Yet no individual, group, or class subject can be said to have chosen or decided the final outcome of conflicting micro-power plays. Thus political class domination is both intentional and nonsubjective.

### **A Relational Approach to State Power**

The preceding conclusion is remarkably reminiscent of Foucault's approach to power and strategies (see particularly Foucault, *HS*, pp. 88-96). Indeed Poulantzas frequently refers to Foucauldian perspectives in developing his analysis in *SPS*. But he is certainly not unambiguously favourable to Foucault's work and criticizes it in many incidental remarks and in more detailed commentaries. This is particularly clear in his discussion of their respective convergences and divergences in the relational theory of power.

Poulantzas agrees with Foucault that power is relational. Indeed he had already emphasized this in *PPSC* and continues to argue that class power depends on the balance of class forces. Likewise he agrees that power is not a fixed quantum or essence which can only be allocated in a zero-sum manner so that losses and gains cancel each other out. Thus the state is not a subject that acquires power for itself by depriving various classes of power; nor is it an instrumental depository of the power held by a dominant class subject located beyond it. Instead it is a strategic site of organization of the dominant class in its relationship to the dominated classes (*SPS*, pp 146-8).

But Poulantzas also disagrees with Foucault. In particular he argues that power has precise bases in economic exploitation, the place of different classes in the various power apparatuses and mechanisms outside the state, and the state system itself. This means that class power is firstly determined by the contrasting positions

occupied by different classes in the social division of labour. It is further determined by their different of organization and their respective strategies in the different fields of class struggle (*SPS*, p 147; cf. *PPSC*, pp 95, 105-7). Here Poulantzas clearly dissents from Foucault's claim that power is immanent and has no bases beyond the power relation itself.

He further argues that Foucault's analyses privilege 'power' over resistance. Power is essentialism and absolutized, resistances are reduced to secondary reactions to power. This means that Foucault cannot explain resistances to power. At best he understands resistance as the product of a natural, plebeian spirit of resistance that seeks to escape from all power relations but is always re-absorbed as soon as the 'plebs' adopts a specific power strategy. In contrast Poulantzas insists that the limits to power are inherent in the mechanisms of power themselves. For these always incorporate and condense the struggles of the dominated classes without necessarily fully integrating and absorbing them. Indeed Poulantzas repeats that the class struggle always has primacy over the institutions-apparatuses of power (*SPS*, pp 149-52).

This relational approach leads to distinctive strategic conclusions. Poulantzas disagrees with Foucault and Deleuze that resistance is doomed to failure because it will always be re-absorbed as soon as it elaborates a general strategy. He also rejects the radical libertarian view that resistance will only be successful to the extent that it remains external to the state and subverts it from outside. For Poulantzas claims that it is impossible to locate oneself outside (state) power since popular struggles have an effect on the state (and other power mechanisms) even when the masses are physically excluded from (political) participation. He also claims that an abstentionist strategy could well simply clear the path to an enhanced statism. Instead Poulantzas advocates participation within the mechanisms of power to intensify their internal contradictions and conflicts. This need not result in complete absorption and loss of autonomy. For whether or not the dominated classes are integrated into these mechanisms depends on the specific strategies they pursue rather than on the mere fact of adopting a strategy of involvement. Provided that these strategies are designed to maintain the autonomy of the masses they will never be fully integrated. But Poulantzas also adds that the masses should also pursue struggles at a distance from the state. They should develop direct, rank-and-file democracy

and introduce self-management networks. In this way resistances can provide the basis for a democratic transition to democratic socialism (*SPS*, p 153).

Following this discussion of power Poulantzas once again emphasizes that political domination is inscribed in the material framework of the State. He concludes that only this approach can clarify the conjoint impact on the state produced, 'on the one hand, by changes in the relations of production and social division of labour and, on the other hand, by changes in class struggles, especially political struggles' (*SPS*, p 158). For such a relational perspective enables one to comprehend (a) how each national state system develops in a distinctive way according to the material condensation of the specific political relations which have developed in a given nation-state, and (b) how the state changes according to each stage and phase of capitalism, according to normal and exceptional periods, and across diverse forms of regime (*SPS*, pp 158-60).

Poulantzas then discusses the state's economic role in the current phase of monopoly capitalism and the corresponding form of the normal state, namely, authoritarian statism (*SPS*, pp 163-247). He ends *SPS* with some comments on the democratic transition to democratic socialism. Economic intervention and authoritarian statism have been discussed above and Poulantzas's views on the transition are considered in chapter 10. Thus we can now present some preliminary conclusions on the regional theory of politics. The most fruitful approach is to consider how the key concepts in Poulantzas's work have changed during the ten years that separate *PPSC* and *SPS*. Accordingly I now examine Poulantzas's changing analyses of relative autonomy, class unity, and hegemony. We can then assess the extent to which Poulantzas merely modified his original regional theory and to what extent he introduced a new relational theory of the state.

## **A Critique of the Relative Autonomy of the State**

Poulantzas is particularly identified with the concept of relative autonomy; but it is not one he helped to clarify. Indeed it causes much confusion in his own work. In part this occurs because he employs the same phrase to refer to concepts at different levels of abstraction. In the *general* theory of historical materialism 'relative autonomy' is

tied to the concept of the 'structure in dominance'. A mode of production comprises economic, political, and ideological regions that have their own structures and effects (i.e., are autonomous) but are organized in a specific hierarchy whose variation is ultimately determined by the economic (i.e., their autonomy is relative). This general concept assumes a specific meaning in the *particular* theory of the CMP. Here it refers to the distinctive institutional separation of the economic and political regions within the overall matrix of capitalism that is simultaneously facilitated and necessitated by the dominance of the value form in the economic region and the monopoly of coercion enjoyed by the state. Poulantzas adopts an analogous use in *SPS* where relative autonomy refers to the state's distinctive place in the social division of labour as reflected in its unique embodiment of mental labour. But here I want to discuss the changing meaning of relative autonomy in the *regional* theory of the capitalist state and its relation to political class struggle.

Poulantzas first introduced the idea of relative autonomy to perform a precise function in his regional theory of the capitalist state. It referred to that form and degree of institutional autonomy relative to the dominant classes and fractions that was necessary to organize their unity as a power bloc and to secure their hegemony over the people-nation. He was careful to distinguish this sense of relative autonomy from two other forms discussed in the marxist classics. The first of these is the relative autonomy that facilitated a revolution from above in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The second is the relative autonomy due to a general or catastrophic equilibrium among social classes that thereby allows the state to arbitrate among them. These should both be seen as exceptional forms of relative autonomy and neither is typical of the capitalist state. The former belongs only to transitional situations and is irrelevant to established capitalist societies. The latter is said to be antagonistic to the relative autonomy of the capitalist state in its real, primary meaning (cf. *PPSC*, pp 259-2, 271-3).

Initially Poulantzas explained relative autonomy in this primary sense in terms of the particular place of the political region in the structural matrix of the CMP. He argued that relative autonomy was based on the institutionalized unity of the state as the instance concerned to maintain the unity of the various levels of the CMP. He added that this unity (and, *a fortiori*, this relative autonomy) is possible only because of the institutional separation of the political

from the economic region and the concomitant separation of political and economic class struggles (*PPSC*, pp 256-7). Even in *PPSC* this structuralist argument is complemented by an analysis of the state in terms of its typical juridico-political institutions. Thus Poulantzas frequently refers to legal concepts in defining the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist state (see chapter 3. At the same time he notes how relative autonomy also depends on the class struggle. This is obviously implied in the antithesis between relative autonomy in its primary, generic sense and that form of relative autonomy that occurs in atypical situations of general or catastrophic equilibrium. But it merits particular emphasis because the precise forms of relative autonomy can only be established by examining how institutional forms are overdetermined in specific conjunctures by the prevailing balance of class forces.

Thus, in his second contribution to the Poulantzas-Miliband debate, Poulantzas responds to Miliband's enquiry as to how relative is the relative autonomy of the state in the following terms.

"I cannot reply to this question, since in this form it is utterly absurd. I could only have answered this question, couched in these general terms, if I really had been guilty of structuralism. I can give no *general answer* - not, as Miliband believes, because I take no account of concrete individuals or of the role of social classes, but precisely because the term 'relative' in the expression 'relative autonomy' of the state (relative in relation to what or whom?) *here* refers to the relationship between state and dominant classes (i.e., relatively autonomous in relation to the dominant classes). In other words, it refers to the class struggle within each social formation and to its corresponding state forms. True, the very principles of the Marxist theory of the state lay down the general negative limits of this autonomy. The (capitalist) state, in the long run, can only correspond to the political interests of the dominant class or classes. But I do not think that this can be the reply which Miliband expects of me. For since he is not some incorrigible Fabian, he of course knows this already. Yet, within these limits, the degree, the extent, the forms, etc. (*how* relative, and *how is it* relative) of the relative autonomy of the state can only be examined (as I constantly underline throughout my book) with reference to a given capitalist state, and to the precise *conjuncture* of the corresponding class struggle (the specific configuration of the

power bloc, the degree of hegemony within this bloc, the relations between the bourgeoisie and its different fractions on the one hand and the working classes and supporting classes on the other, etc.). I cannot, therefore, answer this question in its general form precisely on account of the conjuncture of the class struggle" (1976a, p 72).

This approach is fundamentally flawed. Poulantzas wants to introduce an element of contingency into his analysis of relative autonomy but he also wants to argue that the capitalist state can never in the long run do anything but reproduce bourgeois class domination. This dualism can be traced through all his work from *PPSC* to *SPS*. In his early writings on the state Poulantzas emphasized the structuralist moment of this polarity. Accordingly he effectively treated the class struggle as the vehicle through which the structurally-inscribed necessities of social reproduction were realized. The structuralist bias in his early work made it difficult to concede any real influence to the role of class struggle. However, from *FD* through to *SPS*, Poulantzas more and more emphasized the primacy of the class struggle in historical development. But to what extent did this shift of emphasis enable him to transcend the antinomy of necessity and contingency in relating institutional forms and the class struggle?

In eliminating the Althusserian influences in his work Poulantzas gradually abandoned the commitment to a *structuralist* interpretation of *structural* effects. He no longer treated the structural determination of hegemony or the class unity of the state as reflecting the functional imperatives of the self-reproduction of the social whole. Instead he substituted an account of structural effects that sees them as specific, form-determined effects of political institutions on the class struggle. From the notion of structural causality as formulated by Althusser he moves to the idea of structural selectivity as formulated by Offe. This would have been fruitful if Poulantzas had not followed the early Offe in interpreting the structural selectivity of the state as an in-built guarantee of political class domination. Ever restless, Poulantzas then moves on from the idea of structural selectivity, without ever fully abandoning Offe's notion, to take up Foucault's ideas on power and strategy. Thus *SPS* suggests that the long-term political interest of the bourgeoisie emerges as the resultant of a multiplicity of diversified micro-policies reflecting in turn the class struggles and contradictions inscribed in a specific

manner - due to its structural selectivity - in the state itself (*CCC*, pp 161-4; *SPS*, pp 134-6). This last solution seems to depend on the metaphor of a parallelogram of forces and/or on the structural selectivity inherent in the state itself.

Given that Poulantzas moved away from an Althusserian position, it is ironical that Althusser provides one of the most effective criticisms of such a position. Althusser criticized Engels's analysis of economic determinism in terms that are directly applicable to Poulantzas's position on relative autonomy. For Engels attempted to resolve the problem of economic determination in the last instance in terms of the final self-assertion of the economic movement amid the endless host of accidents, the encounters of innumerable intersecting forces in an infinite series of parallelograms of forces (Engels to Bloch, 21-22nd September, 1890). Althusser justifiably criticized Engels for failing to provide a true solution. Engels cannot explain how this 'macroscopic necessity' finally emerges out of such 'microscopic diversity'. Either Engels's solution is void because it cannot move from an infinity of parallelograms to an unambiguous, final resultant or else it is tautological because he merely postulates the resultant that his theoretical approach itself demands (Althusser, 1968, pp 118-25). Likewise Poulantzas frequently affirms the incoherent and contradictory nature of the various policies pursued by the state as the material condensate of a relation of forces. But he nonetheless insists that this ultimately corresponds to the requirements of an unambiguous and exclusive political power of the bourgeoisie. And, just as Engels failed to solve his version of this general problem, Poulantzas is also unable to provide a satisfactory proof for the relative autonomy of the state as he idiosyncratically defines it (cf. Jessop, 1980, p 121).

Indeed, if Poulantzas had been able to show that the relative autonomy of the state really did guarantee bourgeois political domination, it would have had serious consequences for his overall analysis. For it would clearly undermine his argument that crises of hegemony can occur - since hegemony is supposed to be guaranteed by such relative autonomy. Or, if crises of hegemony were conceded, it would entail a teleological account of the emergence of exceptional states as means to reconstitute bourgeois hegemony (e.g., *CD*, p 98). The problem with such arguments is that they actually render the concept of relative autonomy theoretically redundant. For the underlying argument that the capitalist state must

in the long run have that degree of relative autonomy necessary to secure bourgeois domination would mean that all states have the same effect *sub specie aeternatis*.

This position is rejected by Poulantzas himself as absurd. He criticizes such a subsumptionist approach in both *PPSC* (p 13) and (*SPS*, p 158) and also insists on the conjunctural specificity of relative autonomy in his reply to Miliband. But this actually undermines arguments about the long-run 'macro-scopic necessity' of bourgeois domination. Nowhere did Poulantzas satisfactorily explain how the state's relative autonomy guarantees bourgeois political domination despite the contingencies of the class struggle. Neither the idea of structural causality nor that of structural selectivity (as interpreted by Poulantzas) helps to resolve this problem. In his last attempt at resolving the difficulty Poulantzas draws on Foucault's approach to power and strategy. But, even though they proceed from different ends of the micro-macro continuum, neither Foucault nor Poulantzas can bridge the gap between contingency and necessity.

This suggests that the concept of relative autonomy is at fault and Poulantzas should have abandoned it along with other Althusserian notions. He rightly insists on the institutional separation of the political and economic regions in capitalist societies. He correctly denies that the state is a simple instrument of class forces that are constituted outside the state and employ it to further their pre-given interests. He notes well the complex, conjunctural relations among the state considered as an institutional ensemble, state personnel, and social classes. But he errs in assuming that somewhere in the state there is something that can somehow *guarantee* bourgeois class domination. Instead he should have taken seriously his own idea that the state is a social relation. For this clearly points towards a detailed, conjunctural analysis of the *contingent necessity* of political class domination (or its absence) as the complex resultant of state forms and class forces (*SPS*, p 158).

### **A Critique of the Class Unity of the State**

These problems are reproduced in Poulantzas's analysis of the distinctive unity of state power in capitalist societies. In *PPSC* he considered this in three steps. Firstly, it was necessitated by the

structurally determined role of the state as the factor of unity in a capitalist society. Secondly, it was facilitated by the institutional framework of political democracy that allows a sovereign state to present itself as the representative of the general, national-popular interest. And, thirdly, it was realized through specific class practices that secure the coincidence of the hegemonic fraction in the power bloc and over the people and place this fraction in charge of the dominant branch of the RSA (see chapter 3). But subsequent studies render this notion of class unity more and more problematic.

First, Poulantzas introduced the concept of a plurality of relatively independent ideological state apparatuses alongside a single RSA with a vigorous internal unity (1969a, p 77; *FD*, pp 305-8). This problematizes the institutional unity of the state and thereby its class unity. For Poulantzas argues that different class fractions and/or classes can deploy ISAs as centres of power in the class struggle and also suggests that centralized control over ISAs is difficult because of their 'private' character.

Second, Poulantzas concedes that contradictions within branches of the RSA itself and/or within different ISAs could play a principal rather than merely secondary role in the state's functioning. Presumably this would undermine the internal unity of the state that is allegedly based on the dominance of whatever branch of the RSA is the privileged centre of the hegemonic fraction (*FD*, pp 328-30, 334; *CCC*, pp 163-4, 187; *CD*, pp 33, 49-50, 82-7, 94, 97, 103-4, 112-3, 124-5).

Third, having redefined its relative autonomy, Poulantzas is obliged to redefine the unity of the capitalist state. Relative autonomy became the sum of relative autonomies commanded by different branches, apparatuses, or networks vis-à-vis others of their kind. In turn the institutional unity of the state becomes the sum of the unities of different branches, apparatuses, or networks viewed in terms of the diverse organizations and diverse policies of these different components. This problematizes its *substantive* institutional unity as opposed to its merely formal unity as a specific rational-legal institutional ensemble. In turn this either calls its *class* unity into question or reduces it to a particular, institutionally-mediated pattern of incoherence among multiple, diversified, and mutually contradictory micro-policies (*CD*, p 75; *SPS*, pp 135-9). Moreover, once the class unity of the state system is questioned, the state managers can no longer be viewed merely as political representatives of the hegemonic

class (fraction). Pursuing such issues would have brought Poulantzas closer to much recent work on the state, state managers, and state autonomy (e.g., Block, 1980; Skocpol, 1978).

Finally, Poulantzas abandons the argument that only the dominant classes can enjoy privileged seats of power in the state apparatus. Initially Poulantzas had argued that the dominated classes could at best have centres of *resistance* within the state. But later he argues, as an essential plank in his left Eurocommunist political strategy, that the dominated classes can eventually secure real centres of *power* within the capitalist state itself (e.g., *SPS*, pp 258-89).

This conceptual slippage reflects Poulantzas's progressive abandonment of structuralist formalism in the analysis of class practices. But he still resorts to a formal insistence on the relative autonomy of the state apparatuses as a whole and on the class unity of state power exercised in and through these apparatuses. This insistence is formal because it is relegated to the celebrated last instance, the long-run, the conclusion of the process, etc., and, as has often been remarked, the lonely hour of the last instance never comes, the long-run is merely the aggregate of a series of short-runs, and the process is never concluded but ever-renewed. But Poulantzas continues to insist on these principles in order to distance himself from instrumentalism and/or those approaches that propose a gradual, non-ruptural, piecemeal conquest of state power. However, while the twin principles of relative autonomy and class unity were necessary for a *structuralist* critique of such positions, the latter are more effectively attacked from a different vantage point. The structuralist residues in Poulantzas's analyses undermine rather than strengthen such attacks. They also contradict the premises of his own revolutionary strategy with its stress on the primacy of class struggle over any structures.

### **The Double Determination of Hegemony**

Poulantzas never managed to break completely with functionalism or class reductionism in dealing with the state's relative autonomy or class unity. Thus he never fully exploited his later insight that the state is a social relation. But his discussion of hegemony does begin to develop some implications of this insight. This is not surprising. For the concept of hegemony does not belong to the most abstract level of

Poulantzas's threefold analytical approach to the state. This is indicated in its derivation from Italian Marxism rather than Althusserian structuralism. Instead hegemony is located at the levels of juridico-political institutions and class struggle. In principle this should make it much easier to integrate into a relational approach to state power as the material condensation of the class struggle. It remains to see whether Poulantzas achieved this integration.

Poulantzas seems to have operated with two different meanings of hegemony. This reflects the dual reference of the concept to state apparatuses and class practices, institutional materiality and class struggle. Thus sometimes he emphasizes what one might call the *structural determination* of hegemony inscribed in a particular form of the capitalist state. But on other occasions he seems to be working with a notion of hegemony as a *class position*, i.e., a stance adopted in the class struggle. This treats hegemony as a position of class leadership won in and through political and ideological class struggle.

The structural determination of hegemony is grounded in the particular form of political class domination existing in a given state system. This should be understood in terms of the specific configuration of state branches, apparatuses, and institutions, their specific powers and prerogatives of action, their specific relative autonomies and institutional unities, their specific patterns of domination and subordination, and the resulting system of structural and strategic selectivity. Thus a given state form and/or regime involves a structural privilege for a specific fraction of capital in the contest for bourgeois hegemony. It does not guarantee hegemony. There remains some scope within these structural limits for some marginal variation in long-run hegemony and greater variation in the short-run.

Thus, in relation to the modern interventionist state and its authoritarian statist form, Poulantzas would argue that it underwrites the hegemony of monopoly capital. But it would be quite possible for either banking or industrial, interior or comprador, US-oriented or EEC-oriented fractions of monopoly capital to enjoy long-term hegemony. Conversely it would be impossible for non-monopoly capital to establish its hegemony in the long run within this state form. In the short run, however, there is more scope for variation. There could be periods of unstable hegemony, dissociations between hegemony within the power bloc and hegemony over

the people-nation, crises of hegemony, etc. Which fraction of capital, if any, enjoys hegemony will depend on the outcome of the political and ideological class struggle.

This dual approach to hegemony is clearly implied in the claim that state power is a form-determined condensation of the balance of forces. It is nowhere clearly explicated. But viewing hegemony in this way does help to explain a number of apparent difficulties in Poulantzas's work.

First, it would explain why he can talk of the organic circulation of hegemony within democratic regimes. For, in addition to the more abstract level of structural determination, more concrete struggles must also be taken into account. These struggles are aimed at polarizing class positions around particular strategies or 'hegemonic projects'.

Second, it would also explain the structural resistance ('relative autonomy') that the state offers to the successful pursuit of strategies promoted by structurally disprivileged fractions or classes. This is illustrated by the failure of the working class to establish or maintain its hegemony over the democratization of the political systems of the erstwhile military dictatorships of Spain, Portugal, and Greece (*CD* pp 136, 141-4, 157-8).

Third, it would explain why Poulantzas can talk of working-class hegemony in the democratization process and/or the transition to socialism and still insist that the working class cannot win hegemony before the conquest of state power with its attendant 'smashing' of the capitalist state. The working class could establish its hegemony over the popular masses at the level of class positions and/or exacerbate any disunity among the fractions of the power bloc on the terrain of the capitalist state. But it cannot secure hegemony at the level of structural determination until it has consolidated a new form of state that corresponds to its own long-run, global political interests.

This twin-pronged approach to hegemony is original and merits careful consideration. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that Poulantzas nowhere made it explicit. This leads to serious problems in his analysis of both structural determination and class leadership; it also makes it difficult to see how the shift from a regional to a relational theory modifies his analysis of hegemony.

In considering the moment of structural determination or institutional materiality, Poulantzas often seems to conflate hegemony and domination. He correctly rejects the Marxist-Leninist tendency to reduce the state to political domination (if not to political

repression *tout court*) and insists instead on the specificity of the political class struggle for hegemony in capitalist societies. But this means that he shared for a long time the (neo-)Gramscian tendency to focus on hegemony at the expense of constitutionalized violence and/or extra-legal resort to direct force. This is really remedied only with *SPS*. Moreover, even in the latter text, he still did not adequately distinguish between the structural determination of *de facto* political class domination and the structural determination of hegemonic class *leadership*. Thus structural determination seems to encompass: (a) the dull compulsion of political class domination secured through an institutionally- inscribed structural selectivity; (b) the state's capacity to invoke *raison d'état* and/or the structurally privileged resort to violence in the absence of hegemonic class leadership; and (c) form-determined privileges favouring the exercise of *hegemonic leadership* by a particular class (fraction). In turn this makes it difficult to conceptualize 'structural crises' of the state. For these could refer either to a crisis in the structural determination of hegemony and/or to a generalized inability to maintain the state as a system of political domination 'armoured by coercion'. Yet the alternative interpretations of this concept would have very different implications for political strategy in revolutionary conjunctures and crises.

It is even more difficult to reconstruct Poulantzas's views on hegemony considered as political, intellectual, and moral class leadership. In *PPSC* Poulantzas certainly discusses the ideological terrain (constituted by the 'isolation effect') on which struggles for hegemony occur. Otherwise he offers little more than a general definition of hegemony in terms of the successful coupling of the particular economic-corporate interests of subordinate fractions and classes to the long-term, allegedly 'national-popular' interests of the hegemonic fraction. In part this weakness must be explained in terms of his systematic neglect of the political and ideological forces (such as parties, social movements, 'ideological watchdogs', etc.) that would be involved in a struggle for hegemony. In part it must be explained in terms of his systematic neglect of the specific mechanisms involved in the discursive articulation of different ideological elements into a class-relevant ideological ensemble. In turn these problems reflect his enduring politicism with its one-sided concern with the state system and his marked tendency towards class reductionism in ideological analysis.

The clearest account of hegemonic class leadership can be found in

*FD*. Indeed it is significant that Poulantzas claims that fascism secured the hegemony of monopoly capital and did not simply suggest that it secured the political domination of this fraction. Thus he considers how the fascist parties and/or states established the *structural* preconditions for the *hegemony* of big capital; and he also indicates how fascist ideology helped to secure its political, intellectual, and moral leadership (see chapter 8 below). But Poulantzas does not really explain how specific programmes and policies consolidated support and neutralized resistance during the various stages of the fascist period. Yet an account of the different micro-policies pursued by the fascist parties and regimes is essential to any explanation of the complex links among fascist ideology, the fascist state, and the hegemony of monopoly capital.

Nothing that Poulantzas wrote later concerning actual or past practices goes beyond the account of the hegemonic class leadership of monopoly capital presented in *FD*. For, under the influence of his emerging relational approach, Poulantzas seemed to shift his focus from hegemonic class *leadership* towards two other topics. On the one hand, he emphasized the prodigious incoherence of the micro-policies pursued by the state; and, on the other hand, he considered how these policies are strategically codified through the structure of the state system itself. He also argued that there is typically no rationally formulated, global political strategy and that the general line of political class domination (or hegemony?) more often emerges *post hoc*. This seems to call the concept of hegemonic class leadership into doubt and to dissolve it in favour of a more Foucauldian than Gramscian perspective. In this sense his earlier neglect of the precise modalities of hegemonic class leadership in favour of its more general structural determination might signal some lingering doubts about the historicist and voluntarist implications of the concept of hegemony. But, having adopted a relational approach, Poulantzas still failed to develop a coherent account of the strategic moment of class hegemony and/or domination and continued to emphasize how they were determined in and through specific state structures.

### **Macro-Necessity and Micro-Contingency**

Similar problems occur in Poulantzas's more general account of state

power. In describing how class contradictions are reproduced within the state apparatus and depicting the various mechanisms of its structural selectivity, Poulantzas often noted the prodigious incoherence and chaotic character of state policies. This poses the question, as we have seen, of how such micro-diversity culminates in the macro-necessity of bourgeois domination. His solution is to treat the state as

'a strategic field and process of intersecting power networks ... traversed by tactics which are often highly explicit at the restricted level of their inscription in the state: they intersect and conflict with one another, finding their targets in some apparatuses or being short-circuited by others, and eventually map out that general line of force, the state's policy, which traverses confrontations within the state' (*SPS*, p 136).

This general line of force does not result from the successful application of a coherent global project formulated at the apex of the state but rather results from the collision of different micro-policies and tactics (*SPS*, pp 33, 135-7). Thus Poulantzas resorts to what I earlier called a *strategic* causality that explains state policy in terms of a process of strategic calculation without a calculating subject. In turn, this is strongly reminiscent, as noted above, of Foucault's approach to the same problem.

Both theorists emphasize tactics, strategies, and strategic calculations; but neither elaborates this conceptual field and their arguments remain at the level of metaphor. This would seem more serious in Foucault's case because he lacks any other means of interpreting class domination. For, having insisted on the multiplicity of power relations and rejected their structural determination in favour of the pure immanence of power, the poverty of his account of global strategies leaves him with no means to explain 'hegemonic effects'. However, in contrast with Foucault's assumption of the inherent neutrality of the techniques of power, Poulantzas argues that class domination is inscribed in the materiality of the social division of labour and the structural selectivity of the state apparatus. It is only in this context that he then analyses the micro-policies and class strategies involved in capital accumulation and bourgeois hegemony. But Poulantzas's apparent superiority in this respect is vitiated by his failure to establish that the structural selectivity of the state

is a *class* selectivity and to develop the notions of strategy and tactics beyond the general intimations of Lenin, Gramsci, and Mao.

Instead Poulantzas merely insists on the macro-necessity of class domination and tends to see the diversity of micro-policies as the cunning means whereby the predestined logic of this domination is realized. Thus, despite his frequent criticism of economism and historicism and his insistence on the primacy of class struggle over institutions and apparatuses, he often relapses into a sophisticated but instrumentalist position and/or a teleological view of the selectivity of state structures. No sooner has he described the incoherence of micro-policies than he suggests that 'the strategic organization of the state destines it to function under the hegemony of a class or fraction located within it' (*SPS*, p 137). And he then proceeds to ascribe to this class or fraction the ability to 'establish as dominant the apparatus that already crystallizes its interests' (*ibid.*). This is yet another illustration of his ambiguities and inconsistencies concerning hegemony and shows once again his reluctance to accept hegemony as contingent in anything but the short-term. He may have prioritized the role of the macro-policy of the state in opposition to Foucault's emphasis on the primacy of micro-policies but he remains unable to explain the necessity of the global strategy of capital (for a more detailed analysis of the relations between Foucault and Poulantzas, see chapter 11 and, for a more detailed analysis of the relations between Foucault and Poulantzas, Jessop 1984).

### **Concluding Remarks**

I have now reviewed three crucial theoretical principles in Poulantzas's initial regional theory of politics and have also considered how he later deals with the interface between the micro-physics of power and its alleged macro-necessity. The concepts of relative autonomy and class unity were initially formulated in the framework of Althusserian structuralism. I argued earlier that these have a threefold meaning according to whether Poulantzas considers them at the level of structural matrix, juridico-political institutional ensemble, or political class struggle. But there is a constant slippage from the more concrete, conjunctural level of analysis where relative autonomy and class unity are contingent phenomena to the more

abstract, determinist level of the structural matrix. This slippage is most extreme in the case of relative autonomy, a concept that is most closely linked to the Althusserian matrix (hence Poulantzas's differentiation from the relative independence characteristic of Bonapartism); it also holds to a lesser extent for class unity. In dealing with hegemony, however, Poulantzas is already closer to the level of class struggle. But even here he tends to focus on the juridico-political institutions that mediate the struggle for hegemony rather than on the specific modalities of the struggle for hegemonic leadership. In his final text the role of hegemony seems less prominent and more attention is given to the character of the state as a strategic terrain and its codification of micro-policies to produce a global pattern of domination. Whether this is appropriately characterized as hegemony (let alone hegemonic class leadership) is doubtful.

We have seen that Poulantzas considerably changed his theoretical approach between his preliminary remarks on hegemony and the state (1965b) and his final remarks on the institutional materiality of the capitalist state considered as a social relation (*SPS*). At first his ideas about the state were developed outside the Althusserian framework; next he focused on the regional theory of the political within an Althusserian framework but always adopted a threefold account of state power which encompassed its juridico-political institutions and political class struggles as well as the more abstract determinations entailed in the structural matrix of the CMP; and then he gradually moved away from Althusserian structuralism to adopt a relational approach to the social division of labour, the nature of the state apparatus, and the dynamic of state power.

This shift is clearly stated in a debate on *SPS* when Poulantzas said that it takes:

a distance from a certain conception which I had earlier, i.e., the relative autonomy of the state, which considered social reality in terms of instances or levels. This was, in sum, the Althusserian conception. Here I offer a series of criticisms, because it was a conception which did not succeed in exactly situating the specificity of the state, which did not succeed in grasping the relations between state, society, economy, in a sufficiently precise fashion. .... For example, it is true that for some time, I tended to consider the state (even in its broad sense, including ideological apparatuses) as the

(almost) exclusive site of the institutions of power. This was an error: there are a whole series of other power centres that are extremely important in society. ... In this book I have tried both to break with a conception which considers the state as the totality of power and another conception which neglects entirely, or almost entirely, the state's role: that of Foucault or, ultimately, that of the *Revue Libre* (sc. edited by Castoriadis, Lefort and Gauchet) (1978Ic, pp 27-8).

This new approach is clearly the relational approach. It must be admitted that his discussions of this approach are elliptical but its implications are reasonably clear. Certainly they are different both theoretically and strategically from the earlier regional approach. This will become even more evident when I have outlined Poulantzas's views on social classes, class interests, and class powers in the next chapter and return to the general question of a relational approach in the concluding chapter.

Meanwhile I end these three chapters on Poulantzas's theoretical approach to the state with some brief comments on its limitations. Although Poulantzas gradually moved away from Althusserian structuralism, he never realized the full implications of his new relational approach. In part this reflects the continued use of structuralist concepts to serve new relational purposes and the resulting survival of structuralist residues in his new approach. In part it reflects Poulantzas's continued reluctance to abandon what he believed were the essential principles of historical materialism, namely, economic determination in the last instance and the primacy of class struggle. This was associated with continued commitments to the essential class character of the state in capitalist society and the ultimately determining role of the relations of production in the dynamic of state power. But these commitments meant that Poulantzas could never fully accept the contingency of class power and its dependence on the complex modalities of class struggle as well as the strategic terrain constituted by the state. Thus Poulantzas never managed to resolve the problem posed by Foucault as well as himself concerning the relation between macro-necessity and micro-contingency. Whether it is possible to do so must be considered in the concluding chapter of this work.

## **Part III**

# **Social class, Ideology and Class Struggle**

# 6

## **Social Classes and Class Alliances**

This chapter deals with Poulantzas's views on social classes, class alliances, and the political representation of class interests. It is difficult to disentangle these issues from the question of the state apparatuses and state power but the effort is worthwhile because of widespread misunderstanding of his approach to class determination and class position. This is best corrected by considering Poulantzas's changing theoretical and strategic concerns. The principal shifts in his theoretical views on class are marked by three key texts: *PPSC*, *FD*, and *CCC*. Their political dynamic is provided by his concern with the question of class alliances. At stake in the case of France are the anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist alliance and its implications for the Union de la Gauche. In Greece the problem concerns the appropriate relation between the anti-dictatorial alliance and the anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist alliance. Although his basic views on social classes remain more or less the same after *CCC*, Poulantzas does re-evaluate the character of social movements. Having initially dismissed the new social movements as irredeemably petty bourgeois, Poulantzas later saw them as valid forms of struggle independent of class struggle. This raises new problems concerning alliance politics and produced a further shift in his approach.

### **Early Views on Class**

Poulantzas hardly touches on questions of class determination in his existential Marxist phase. To the extent that he does, he subscribes to an economist-historicist problematic of the class subject. This defines classes solely in terms of their economic position in the relations of production without regard for their insertion into

political and ideological relations. Moreover, at least in the anthropological or humanist version adopted by Poulantzas under the influence of existentialism, it considers economic relations themselves in terms of a 'world of needs, alienation, scarcity, and so forth. In its historicist moment it also considers classes as the genetic principle of historical change. Each class is treated as a unitary class subject with its own class consciousness or worldview reflecting its economic role in society; and historical transformation is explained in terms of the succession of dominant economic classes imposing their distinctive worldview as the unifying and totalising principle of a given social order. Some of the most effective criticism of this approach can be found in Poulantzas's subsequent work, although, characteristically for Poulantzas, it is criticism directed at others (1966e, *passim*; 1967a, pp 60-67; 1967b, pp 145-50; PPSC, pp 60-3, 76, 124, 138-9, 195-201).

The transition from an economist-historicist problematic is realised in three articles as Poulantzas moved from existential Marxism to his more structural Marxist phase. In his preliminary remarks on hegemony and the capitalist state (1965c) he assessed the implications of the institutional separation of the economic and political in the CMP for the analysis of political class domination. This article still operates with the distinction between "civil society" and "state" and its anthropological conception of the needs and interests of *homo economicus*. But Poulantzas now criticises historicism and adopts an alternative approach to ideological class domination and the unification of societies-divided-into classes. He also stresses that class struggle in capitalist societies is never dichotomous but always involves problems of class alliances and class strategies (1965c, *passim*; for a detailed summary, see chapter 3).

In his contribution to the Second Week of Contemporary Thought in Athens in 1966 Poulantzas adumbrates most of the key elements in PPSC. He sets himself firmly against both economist and idealist interpretations of class (citing Kautsky and Lukacs respectively) and describes social classes as the effects of the economic, political, and ideological levels of the social formation. He also argues against historicism and voluntarism by insisting that the analysis of social classes must proceed from the analysis of a social formation constituted by specific structures rather than from individuals and their alleged needs or ideas. In turn individuals should be seen as

totalities of social relations, i.e., as intersection or assembly points of objective structures of objective structures. Individuals are the *Träger* of social structures and there are various, historically conditioned forms of individuality. Finally he discusses political class struggle in terms of class alliances, hegemony, and the *archon syngrotima* (or power bloc). In particular he criticises crude 'workerist' conceptions of revolutionary strategy and argues for working class alliances similar to those in which the hegemonic bourgeoisie is involved (1966e, pp 330-45).

Finally, in his critique of Marxist political theory in Great Britain, Poulantzas develops a sustained attack on the alleged historicism and subjectivism of the work of Nairn and Anderson (1967, *passim*; for a more detailed summary, see chapter 7). In all three articles Poulantzas develops his critique of economism, with its exclusive emphasis on the relations of production in defining classes; his critique of historicism; and his insistence on the political character of class domination and the significance of struggles for hegemony. He also emphasises the need to relate class analysis to the structural specificity of the CMP and bourgeois societies rather than expatiate on classes in general.

### **Social Classes and Class Powers**

Social classes and class struggle have a central role in *PPSC*. Indeed the state's general function is established immediately in class-theoretical terms as maintaining the unity of a society-divided-into-classes. In applying this argument to the particular theory of the CMP, Poulantzas then specifies the precise field and application of some key concepts in class analysis. These include institutions, structures, articulation of structures, classes, class relations, levels of class practice, levels of class organisation, forms of class organisation, the nature and levels of class domination, and the dissociation and displacements possible among these various levels. Poulantzas thereby provides important conceptual tools for abstract and conjunctural analyses alike and offers an incisive and original analysis of class relations and struggles. In particular he provides a novel set of concepts for political class analysis based on a careful 'symptomatic' reading of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Gramsci within a basically Marxist-Leninist approach to issues of class organisation.

Thus Poulantzas often emphasises the role of the vanguard party in raising class consciousness and directing the political struggle of the working class and its allies.

There are both negative and positive reference points in PPSC. Negatively Poulantzas still opposes economism and historicism in all their manifold forms. There is no need to rehearse these criticisms again. Positively he takes the work of Althusser and Gramsci as major sources of theoretical inspiration. From Althusser he takes the notion of the pure CMP as a specific combination of economic, political, and ideological structures determined in the last instance by the economic; and, from Gramsci, he draws the notion of hegemony as the distinctive form of political class struggle in capitalist societies. I consider the structuralist moment first.

Poulantzas argues that 'everything happens as if social classes were the *result of an ensemble of structures and of their relations*, firstly at the economic level, secondly at the political level, and thirdly at the ideological level' (PPSC, p 63; cf. pp 67-9). This argument rests on the distinction between the field of structures (such as relations of production, the state and law, and ideological institutions) and the field of class relations or class practices. Thus Poulantzas writes that:

'relations of production are not the same as the economic class struggle, since these relations are not classes, just as the juridico-political state superstructure and the ideological structures are not the same as the political or ideological class struggle, since the state apparatus or ideological language are no more classes than are relations of production' (PPSC, p 87).

However, whilst the field of structures and the field of class relations are distinct, they are also closely connected. Their point of intersection is located in the agents of production. For these are both the *Träger* of the social relations of production and the active forces in the field of class practices or struggles.

By treating agents as *Träger* Poulantzas hopes to avoid the problematic of the subject (in which men are seen as the genetic origins or creators of the relations of production). By treating them as active forces in the class struggle, he presumably hopes to show that men nonetheless make their own history but not in circumstances (such as the relations of production) of their own choosing. Poulantzas implies that agents are first allocated to existing relations

of production and then act as *Träger* in reproducing these relations and/or engage in class struggle to transform them. I first clarify some misunderstandings and then deal with the (dis)advantages of this approach.

### **Some Points of Clarification**

First, what is involved in the claim that social classes are the result of structures? This must be interpreted in terms of a synchronic, structural causality rather than a chronological, genetic causation. For Poulantzas argues that what is involved is 'the existence of the determination of structures in social classes' (PPSC, p 68n). Thus one cannot reduce class relations to interpersonal relations because they are determined in the first instance by the social relations of production. The structural matrix of the CMP not only defines the places that individuals will occupy but also establishes the forms of their interaction. Individuals are distributed into classes according to the specific place(s) they occupy in the overall matrix of the CMP and they interact within the particular framework of categories such as capital, wage-labour, profit, citizenship, universal suffrage, popular sovereignty, etc., implied in this matrix. This approach is most significant for avoiding a voluntaristic, historicist account of class struggle.

Second, although Poulantzas argues that classes are the result of structures, he denies that the field of class relations and struggles is exhaustively determined by the matrix of the CMP. Indeed he suggests that class interests and class power can only be analysed in relation to class practices. They cannot be derived from the determination of classes by the relations of production. In this way Poulantzas avoids a whole series of problems raised by such distinctions as objective and subjective classes, latent and manifest interests, etc., and can also introduce strategic concepts into the heart of his analysis. This is worth emphasising because many critics of Poulantzas's later distinction between 'structural determination' and 'class position' wrongly attribute to him the false argument that the structural determination of class relations entails the objective determination of pre-given class interests from which positions actually adopted in class struggle may diverge. They also suggest that Poulantzas believes that forms of representation do not modify

interests and that 'false consciousness' is due to simple misrecognition of these pre-given interests (e.g., Cutler et al., 1979). Yet Poulantzas opposes such views quite explicitly.

He writes that 'attempts to locate class interests in the structures are incompatible with a scientific conception' because they are rooted in the economist-historicist problematic. This sees in the economic structure the economic interests (or 'situation') of the class-in-itself that then becomes a class-for-itself to the extent that its class consciousness and actions correspond to these pre-given interests (PPSC, pp 60-2, 110-2). In contrast Poulantzas locates class interests in the field of class practices. They are defined in terms of the 'horizon of action' of a given class, i.e., the maximum feasible advances which can be secured against opposing classes in particular conjunctures. These conjunctures depend not only on the structural constraints entailed in the matrix of the CMP but also on the prevailing balance of forces associated with specific forms of class representation and organisation. Thus, although the structural matrix is an important element in determining class interests, it is still only one element and must always be related to class practices. Of course, this does not mean that class forces never miscalculate their interests. But it does imply a relational, conjunctural view of interests and an emphasis on strategic calculation rather than simple recognition of pre-given 'facts'.

A third clarification concerns the clear-cut 'relational' character of this analysis. Poulantzas insists that class practices must be understood in relation to the practices of other classes. For class practices are objectively interconnected through the complex field of class relations. More precisely, they must be considered in terms of their double determination by structures and by the relation of forces. Structures and their articulation set definite structural limits to class practices and class powers but these limits are themselves overdetermined by the relation of forces. Thus Poulantzas defines power as 'the capacity of a social class to realise its specific objective interests ... in opposition to the capacity and interests of other classes' (PPSC, p 105).

Fourth, in adopting this approach, Poulantzas rejects a zero-sum conception of power. This is a conception in which the loss or gain of power by one class is exactly counterbalanced by the gain or loss of its opposing class(es). Poulantzas deploys four arguments against this view. He insists that power is only exercised within limits established

by structures so that a loss of power by one class may not involve a corresponding increase in power by its opponent(s). He also suggests that the zero-sum conception assumes a dichotomous or polarised class situation. This ignores power relations within the two main classes (e.g., among fractions in the power bloc) as well as the impact of alliances or support involving classes other than capital or labour. Likewise Poulantzas suggests that the zero-sum conception ignores the decentration and/or dislocation of power relations across different fields of class struggle. A loss in one field need not produce equivalent losses elsewhere and could even be counteracted by displacing the locus of the dominant form of power. Lastly, Poulantzas argues that this conception ignores the distinctive unity of class power in the capitalist state that means that state power cannot be parcelled out among different class forces. Thus losing control over one apparatus or institution need not entail any serious decline in the state's overall function as a system of political class domination (PPSC, pp 117-9).

Fifth, apparatuses must be seen as institutional sites for the exercise of power (i.e., as 'power centres') rather than as possessing power in their own right. Various institutional centres exist and form a specific hierarchy of power depending on the articulation of different regions and the prevailing balance of forces. Moreover, given the institutional separation and possible dislocation of the economic, political, and ideological regions peculiar to capitalism, the dominant class can be identified as the class that is dominant in the dominant region of capitalist society (PPSC, pp 114, 116, 313-4, 316). This is particularly significant for understanding the role of the absolutist state in the transition from feudalism to capitalism and for identifying the dominant class (fraction) in the monopoly as opposed to liberal stages of capitalism (PPSC, pp 164-83, 314-5).

Sixth, Poulantzas argues that power cannot be exercised by a class that is not specifically present as such at the appropriate level of class practice. He tackles this issue in two ways according to whether he is dealing with the two main classes or classes associated with subordinate modes of production. The presence of the bourgeoisie as a specific political force depends on the state's organisational role as the 'party' of the bourgeoisie. This allegedly corresponds to the role of the vanguard party in securing the presence of the working class. The presence of a subordinate class as a social force (as opposed to its role as a *Träger* of social relations of production), however, depends only

on its having so-called 'pertinent effects' at the economic, political, or ideological levels. These pertinent effects do not require the actual organisation of the class in question since they can also be achieved through modifications in relations of power and/or structures of action that would not otherwise occur.

An obvious example of such pertinent effects occurred in Bonapartism. This particular exceptional regime could not have developed without the specific presence of the smallholding peasantry as a social force even though the peasants lacked their own political organisation and ideology. It was the impact of universal suffrage and Bonapartist ideology that turned the peasantry into a distinct social force with a major supporting role in the Bonapartist state. The small peasants in Bismarck's Prussia never functioned as a social force, however, because the feudal structures of the Bismarckist state were less conducive to this than the capitalist type of state in France (PPSC, pp 79-81).

Similar considerations apply to the presence of class fractions and social categories as social forces and to the often significant political repercussions of the economic or ideological organisation of a class that is not also politically organised (PPSC, pp 81-5). Although such pertinent effects or political repercussions mark the emergence of a class (fraction) to the threshold of class power relations, this does not mean that it has acquired the capacity to engage in a full and open struggle for political power. This always depends on particular conditions of political organisation (normally associated with the development of a distinct and autonomous party) and the priority given to the political struggle over economic struggle (PPSC, pp 91-2, 97-8, 107-8).

## **Two Points of Criticism**

It is not difficult to find fault with Poulantzas's approach to these issues -- especially its excessive formalism. But I want to focus here on two fundamental theoretical errors that deform his general discussion of class determination and the relations between the field of structures and the field of class relations. These errors do not seriously undermine his contributions to the relational analysis of power and are largely corrected in subsequent work. Nonetheless they are sufficiently troublesome to warrant extended discussion.

First, Poulantzas adopts a structural Marxist framework that prevents him deciphering the articulation of technical and class relations in the economic region. He recognises that the relations of production are not reducible to purely technical relations associated with an allegedly class-neutral process of material production. For the claim that the CMP is a complex structure in dominance comprising a specific combination of economic, political, and ideological structures leads him to argue that class relations cannot be reduced to the purely technico-economic level of the distribution of the economic powers of possession and ownership. But the related view that these regions are structurally differentiated leads him to argue that class relations are determined by the position of agents in the juridico-political superstructure of the state and the structures of the ideological region as well as in the economy. Poulantzas tries to justify this claim by suggesting that Marx subscribed to it (distinguishing between 'production relations' and 'social production relations') and maintaining that the economic level is ultimately determinant in the field of class practices as well as in the structural matrix of modes of production (PPSC, pp 57, 62-3, 63n, 65-8, 69, 72, 75). The first suggestion is implausible and actually implies a totalising view of capital as a social relation that Poulantzas would be the first to reject in another context. Likewise the claim that the economic region is determinant in the last instance involves serious problems that Poulantzas later rejected, as we shall see, in favour of a relational theory of production.

Poulantzas's second theoretical error also stems from his commitment to structural Marxism. He accepts Reading Capital's argument that individuals are merely the *Träger* (*porteurs*, supports) of capitalist relations of production. Yet this argument leaves no theoretical space for economic class struggle other than as the means whereby capital realises the conditions for its self-reproduction and, perhaps, its ultimate self-destruction. It also implies that any short-run deviations from this preordained path result from the intrusion of political and/or ideological class struggles into the working of these natural economic laws. Poulantzas's early critique of Althusser (1966b) would suggest that he rejects these implications but in discussing class relations he appears to accept them. For he distinguishes two distinct orders of phenomena: an ensemble of structures in which individuals act as the *Träger* of capitalist reproduction and a field of social relations in which they engage in struggle as members of

classes. This leaves it unclear how economic class struggle relates to economic laws and encourages Poulantzas to escape this difficulty by treating political practice as the overdetermining level of class struggle (PPSC, pp 66, 68-9, 76-7, 87-8, 92, 101-2).

This does not mean that Poulantzas is wrong to insist that structures and class relations are distinct types of phenomenon (PPSC, p 87). It does mean that he fails to establish any meaningful link between structures and class struggles other than the determining role of the CMP's structural matrix in defining the position of social classes and the dominant role of political class struggle in maintaining or transforming this matrix. In all other respects there is a yawning gap between these two fields of analysis. In turn this leads Poulantzas to treat structures as synchronic and static, social relations as diachronic and dynamic.

The problem here derives from the structural Marxists' misinterpretation of the theoretical role of the concept of *Träger* in *Capital*. Althusser et al. seem to believe that individual capitalists and wage-labourers really do act merely as *Träger* of the capital relation in the real world. For Marx this concept was not intended to describe concrete patterns of conduct but to permit an account of the abstract dynamic of capital in general. Capitalism's laws of economic motion express the average movement and regularities of capital accumulation considered apart from historical peculiarities. Thus Marx abstracts entirely from the existence of individual capitals to examine capital in general; and he assumes that they act capitalistically, i.e., as *Träger*, in examining competition. More concrete studies would need to consider the differential interpellation and modes of calculation of particular capitals and assess their impact on the realisation of the abstract laws of motion and on the incidence of competitive forces on different capitals. Likewise Marx abstracts from the role of wage-labour in discussing both capital in general and capitalist competition. Instead he focuses on crisis tendencies (such as the TRPF) which can be analysed at the level of capital in general; and/or on wage-labour as variable capital exploited more or less efficiently by individual capitals relative to the socially necessary labour time established through competition. More concrete studies would need to consider the specific form and content of working class struggles and examine how the general crisis tendencies are overdetermined by specific failures on the part of capital to maintain its domination over wage-labour. In Thus, as Marx moved from the

abstract to the concrete, the concept of *Träger* became increasingly irrelevant and redundant (cf. Jessop, 1982, pp 134-5).

Poulantzas confronts neither problem directly in PPSC but the germs of solutions can be discerned. Thus he considers how the juridico-political and ideological regions intervene in the economic to produce the 'isolation effect' as an essential factor in securing economic class domination. This anticipates his argument that production relations have economic, political, and ideological dimensions rather than involving the articulation of distinct economic, political, and ideological *structures* (PPSC, pp 130-2, 143, 213-4, 275; SPS, pp 26-7). Adopting this new argument enables Poulantzas to abandon the forlorn attempt to define class membership in terms of the coincidence of places in three different structures and to substitute a discussion of the political and ideological preconditions of economic class domination and the repercussions of economic class relations in the political and ideological spheres.

In PPSC Poulantzas also emphasises that the economic, political, and ideological power of classes in conflict depends on their *level of class organisation* in unions, parties, etc., and adds that this *cannot be directly derived from the structural determination of class position* (PPSC, pp 59, 78, 83-4, 91-2, 97-8, 107-9). This argument underpins his analysis of the organisational role of the state for the power bloc and of the vanguard party for the working class and its allies. Poulantzas also refers here to opposing class strategies and their interaction in determining power relations (PPSC, p 109). By pursuing these organisational and strategic issues, Poulantzas could develop an account of reproduction, not in the abstract and unsatisfactory terms of structural causality and *Träger*, but in terms of the concrete conjunctures involved in particular patterns of structural constraints and class forces. This approach is already evident in Poulantzas's discussion of power in PPSC and it is developed more fully in later work.

## **Social Classes and Relations of Production**

PPSC was completed too soon after the 1967 coup in Greece to consider its implications for political and class analysis. And, along with so much other theoretical and political work of its time, it failed to anticipate the events of May 1968 that erupted within days of its

publication. As if to make amends for these failures, FD and CCC intervene deliberately in the analysis of social classes and political strategies. For Poulantzas considers two new issues: firstly, the periodisation of the bourgeoisie (including the impact of internationalisation) and petty bourgeoisie (especially the internal differentiation of the new middle class) and, secondly, the role of the petty bourgeoisie and the interior bourgeoisie as potential allies of the working class in anti-dictatorial struggles, anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly alliances, and the transition to socialism. FD focuses on the petty bourgeoisie but CCC also considers the bourgeoisie.

Before considering his analyses of specific social classes and class fractions, however, we should review Poulantzas's more general approach to class analysis. The central text here is CCC. This takes up and extends the analyses of PPSC and FD and also offers some rectifications and adjustments (CCC, p 11). The major theoretical innovations concern: firstly, the expanded reproduction of social classes through the agency of the RSA and ISAs (especially the family and education systems) as essential adjuncts to the role of capital accumulation and the wage and salary forms associated with the labour market; secondly, the analysis of the internationalisation of production under the hegemony of US capital and its repercussions on the comprador and national bourgeois fractions outside the USA; and, thirdly, an extended analysis of the class determination of the new petty bourgeoisie. In addition Poulantzas begins to develop his notion of the state as a social relation and to emphasise the importance of the division between mental and manual labour. But here we consider his account of class relations and class struggle.

Poulantzas suggests that classes comprise groupings of social agents defined principally (but not exclusively) by their objective place in the process of production. We explore below how political and ideological relations outside the economic sphere can play a secondary role in defining the class membership of agents in social categories such as the bureaucracy; but, for the moment, we concentrate on the determining role of an agent's place in production. The latter is said to comprise 'the unity of the labour process, the productive forces, and the relations of production' (CCC, p 20). In turn the relations of production are considered to have three analytically distinct but organically interrelated moments: economic, political, and ideological. However, although Poulantzas generally considers all three moments in defining class membership, he gives

more weight to the economic in dealing with capital and labour and more weight to the political and ideological in dealing with the petty bourgeoisie.

In purely economic terms, Poulantzas discusses three aspects of the relations of production: ownership, possession, and exploitation. Real economic ownership (or control) should not be confused with legal ownership in the juridical form of property. Instead it involves the power to assign the means of production and to allocate resources and profits to this or that usage. In contrast economic possession involves a series of powers concerning the particular direction and internal organisation of the labour process (or process of real appropriation) in a given economic apparatus (CCC, pp 18, 58, 116, 122, 225-6; cf. PPSC, pp 26-7). Finally, economic exploitation involves the power of the owners of the means of production to appropriate the surplus-labour performed by the direct producers in the production process. Strictly speaking this is an aspect of economic ownership and Poulantzas himself tends to subsume it entirely under this rubric in PPSC. This invites the charge of technicism and/or neo-Ricardianism, i.e., the accusation that he sees production as a purely technical and class-neutral process and/or restricts economic exploitation to the sphere of distribution and forms of revenue (for a spirited critique along these lines, see: Clarke, 1977, pp 7-17). But even in PPSC Poulantzas recognises that the precise form of economic exploitation always depends on how the powers of economic ownership and possession are combined in a given mode of production. Moreover subsequent work explores this argument more fully to show how the form of economic exploitation directly shapes the organisation of the labour process under capitalism (PPSC, pp 26-32; CCC, pp 18-21, 62-4, 107, 111-3, 116-27, 134-5, 300-27; SPS, pp 173-9).

Thus, although economic exploitation is clearly one aspect of economic ownership, it can only be examined through its articulation with economic possession. It should also be recognised that economic exploitation is only one aspect of ownership and possession and that these powers also concern the relations between capitals as well as the relation between capital and labour. In this context Poulantzas devotes a considerable part of CCC to an account of how different powers of ownership and possession are dispersed, concentrated, and centralised in different stages of the CMP (CCC, pp 42-69, 80-4, 109-30, 144-51, 166-7, 300-27).

These concepts can be used to compare capital and labour. Poulantzas argues that capital not only owns the means of production but also enjoys economic possession. It uses these interrelated economic powers to exploit the surplus-value of wage-labour and to pursue particular accumulation strategies. Different stages of the CMP involve different combinations of economic ownership and possession within the overall the circuit of capital and specific contradictions can emerge when these powers become too disjointed. The proletariat seems powerless in comparison. It enjoys the juridical ownership of its labour-power but must sell real control to capital; it is also excluded from -- and subordinated to -- the economic powers of possession concentrated in the hands of management in each economic apparatus (CCC, pp 19, 32, 116, 225-6). This specific class location is the basis of its economic exploitation under the dominance of the value form but it also provides the material basis for working class resistance to exploitation. The proletariat is also subject to the political power of capital over the production process as expressed in 'factory despotism' backed up by state coercion; and to its ideological power as revealed in the exclusion of direct producers from knowledge about the organisation and direction of production and/or about the powers of economic ownership (CCC, pp 21, 30-2, 180-1, 224-42, 248-9, 271-3; cf. SPS, pp 26-7, 35-6, 55, 80-2, 183).

Poulantzas does not restrict himself to the economic powers of ownership and possession when he defines class places and objective class membership. He also considers the political and ideological powers that are exercised within the relations of production. This is essential in differentiating the various non-owning classes because Poulantzas denies that all non-owners are ipso facto members of the working class. In some cases this is obvious. Thus non-owners whose surplus-labour does not take the form of surplus-value and/or who are paid from revenue rather than from variable capital do not belong to the working class. But problems arise for some engineers or technicians.

It could be argued that engineers or technicians form part of the collective labourer in so far as they contribute to the material form of capitalist commodities as use-values (and not just to their form as exchange-values). But they may also exercise economic, political, and ideological powers over the proletariat. Not only do engineers and technicians sometimes directly exercise delegated

powers of economic possession or political surveillance and control in the system of 'factory despotism' but they can also help to subordinate wage-labour through designing processes and technologies of production which restrict labour's chances of resisting exploitation. They are also involved in the domination of mental over manual labour and participate in its associated ideological rituals. Thus the political and ideological aspects of their place in the relations of production put these engineers and technicians in the camp of the petty bourgeoisie rather than proletariat. Nonetheless their class determination is still defined by their place in the production process and not by their political and ideological orientations in the field of class struggle as a whole (CCC, pp 224-50).

### ***The Role of Class Struggle in Class Determination***

Although Poulantzas defines class membership in terms of objective places in the relations of production, he also suggests that class contradictions and class struggle are essential elements of classes. He justifies this claim on the grounds that (a) the structural determination of classes directly engenders contradictions and (b) class practices embody the mutual opposition between classes by virtue of the structural determination present in classes. Thus Poulantzas concludes that classes exist only in the class struggle (CCC, p 14).

Unfortunately this thesis is often repeated but never really explicated. It is most plausibly interpreted along lines proposed by Andor Skotnes in a critique of the structuralist theory of classes. Skotnes suggests that the structurally determined role of capital in reproducing the CMP requires it to exercise its various economic, political, and ideological powers in order to secure the continuing exploitation and oppression of the working class. Conversely, the structurally determined role of the proletariat as a *Träger* of the capital relation requires passive subordination to these powers. But the class position of the proletariat nonetheless engenders resistance to this domination. Indeed one could argue that the expanded reproduction of the CMP actually requires the proletariat to resist capitalist exploitation -- within the limits of market rationality -- as a spur to innovation and/or competition. In any event, without the continuing struggle of capital to control the working class and extract surplus-value, valorisation and accumulation would not occur and the capital relation would cease to exist. In short, without class

struggle, classes would not exist (Skotnes, 1979, pp 39-41, 49, and 51).

Poulantzas himself concedes that his thesis is problematic and 'must be approached with many precautions' (1973b, p 370). But this does not stop him conflating classes as ensembles of agents with classes as social forces. For, although he admits that PPSC tended to separate structures and class practices and claims to have rectified this in later work, he still insists that classes cannot be defined solely in terms of class struggle and their involvement in specific social movements. Instead it is essential to distinguish between class determination and class positions in struggle. Thus he concludes that 'classes exist in class struggle, it is in struggle that they assume their forms of existence, but there is an objective class situation which is more important in defining them than any concrete conjuncture of struggle' (1973b, p 371, own translation). This argument rests on conceptual confusion. For, whereas the class determination of economic agents can and must be defined by their objective place in the relations of production, classes as social forces can only be defined through specific conjunctures of class struggle and the particular class orientations and/or 'pertinent effects' that are evident therein. Where Poulantzas goes wrong is in leaping from the notion of structurally determined antagonisms and objectively given necessities for class struggle to the conclusion that class forces will empirically polarise around these antagonisms and necessities -- which he then rejects as absurd. In comparison with his own account of this thesis, that offered by Skotnes seems more coherent and also more consistent with his principal lines of argument.

### ***Class Determination and Class Position***

Poulantzas argues that, although the structural determination of classes is evident in their class positions, these are nonetheless distinct phenomenal fields. Thus structural determination and class position could well diverge in particular conjunctures -- as illustrated by the labour aristocracy. In general this divergence occurs when a class does not take up class positions that reflect its interests as 'defined by the class determination that fixes the horizon of the class's struggle' (CCC, p 15). This horizon of action consists in the maximum feasible advances that can be realised in a given conjuncture as determined by the structural limits and the balance of

forces. Within this horizon it is the class struggle that is the driving force of history (CCC, pp 23, 27; cf. FD, p 40).

Given his concern with class struggle, especially in the political field, and his recognition that positions adopted therein can diverge from the structural determination of class places, it is worth asking why Poulantzas considers class determination through the relations of production at all. At best economic determination would seem to explain certain aspects of capital accumulation (e.g., the effects of an expansion of unproductive labour on the circuit of industrial capital) and/or to provide criteria for examining the 'pertinent effects' of struggle between class-relevant forces. But Poulantzas clearly still subscribes to the economically determined role of the proletariat as the essential, pre-given revolutionary subject and to the correlative assumption that the revolution will occur through the political struggles of an effective class alliance under the hegemony of the vanguard communist party (e.g., 1977b, pp 114-6). Thus he must unambiguously delineate the boundaries of the proletariat and establish the structurally inscribed potential for long-term alliances with other classes or class fractions. The latter is all the more important because he argues that the interests of potential allies are determined in part by their objective places in the circuit of capital and/or the overall articulation of modes of production. This means that the programme for an effective class alliance must take due account of these structural factors (cf. CCC, pp 334-6; 1977b, *passim*).

### ***Social Classes and Social Categories***

Poulantzas also distinguishes between social categories and social classes. Whereas classes are defined principally (but not exclusively) by their place in the relations of production, social categories are defined principally by their place in political and/or ideological relations beyond the realm of production. Thus the state bureaucracy is defined by its relation to the state apparatus; and intellectuals are defined by their place in elaborating and deploying ideology. Social categories may become autonomous social forces with their own organisation and ideologies or, at least, pertinent effects in a given conjuncture. But they always have a specific class belonging that depends on the particular role of the apparatus with which they are

associated and their place within it. Thus the heads of the state apparatus belong to the bourgeois class by virtue of their directing and coordinating function within the capitalist state; in contrast, the intermediate groups in the state belong to the new petty bourgeoisie (CCC, pp 183-9).

It is important for Poulantzas to allow for a secondary determination of class membership through the class-relevant effects of political and ideological practices as elements in a system of class domination. Otherwise he could only ascribe all agents a class belonging in terms of revenue or distributional categories (e.g., the receipt of wages). The latter approach involves the allegedly unscientific and social democratic conception of the 'wage-earning classes' embracing both the proletariat and the new middle classes. It would also mean that the heads of the state apparatus as well as its intermediate strata belonged to the salariat.

Nonetheless Poulantzas's preferred approach is not without its own difficulties. In particular it presupposes the class unity (and not merely the institutional unity) of the state apparatus. Without such class unity, the class membership of the heads of the state apparatus would vary with the net consequences of state policies. Even this assumption breaks down for intellectuals. For Poulantzas himself admits that the ISAs are pluralistic and lack any rigorous class unity.

### **The Expanded Reproduction of Social Classes**

Poulantzas also considers two aspects of the relationship between classes and apparatuses. These concern (a) the role of repressive and ideological state apparatuses in reproducing the economic determination of classes and (b) the role of economic, political, and ideological apparatuses in securing class domination in the different regions of capitalist societies. He now argues that the RSA and ISAs are implicated in the relations of production through their role in reproducing the conditions of existence of the three different moments of these relations: the economic powers of capital, the private political system of 'factory despotism', and the ideological domination of mental over manual labour in the economic sphere. Thus the reproduction of classes as ensembles of economic agents cannot be reduced to purely economic factors (let alone to the supposedly self-regulating automatism of market forces). For, in addition to the political and

ideological as well as economic powers deployed by capital within the labour process, the RSA and ISAs play an essential role in reproducing the background conditions of all three moments of economic class domination. Thus Poulantzas concludes that 'reproduction, being understood as the extended reproduction of social classes, immediately means reproduction of the political and ideological relations of class determination' (CCC, p 27; more generally, CCC, pp 21, 24-5, 27-8, 110-1; cf. SPS, pp 25-7, 38, 55-6, 69, 80-1, 167-9, 181, 183-9).

Poulantzas then considers the role played by various apparatuses in constituting and reproducing different forms of domination. He argues that they materialise and condense class relations but do not themselves directly engender class relations or class antagonisms. Thus classes as ensembles of economic agents must first be defined at more abstract levels of analysis than the institutional structures and practices of specific economic apparatuses. Likewise the ISAs do not produce class ideologies *ex nihilo* but instead they elaborate and transform already existing ideological elements. Nor, *pace* theorists such as Dahrendorf, are classes and class conflict grounded in the structure of political authority. Naturally these arguments do not mean that apparatuses are class-neutral and/or derive their class character from their accidental or circumstantial utilisation by pre-existing class subjects.

Indeed Poulantzas insists that the specific institutional forms of the apparatuses materialise and condense class relations in distinctive patterns of domination and subordination. However, because classes actually originate outside and beyond any specific apparatuses, the class struggle cannot be fully controlled or restrained by the activities of apparatuses. It always escapes such control and actually restricts their own operation. Thus class domination is always determined by the interaction between institutional forms and class forces. We have already encountered this argument in Poulantzas's approach to state power as a form-determined condensation of opposing class forces. Here it is generalised to all forms of class power. There is nothing particularly controversial in this latter argument and it largely serves to differentiate Poulantzas's position from institutionalist and functionalist arguments in fields such as educational sociology or conflict theory (CCC, pp 29-33; cf. 1972a, pp 12-16).

Finally, Poulantzas notes that the reproduction and allocation of social agents is a secondary and subordinate aspect of the reproduction

of classes. What is primary is the reproduction of class places and this is determined in the last instance by the reproduction of the capital relation. The reproduction of social agents depends on the ISAs and/or the RSA and their subsequent allocation to different class places depends on the operation of the labour market (CCC, pp 34-5).

There is little new or controversial here, but Poulantzas did criticise the work of Baudelot and Establet on the French educational system and its role in reproducing the working class and petty bourgeoisie. These authors suggested that there are two educational systems in France reproducing either agents of the 'upper classes' or agents of the 'lower classes'. Poulantzas argued that the bi-polar institutional structure of French education should not be confused with its role in class reproduction, for despite the twofold division of primary/vocational and secondary/higher education, there is a specifically petty bourgeois form of education. Whereas students destined for proletarian occupations are typically instructed in discipline, respect for authority, and the veneration of mental labour, students going into the new middle class are trained in mental labour and its rituals within the school system itself. Poulantzas also criticised Baudelot and Establet for arguing that the educational apparatus is the dominant ISA in capitalism concerned with reproducing, distributing, and training agents. He suggested instead that the dominance of an apparatus in this respect depends on the class struggle and can even vary within a given society according to which class is being considered. Thus even if the school is the dominant ISA for the petty bourgeoisie in France, it is not so for the working class in France or elsewhere (CCC, pp 32-5, 259-70; cf. 1972a, pp. 8-15; Baudelot and Establet, 1971, *passim*).

Overall these arguments involve a general attempt to theorise the nature of classes and class struggle. Poulantzas has advanced beyond the more structuralist perspectives of PPSC in breaking with the claim that classes must be defined in terms of their objective places in the economy, state system, and ideological region considered as separate structures. He now focuses on the economic, political, and ideological moments of the relations of production. It is only when dealing with the class membership of social categories such as bureaucrats and intellectuals that he still refers directly to the role of political and ideological structures in class determination. Poulantzas has also tried to eliminate the rupture between structures

and practices that characterised PPSC by defining classes in terms of class struggle -- if not at the level of their structural determination, then at least in terms of their form of existence. But this attempt causes serious problems in analysing the relationship between class determination and class position. These problems can be illustrated by considering his analyses of the petty bourgeoisie, the rural classes, and the 'interior' bourgeoisie of modern capitalism.

### **From Structuralist Marxism to Political Strategy**

In *FD* Poulantzas is already moving away from the structuralist Marxism of *PPSC*. In discussing capital and labour he now defines *class determination* purely in terms of the relations of production and ignores their positions in the juridico-political and ideological structures. But he also discusses economic *class domination* as depending on the changing modalities of political and ideological struggles as well as purely economic struggles. In addition, political and ideological class domination are considered to be relatively autonomous from economic class domination (see chapter 8). In distinguishing between class determination and the different fields of class domination, Poulantzas rejected his earlier argument that the structural determination of a class must be related to its position in all three structural levels. This new approach provides a useful framework for defining the structural determination of other classes and its implications for the class struggle and alliance strategies. But how successfully does Poulantzas follow it up?

#### ***The Petty Bourgeoisie***

Poulantzas remarks that 'the definition of the class nature of the petty bourgeoisie is the focal point of the Marxist theory of social classes' (*FD*, p 237). He justifies this extraordinary claim by arguing that this issue reveals that classes cannot be defined solely in economic terms. They must also be considered in terms of their determination by political and ideological factors. Thus, if the petty bourgeoisie is viewed only in economic terms, we find two main sets of agents who have nothing positive in common. The traditional petty bourgeoisie has its economic basis in small-scale production and/or small-scale ownership but is not directly involved in exploiting wage-

labour. In contrast the new petty bourgeoisie comprises non-productive salaried employees. The latter are not direct producers of capitalist commodities but they are involved in reproducing the conditions of surplus-value production in their capacities as circulation workers, engineers, civil servants, teachers, etc. (*FD*, pp 237-9). However, although these two class fractions occupy contrasting economic positions, they are both equally excluded from the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Poulantzas argues that this shared *negative* position typically produces similar effects at the political and ideological levels. *Politically* the petty bourgeoisie cannot have any long-term interests of its own since it is not a fundamental class in the CMP. Thus it has an unstable and vacillating character and has difficulty in organizing its own class party. In turn this means that it is often represented indirectly - through parties whose primary allegiance is to other classes and/or through specific branches of the state (*FD*, pp 242-4). *Ideologically* the petty bourgeoisie shares three traits: status quo anti-capitalism, belief in the myth of the ladder of upward mobility, and a statist trust in the state's benevolence and inherent class neutrality (*FD*, pp 240-2). Because these common political and ideological effects allegedly stem from their shared negative position, Poulantzas concludes that the traditional and the new petty bourgeoisie actually belong to the same class.

Poulantzas would have been outraged if such arguments had been used to suggest that the labour aristocracy was actually a fraction of capital because it sometimes takes up bourgeois class positions and/or that the inclusion of the national bourgeoisie within the 'people' in an anti-imperialist struggle meant that it had lost its class determination. In both cases he would have insisted that it is the *objective* position of a stratum (such as the labour aristocracy) or a class fraction (such as the national bourgeoisie) in the *relations of production* that defines its class character. He would certainly have denied that its class character could be established through the stance it happened to adopt in economic, political, or ideological struggles (cf. *FD*, pp 150-1, 181n, 189; *CC*, pp 15-6, 23-4). Yet his discussion of the petty bourgeoisie seems to revert to the old structuralist approach. Poulantzas tries to establish its class determination in terms of all three regions. But he now does so in terms of their objective position in the relations of production and their subjective position in the political and ideological regions. A similar methodological procedure is adopted for the rural classes.

### ***The Rural Classes***

In discussing rural classes Poulantzas operates in two stages. He first establishes the basic class divisions in terms of their differential economic determinations (allocating different sets of economic agents to an exploiting class of non-labourers or an exploited class of direct producers); and then sub-divides these classes into fractions according to the specific political and ideological effects produced by variations in the precise form and size of the agricultural enterprise. Thus he writes that:

*"ideological and political relationships play a crucial role in dividing the peasantry into classes, not only in dividing them into different fractions, but as a factor around which the classes themselves regroup and polarise, locating and defining them"* (FD, p 275).

This leads him to propose a sixfold division among the rural classes, viz.: (a) great landowners with different fractions, according to the different political and ideological positions they adopt; (b) rich and upper middle peasantry – with different political and ideological effects according to the type of economic ownership; (c) middle peasantry; (d) poor and lower middle peasantry; (e) agricultural labourers proper; and (f) individuals and groups situated on the fringes of these classes (FD, pp 276-7).

Not only does Poulantzas operate here with economic *determinations* and political and ideological *orientations* but he also resorts to an empiricist procedure in which the size of enterprise (FD, p 278) and conjunctural effects are involved in ascribing class membership. This is far removed from his earlier claim that classes should be determined in terms of one perfectly defined criterion rather than a plurality of criteria (PPSC, p 70n).

### ***The Interior Bourgeoisie***

Similar problems occur in analysing the interior or domestic bourgeoisie. Poulantzas suggests that the internationalisation of capital under the hegemony of US monopoly capital has transformed the relations among different fractions of capital. In particular he argues that the distinction between comprador and national bourgeoisies is now relevant only to the imperialist metropolitan-peripheral relationship and that inter-metropolitan relations are developing in a

novel direction. Here a new fraction is becoming tendentially differentiated from the comprador and national bourgeois fractions. This 'interior' bourgeoisie is neither totally dependent on foreign capital - as is the comprador bourgeoisie, which lacks its own base of accumulation and is economically, politically, and ideologically subordinated. Nor is the 'interior' bourgeoisie sufficiently independent to play a leading role in any genuine anti-imperialist struggle (as is the national bourgeoisie). This intermediate position does not mean that the interior bourgeoisie lacks all measure of independence. For it does have its own economic foundation and bases of accumulation at home and abroad and it still exhibits its own specific, national political and ideological orientations in opposition to American capital (CC, pp 71-72).

All this is significant because it underpins the growing contradictions between US capital and the interior bourgeoisies in other advanced capitalist economies. Indeed Poulantzas tries to show that the interior bourgeoisie cannot be a leading force in the struggle against American imperialism because it is not a genuine national bourgeoisie. Its economic links with US capital mean that it is also politically and ideologically aligned therewith. This also means that the growing crisis of American hegemony within postwar imperialism cannot be restricted to US capital. If this were so, other national capitals might feel encouraged to lead popular struggles against US imperialism to advance their own interests in the inter-imperialist conflict. But Poulantzas argues that there is a general crisis of imperialism and not one restricted to US hegemony over an otherwise stable system. Thus he concludes that the principal contradiction in Europe is not one between specific national economies and American domination but rather involves the popular masses against their own bourgeoisies and their own states (CC, pp 86-8). It is also in this context that he defines the principal enemy in European nations as monopoly capital as a whole rather than US capital and thus emphasises an alliance with non-monopoly capital rather than national capital (e.g., CCC, pp 87-88, 155; 1974d).

In this case, then, Poulantzas works *forwards* from the changing international relations of production to argue that an emergent interior bourgeoisie cannot play the political and ideological role of a national bourgeoisie. In the case of the so-called interior bourgeoisies in the dependent economies of the erstwhile military dictatorships of Southern Europe, however, he works *backwards* from political and

ideological class positions to argue that they form a distinct economic fraction. In both cases Poulantzas refers to the political and ideological overdetermination of fractions of capital in order to validate his own strategic calculations: to deny the role of the interior bourgeoisie as an ally in anti-imperialist struggles and to affirm its role in anti-dictatorial struggles. In the first case the political and ideological positions are derived from the structural economic determination. In the latter case they are deployed to prove the economic distinctiveness of the interior fraction.

### **The Primacy of the Political?**

In four separate examples, therefore, those of the petty bourgeoisie, the rural classes, and the two types of 'interior' bourgeoisies, Poulantzas conflates structural determination and class position in different ways in defiance of his own methodological strictures. This probably stems from the attempt to break with structuralist Marxism and give greater weight to the class struggle in analysing class relations. This causes few problems when dealing with the economic class *determination* of the bourgeoisie and proletariat or with the role of political and ideological class *struggle* in securing their domination (or 'dictatorships'). It is less clear how this approach applies to classes whose structural determination involves no necessary antagonism with capital or wage-labour and whose constitution as class forces is therefore relatively under-determined at this level.

This problem was already evident in Poulantzas's discussion of 'pertinent effects' in *PPSC* (see above). It becomes more urgent when Poulantzas considers the role of the non-fundamental classes in anti-dictatorial and anti-monopoly alliances. Their economic under-determination as class forces in the crucial field of political struggle leads Poulantzas to consider other factors. Since he operates on a class reductionist analysis of political forces, however, these factors must establish the class belonging of potential or actual political allies. But it is no longer appropriate to focus on the juridico-political and ideological *structures* of the CMP and he must therefore look at political and ideological *orientations*. This explains why he conflates structural determination and class position.

This is very clear in all four cases considered above. Thus political and ideological effects are invoked to establish the real *unity* of two

economically disparate fractions of the petty bourgeoisie as a potential class ally (whether for the bourgeoisie or proletariat). In the case of the rural classes Poulantzas employs different political and ideological orientations to establish the *fractioning* of economically similar groups (notably within the peasantry) so that only some can be polarised towards one or other fundamental class. In the case of the metropolitan European interior bourgeois fractions he *derives* specific political and ideological class positions from their specific economic interrelations with US monopoly capital and argues that they cannot be reliable allies in anti-imperialist struggles. And, in the case of the peripheral European interior bourgeois fractions, he *infers* the existence of a specific or at least tendential economic fraction from the temporary emergence of an anti-dictatorial alliance with the popular masses and a more permanent strategic orientation towards the EEC. None of these arguments can be understood from a structuralist Marxist position or from his 'rectified' position on the triple determination of class situation through the social division of labour. They can be understood as effects of the priority Poulantzas gives to strategic calculation in considering classes and class struggle. Of course, this does not mean that these arguments are justified simply because they are politically convenient. But it does help us to understand them. Thus it is his *strategic* concerns coupled with his class reductionist account of social forces and potential allies that produces this unsatisfactory account of intermediate classes.

This interpretation is confirmed in CC. This signals Poulantzas's final break with a structuralist Marxist account of class determination in terms of three regional instances. Here he establishes a threefold structural determination of the class location of the new petty bourgeoisie in radically new terms. He now considers its class location in terms of its capitalistically unproductive *economic* role, its *political* work of supervision and control, and its *ideological* role of mental labour - all considered as moments within the social relations of production. He still emphasises political and ideological factors in defining its class character (so that engineers and other groups forming part of the collective labourer can still be allocated to the new petty bourgeoisie rather than the proletariat). In dealing with the structural determination of the traditional petty bourgeoisie, however, Poulantzas admits that the mental-manual distinction in its capitalist form is irrelevant. He therefore gives more weight to its economic location. But, regardless of which moments are stressed in this

new approach, they are all equally concerned with structural determination through the relations of production and not with the class position adopted from time to time in class struggles.

Given that Poulantzas eventually found a way to consider the threefold determination of class membership without raising the spectre of structuralism, there was surely no need to resort to political and ideological effects in establishing the class character of the petty bourgeoisie. Indeed his new analysis shows even more clearly that the traditional petty bourgeoisie and the new middle class are economically heterogeneous. Yet Poulantzas still resorts to the allegedly common political and ideological effects of these disparate economic class situations in order to establish the shared class identity of the old and new middle classes. This argument is essentially redundant and is not required by his basic theoretical analysis. It is required by his approach to class alliances.

### **The Internationalisation of Capital**

Following our detour through the vagaries of Poulantzas's account of the non-fundamental classes, we can return to more basic issues of class analysis. Despite the primacy he gives to the working class as the essentially revolutionary class whose hegemony will be secured through the allegedly vanguard role of the communist party, Poulantzas actually pays limited attention to the class determination and class position of the proletariat. At most we find an historical account of the relationships among different parties in pre-fascist Italy and Weimar Germany and the strategic errors committed in the anti-fascist struggle (see chapter 8). This general neglect reflects his concern with the correct choice of class allies if the proletariat is to realise its particular strategic objectives in a given conjuncture. It is for the same reason that Poulantzas focuses on the different fractions of the bourgeoisie - both to 'know one's enemy' and to assess whether any fraction(s) could be drawn into alliance with the working class. In particular he is concerned with the contradictions between monopoly and non-monopoly capital, the national bourgeoisie and foreign capital, and industrial and banking capital. These concerns are especially clear in *CC* and associated interviews.

Poulantzas argues that the periodisation of imperialism cannot be reduced to that of the pure CMP and must refer to a number of

additional criteria. The fundamental and determinant tendency of imperialism is said to be the export of capital rather than the export of commodities and Poulantzas relates this to the growing significance of the TRPF. In this context he also considers how the export of capital affects the articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist relations of production - especially regarding the conservation or dissolution of the latter relations - and the changing relations between metropolitan and peripheral regions in the imperialist chain. He identifies the transition to imperialism as occurring from the 1870s to 1920s. Likewise its consolidation is dated in the 1930s and associated with the dominance of monopoly capital, the final shift to dominance of the political over the economic, the dominance of the export of capital over that of commodities, and the continued conservation of pre-capitalist relations in the periphery. The current phase is located since 1945.

The current phase of imperialism is characterised above all by the increasing penetration of US capital into the European and Japanese metropolises and their integration into the political and ideological orbit of American capital's expanded reproduction in the face of the TRPF (CC, pp 42, 44-7, 50-4, 65, 69, 123-5). It is also characterised by new forms of socialisation. Thus, whereas earlier phases were associated with international cartels and/or financial holding companies or, at most, with one capital controlling the activities of separate production units in different countries, the current phase witnesses integrated production among several multi-national production units subject to a single centre of economic ownership (CC, pp 58-9). The nation-state also plays a crucial role in the current phase of internationalisation.

Indeed the political situation is highly complex. For the current phase of imperialism neither suppresses nor by-passes the system of nation-states. It is associated neither with the peaceful integration of capitals 'above' the level of the nation-state in a harmonious 'super-imperialism' nor with the gradual supercession of individual nation-states through the emergence of a global American super-state. At the same time Poulantzas argues that 'these states themselves take charge of the interest of the dominant imperialist capital in its development within the 'national' social formation' (CC, p 73). This does not mean that foreign capital necessarily participates directly in national power blocs as an autonomous social force. Instead its presence in the power bloc and the state is mediated through fractions of the interior

bourgeoisie linked with one or another foreign capital and/or through the structural constraints associated with the penetration of foreign capitals into the domestic circuit of capital (CC, p 75).

The links of different capital fractions in a national formation to different foreign capitals and/or their own activities abroad fragments and disarticulates the domestic bourgeoisie. In turn this means that it cannot present a concerted resistance to the penetration and hegemony of US capital. The new means available to American multinationals to put pressure on recalcitrant nation-states (e.g., tax evasion, monetary speculation, transfer pricing, misuse of customs barriers, etc.) are essentially secondary factors in the inability of European states to resist American hegemony. The primary obstacles are found in the internal political weakness of the domestic bourgeoisie (CC, p 75; cf. CD, p 44).

Despite these changes the state still maintains its character as a nation-state. For its primary function is still to maintain the unity and cohesion of the social formation as a whole and the national dimension remains important because of the other class forces within each formation. Thus the peasant classes and petty bourgeoisie remain committed to nationalism; the social categories involved in the state continue to derive privileges from the nation-state system; and even the working class, which is undergoing a significant internationalisation due to the development of worldwide relations of production, is still mainly oriented to the national dimension of politics (CC, pp 78-9). Although the state retains its national character, however, it also acquires new international functions and/or sees the partial internationalisation of its traditional functions. In both cases international functions are always shot through with national state issues and are far from being just technical and neutral in character (CC, pp 79-81).

Thus the struggle for socialism must still be organised around the conquest of state power at the level of the nation-state. Likewise it is essential to organise an anti-imperialist alliance among the 'people' around national-popular issues. This means that the interior bourgeoisie cannot be a leading force in the anti-imperialist struggle (let alone in the anti-monopoly struggle). Hence the leading role must fall to the working class organised under the hegemony of the vanguard party. But this is not an exclusive role and must be articulated with the struggles of the petty bourgeoisie and, where relevant, non-monopoly capital (CC, pp 82-7).

## Social Classes and Political Parties

In many of his analyses Poulantzas insists on the leading role of the working class and the vanguard party. We can now consider his views on class and party in more detail. His initial position was strongly class reductionist and always related parties to the class struggle. Nonetheless he did consider them at different levels of abstraction and from several different angles. Among the issues examined are: the role of the capitalist state as the principal 'party' of the bourgeoisie; the functions of the party system considered as a whole in ideological inculcation and mass integration; the more or less complex representational ties that can link specific political parties and classes or class fractions; and the various strategies and tactics pursued by particular parties in crucial political conjunctures.

Poulantzas argued that only the two main classes of capitalist societies can have their own long-term political interests and class ideologies. This is reflected in the organisation and operation of the party system. In general terms he suggests that the bourgeoisie is incapable of organising its own political and ideological hegemony through the party system alone and must depend on the state as a whole to act as its organisational motor force. The party system can certainly help to circulate power within the power bloc but it is not the only means available to represent fractional interests in the state. Moreover, with the exception of the vanguard party, mass parties are essentially concerned with political integration and ideological inculcation. This implies that the working class cannot win political class power within the framework of the capitalist state and must develop a counter-state form of organisation, i.e., a Leninist vanguard party, to smash the bourgeois state (1966e, p 347; 1967b, pp 72-3; *PPSC*, pp 108, 275, 287, 299, 300n; *FD*, pp 308-9, 325n; *CCC*, pp 26, 98; *CD*, p 102).

The precise operation of the party system must be related to the form of the state (especially the relative weight of the executive and legislative) and the nature of the power bloc. Often there is a divorce between class relations in the power bloc and their representation on the political scene. Thus one cannot infer the balance of forces within the former from the relations among parties. This is why Poulantzas distinguishes between the hegemonic class (fraction) in the power bloc and the ruling class (fraction) whose party is dominant within the party system (see chapter 3). More generally he emphasises that the

relative autonomy of the state in organising the power bloc is usually greater where the executive branch is dominant, there is a multi-party system, and individual parties have weak internal discipline. Parties are also less significant during a representational crisis - which is often associated with a proliferation of more direct forms of political representation, such as employers' associations, pressure groups, parallel power networks, and private militias. Thus it is crucial not to reduce class practices to party practices (*PPSC*, pp 154, 235, 248-52, 286, 300n, 315, 317-21; *FD*, pp 73-5, 144, 249-51).

At the same time Poulantzas rejects the view that one can ascribe an essential class belonging to parties or a pre-given party belonging to specific social classes. Even if the party system (excluding the vanguard party) must perform ideological and mass integrative functions, it does not follow that the specific role of particular parties will always be the same. Thus Poulantzas argues in *FD* that all normal capitalist states need a social democratic type of party and that, "if a party no longer fulfils this role (if it is discredited), another will necessarily take its place" (*FD*, p 151; for a subsequent qualification, see *FD*, p 196). More generally, and more convincingly, he denies that each class (or fraction) carries a party label on its back in the same way that each pupil has his own desk at school (1970b).

Thus Poulantzas argues that establishing a one-to-one correlation between classes and parties would be to completely mistake the nature of political representation, especially as it affects the non-fundamental classes. Only the bourgeoisie through the state, and the working class through the vanguard party, can organise politically to advance their political class power in open and declared action. In contrast the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie can have no *long-term* political interests of their own (because of their objective class position) and so cannot have a political party which represents such interests. Furthermore, whilst the dominant class fractions can advance their interests through various parties and/or outside the party form of organisation, the proletariat often supports social democratic type parties and/or bourgeois parties with a working class clientele. In contrast the non-fundamental classes are often present as political forces only through their 'pertinent effects' (such as in Bonapartism) and/or through their representation via state apparatuses or political parties that advance the real interests of other classes. In all cases Poulantzas emphasises that the specific class bases and appeals of parties have definite effects on their

structure, operation, and insertion into the party system as a whole (*PPSC*, pp 79-81, 97, 247; *FD*, pp 104, 124, 151-2, 240, 247-51).

### **Political Parties and Political Representation**

This approach raises a general problem about the meaning of political representation. Poulantzas distinguishes two types. Political representation can refer either to a party's role in advancing the real interests of a class and/or to its organisational and ideological ties to a class whose real interests it ignores in favour of another class (1970b; cf. *FD*, p 249). Thus he notes that, although fascist parties managed to develop effective organisational and ideological ties to the petty bourgeoisie (in contrast with the bourgeois parties which traditionally received their electoral support), they only promoted its real (short-term) interests during the first step of the rise of fascism and thereafter they only represented the real interests of the bourgeoisie (*FD*, pp 247-51, 261-4, 266-7). This distinction clearly has significant implications for political calculation about class alliances and electoral pacts.

Poulantzas employs this distinction to criticise the frontist strategies adopted by the Comintern after 1935 against fascism and to formulate an alternative strategy against the military dictatorship in postwar Greece. For, once one rejects crude class reductionist views about the necessary party identities of particular classes and fractions and recognise that there are different types of political representation, one cannot claim to know at every moment which party represents a give class or fraction and thus with which party to form class alliances.

After the Comintern adopted its Popular and United Front policies, there was a marked tendency for communist parties simply to enter into electoral cartels with bourgeois parties. They did so in the mistaken belief that the organisational, ideological, and electoral ties of such parties to different classes or fractions among the popular masses involved genuine ties of political representation such that party ententes from above would be a sufficient condition of effective class alliances at the base. This ignored the need to approach potential class allies at the base, independently of their party organisations; and to attempt to win over branches or sections of the bourgeois parties to the communist movement (1970b; see also chapter 9).

The Greek Communist Party made the opposite mistake before the 1967 coup. For, in correctly denying that bourgeois parties (such as the Centre Party) represented the real interests of the popular masses, it drew the false conclusion that there were no representational ties at all with these forces. Thus the KKE set up 'new' parties to advance the real interests of different classes and fractions and then entered alliances with them. Such counterfeiting of class parties with no mass support meant that the KKE (as also the EDA) was really allying with itself and ensured that the Greek communists remained isolated from the popular masses. In this respect they repeated the errors of the Bordiguist tendency of the PCI and of the KPD before the rise of Italian fascism and Nazism. Only when one recognises the different forms that political representation takes can an adequate alliance strategy be developed (1970b; cf. *FD*, pp 156-65, 180-8, 209-13).

The strategy recommended by Poulantzas is twofold. It is clearly necessary to enter alliances with parties that have organisational and ideological ties to the popular masses and/or to anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly elements among the dominant class fractions. A boycott of 'bourgeois' parties or unions would be appropriate only where they lacked mass involvement (e.g., because they were the artificial creations of the dictatorship). But it was also necessary to make direct contact with the popular masses at the base and through organisations without an immediate party character in order to build real representational ties to the dominated classes. Indeed, during political crises that politicise the intermediate classes, it is particularly absurd to rely on party ententes from above. For such crises tend to involve a breaking of representational ties and the disintegration of the traditional bourgeois parties. This creates opportunities for an effective class alliance strategy at the base and the recomposition of the balance of class forces in favour of the left. Poulantzas emphasises throughout these analyses the importance of pursuing the *mass line* (1967c; 1970b; *FD*, pp 18-19, 40, 213-6, 223, 228-33; see also chapter 9).

Poulantzas also applies these ideas to left unity and the Common Programme in France and to the relations between PASOK and the 'renovating left' in Greece. Thus, despite his initial distrust of the social democratic and 'catch-all' tendencies of Mitterand and the allegedly anarcho-syndicalist tendencies of the 'auto-gestionnaire' currents in the PSU, CFTD, and CGT, Poulantzas nonetheless supported the *Programme commun* as the most realistic route to democratic socialism in France (on his distrust, see: 1974I.e, pp

29, 31-2, 35-6). He is particularly critical of the Trotskyist beliefs that the revolutionary left in France could rapidly displace the traditional left (especially the PCF) in a revolutionary crisis; and that it could also create and centralise a system of dual power before the forces of the state could launch a counter-attack (1977I.k, pp 10-11). Instead Poulantzas chooses to rely on the dynamic of attempts to introduce the Common Programme and to further radicalise sections of the state apparatus to produce a rupture within the state system itself. The key to this strategy is the growing radicalisation of the new petty bourgeoisie (together with the declining political significance of the 'conservative smallholding peasantry') and their increasing support for the Socialist Party under Mitterand or even the PCF under Marchais (1974I.f, pp 25, 28-32, 37; CCC, pp 332-6 and passim). In turn this points to the possibilities for an effective class alliance provided that systematic account is taken of the differential class determination of the working class and the new petty bourgeoisie and appropriate modifications made in the programme of the PCF to consolidate this alliance. It would also be necessary, of course, to cement the electoral pact among the left parties through mass work at the base (*FD*, pp 164-5; CCC, pp 334-6; 1974I.k, pp 5-12). A similar mass line is adopted in Poulantzas's approach to the relations between PASOK and the 'renovating left' in Greece (see chapter 9).

A constant theme in these discussions is the argument that the hegemonic force in any transition to socialism will be the working class and that it must be led in turn by the communist party. This commitment is never justified theoretically and, at best, we find gestural references to Lenin(ism) as a political justification. It is a curious commitment in many ways because much of the theoretical argument and much of the historical evidence deployed by Poulantzas -- about classes, parties, fascism, military dictatorships, and the Soviet Union -- would seem to contradict the assumptions that the proletariat is essentially revolutionary by class nature and that communist parties are the most appropriate organs for formulating correct revolutionary strategy and tactics. The commitment is reflected in his remarkable failure to discuss the nature of the working class in contrast with the detailed consideration given to the petty bourgeoisie and the internal divisions and contradictions of capital. It is also reflected in his long-held dismissive attitude towards new social movements as potential forces for revolutionary change. Thus it is intriguing to note that Poulantzas eventually came to argue for a

'*pluriclassiste*' and '*pluripartiste*' transition to democratic socialism (see chapter 10).

## Social Classes and Social Movements

In CCC Poulantzas insisted that the only significant political forces were class forces. They alone were agencies of political transformation. Indeed Poulantzas claims that it is a fundamental and constitutive principle of Marxist theory that there can be no social groupings "alongside, marginal to or above classes, in other words external to them" (CCC, p 198; cf. p 201). This does not mean that there cannot be individual agents who experience transitory or contradictory class memberships in the course of their training, formation as class subjects, and distribution to class places, or, indeed, who even undergo an effective 'declassing'. But "a sum of 'declassified' agents can never amount to a pertinent social grouping in the field of class struggle" (CCC, p 203). In short, the only relevant forces in a class-divided society are class forces. This means that so-called 'social movements' can have no role outside and independent of the class struggle (cf. Poulantzas's critique of Touraine's positions on social movements, 1973b).

Such arguments amply confirm Poulantzas's class reductionism. This pervades almost all his work, from the preliminary studies for *PPSC* to his political testament in *SPS*. But he was not always as dismissive towards social movements. For, whilst he ignored them before May 1968, marginalised them in his account of fascism, treated them as irrelevant to a Marxist analysis of class determination and/or ascribed them an implicitly petty bourgeois character in the field of class struggle in describing classes in contemporary capitalism, he later came to see new social movements as new forms of class struggle which corresponded to the expanding sphere of state intervention and involved more or less direct confrontation with the state itself (1974I.e, pp 19-20, 34; *CD*, pp 71-3; *SPS*, pp 178, 183-8, 211, 213). Moreover, although he recognises that these new forms of struggle and movement often involve privileged economic agents (e.g., the labour aristocracy at the Lip watch factory or the new petty bourgeoisie), he no longer dismisses them as diversionary, reactionary, or inherently 'petty bourgeois'.

Indeed *SPS* argues that the new social movements, such as the

student movement, women's liberation, and the ecological movement, are engaged in class struggle on fronts that can no longer be regarded as 'secondary'. Thus they are no longer diversionary. Moreover the politicisation of the petty bourgeoisie in and through such struggles and movements is breaking the classical alliance between the bourgeoisie and the middle classes and thereby expanding the objective scope of popular alliances (*SPS*, p 211). Thus they are no longer reactionary. And, although they are still considered primarily as class forces, they are certainly not just petty bourgeois. Indeed, as we shall see in chapter 10, they have a crucial role to play in a transition to democratic socialism.

### **Some Unresolved Difficulties**

Poulantzas's views on class changed considerably but certain problems were left unresolved. Poulantzas remains committed to a class reductionist approach to political analysis and a politicist approach to class analysis. His work on political strategies revolves around problems of class struggle and these problems determine his account of class boundaries and positions.

For a long time Poulantzas was concerned with the relation between class determination and class position. But he never satisfactorily defined this relation. This can be seen in such crucial areas as the presence of the structural determination of class places in class practices, the role of apparatuses in class reproduction, the modalities of class struggle, the identification of class and class-relevant forces, the concept of class interests, and his understanding of class strategies. Before concluding this chapter I want to review some outstanding problems with his approach.

The issue of structural determination and class practices could have been clarified if Poulantzas had considered more carefully the particular forms of the capital relation. For, in focusing on the objective places of capital and labour at the most general level of theoretical abstraction, i.e., economic ownership and exploitation, he misses more concrete forms of the presence of structure in class relations. He did not analyse the value form, money form, wage form, commodity form, price form, tax form, etc., and the way in which these various forms condition the interaction between classes.

Yet these comprise different moments in the structural determination of class relations and are also clearly reflected in the class practices of capital and labour.

This point is linked to the more general question of the role of apparatuses in the expanded reproduction of classes. In insisting that apparatuses are not the cause of classes or class conflict, Poulantzas establishes class determination at a very high level of theoretical abstraction. Thus capital and labour are defined in terms of economic ownership and exploitation without referring to specific forms of economic enterprise. But, if classes cannot be reduced to interpersonal relations and really are determined in and through structures, it is surely relevant to consider how particular institutional forms overdetermine classes and class conflicts. Phenomena such as machinofacture, banking capital, state credit, and mass integration necessarily involve specific forms of apparatus and it is absurd to exclude them from the structural determination of classes at more concrete levels of analysis simply to avoid the charge of 'institutionalism'. Without referring to specific forms and apparatuses, any discussion of class relations or class practices in particular conjunctures would be underdetermined and gestural. The more concrete the level of class analysis, the more attention must be paid to the role of apparatuses and specific forms of class relation. Poulantzas acknowledges this implicitly in his account of the proletarianisation of the new petty bourgeoisie and his incidental recognition that a state capitalist fraction can develop in dependent capitalist societies. But he did not confront the theoretical implications of these insights in his more general discussion of the relationship between classes and apparatuses.

Third, for all his emphasis on the class struggle, Poulantzas was remarkably silent on many key aspects. He hardly considered economic class struggle. Indeed, in starting from the typical separation of economic and political class struggles associated with the relative autonomy of the different instances of the CMP, he was encouraged to look at the political level as primordial and overdetermining. At best Poulantzas refers to the different forms of economic relations associated with absolute and relative surplus-value, the TRPF, the mobilisation of counter-tendencies, and contradictions among fractions of capital. He also discusses the role of trade unions. But surplus-value is typically considered from the viewpoint of capital

rather than the working class. And, despite their importance in economic and political struggle, trade unions are typically dismissed as ISAs.

Likewise, in characterising political class struggle, Poulantzas certainly introduced a wide range of concepts. These range from abstract concepts such as power bloc and people at the level of the state or regime to more concrete concepts for the analysis of the so-called 'political scene' at the level of specific political organisations. But Poulantzas never says how the power bloc and people can be specified empirically nor how they can be linked with more concrete phenomena in the political scene. Moreover, just as his analyses of the economic struggles of the dominated classes are confined to the trade union apparatus, Poulantzas focused almost exclusively on political parties in dealing with the political scene. This means that he neglected other means of political struggle such as pressure groups, functional associations, social movements, and so forth. These gaps reflect an excessive concern with the structural determinations of the state system to the detriment of the political system more generally. There are similar problems in his account of ideological struggle (see chapter 7).

These problems are aggravated because Poulantzas does not explain how the class character of political or ideological forces can be established. This is all the more surprising because he says that class is not a constitutive principle of the typical capitalist state and that the 'isolation effect' ensures that classes are individuated, fragmented, and disorganised. This means that class struggle is unlikely to be present in pure form in the political arena. Poulantzas recognises this in three areas: firstly, he distinguishes between the two forms of political representation; secondly, he distinguishes between *class organisation* as a condition of open class action and *pertinent effects* as a consequence of the structural selectivity of the state and/or of the political calculations of other class forces; and, thirdly, he notes how the state assigns a class pertinence to non-class social relations and forces. In their different ways each of these distinctions raises crucial issues about the criteria for assessing the class nature of social forces. Poulantzas himself does not confront such issues.

These issues are necessarily related to the concept of class interests. This also poses problems. For Poulantzas is keen to reject the historicist problematic of the inevitable movement of the 'class-in-itself' to the 'class-for-itself' and proposes instead to relate interests

to the 'horizon of action' in a given conjuncture. But he did not fully realise that this can only be established in terms of particular conceptions of strategy as well as in terms of structural constraints and forms of class organisation. Thus his own account of the horizon of action of the working class in Greece would have varied according to his changing strategic perspectives. It would clearly have differed according to whether he currently favoured a frontal assault, a protracted people's war, a Gramscian war of position, or a left Eurocommunist reformist position. And at one time or another he advocated each of these approaches. Given this variation, it is clearly impossible to establish *the* objective interests of the proletariat. Similar considerations apply to the calculation of the interests of any other class or class fraction. One can only ever assess interests in relation to particular conceptions of strategy. This does not make the interests any the less objective since there are still specific material conditions of existence for the realisation of specific strategic objectives. But adopting such an approach does mean that class interests can no longer be seen as permanently and exclusively inscribed in the relations of production and thus as absolute and unconditional.

Here it is worth recalling the difficulties that Poulantzas encounters in establishing the boundaries of the petty bourgeoisie, the rural classes, and the interior bourgeoisie. These illustrate his class reductionism. For the attempt to define the boundaries of different classes is based on the assumptions that it is classes alone which can make the transition to socialism, that the working class alone is inherently revolutionary, that other classes will be mobilised if their specific interests are recognised in the alliance strategy of the working class, and that relatively stable class positions provide some indication of underlying class determination. But once he recognises that social movements have an autonomous role in democratic socialism, that no class is inherently revolutionary, that class interests are not determined exclusively at the level of class determination but are conjuncturally and strategically overdetermined, and that there is no necessary correlation between class positions (not even those that last for many years) and class determination, the whole effort seems far less relevant to the issues of strategic calculation.

This does not mean that the identification of class boundaries in terms of economic ownership, possession, and exploitation is irrelevant to other theoretical problems (e.g., the dynamic of

accumulation). It does not mean that class boundaries tell us nothing in themselves about the prospects for revolution. These depend on economic, political, and ideological struggles that must take account of the circuit of capital but are more directly determined by specific strategies and forms of organisation.

## A Way Forward?

If one rejects both the eventual identity and the permanent separation of class determination and class practice, is there a third way? Any solution must reject the basic premise underlying such questions. For they presuppose that class determination and class practice refer to *different* aspects of the *same* phenomenon. This makes it seem implausible that these aspects could be permanently separated; but it provides no guarantee that they will eventually coincide. Surely the best solution is to specify *two* sets of concepts. One set would deal with objective class location; the other would deal with social forces regardless of whether they are identified and organised as *class-conscious* forces. One could then establish the *contingently necessary* links between these phenomena in terms of the *class-relevance* of social forces. Concepts of class location would concern the social relations of production and such distinctions as productive and unproductive labour or different moments in the circuit of capital. Class-relevance would then be calculated with reference to the reproduction of the social relations of production and patterns of class domination (cf. Jessop, 1982, pp 242-3). Such calculation depends on many factors. In particular there is a central role for concepts of strategy to articulate class determination and class position (see chapter 12).

It is just such an approach that Poulantzas alludes to in *CCC* when he suggests that "the articulation of the structural determination of classes and of class positions within a social formation ... requires particular concepts. I shall call these *concepts of strategy*, embracing in particular such phenomena as class polarisation and class alliance" (*CCC*, p 24). In other words, Poulantzas treats the articulation between class determination and class practice as contingent and conjunctural. He suggests that it is class strategies as crystallised in class alliances that determine class positions in the class struggle and how far the interests of different classes in a given conjuncture are realised. This solution leaves unanswered two

questions. Firstly it provides no answer to the problem of whether class struggles, alliances, positions, interests, etc., are to be understood in terms of class-*relevance* or open, direct class-*consciousness*. Nor does it establish that the *principal* contradiction in a given conjuncture is necessarily a class contradiction. In both cases Poulantzas lapses into class reductionism. He ascribes a class belonging to social forces and assumes that non-class contradictions are only significant by virtue of acquiring a class pertinence. We cannot follow Poulantzas along this road.

Instead we need to develop the relational account of class interests and struggle which Poulantzas himself never fully explicated. In linking class interests to the horizon of action of a class he made an important theoretical innovation. But he did not see that the horizon of action of a class itself depended on specific conceptions of political strategy. Building on this insight is one way to move forward (see chapter 12).

Matters became even more complicated when Poulantzas eventually recognised the autonomous role of social movements in the struggle for democratic socialism. Sometimes these are seen as class movements, sometimes as non-class movements, sometimes as having a class pertinence. This problem is relatively easy to solve once one draws a distinction between class-conscious and class-relevant forces and allows for variation in relevance according to changing perceptions of strategy. But, although Poulantzas occasionally hints at the former distinction, he never faced up to the contingency of strategic calculation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In reviewing his successive remarks on the determination of social classes we find that Poulantzas moves from an economist-historicist perspective through structuralist Marxism to an analysis of the social division of labour. In tandem with this theoretical evolution we find a changing appreciation of the nature of class consciousness and of class struggle and strategies. Despite his changing views on class relations, Poulantzas left many issues unresolved. Among the reasons for this are his limited concern with economic analysis, his enduring class reductionism, and his overriding concern for problems of class alliances at the expense of rigorous analysis of class determination. It

is particularly interesting to note here that the field of class analysis was the last area where Poulantzas began to question the theoretical and political assumptions with which he had been operating during the 'seventies. Poulantzas himself certainly believed he was making a significant intervention into class analysis (e.g., prioritising the alliance between proletariat and new petty bourgeoisie at the expense of the traditional communist commitment to the proletarian-peasant alliance or reassessing the role of the national bourgeoisie in anti-imperialist struggles or arguing that the 'storm centre' of world revolution was in Europe rather than the Third World). But his contributions here were somewhat unoriginal and had little impact. Even where Poulantzas did establish new orientations in class analysis (e.g., his relational approach to class power, his conjunctural and strategic account of interests, and his specification of concepts peculiar to political class struggle), he failed to draw out all their implications and remained trapped within a class reductionist approach. Only during the few months preceding his death did Poulantzas begin to break with class reductionism and prepare the ground for a further theoretical and strategic break.

# 7

## Ideology, the State and Ideological Confrontation

The analysis of ideology and ideological struggles is the Achilles' heel of Poulantzas's contribution to Marxist political theory and practice. Concepts such as the 'isolation effect', 'hegemony', 'generalised ideological crisis' and 'ideological state apparatus' are central to his interpretation of the state and class struggle. Yet his overall account of ideology is sadly deficient. This is true not only of his early writings but also his subsequent studies from *PPSC* through to *SPS*. This does not mean that his views on ideology survived unchanged - there were certainly important shifts throughout his intellectual and political career. But these shifts generally operated within a continuing 'politician' bias. This is especially clear in *FD* and *CCC* but significant 'politician' residues also occur in later work. To the extent that Poulantzas breaks with this approach it was probably because he wanted to develop a more effective mode of ideological intervention in political struggle. Indeed it is primarily through his reappraisal of the political role of intellectuals and their work on the 'ideological front' that he moved towards a more open account of ideology and ideological class domination.

### **From Weltanschauungen to Egemonia**

In tackling the ideological terrain in his earliest work Poulantzas was much attached to the approaches of Lucien Goldmann and George Lukacs. In particular he drew on Goldmann's account of different *visions du monde* ('worldviews' or *Weltanschauungen*) corresponding to different classes and on Lukács' subjectivist problematic of class consciousness (cf. Goldmann, 1969, especially pp 102-32; and Lukács, 1971, especially pp xxii-xxv and 46-222).

This emerges most obviously in the crucial mediating role that Poulantzas assigns to the changing bourgeois worldview in his analysis of the sociology of law. In this context he argues that the ensemble of needs and economic activities of a particular class gives rise to a specific global attitude to the world. It is the worldview of the dominant class that constitutes the dominant worldview in a class-divided society. In the legal field the influence of this worldview is mediated through general legal values or principles and through general ideological conceptions such as the requirements of public order at a given level of social development (*NDC*, pp 288-9, 313-27, and *passim*; cf. Goldmann, 1969, pp 95-6). Such an approach was essential for Poulantzas at a time when he was attempting to establish the unity of fact and value from an allegedly Marxist stance. Later he rejected this approach as contaminated with historicism and humanism and developed an alternative account drawing on the work of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci.

This shift in approach is signalled in his preliminary remarks on the state and hegemony (1965b) and his critique of Marxist political theory in Great Britain (1967a). In both articles Poulantzas criticises perspectives that treat state power as the immediate expression of the class consciousness of the politically dominant class *qua* subject of history. In particular he claims that these perspectives deny any intrinsic autonomy to the political superstructure as a specific level of the social formation (cf. *PPSC*, pp 42, 199-200). Likewise he rejects conceptions of the unity of a social formation that reduce it to an effect of the imposition of the distinctive worldview of a hegemonic class subject (1965b, pp 864, 868, 870-1; 1967a, p 64). Poulantzas suggests that these errors derive in part from the lack of any systematic Marxist account of social classes at the level of social formations. He argues that current Marxist theory could not go beyond abstract relations of production in the 'pure' MP to the articulation of modes of production and/or to the political and ideological overdetermination of class struggle. Accordingly Marxists tended to decipher relations of class domination from a superficial and historicist account of the 'ruling ideology' and its production by a unitary 'ruling class' (1967a, pp 62-3).

In countering the first error Poulantzas emphasises the significance of the 'power bloc' as a contradictory unity of various classes and fractions. In countering the second he stresses the crucial institutional and organisational mediations that are involved in

securing the cohesion and hegemony of this *bloc au pouvoir*. He also emphasises the possibilities of disjunctions among different forms of class domination (economic, political and ideological) and/or between the apparent class content of the dominant ideology and its objective role in realising ideological class domination (1967a, p 65; cf. *PPSC*, pp 41, 89-91, 155, 171, 203). Disjunction and correspondence among different levels must alike be related to their articulation in a complex 'structure in dominance' as analysed by Althusser and to the role of the dominant ideology in 'cementing' together the social formation as indicated by Gramsci.

Although he moved from an emphasis on world-views and class consciousness to a concern with hegemony, Poulantzas still retains a certain distance from Gramsci. He argued that Gramsci's political analyses are often tainted by the historicism of Croce and Labriola and need to be handled with care (*PPSC*, pp 39, 138-9, 194, 197, 200-1; cf. 1967a, p 68). He also criticised Gramsci for failing to locate the specificity of the various regions of capitalist society in terms of its particular institutional matrix. Instead of establishing the distinctive articulation of the economic, political and ideological regions in capitalism, Gramsci operated with a simple contrast between the hybrid character of politics grafted onto economics in feudal societies and the separation of 'civil society' and state under capitalism (*PPSC*, pp 139-40). This criticism is somewhat barefaced since Poulantzas adopted the same position in his own initial comments on hegemony and the state (*PPSC*, p. 139). Here Poulantzas argued that the modern state can be hegemonic insofar as it is able to represent the universal, general interest as opposed to particular, private interests rooted in civil society. He contrasted this possibility with the preponderant use of force by the pre-capitalist state to impose the immediate "economic-corporate" interests of the dominant class (1965b, pp. 87-3; cf. *PPSC*, pp. 139-40).

In *PPSC* Poulantzas moved beyond an *échangiste* view of civil society. He explained the atomisation of civil society and the mutual opposition of private interests in terms of the 'isolation effect' secured within the matrix of the CMP (*PPSC*, pp 127-8, 130-7, 188, 213-4, 275-6). Thus he claims that the real problems in this area 'are concerned with the specific autonomy of the instances of the

CMP, with the effect of isolation in the socio-economic relations of this mode, and with the way in which the state and the political practices of the dominant classes are related to this isolation' (*PPSC*, p 140). It is in this revised framework that Poulantzas proposed to develop the concept of hegemony.

### **Towards a Regional Theory of Ideology**

In place of a historicist and subjectivist approach Poulantzas tries to develop a regional theory of ideology. This should be understood in a double sense. Firstly, Poulantzas suggests that the ideological region in capitalist societies is characterised by a specific autonomy from the political region. Thus the dominant ideology in capitalist societies has an apolitical (in the sense of politically class-neutral) and/or 'scientific' veneer which distinguishes it from the directly political and/or sacred character of pre-capitalist ideologies (1965b, pp. 871-3; cf. *PPSC*, pp. 139-40). Yet this separation of the ideological region from the political makes it possible for the dominant ideology to play an intensely political role insofar as it provides the ideological framework within which the dominant class (fraction) can establish its political hegemony. Indeed, Poulantzas claimed that the peculiar relation between ideology and reality in capitalist formations and the extremely mediated presence of any political class connotations are the precondition for the tremendous political efficacy of the ideological domain under capitalism (1965b, pp 888-9; cf. *PPSC*, pp. 215-16). In short, in capitalism there is 'a necessary over-politicisation of ideologies which expresses itself on the surface through their depoliticised character' (1965b: p. 889).

Second, Poulantzas argued that the ideological permeates the other levels of the formation and is itself characterised by various regional sub-ensembles corresponding to different fields of social activity. The specific articulation of a given social formation is reflected not only in the specific mode of ideological effectivity in other regions but also in the particular regional sub-ensemble which dominates the ideological region viewed as a whole (*PPSC*, pp. 210-15, 220-1). In feudal societies the dominant sub-ensemble is the religious and in capitalist societies it tends to be the juridico-political region (1965b, pp. 874-5; cf. *PPSC*, pp. 15, 163, 210-15, 220-1). In both cases, it is essential to relate the nature of the dominant ideology and its

dominant ideological sub-ensemble to the overall articulation of the social formation.

Poulantzas constructed his regional theory of the ideological in several stages. He began by considering the nature and function of ideology in general, next reviewed the specific characteristics required of the dominant ideology, then discussed how these characteristics will vary according to the dominant mode of production, and, finally, considered how the ideological region is overdetermined by the class struggle. Poulantzas claimed to follow Marx in proposing that ideologies constitute a specific objective level of the social formation with their own reality and materiality. They are said to comprise a relatively coherent ensemble of concepts, representations, values, etc., whose function is to provide men with an 'imaginary' relation to their real conditions of existence. They concern 'the world in which men live, their relations to nature, to society, to other men and to their own activity including their own economic and political activity' (1965b, pp 886-7; *PPSC*, pp 206-7; 1969b, p 45).

In this sense ideology clearly permeates every level of the social structure. Its function is to mold agents' understanding of their real relations so that they experience them in a way that is obvious but false. These representations are obvious in the sense that it includes elements of *knowledge* that enable agents to engage in political activities but false in the sense that it hides the real contradictions in their situation (*PPSC*, p 207; 1969b, p 45). This relation of 'adequation-inadequation' to the real world distinguishes ideology from science and is essential to its function of enabling men to experience the world as coherent and unified regardless of its real contradictions (1965b, pp 886-7; *PPSC*, pp 207). In this sense Poulantzas suggests that men are the unconscious or unwitting *Träger* of the 'real practical-social function' of ideologies and cannot be considered as alienated or falsely conscious human subjects (*PPSC*, p 207).

Poulantzas then moves from the 'social-imaginary relation' in *general* to the *dominant* ideology in particular. He argues that this must insert men into the objective system of social relations in such a way that they 'live' these relations in terms that are compatible with continued class domination (1965b, pp 886-7; *PPSC*, pp 206-7). He argues that neither a theory of representation nor a theory of alienation-reification can adequately grasp the content of the dominant ideology. For ideologies do not involve *correct* interpretations

of social reality differentiated according to the angle from which particular classes perceive it. Nor are they so many forms of *false* consciousness produced by each class in isolation according to its distinct place in production and history (1965b, pp 886-7; *PPSC*, pp 195-7, 207). But this does not mean that the relationship between the dominant ideology and the nature of a given society is purely arbitrary. For Poulantzas suggests that this will vary with the precise forms of 'adequation-inadequation' needed to secure social reproduction in particular types of class-divided society. This can be seen in the dominant ideologies of pre-capitalist as opposed to capitalist societies. In the former the dominant ideology simply serves to justify their self-evident class inequalities. But in capitalist societies it must deny such inequalities and emphasise the juridico-political equality and freedom of individual citizens (1965b, pp 887-8; *PPSC*, pp 195-7, 207).

The objective function of the dominant ideology is to act as the cement of a social formation with various structural levels. This does not mean that it is the ideological level itself that constitutes the unity of a 'structure in dominance' (*PPSC*, pp 207-9, 213; cf. 1965b, p 888; 1967a, p 67). For the dominant ideology both reflects and distorts the overall unity of the social formation. It acts as a cement by permeating the different levels of the social formation (including the economic and political) and imposing upon them the 'imaginary' coherence that corresponds to the particular type of unity characteristic of its 'structure in dominance'. In turn this means that the dominant ideology itself must have a certain unity or coherence so that it can express the unity of the social formation viewed as a whole (1967a, pp 66-7).

This particular argument is abstruse as well as abstract. Fortunately Poulantzas illustrated it by periodising the dominant ideology in capitalist societies. He argued that the coherence of the politically dominant ideology in competitive capitalism is secured through the dominance of the juridico-political region of the ideological sphere. In this stage juridico-political themes permeate all levels of ideological discourse (moral, religious, philosophical, etc.) and provide them with organising principles and reference points for their own processes of signification (*PPSC*, pp 211-3; 1969b, pp 48-9). This permeation also extends to the apparently non-ideological field of science. For, although Poulantzas distinguished between ideology and science, he also maintained that the dominant ideology

is always present in the field of science and especially in social sciences. This can be seen in the definition of the various specific objects of science, their epistemological presuppositions, their methods and concepts, and, finally, their results (1969b, pp 48-9). By way of illustration Poulantzas argues that the main characteristics of juridico-political ideology (viz., humanism, individualism, personalism, and historicism) are expressed in the speculative and empiricist character of bourgeois social science (1969b, pp 49-53). Nor are these influences confined to the dominant classes. They also affect the ways in which dominated classes resist oppression. For they 'spontaneously' live their revolt against the power bloc through notions such as 'equality', 'democracy' and 'justice' drawn from the juridico-political region of the dominant ideology (*PPSC*, pp 212-3, 223).

More generally Poulantzas argues that the dominance of juridico-political ideology in competitive capitalism serves a dual purpose. It masks the dominance (as well as ultimately determining role) of the economic region at this stage in the CMP and it also provides an ideological matrix for securing political hegemony through the construction and representation of the so-called general interest (1965b, pp 888-9; *PPSC*, pp 211, 213-5). Conversely, with the rise of state monopoly capitalism, the dominant ideological region is displaced from the political to the economic with special emphasis on technocratic themes and values. This shift in the articulating principle of the dominant ideology disguises the new-found dominance of the political level within the CMP and also provides a new terrain for struggles over hegemony (*PPSC*, p 211).

We have already seen that Poulantzas considers hegemony as the distinctive form of politics in capitalist societies and that he explains its scope and effectivity in terms of the equally distinctive articulation of the CMP. He also argues that the matrix of the CMP and the centrality of hegemony have major implications for the ideological region itself. In particular the hegemonic capacities of the dominant ideology depend on its contribution to social cohesion. This cohesion must always be related to the field of class struggle as a whole and not just to the dominant class viewed in isolation (*PPSC*, p 205). It is for this reason that Poulantzas argues that the dominant ideology cannot be directly identified with the political will of a class subject 'as if ideologies were 'political' number-plates that social classes wore on their backs' (1967a, p 67; cf. *PPSC*, p 202).

Instead he emphasises that the dominant ideology will reflect the

balance of class forces in a society. Thus it will integrate ideological elements corresponding to other classes and fractions. This means that the internal unity of the dominant ideology does not derive from its 'purity' as an expression of one class consciousness or one global worldview but rather comes from its expression of the unity, at the political level, the various conflicting classes (1967a, pp 67-8, 70; cf. *PPSC*, pp 201-3). Poulantzas cites several examples of this permeation of the dominant ideology by elements stemming from the 'way of life' of classes or fractions other than the dominant class or fraction. These examples include 'Jacobinism' and its successor 'radicalism' in France (absorption of petit-bourgeois elements in a normal state), 'bourgeois socialism' such as Saint-Simonism or social democracy (bourgeois permeation of working class ideology), the 'aristocratic' political culture of Britain (pervaded by ideological elements from a feudal class which later became a landed fraction of capital), the 'feudal-imperialism' of Wilhelmine Germany (due to the articulation of Junker and monopoly capital ideological elements) and fascism (a product of the dominance of petit-bourgeois ideological elements in a period of political and ideological crisis) (*PPSC*, pp 181-4, 203-4; cf. 1967a, pp 66-70; *FD*, pp 103-5).

Since a dominant ideology can incorporate elements from the 'way of life' of other classes or fractions it is particularly important not to 'read off' the nature of the politically dominant class (fraction) from the superficial content of the dominant ideology. Instead one must consider its specific effects in a particular conjuncture and establish its class character in terms of its objective role in reproducing political class domination (1967a, pp 62-3, 65, 67-8; *PPSC*, p 203).

Corollary to the permeation of the dominant ideology by ideological elements from other classes and fractions is the penetration of elements from the dominant ideology into the 'way of life' of dominated classes. In particular Poulantzas notes the permanent possibility of the contamination of working class ideology by the absorption of elements from the dominant and/or petit bourgeois ideologies. This can be seen in the fact that the 'spontaneous' ideology of the working class often finds expression in anarcho-syndicalism, trade unionism and political reformism (*PPSC*, pp 205-6). Indeed elsewhere Poulantzas attempts to relate the specific deformations of working class struggle in particular societies to the particular forms of their national bourgeois revolutions. Thus for the British labour movement, the danger is trade unionism; for the French working

class it is 'Jacobinism'; and, for the German working class, it is 'Lassallism'. This last deviation is defined as a belief that the state is a third party which mediates between the classes in conflict and whose hand can be forced to introduce a socialist revolution from above (*PPSC*, pp 183-4).

Likewise Poulantzas claims that the dominated classes 'spontaneously' live their revolt against the bourgeoisie in terms of categories and values drawn from the dominant ideology (*PPSC*, pp 183-4, 195, 213, 310-12, 356-7; cf. *FD*, pp 144-7). Indeed, if the dominant class is to win hegemonic leadership by presenting itself as the political representative of the general interest of the 'people-nation', such 'contamination' is just as essential as the absorption of themes and demands emerging from the dominated classes. Conversely, if the working class is to elaborate a revolutionary ideology and constitute a 'revolutionary bloc' under its own hegemonic leadership, it must counteract these tendencies. In particular it must engage in a permanent critique of its 'spontaneous' ideology and develop a political organisation that can link the specific interests of other dominated classes to those of the proletariat itself (*PPSC*, p 206; 1967a, pp 72-3). Likewise Poulantzas insists elsewhere that adopting the cause of the proletariat is not a sufficient condition for producing science. For proletarian consciousness does not automatically include science. This was why Lenin had correctly emphasised that that science and revolutionary consciousness had to be brought to the proletariat "from the exterior" (1969b, p 54).

Finally, Poulantzas refuses any attempt to reduce bourgeois hegemony to an effect of the ideological level on its own. He stresses that hegemony is overdetermined through specific institutional and organisational forms at the political level (1965b, pp 872-7, 879-80, 893-6; 1967a, pp 69-70). The hegemonic capacities of the dominant ideology certainly depend on its inclusion of subordinate ideological elements and its penetration into the ideological sub-ensembles of subordinate classes. But they also depend on appropriate forms of political and economic organisation. Thus Poulantzas argues that

'hegemony designates the objective structuration of the specific 'interests' of a class or fraction as representative of a general political interest of the classes or fractions in power despite their deep contradictions; the dominant ideology is therefore only one

aspect of this organisation of the hegemonic class or fraction' (1967a, p 70).

Similar considerations apply to the hegemony of the proletariat in a revolutionary bloc (1967a, pp 71-3). It is here that a regional theory of the ideological must be articulated with a regional theory of the political with special reference to the issues of state form and political organisation.

### **The Ideological State Apparatus**

This regional theory of the ideological undergoes two significant modifications in subsequent work. For Poulantzas later gives much greater weight, firstly, to the ideological class struggle and, secondly, to the materialisation of ideological domination in specific apparatuses. Neither development involves a major break with his earlier work on ideology. We have already seen that Poulantzas insists on relating the dominant ideology to the field of class struggle. In addition he had already noted the crucial role of so-called 'private' organisations alongside that of the institutions of government in maintaining the hegemony of the dominant class. Thus, whereas the state operates on all levels through its resort to 'constitutionalised violence', 'private' organisations exercise political power through an intellectual and moral leadership backed by the formal and *de facto* powers of coercion available to the hegemonic class. In this sense Poulantzas insists that political power in capitalist societies must be seen as a contradictory unity of coercion and hegemonic leadership mediated through 'private' organisations as well as the official apparatuses of government itself (1965b, pp 893-6; cf. *PPSC*, pp 225-6). Here and in his emphasis on the ideological class struggle he is clearly influenced by Gramsci. However, although he continues to emphasise the role of ideological class struggle in developing his regional theory in *PPSC*, the significant role of 'private' organisations in securing hegemony disappears from view. It is only with the shock of May 1968 that Poulantzas is encouraged to return to this issue.

Discussion of 'private' organisations resurfaces in his initial contribution to the debate with Miliband. For the first time Poulantzas identifies them as 'ideological state apparatuses' and now treats them in terms that owe as much to Althusser as to Gramsci.

He defines the ISAs in terms of their principal function - ideological inculcation and transmission as opposed to repression - and insists that they should be viewed as part of the state system. This is because they contribute to the maintenance of social cohesion (which is the generic function of the state) and because their operation depends on the indirect support of the RSA. At the same time he concedes that the ISAs have a greater degree of autonomy from each other and from the RSA than do the different branches of the RSA itself. Even so every important modification of the form of the state has repercussions not only on the RSA but also on the relations among the ISAs and between the ISAs and the RSA. Among other things this means that the advent of socialism depends on breaking the power of the ISAs as well as that of the RSA and thus on the pursuit of a cultural revolution. But it does not mean that specific ISAs (such as the university system) can be effectively 'smashed' without the prior destruction of the RSA that maintains their operational milieu. In short, although breaking the RSA remains the prime objective, the ISAs must also be radically transformed (1969a, pp 76-9; cf. *FD*, pp 301-2, 304-5).

These themes are developed at greater length in Poulantzas's account of fascism. In particular he argues that the concept of ISA must be rigorously related to class struggle if it is not to lead to what Poulantzas describes somewhat enigmatically as 'certain confusions' (*FD*, p 300). This argument marks a shift from *PPSC*. For there Poulantzas argued that the general role of ideology in maintaining social cohesion is overdetermined by class struggle. In *FD* he advances he stronger claim that ideology cannot be neutral because the only ideologies are class ideologies (pp 206-10).

In developing this argument Poulantzas is criticising Althusser's approach to ISAs. This is said to be both abstract and formal. Thus Althusser derives the 'unity' of the ISAs from their alleged permeation with the ruling ideology produced by the class that holds state power. This approach is inadequate because it equates the ruling ideology with 'the mechanism of ideology in general'. Hence it ignores the intense ideological contradictions within the ISAs that stem from the struggle among 'ideological spokesmen' of different classes (*FD*, pp 300-1n, 304, 305n). Poulantzas also suggests that Althusser cannot establish the relative autonomy of the ISAs - either one from another or from the RSA. For this is directly founded in the ideological class struggle which pervades them (*FD*,

p 304). He further criticises Althusser's analysis of the ISAs because it takes no account of potential dislocations in state power between the RSA and the ISAs (*FD*, p 305n). Here Poulantzas refers to the possibility that the failure of the working class to conquer the ISAs as well as the RSA could permit the bourgeoisie to reconstitute itself as the dominant class through bastions among the ISAs. This is supposed to have happened, for example, in the Soviet Union (*FD*, pp 230-3). More generally Poulantzas argues that ISAs often constitute the favoured 'refuges' and favoured 'spoils' of non-hegemonic fractions and classes and can provide not only the last ramparts of power for declining fractions or classes but also the first strongholds for fractions or classes on the ascendant (*FD*, pp 230-1, 308). Finally he notes that the struggles of the popular masses are reflected in the ISAs and have a particularly marked influence upon those - such as trade unions and 'social-democratic type' parties - concerned with mass integration (*FD*, p 309). In short, once due account is taken of the class struggle and the resulting 'game' of class power played out between the RSA and the ISAs, one can neither postulate a mechanism of ideology in general to explain the operation of ISAs nor assume that unity exists among the state apparatuses.

Poulantzas takes this criticism further in *SPS*. However, although Althusser is still his stalking-horse and the attack is also extended to the *nouveau philosophes*, there is now a large measure of unacknowledged self-criticism in his arguments. In particular he claims that Althusser's conception of the state as comprising the RSAs and ISAs 'rests on the idea of a State that acts and functions through repression and ideological inculcation, and *nothing else*' (*SPS*, p 30). This implies that the state's economic role is purely negative, i.e., that it prevents any encroachment on the economy through its use of repression and ideology. This ignores the state's crucial positive role in constituting the relations of production and regulating, however ineffectively, the economic process. It also implies an 'idealist, police conception of power, according to which the State dominates the masses either through police terror or internalised repression (it matters little which), or else through trickery and illusion'. This ignores the state's crucial role in consolidating mass support through material concessions (*SPS*, pp 30-1). It further implies that there are only repressive and ideological state apparatuses within the state system. This diminishes the specificity of the economic state apparatuses - something whose

existence Poulantzas had earlier denied (*FD*, 304 and 304n; *CCC*, p 99)<sup>2</sup> -- and thereby conceals the state network in and through which the hegemony of monopoly capital finds its most concentrated expression (*SPS*, p 33; Poulantzas first referred to an economic state apparatus in *CD*, p 123). Finally Poulantzas suggests that the 'RSA/ISA' couplet is oblivious to the way in which particular apparatuses can slide from a mainly repressive to mainly ideological function and/or take on new functions additional to, or in exchange for, old ones. This means that the criterion used to differentiate the RSA and the ISAs (whether their function is 'mainly' repressive or ideological) is too vague to be useful and thus any distinction between them must be seen as purely descriptive (*SPS*, pp 33-4).

### **Ideological Sub-Ensembles and Ideological Class Struggle**

Even if the 'RSA/ISA' concept is rejected as descriptive it is still necessary to examine how political and ideological class domination is mediated through specific forms of organisation and struggle. Poulantzas certainly offers a more detailed account of ideological class struggle in his later work. He also introduces a more abstract and sophisticated discussion of ideological domination in terms of the division between mental and manual labour found in all apparatuses. We consider this account below and meanwhile review his views on ideological class struggle. The key texts in this respect are *FD* and *CCC*.

Poulantzas argues that 'the only real class ideologies in a capitalist social formation are those of the two basic classes in irreconcilable opposition: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat' (*FD*, p 240; cf. *CCC*, p 287). This means that only the bourgeoisie and the working class can elaborate ideologies with a coherent, relatively systematic structure. Thus only these classes can provide the dominant ideological 'cement' in capitalist or socialist societies. Other classes have no long-term political interests of their own which could form the basis of class domination. At most their specific class situation engenders certain disparate ideological elements that cannot be developed into a coherent ideological system (*FD*, pp 240, 243; *CCC*, pp 287, 297, 334). Nonetheless Poulantzas does concede that such classes can develop particular 'sub-ensembles'. These would comprise

relatively distinct ideological systems formed through the combination of their *sui generis* ideological elements with elements drawn from bourgeois and proletarian ideologies but adapted to their specific class aspirations (*FD*, pp 76, 240, 251-2; *CCC*, pp 287-90). It is in this context that Poulantzas examines the ideological sub-ensemble of the petty bourgeoisie.

The ideological elements peculiar to the class situation of the two fractions of the petty bourgeoisie include such themes as *status quo* anti-capitalism, the myth of the 'ladder' of upward social mobility, the statolatrous belief in the inherent neutrality of the state as an arbitrating force among conflicting social classes, and individualism. Poulantzas also notes that the new petty bourgeoisie demands 'participation' in economic and political decision-making and that the traditional petty bourgeoisie is strongly attached to traditional family forms (*FD*, pp 240-3; *CCC*, pp 290-7; cf. *PPSC*, pp 339, 355). These elements can be articulated with themes from the dominant bourgeois ideology and/or from working class ideology to form a specific sub-ensemble. The ambiguous position of the petty bourgeoisie between the bourgeoisie and the working class is reflected in the shifting and unstable nature of petit bourgeois ideology.

Thus Poulantzas concluded that:

'the conjunctural position of the petty bourgeoisie determines the form in which these contradictory factors combine, i.e., the role and forms of influence of bourgeois ideology, the role of the ideological 'elements' peculiar to the petty bourgeoisie, and the forms and role of the 'borrowings' from the ideology linked to the working class' (*FD*, p240; cf. *CCC*, pp 297-8).

In some cases its ideological sub-ensemble will be polarised towards the dominant ideology and in other cases its 'borrowings' from the working class will be more important. In exceptional cases it is even possible for the distinctively petit bourgeois elements to become the articulating principle as occurred with French Radicalism and the ideologies of Italian Fascism and National Socialism (1970b; cf. *FD*, pp 251-6; *CCC*, p 333).

This analysis has quite definite implications for the class struggle. Poulantzas argues that 'the petty bourgeois ideological sub-ensemble is a terrain of struggle and a particular battlefield between bourgeois ideology and working class ideology, though with the specific

intervention of peculiarly petty-bourgeois elements' (CCC, p 289). We have already noted that Poulantzas claims that bourgeois hegemony depends on penetrating the ideologies of the dominated classes and articulating their aspirations to a vision of the general interest that serves the power bloc. He also argues that the proletariat's revolutionary organisations must penetrate petty bourgeois ideology and encourage whole sections of this class to adopt working-class positions and even to place themselves on the actual terrain of working-class ideology (CCC, pp 289, 334-5; cf. 1967a, pp 72-3; *FD*, pp 158, 163-4, 185). In this sense Poulantzas treats petit bourgeois ideology as the field *par excellence* of ideological class struggle. Thus the prospects for a democratic transition to democratic socialism depend on the outcome of this struggle (CCC, pp 334-5).

This approach clearly depends on a quite specific interpretation of class ideologies. It denies that ideological ensembles are simple epiphenomena of objective class positions and/or that there are coherent, hermetically sealed and mutually exclusive ideologies produced by each class in isolation. Instead Poulantzas argues that 'the various ideologies and ideological sub-ensembles are only constituted in the course of an ideological class struggle and must therefore be chiefly considered not as constituted conceptual ensembles, but rather as they are materialised in class practices' (CCC, p 289). This means that ideologies are not pre-constituted ensembles which subsequently act *externally* on other ideologies. In fact ideological struggle is present as such in the actual formation of every class ideology and in the interaction between them (CCC, p 290). In this sense Poulantzas considers every ideological ensemble or sub-ensemble as involving a complex articulation and co-presence of bourgeois, petit bourgeois and working class elements. They are distinguished in terms of their particular mix of elements and their effects on the reproduction of political and ideological class domination (1967a, *passim*; CCC, pp 286-90).

These arguments are supplemented with additional remarks on the ideologies peculiar to various branches of the RSA and to different ISAs. Poulantzas first drew attention to this problem in *PPSC* where he considered the distinctive effects of the dominant bourgeois ideology with its juridico-political thematic on the operation of the capitalist state itself. In this context he refers to the politico-ideological phenomenon of *bureaucratism* with its penchant for

secrecy, hierarchical authority, power fetishism etc. (*PPSC*, pp 332-3, 347-50, 355, 358).

This argument is taken further in *FD* and *CD*. For Poulantzas now argues that the state apparatuses in all forms of state 'secrete' their own internal ideology and adds that this is often perceptibly different from the dominant ideology. Thus the state bureaucracy, the armed forces, the Church and the educational system all have an internal ideology of their own. In exceptional forms of state this can even lead to the dominance of such an internal ideology over the whole society due to the dominance of the branch or SA in question. Thus one observes the 'militarisation' of society when the army is dominant, its 'bureaucratisation' when the administration is dominant and its 'clericalisation' when the Church is the dominant apparatus (*FD*, pp 317, 327-8, 342-3; cf. *CD*, pp 113-7, 119, 120-1, 123). This has significant effects on the mediation of the economic and political interests of the power bloc and dominated classes and also influences the way in which the particular economic-corporate interests of the state personnel are represented in and through the state. Thus Poulantzas notes how the domestic bourgeoisie was able to win the support of the armed forces in the military dictatorships by appealing to their sense of nationalism against US influence and Atlanticism. Conversely the army's commitment to the continuity of the state and to national unity put a brake on radical change once the process of democratisation had begun (*CD*, pp 114-7). Similar openings were possible through the developing *aggiornamento* in the Catholic Church in Portugal and Spain; and through the distaste for inefficiency and corruption found among administrators committed to technocratic values (*CD*, pp 118-9, 120-2).

## **Critique and Counter-Critique**

Poulantzas draws on these arguments about ideological class struggle to criticise alternative accounts of the popular impact of fascism inspired by psycho-analysis and discourse theory. He abruptly dismisses the psychoanalytic reductionism that suggests that the masses somehow desired fascism at an unconscious level and were therefore receptive to its popular appeal (1976c, p 90). He also criticises Faye's analysis in *Langages Totalitaires* on the grounds that

it privileges the *language* employed by fascism in addressing the masses. This approach allegedly revives the old claim that ideas make history. It thereby excludes consideration of fascism's popular impact in terms of diverse classes and their ideological sub-ensembles (1976c, p 91; cf. 1973a, pp 74-5). Poulantzas argues that this approach implies that ideology can be treated as a series of words uttered by one or more subjects and transmitted indiscriminately to other individual subjects who respond in an undifferentiated manner as pure receivers of such words-ideas. In focusing on how fascism was *recounted* to the masses Faye illegitimately presupposes that this explains why it was heard and successfully subjugated the masses (1976c, pp 91-2). This ignores the problem of the conditions under which one ideological ensemble can influence another and the concomitant issue of its differential impact on specific classes, fractions, and categories. Indeed Poulantzas claims that Faye reduces these conditions to the inter-personal relations among the advocates of different discourses at the same time as these advocates are seen as free-floating intellectuals without class belonging. Faye thereby ignores the role of petty bourgeois ideology as a relay or sounding box for the influence of working class ideology on bourgeois ideology and vice versa and also fails to locate fascist intellectuals in terms of the ideological class struggle (1973a, pp 77-8).

In opposition to these approaches Poulantzas insists that the working class and the great mass of poor peasants remained unresponsive to fascism. Conversely the new and traditional petty bourgeoisie were over-represented in fascism. Poulantzas adds that certain social categories - most notably women and youth - were also more receptive because of the role of the family and education in their ideological formation. He also observes that the support for fascism must be periodised in so far as it had clear peaks and troughs associated with the changing fortunes of economic and military policies (1976c, pp 96-7). Finally he suggests that 'impact' is too vague a term to designate the appeal of fascism because it ranged from active adhesion through contingent support to passive resignation (1976c, p 97).

In explaining the differential popular appeal of fascism Poulantzas emphasises three factors. Firstly, he notes its ability to absorb unemployment, protect and sometimes improve the purchasing power of certain sections of the popular masses, introduce 'social legislation', etc.. He refers to its ability to present itself as the

champion of national unity. And, thirdly, he notes that fascism was able to articulate a series of deep popular aspirations to its institutional structure. In particular he refers to the crucial role of fascist ISAs addressed to specific classes and categories (such as fascist unions, youth organisations, and women's groupings) in providing grounds for hope that fascism would advance their specific economic-corporate interests (1976c, pp 98-103; cf. *FD*, pp 165-7, 191-5, 220-2, and *SPS*, p31).

This analysis prompted a reply from Jean-Pierre Faye. He addresses himself only to the first of Poulantzas's two critiques but much of his counter-critique applies to all of Poulantzas's work on the ideological. Faye argues that there is no real choice between analysing fascism in terms of social classes and class struggle and in terms of language and *recits*. For there is a clear link between the theory of narrative systems and that of class struggle. Indeed Faye insists that class struggle is mediated through a war of statements, opinions, and doctrines. It is essential to study the materiality of language (not, *pace* Poulantzas, words) in terms of its various modes of production, circulation, and reception (Faye, 1973a, pp 22-3, 30-4; 1973b, 66-7). In this context he mentions three examples: (a) the decisive role of Carl Schmitt in establishing the totalitarian state by introducing a specific juridical discourse making no distinction between law and morality and thereby preparing the ground for a juncture of traditional conservative discourse (defense of the state) and the new language of fascism; (b) the crucial contribution of the Comintern doctrine of 'social fascism' as it interacted with fascist discourse in helping 'real fascism' to power; and (c) the fundamental role of Helmut Schacht in developing economic doctrines that could make the unorthodox financing of work creation acceptable to business and so aid fascism in mobilising popular support through the reduction of unemployment (1973c, pp 116-7, 120-7; cf. 1973a, pp 36-7; more generally, see Faye, 1972, especially pp 637-83). None of these effects can be understood without close examination of particular discourses and their intersection-interaction with the discourses of those groups to which they were addressed.

In this context Faye is particularly critical of Poulantzas's definition of ideology as a specific regional instance of a mode of production or social formation. He suggests that Poulantzas's formal classification of dominant ideologies, dominant ideological regions, and dominant modes of production reveals a 'neo-Aristotelian'

concern with taxonomy that is unable to capture the relations between history and language. Thus Faye asks whether the absurd account elaborated by Rosenberg in *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* is really a specific instance of the CMP as described by Marx in *Capital*. In place of this 'palaeo-structuralism' Faye proposes an approach in terms of *articulation* as a relation that ties together different modes and registers of discourse. Faye treats articulation as an effectively unlimited process in which different meanings are produced according to the specific surface linkages established among various discursive formations. In contrast, having defined ideology as 'a relatively coherent ensemble of representations, values, and beliefs', Poulantzas supposedly has no way of explaining the complex and indeterminate process whereby meaning is produced (Faye, 1973c, pp 118-20, 127-9).

In particular Faye argues that Poulantzas finds it difficult to understand the ideological class struggle because both its form and effects depend on the non-fixity of meaning. It is not a relatively coherent ensemble but a fluid nexus of meanings that defines ideology. Thus Faye notes that fascism in Germany was made more acceptable by exploiting the ambiguities in the concepts of *Volk*, *völkisch*, and *Volksstaat* to effect a shift from a popular democratic republic to a people's state in which the *Führer* embodies the will of the people. Likewise, whilst the extreme poles of left and right represented by the communists in the *Internationale Rote Hilfe* and the ultra-conservatives in the *Herrenklub* respectively are permanently and totally separated, significant oscillations and displacements can occur within these polar limits. The mediation of discourses is crucial here. Examples include such phenomena as the 'Scheringer line' and 'national-communism' on the left and 'national bolshevism' on the right. Finally Faye recalls that it was through language as a generator of meanings that specific connotations were attached to the enigmatic word 'jewish' which made it acceptable to exterminate 1.8 million children less than 14 years' old (Faye, 1973a, pp 138-42).

Similar ideas are proposed by Ernesto Laclau in his critique of FD's account of ideological class struggle. In particular he claims that the validity of this account depends on two fundamental components of Poulantzas's argument, namely, his approaches to ideology and to the petty bourgeoisie. Laclau criticises both components. The conception of ideology is said to be taxonomic in so far as it involves considering ideology in terms of the class belonging of its elements -

whether shared or exclusive in character - and postulating pure, necessary, paradigmatic ideologies peculiar to each class. This means that Poulantzas views concrete historical ideologies as amalgams of heterogeneous elements each with its own class belonging. In turn this implies that the transformation of a given class ideology occurs through the incorporation or articulation of elements from other class ideologies without any fundamental change in its original, essential class nature. But Poulantzas finds it difficult to establish the class belonging of specific ideological elements and often resorts to an empiricist procedure which provides more or less plausible accounts of the objective class determination of themes which predominate in one or another class (Laclau, 1977, pp 92-7).

To this admixture of taxonomic formalism and empiricism Laclau counterposes the claim that

'ideological "elements" taken in isolation have no necessary class connotation, and that this connotation is only the result of the articulation of those elements in a concrete ideological discourse. This means that the precondition for analysing the class nature of an ideology is to conduct the inquiry through that which constitutes the distinctive unity of an ideological discourse' (Laclau, 1977, pp 97-8).

He concludes that Poulantzas cannot provide an adequate account of such unity because he lacks any developed theoretical account of their articulating principles in the face of the fundamental heterogeneity of their basic constituents (Laclau, 1977, p 99).

Laclau's own solution draws on Althusser's analysis of the mechanism of ideology in general, i.e., the mechanism of 'interpellation'. Thus he suggests that the unifying principle of any ideological discourse is the specific mode of address (or 'interpellation') to particular social subjects that serves as the means through which they are mobilised as its supports. This mode of address defines one particular social identity as the point of condensation or multiple connotation of other social positions so that many areas of activity are integrated discursively into a relatively coherent ideological ensemble. Laclau also argues that ideological class struggle is concerned above all to articulate interpellations of a non-class character into a discourse with clear class relevance. In this context he identifies the field of 'popular-democratic' interpellations focused

around the contradiction between 'power bloc' and 'people' as the principal site of ideological conflict. For every class strives to give coherence to its ideological discourse by presenting its class objectives as the consummation of popular objectives (Laclau, 1977, p 109).

Laclau adds that the separation of the traditional and new petty bourgeois class fractions from the dominant relations of production makes them peculiarly susceptible to mobilisation in terms of 'popular-democratic' interpellations. This means that the middle classes or 'intermediate sectors' are the natural arena for democratic struggle and, *a fortiori*, provide the field *par excellence* for the political and ideological class struggle (Laclau, 1977, pp 111-15). He concludes that Poulantzas's class reductionism prevented him from grasping these fundamental points. For Poulantzas supposedly ignores the autonomous domain of the 'popular-democratic' struggle in favour of attributing a necessary class belonging to every ideological element. In addition, despite the quite distinct economic places occupied by its two supposed fractions, he ascribes a spurious class unity to the petty bourgeoisie. It follows, according to Laclau, that Poulantzas's account of fascist ideology is flawed by its class reductionism as well as its inability to explain the source of unity in fascist (or any other) ideological ensemble (Laclau, 1977, pp 100-24 and *passim*).

A different set of criticisms has been formulated by John Clarke *et al.*. Whereas Faye and Laclau both concentrate on Poulantzas's analysis of fascist ideology, Clarke *et al.* focus on his more general regional theory. They argue that he distinguishes 'lived experience' and ideology only to conflate them later. Thus it is unclear whether ideology moulds a partially autonomous experience originating elsewhere or actually constitutes 'lived experience'. Secondly, Poulantzas's attempt to introduce the distinction between ideology and science in terms of their 'imaginary' and knowledge functions respectively involves an empiricist problematic of truth and falsity which oversimplifies 'real relations' and hence the nature of the 'imaginary relation to the real' (Clarke *et al.*, 1977, pp 113-4).

Third, they claim there is a 'tension between the theoretical weight attached to the notion of structural causality and the important role that class struggle is accorded' (Clarke *et al.*, 1977, p 114). This is allegedly reflected in the doubling of explanations in terms of ascribing the same effect (e.g., the dominance of

a particular ideological system) is both structural and class conflictual causes. These and other difficulties are said to result from the mistaken attempt to develop general, formal propositions about the nature of ideology at the most abstract level (hence the treatment of ideology in terms of the functional imperatives of social reproduction) which is theoretically incompatible with a concrete understanding of the forms and conditions under which ideology operates. It is just such an understanding that Poulantzas attempts to advance when he considers the nature, mediations, and effects of ideological class struggle. But Clarke *et al.* note that 'he is unable to accomplish any theoretical unity between these two forms of analysis *precisely* because the sets of concepts are generated at different levels of abstraction' (1977, p 15). Nonetheless they suggest that Poulantzas's most fruitful contribution is in the analysis of ideological class struggle.

### **In Defense of Poulantzas**

These critiques certainly highlight important flaws in Poulantzas's work on ideology and class struggle. But the position is not as bad as these critics suggest. Let us see how one might defend the regional theory of ideology in *PPSC* and the account of ideological struggle in *FD*.

Clarke *et al.* correctly identify two contrasting approaches in Poulantzas's analysis. The same problem occurs in his early work on the state. Here Poulantzas moves from a functionalist, class reductionist account of the state as the factor of cohesion in a class-divided society to a form-determined, capital-theoretical account of the typical bourgeois state and its normal mode of political struggle. A similar theoretical movement seems to operate in Poulantzas's approach to ideology. But this movement is less successful because he cannot adequately describe the functions and forms of ideology at any level of abstraction.

Thus Poulantzas resorts to functionalism in describing ideology in general. He suggests that ideology inserts the agents or *Träger* of social action into social relations and endows them with an appropriate social consciousness. Given his initial commitment to an Althusserian model of ideology, which sees it as surviving the abolition of class divisions, this general, functionalist account cannot

have a class-theoretical basis. This contrasts with his analysis of the general function of the state. Nonetheless Poulantzas does note immediately that the general function of ideology is overdetermined by class relations. He also implies that the relative balance of ideology and science will tilt towards the latter after the proletarian revolution (*PPSC*, p 206).

The next step must be to move from the function of ideology in general to an account of the particular role of ideology in the CMP (not yet in society as a whole). There are two possible paths here: capital- and class-theoretical. In capital-theoretical terms it is necessary to analyse the correspondence between the theoretically typical ideological region and the overall matrix of the CMP. It is in this context that Poulantzas points to the dominance of the juridico-political region in the ideological sphere and clearly links this with the bourgeois type of legitimacy that corresponds to political domination with hegemonic class leadership (*PPSC*, p 224). He also notes that particular societies and states can be characterised by the co-existence of different ideologies and/or types of legitimacy; and that displacements can occur between the apparent class content of the dominant ideology and its actual class function (*PPSC*, pp 203-4, 222, 224; cf. 1967a, *passim*). It is worth noting that Poulantzas does provide an answer to Laclau's question concerning the nature of the unifying principle of a dominant ideology. For he suggests that the theoretically typical ideology of capitalist societies is unified through the dominance of juridico-political ideology and its permeation of other ideological regions.

In class-theoretical terms Poulantzas argues that there are two fundamental classes in the CMP (bourgeoisie and proletariat) and that two basic ideological ensembles correspond to these classes. In abstract terms these are identified as the dominant ideology of the pure CMP and the revolutionary ideology of the working class (as purified by the permanent critique of Marxist science as mediated through the vanguard party) (*PPSC*, p 206). But these 'pure' ideologies are never realised in practice because the ideological class struggle always intervenes. This modifies them through the reciprocal (albeit symmetrical) absorption and integration of elements from the opposing discourse. Moreover, once we move to the social formation from the pure CMP, we find other classes and their ideological sub-ensembles.

Only at the level of society as a whole can one provide an account of

the concrete content and effects of particular ideological ensembles and sub-ensembles. Moreover, *pace* Faye and Laclau alike, who both suggest that Poulantzas ignores the role of articulation in the development of ideologies, he does allude to this process in discussing ideological class struggle at the most concrete level of analysis. This is particularly clear in his analysis of the popular appeal of fascism. Finally, as Poulantzas moves from the most abstract level of ideology in general through the theoretically typical form of bourgeois ideology in the pure CMP to the more concrete levels of ideological class struggle, he also begins to emphasise the possibilities of dislocations, crises, and exceptional forms and to introduce concepts relevant to these issues (*FD*, pp 76-8, 251-3, and *passim*). In short, unless one relates Poulantzas's theoretical and empirical work on ideology to his typical methodological movement from abstract to concrete, it is easy to misinterpret his arguments and to assume that they all have the same relevance to the empirical.

This does not mean that Poulantzas's regional theory and his interpretation of ideological class struggle are wholly adequate to the tasks he himself sets. At the most abstract level the distinction between ideology and science unnecessarily complicates his analysis of the ideological construction of the 'social imaginary'. At the level of the pure CMP his analysis of the juridico-political region is just as reductionist as his argument that the liberal democratic republic is essentially and irredeemably bourgeois in character. This essentialism is matched by his unquestioning faith, at least initially, in Marxist science and, later, the mass line (*PPSC*, pp 206, 211-7). This is not to deny the importance of juridico-political ideology in capitalist societies along the lines indicated by Poulantzas. It is to argue for taking rights, democracy, social justice, etc., seriously and linking juridico-political discourse to democratic socialism (cf. *SPS*).

At the level of societies, Poulantzas resorts to a class reductionist taxonomy of ideological elements. In fact it would have been sufficient to observe that, at any given moment, there is an uneven distribution of ideological elements across classes, fractions, categories, etc. Ideological class struggle would then consist in the selective articulation of these elements into particular class-biased ideological ensembles and/or the disarticulation of ensembles that favour the interests of opposing classes. Indeed Poulantzas himself subsequently argues that 'ideological struggle is present as such in the actual formation of every class ideology, in its very midst' (*CCC*,

p 290). This formula is better and points to the solution indicated. Class reductionism is unnecessary and unhelpful. It derives from Poulantzas's persistent confusion over the nature and effectivity of class struggle. Thus sometimes Poulantzas establishes the bourgeois nature of the dominant ideology in terms of its organisation under the dominance of elements with an essentially bourgeois rather than petty bourgeois or proletarian class belonging. On other occasions he does so in terms of its *effects* in a particular conjuncture. The latter approach underpins his claim that the class content and class effects of an ideology can be divorced (e.g., 1967a, passim; *PPSC*, pp 203-4, 207, 209; *FD*, pp 76-7, 103-4, 127-8, 251-3, 316-7).

We have already argued that only the calculation of effects is appropriate but we would also agree with Poulantzas against his critics that this cannot be confined to ideological elements. It also depends on the institutionalisation of ideologies in the ISAs and ideologically-relevant apparatuses, the relative importance or weight of these apparatuses within the state system and/or on the political scene, and the nature of the strategies pursued in the ideological class struggle. These factors must be considered when explaining the production, circulation, and reception of ideologies. Moreover, as Poulantzas later came to see, they should also be linked to the division between mental and manual labour (see below).

Poulantzas is also right to emphasise the problem of 'adequation-inadequation' even if his interpretation is contaminated by the 'ideology-science' couplet. The latter couplet is particularly problematic in the social sciences because the social is itself reproduced in and through discourse. But the conceptual couplet of 'adequation-inadequation' is useful provided that it is interpreted relationally. Both terms refer to the degree of correspondence between discursive and extra-discursive practices and properties, i.e., the extent to which particular discourses are compatible with the reproduction of particular social relations, institutions, apparatuses.<sup>3</sup> It is essential to specify '(in)adequation' in relation to particular discourses and extra-discursive practices and properties. For the same discourse may be

more or less (in)adequate according to which extra-discursive practice serves as a reference point. This argument holds for discourses from individual orientations through the forms of calculation adopted by firms, parties, etc., to macro-level accumulation strategies, hegemonic projects, etc.

The 'adequation-inadequation' couplet serves to distinguish between 'arbitrary, rationalistic, and willed' ideologies and those 'organic' ideologies which can serve as the ideological 'cement' of an 'historical bloc'. Building on Gramsci we can define an historical bloc as a contingently complementary, relatively unified ensemble of economic, political, and ideological elements that is capable of long-term reproduction (cf. Gramsci, 1971, pp 137, 168, 366, 376-7). To reject such an approach suggests that the relation between the dominant ideology and a given social formation is purely arbitrary. Indeed, as Faye's misdirected jibe about Rosenberg's fantasies implies, such a suggestion would make nonsense of concepts such as 'hegemony', 'historical bloc', and 'ideological crisis'.

Turning now to Faye and Laclau, their critiques appear only partially justified. Thus, although Poulantzas certainly misrepresents Faye's work on *Langages totalitaires* as being merely a history of words and neglectful of the class struggle, he is right to argue that Faye reduces the problem of ideological impact to what could be termed the intersection of the interpersonal and the interdiscursive (on the 'interdiscursive, see: Pecheux, 1975). Faye's emphasis on individual narrative communication through the medium of an unstable, oscillating set of overlapping languages or discursive systems clearly underplays the significance of the material and organisational conditions of ideological production, circulation, and reception and the role of class traditions and 'instincts' in moulding the differential impact of particular discourses. It is nonetheless worth noting that Poulantzas moves some way towards Faye's emphasis on the role of ideological articulation in class struggle in his later work on class alliances and ideological fronts.

Laclau's critique is problematic for different reasons. For he assumes that ideological ensembles are unified and then reduces this unity to the effect of 'interpellation' as the mechanism of ideology in general. Yet Poulantzas argues that

"fascist ideology" cannot constitute a field of research in the same way as the ideological ensembles essentially tied to the bourgeoisie

and the working class ... it is rather *an amalgam of contradictory elements*, whose articulation can ultimately be grasped only when they are embodied in the practices and apparatuses (sc. of specific fascist regimes)' (*FD*, p 253, italics in original).

There are also good grounds for questioning the unity of bourgeois and proletarian ideologies and hence for examining their internal contradictions as well. Moreover, to the extent that ideologies can be differentiated from each other and treated as relatively stable and unified, this surely cannot be attributed solely to the connotative power of one dominant interpellation. Such an approach smacks of idealism. It also neglects the role of specific apparatuses and practices in confining the play of an ideology's internal contradictions within the limits necessary to ensure its continuing role as the social 'cement'.

Nonetheless Laclau has identified problems in Poulantzas's initial attempt to relate ideology and fascism. Laclau is particularly incisive on the bias to class reductionism, the neglect of the 'popular-democratic', and the problematic status of the petty bourgeoisie. But Poulantzas himself seems to anticipate at least the first two criticisms in subsequent work. Thus, in discussing the popular impact of fascism, he pays special attention to social categories as well as classes and also emphasises the ideological appeal of the 'national-popular' (1976c, *passim*). He also appears to reject an essentialist approach to class ideologies (whether bourgeois, working class, or petty bourgeois) in discussing class struggle for the support of the petty bourgeoisie (*CCC*, pp 289-99).

### **Intellectuals, Parties, and Ideological Contestation**

In pursuing his concern with ideological class struggle Poulantzas became increasingly interested in the role of intellectuals and their relation to political parties and/or the state. On a practical level this can be seen in his own involvement with the CFDT, the anti-dictatorial resistance of the Greek intellectual diaspora, the campaign for left unity around the *Programme commun* in France, and his criticism of the irrationalism of the *nouveaux philosophes*. It is also reflected in several articles for the French and Greek press. Here Poulantzas examines the different types of intellectual, their political temptations, and their proper role in political and ideological affairs.

Poulantzas distinguishes two traditional types of intellectual in Greece: party intellectuals and university intellectuals. The former adhere to a party line and are involved in political and/or cultural fronts; and the latter are a conservative intelligentsia who consider themselves outside and above parties and politics and remain aloof from the public sphere beyond the universities. Although they constitute mutually exclusive intellectual circles, they nonetheless share two characteristics. They both subscribe to the same notion of a truth - whether embodied in the party and Marxism-Leninism or in the eternal human spirit of classical idealism - whose support and disclosure is the special role of the intellectual. They also share a special relation of subordination and dependence on authority - the party leadership as the ultimate arbiters of truth or an enlightened intellectual elite approved by the government (1978I.k).

Since the collapse of the military dictatorship a new intellectual role is emerging comparable to that developing elsewhere in the West. This sees intellectual production as critique, recognises that ideology and science are interlinked, concedes that ideological elements exist inside every system of "scientific truth", and acknowledges that every system of power or authority secretes its own ideology or knowledge. This new role requires party intellectuals to find the criteria of truth in more general social and political practices and to produce and communicate their idea outside as well as within party channels. Likewise, university teachers must move beyond pedagogy to take a critical role in public life outside the cloisters of academe. In particular, dons must get involved as "specific" rather than "universal" intellectuals, i.e., as experts in particular disciplines relevant to specific areas of social life rather than as dilettantes whose influence depends on their general literary or intellectual position. In both cases the new role requires intellectuals to present scientific analyses to a broad public without engaging in vulgarisation. The party intellectuals should not limit themselves to writing for the party press and the university intellectuals should no longer scorn all forms of journalism. In this sense intellectuals should aim to develop an organic relationship with the popular masses and relate their intellectual work to the problems of everyday life (*Ibid.*).

Poulantzas thought the prospects for such involvement in the late seventies were good in Greece and France alike. Throughout the West there had been a growing movement towards ideological contestation and involvement due to changes affecting both the intellectual

establishment and the left intelligentsia. For, whilst the Cold War, the "end of ideology", and technocratic consumerism no longer ossified the intellectual establishment, the decline of Stalinism and social democracy had weakened leftwing intellectuals' traditional suspicion of the popular masses and rank-and-file democracy. In this new intellectual climate there had been a growth of contestation. Workers confronted employers, young people questioned the family and education systems, scientists criticised established traditions, artists protested against commercialism and the fetishisation of culture (1977I.g).

This general shift was reinforced by factors peculiar to the two countries that interested Poulantzas. In Greece education was historically significant in the upward mobility of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie. This meant that the popular masses were especially open to high culture and less prone to anti-intellectualism. The collapse of the dictatorship had also been accompanied by a haemorrhage of bourgeois and petty bourgeois intellectuals to the side of the masses. Thus Poulantzas felt that conditions were particularly favourable for a dialogue between the people and progressive intellectuals (1978I.g).

Poulantzas also argued that the Union of the Left in France had opened a space for an organic relation between intellectuals and masses. But his optimism was qualified by the growth of irrationalism evident in the influence of the *nouveaux philosophes* and in the emergence of a complacent, generalised dissidence on the part of many left intellectuals following the break-up of the Union and electoral defeat. There was a danger that the media could transform the dissident left into traditional intellectuals lending their support to the state and that those who remained loyal to their parties could lose their influence by adopting a siege mentality. However, provided that dissident intellectuals took the initiative in seeking a rapprochement with the institutional left, the prospects for a progressive intellectual hegemony still seemed bright (1977f; 1978g).

Poulantzas also discussed more general problems and dangers in the current political role of intellectuals. He notes three traps to be avoided. Since real, democratic socialism was on the agenda, involvement was crucial. Thus the first danger is abstentionism - the pretence that intellectuals are above politics. The second danger is being incorporated into government. This could result from simple arrivisme and/or from a thirst for power and domination based on

one's specialised knowledge. The third danger is that of being used by leftwing parties to express fanatical support for their policies and/or to suppress criticism. These last two dangers do not mean that it is best for progressive intellectuals to seek an unmediated, direct relationship to the masses (1977I.h).

Instead Poulantzas argues that, with minor exceptions such as street theatre or art, intellectuals should be active in political parties (1980I.a, pp 44-53; see also 1977I.g). But their membership of a political party must be conditional on freedom and liberties. Indeed, because their own activity rests on freedom of thought, intellectuals can appreciate the value of freedom and should be aware of its abuse and oppression. Thus it is essential for intellectuals to criticise oppression everywhere it occurs and not just selectively. Poulantzas actually claims that no intellectual who connives in the silence of another can ever be truly free (1977I.h).

Poulantzas argues that the *nouveaux philosophes* run a different risk: plebeian populism. This occurs because they argue that all knowledge, all resistance, and all organisation nourish domination over the people (or plebs). These arguments operate to demobilise the masses and turn the new philosophers themselves into elitist spokesmen in behalf of the plebs (1977f).

Elsewhere Poulantzas suggests that the left sometimes shares the mistaken practices of contestation that characterise the *nouveaux philosophes'* irrationalism and blanket hostility to organisation or resistance. The total rejection of established culture always engenders theoretical and practical difficulties. Thus the total rejection of Marxism as a closed dogma or as the direct cause of the Gulag also implies the rejection of socialism. The total rejection of motherhood by some feminists implies that motherhood is only realisable through the "natural" compulsion of the traditional family form and thereby blocks off alternative patterns of child-rearing. And the total rejection by leftwing forces of the reactionary nationalism of the bourgeoisie implies that the proletariat has no fatherland and thus makes it impossible to articulate a socialist, proletarian nationhood. In short, if one engages in total rejection of the kind practised by the *nouveaux philosophes* and others, then traditional concepts remain as fixed, unchanging points of reference. In turn this promotes their continued materialisation in institutions and practices.

In contrast Poulantzas calls for a different form of theoretical and ideological contestation. This should be directed against any systematisation

of discourse or science as a means of domination and repression. He argues that every discourse can be used as a means of oppression by those who monopolise it and this can only be avoided by continual criticism from the base. In this sense the use of Marxism as a dictatorial language and justification for repression in the eastern bloc is not to be dismissed as a mere disfigurement of an otherwise healthy discourse. Nor can the use of psychoanalysis as the official language of legitimisation of new, authoritarian forms of control and "normalisation" in the West be lightly written off as accidental. The risk of such abuse is inherent in all forms of knowledge and must always be resisted. But Poulantzas also argues that some discourses have a greater liberatory potential than others so that a blanket rejection of all knowledge as a source of domination is mistaken. Likewise, one should adopt a critical stance towards all forms of socio-political institutionalisation, including leftwing parties, without engaging in total rejection of all forms of organisation. It is just as wrong to believe that every party is naturally bureaucratic and repressive as it is to see every communist party as inherently revolutionary and incorruptible, anti-bureaucratic and emancipatory. But Stalinism is a potential deformation in every party and the masses must always contest such developments and press for democracy at the base.

Poulantzas argues that contestation should not be restricted to questions of class relations and class parties but must be extended to new fronts in the cultural and ideological struggle. Movements such as feminism, the students' movement, and ecology are no longer secondary to the class struggle and must be approached in the same spirit of contestation. Finally Poulantzas warns that the proper role of intellectuals in criticism and defense of freedom could be blocked by misunderstanding about the nature of ideological fronts. For political alliances and compromises should not be translated into the ideological sphere. Otherwise political alliance could result in eclecticism and restrict intellectuals' critical freedom (1977I.f; see also 1980I.a).

### **The Division between Mental and Manual Labour**

In discussing the proper political role of intellectuals, Poulantzas implies that specialisation in certain forms of mental labour can be

justified. But elsewhere he develops an uncompromising critique of the division between mental and manual labour and argues strongly for its transcendence in the transition to democratic socialism. This critique first appears in his discussion of the petty bourgeoisie but it is fully developed only in his last book.

In CCC Poulantzas notes that the Marxist classics always emphasised the decisive role of the division between mental and manual labour in the emergence of class divisions and also argued that the abolition of these divisions required the suppression of the mental-manual division itself. In this context Poulantzas himself claims that this division is:

"not simply a technical division of labour, but ... actually forms, in every mode of production divided into classes, the concentrated expression of the relationship between political and ideological relations... in their articulation to the relations of production ... both within the production process itself and, beyond this, in the social formation as a whole" (CCC, pp 233-4).

Technological applications of science inside the capitalist labour process, for example, are encased within rituals of knowledge, etc., with the result that manual labour cannot control them. Likewise managerial functions are legitimated as neutral, technical, and scientific in character (CCC, pp 235-40).

More generally, Poulantzas notes that bureaucratisation is "the essential materialisation, in the social division of labour, of a mental labour 'separate', in the capitalist manner, from manual labour (CCC, p 275). This obviously extends beyond the production process itself to the state system and the social formation as a whole. Indeed Poulantzas emphasises that the very separation of the bourgeois state as a particular institutional ensemble rests on the specific separation of mental and manual labour. The latter was founded on the encasement of knowledge in the dominant legal-political ideology in the form of 'science'. In turn the state has a key role in reproducing the division between mental and manual labour through the educational system and other ISAs (CCC, pp 30-4, 259-70).

These arguments are developed in SPS. Here Poulantzas argues that the prodigious reorganisation of the social division of labour effected through the CMP is the precondition of the modern state. This implies a fundamental break between the capitalist state and its

precursors such as the Asiatic, slave, and feudal types of state. In this context the most important aspect of the social division of labour is that between mental and manual labour and, in all its apparatuses (economic and repressive as well as ideological), the state is the site *par excellence* for intellectual labour divorced from manual labour. Its various apparatuses are the consummate expression of the organic relationship that connects intellectual labour and political domination, knowledge and power (SPS, pp 54-6).

Indeed the very nature of official discourse serves to exclude the popular masses from participation in the exercise of state power. For it makes up in its notorious opacity and elaborate codes for the exoteric and uniform character of the national language installed by the nation-state (SPS, pp 58-60). Poulantzas also suggests that official discourse and the accumulation of documentary records constitute the internal cement of state functionaries *qua* intellectuals. And he notes how the capitalist state organises intellectual labour elsewhere by establishing a whole series of circuits and networks through which intellectuals function and by influencing the scientific agenda in both the human and natural sciences. Thus intellectuals in universities, institutes, and learned societies have been transformed into state functionaries through the same mechanisms that have transformed state functionaries into intellectuals (SPS, pp 57, 59). Finally, Poulantzas emphasises that the state is not only based on the mental-manual division of labour in the CMP but is also intimately and actively involved in reproducing that division. It does this through its role in the training and qualification of labour-power and its more general role in reproducing the organic connections between knowledge and power (SPS, pp 59-60).

Although he stresses the links between *savoir* and *pouvoir* and treats the state as the quintessential site of mental labour, Poulantzas is careful to avoid suggesting that this alone explains the class character and/or effects of the capitalist state. Indeed he notes that the states in the countries of 'actually existing socialism' are also affected by this relationship (SPS, p 60). This means that the relationship between the state and the mental/manual division of labour is only one step in the process whereby the capitalist state is brought into relation with classes and the class struggle under capitalism. One must also consider how the bourgeoisie is constituted into the politically dominant class through the specific institutional forms of the state and the political and ideological practices concerned with hegemony (SPS, pp 61, 123-6, and *passim*).

## Concluding Remarks on Ideological Class Domination

We have seen above how Poulantzas moves progressively from an historicist account of ideologies as the creation of the dominant class subject through a structuralist analysis of the ideological as a specific region of the social formation to an understanding of ideological class struggle based on concepts such as articulation, contestation, and *savoir-pouvoir*. This movement is symptomatic of the more general influence of three contrasting schools of French philosophy (Goldmann, Althusser, Foucault) but it also exemplifies the increasing concern with problems of political (and ideological) strategy. Nonetheless Poulantzas's contributions to the analysis of ideological class domination are less systematic and substantial than his analyses of political class domination. At no point did Poulantzas really consider the ideological as such at any length. He was much more interested in its articulation with the political region and political class struggle than with its own internal mechanisms and efficacy. This is reflected in his neglect of the potential contributions of discourse theory to the analysis of ideology and ideological class struggle and his lack of sympathy for Faye's work on totalitarian languages or Althusser's account of the general mechanism of 'interpellation'. Instead what interests Poulantzas is the political pertinence of ideology.

Poulantzas's arguments in this respect must be related to his general methodological stance. This involves a movement from abstract to concrete and the development of concepts appropriate to each stage in this movement. But it is particularly clear in his analyses of ideology that Poulantzas encounters real difficulty in effecting this movement. At the most abstract level of analysis there can be little objection to an account of ideology in terms of the constitution of the 'social imaginary' or 'lived experience' as long as this is not grounded in essentialism (at least in the guise of the 'alienation-reification' of an essential human subject) and/or empiricism (hence his insistence on the 'adequation- inadequation' of 'lived experience'). There are many ways in which this general approach to ideology could be developed, however, witness the differences between Althusser, Castoriadis, Derrida, Faye, Foucault, Hirst, Laclau, Lacan, Pecheux, and others. Yet Poulantzas makes no attempt to specify what mechanisms might be involved. Even if one rejects the idea of a mechanism of ideology in general (such as

'interpellation'), one must surely still specify its most important, albeit pluralistic, mechanisms. Instead he leaves us with the abstract regional theory of ideology in *PPSC*, the metaphorical notion of ideology as a 'cement', various forms of class reductionism, and occasional references to the role of intellectuals and 'ideological watchdogs'.

Only when he discusses the mental-manual division and connects it to the 'pouvoir-savoir' relation does Poulantzas really begin to tackle these problems. In *SPS* Poulantzas appears to distinguish two levels of ideological production: a primary level of ideological production in and through 'disciplinary mechanisms' or material practices and a secondary level of ideological struggles which work on the results of this first set of mechanisms. Thus he refers to the effects of individualisation secured through the state in the following terms:

'it is not therefore so much a question of the ideology constituted, systematised, and formulated by the organic intellectuals of the bourgeoisie - which is always a second-order ideology - as it is of the primary and 'spontaneous' forms of ideology that are secreted by the social division of labour and directly embodied in the state apparatuses and practices of power' (*SPS*, p 66).

Thus Poulantzas now treats the 'social imaginary' or 'lived experience' as created through various disciplinary mechanisms, each with its own specific *modus operandi*. This occurs within the general framework of the social division of labour, especially the mental-manual division and all its implications for the differential production and diffusion of knowledges. It also provides the 'raw material' or ideological elements that are articulated by organic intellectuals and 'ideological watchdogs' into class ideologies of one kind or another. This approach remains embryonic and needs much more work.

Nonetheless Poulantzas's analysis of ideological domination has moved closer to his work on political hegemony. The latter considers both the structural determination of hegemony through specific state forms and the specific ideological and political practices that aim to polarise class positions around particular strategies or 'hegemonic projects'. In discussing ideological class domination Poulantzas seems to distinguish between its structural determination through

the mental-manual division of labour (in which the state has a central place) and specific disciplinary mechanisms. But these mechanisms do not fully determine the specific patterns of ideological domination and subordination. This depends on the outcome of specific struggles to articulate specific ideological elements into an ideological ensemble (or sub-ensemble) that serves the interests of a given class or class fraction. Finally, just as the struggle for hegemony can aim to reorganise the state system as a structural determinant of potential hegemonic positions, so ideological struggles can aim to transform the mental-manual division and the disciplinary mechanisms which generate the 'primary and 'spontaneous' forms of ideology' which are the raw material of second-order ideological struggles. These are merely indications in Poulantzas's latest work. They would need considerable elaboration before they could be said to resolve the fundamental problems evident in his earlier treatment of ideology and ideological struggles.

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<sup>2</sup> Since Poulantzas recognised the state's technical and economic functions, he cannot be accused of restricting its function to the repressive and ideological (cf. *PPSC*, pp 50-4; *CCC*, p 99). But he refutes the idea of a specific economic state apparatus on the grounds that the state's economic activities are never neutral but are always linked to political class domination and mainly serve either repressive or ideological functions (cf. *CCC*, p 99). Thus Poulantzas falls foul of his third and fourth criticisms of the RSA/ISA couplet even though his work generally escapes the first and second criticisms levelled against Althusser's account of the state.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of the extra-discursive troubles many discourse theorists. Here it designates the emergent (structural) properties and other constraints on action entailed in a particular ensemble of practices when viewed from the perspective of one or more social agents or forces in a given conjuncture (cf. Jessop, 1982, pp 199-202, 252-6).

## **Part IV**

# **Problem of Political Strategy**

# 8

## **Fascism and Dictatorship**

Poulantzas deserves to be better known for his analyses of fascism and military dictatorship. For his theoretical and political development can only really be understood by examining how it was influenced by the historical example of fascism and the contemporary reality of military dictatorship. Unfortunately his reputation as a structuralist theoretician has hindered recognition of the direct relationship between his concern with concrete historical analysis and his interest in problems of political strategy. Indeed his contributions to historical debate are generally discussed as examples of 'applied structuralism' rather than instances of strategically-oriented political enquiries. Thus it is worth 'bending the stick in the other direction' by considering Poulantzas's accounts of exceptional states in terms of their strategic interest rather than as examples of history for history's sake. We discuss fascism in the present chapter and military dictatorships in chapter 7.

### **The Context of Fascism**

In *Fascism and Dictatorship* Poulantzas examines the causes and effects of fascism, the nature of the fascist state, and the failures of the labour movement to check the rise of fascism. Although *FD* contains much factual material, essentially it is a theoretical and strategic work rather than a detailed historiographic account of fascism. For he argues that the major crisis of imperialism and the intensification of class struggles unfolding in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies once again place both revolution and fascism on the political agenda. In order to assess whether fascism is about to rise again (or has already begun to do so) one must know what fascism and the exceptional state really involve as well as examining the present conjuncture in different societies. Moreover, since one cannot discuss fascism without discussing the

failures of the working class to prevent it, it is equally necessary to consider the question of anti-fascist strategy. Here Poulantzas concentrates on the politics of the Comintern and the principles that informed its approach to fascism. This focus is justified as giving a good insight into the Comintern itself and also as showing how far these principles still contaminate the labour movement. Thus, although Poulantzas deals explicitly with fascism in Italy and Germany in the interwar period, contemporary politics and strategic problems provide both the motive and the *leitmotif* of his analysis (*FD*, pp 11-12, 357-9).

Poulantzas begins by considering the general historical period to which fascism belongs. This he identifies as the decisive start of the transition to the dominance of monopoly capitalism or imperialism and the accompanying rise of the interventionist state. Thus the fascist period is characterised by the contradictions of imperialism and monopoly capitalism together with the contradictions peculiar to a phase of transition (*FD*, pp 17, 20-21, 29, 52-3). Several economic crises occur during this period (especially those of 1919-21 and 1929-31) but economic crises are not in themselves sufficient to produce fascism (*FD*, pp 34, 53-4). Instead it is specific conjunctures of class struggle that determine the development of fascism. These conjunctures must be considered in terms of the complex interaction between the so-called imperialist chain and factors internal to each society.

Poulantzas argues that fascism occurred in the two weakest links in the imperialist chain following the break associated with the Russian Revolution. These links were Italy and Germany. In this context weakness is not reducible to economic backwardness but involves the cumulative effect of economic, political, and ideological contradictions at home and inter-imperialist struggles for hegemony abroad (*FD*, pp 22-24, 53-4). Among the factors common to the two societies Poulantzas notes late industrialisation, lack of foreign markets, a strong development of finance capital, splits between industry and agriculture, absence of agrarian reform and resulting uneven development, contraction of the internal market, foreign indebtedness, a marked lack of national unity (seen in federalism, decentralisation, and provincialism), the absence of a hegemonic bourgeoisie able to preside over the process of nation-building and state formation, and a state whose general interventionist role prevents it from performing a specific role on behalf of

monopoly capital. In addition to these common features Poulantzas notes various elements specific to each case (*FD*, pp 25-34).

In summarising these diverse causes the primary emphasis nonetheless falls on the weakness of the two countries in the inter-imperialist struggle for hegemony and their seriously deficient level of national unity (*FD*, pp 27, 34). These are the decisive factors shaping the development of the class struggle and culminating in the rise of fascism.

Poulantzas considers the rise of fascism as a specific process characterised by successive steps in a complex war of position and manoeuvre (*FD*, p 54). He rejects any interpretation of the growth of fascism in terms of equilibrium in the class struggle (*FD*, pp 59-61). Instead he emphasises that the bourgeoisie occupies the *dominant* position in the class struggle throughout the rise and consolidation of fascism. He agrees that the working class had launched an unsuccessful offensive before the rise of fascism. But he adds that this was followed by a step of relative stabilisation in the class struggle before the bourgeoisie embarked in turn on the offensive that culminated in fascism. Thus Poulantzas says that fascism involves an attempt to smash the organisational bases of the labour movement and to roll back its economic and political gains when the working class had already suffered decisive defeats in an open war of manoeuvre. In this sense fascism corresponds to a *defensive* step by the working class and an *offensive* step by the bourgeoisie. Hence it is quite inappropriate to interpret fascism in terms of general or catastrophic crises of equilibrium (*FD*, pp 78-82, 59-61, 62-3, 84-5, 86, 107). Instead Poulantzas argues that fascism develops in response to other forms of crisis - a dual crisis of hegemony and a generalised ideological crisis (*FD*, pp 72-3, 76-8).

### **The Power Bloc and the Crisis of Hegemony**

The intense political class struggle during the rise of fascism results from a crisis of hegemony within the power bloc linked with a crisis of hegemony over the society as a whole. After a period of unstable hegemony (in which medium and monopoly capital contend for leadership of the power bloc and the support of the masses) there comes a moment when no dominant class or fraction is able to impose its leadership within the existing political order. The period of

unstable hegemony saw a profound political disorientation of the power bloc. It was associated with a representational crisis in the parliamentary sphere, ministerial instability, the proliferation of pressure groups and paramilitary cells, the displacement of real power from formal constitutional channels to informal power networks, growing incoherence in government policies, and other signs of institutional crisis in the state system (*FD*, pp 71-2, 74-5, 100-103, 124-7, 334). Together with the aggravation of contradictions inside the power bloc this institutional crisis meant that no fraction of capital could establish its hegemony even for a brief period. New forms of political organisation were necessary to resolve the crisis of hegemony and to conduct the bourgeois offensive against the labour movement.

In this context Poulantzas suggests that the political crisis could only be resolved by establishing the hegemony of monopoly capital to match its growing economic domination. This would seem to be all the more important because, as Poulantzas noted in *PPSC*, the dominant class in any society is the class which is dominant at the dominant level of the social formation. Economic domination alone is therefore particularly inadequate in monopoly capitalism because the latter involves a displacement of dominance to the political region. In Germany and Italy this involved action on three fronts. For monopoly capital had to establish a new state form and a new ideological cement as well as pursue an economic strategy that advances monopoly interests and permits increased exploitation of the working class (*FD*, pp 72, 74, 86, 102-3, 126, 142, 153-4, 155, 156, 172). We shall see below how far, according to Poulantzas, this was achieved in the fascist regimes.

The dual crisis of hegemony is associated with an ideological crisis affecting both the power bloc and the popular masses. Not only does the dominant ideology come under attack from the masses, it also ceases to provide a convincing ideological cement for the power bloc itself (*FD*, pp 76-8). Poulantzas argues that the dominant ideology in Germany comprised a specific combination of feudal and imperialist elements. This was then subject to internal dissolution with the emergence of reactionary feudal romanticism and a medieval corporatism on the one hand and a more technocratic imperialist ideology of organised capitalism on the other hand. But it was also subject to an external challenge from the 'liberal' pretensions of medium capital (*FD*, pp 103-5). The situation in Italy differed

somewhat. Here there was a deep crisis in the dominant liberal-nationalist ideology. This was evident in a growing divergence between liberal themes favoured by medium capital and nationalist elements articulated to imperialist objectives by monopoly capital. In addition there were increasing attacks on both ideological currents in Italy from feudal-socialist, futurist, corporativist, and other circles that had close links to the power bloc (*FD*, pp 127-30, 267).

In both Italy and Germany this crisis in the dominant ideology was reflected in the attitudes of the organic intellectuals attached to the power bloc. For they showed increasing disaffection and hostility towards traditional bourgeois ideology and traditional bourgeois parties (*FD*, pp 77-8, 106-7, 129-30, 317). Ideological apparatuses such as the universities, student movements, patriotic groups, the Church, 'intellectual' clubs, the press, and the new mass media of radio and cinema, acquired a decisive political role during this period. They contributed significantly to the ideological ferment in which fascism could become respectable (*FD*, pp 105-6, 130).

The growing internal ideological disarray of the power bloc at this time also had major repercussions on the popular masses and was associated with a parallel, albeit independent, crisis in Marxism-Leninism. This prevented an effective politico-ideological response to the accumulating contradictions in Italy and Germany (*FD*, pp 143-7). In this respect Poulantzas argues that these 'weak links' were subject not just to a crisis in the dominant ideology but rather to a *generalised* ideological crisis (*FD*, p 76).

### **The Successive Steps of Fascism**

It is in this context that Poulantzas locates the role of fascism in reorganising hegemony and increasing exploitation on behalf of big capital. He rejects any blanket generalisations about the fascist role in the class struggle and insists on a careful periodisation according to the successive steps of a complex war of position and manoeuvre. During the step of working class offensive the fascist movement primarily consisted in armed bands that were financed by big capital, large landowners, and rich peasants to wage their counter-attack. During the phase of relative stabilisation the fascist bands were abandoned by the power bloc and fascism attempted to transform itself into a mass party. Starting with the launch of the

bourgeois offensive the fascist movement increasingly takes on the character of a mass party and is once more openly maintained by big capitalist circles (*FD*, pp 86-8, 108, 131). Initially the fascist party genuinely represented the short-term political interests of the petty bourgeoisie and established organisational and ideological ties with this class at all levels from voters to higher party cadres (*FD*, pp 249-50, 261-2, 266).

Subsequently fascism gains the support of monopoly capital as a whole and attempts to build organisational ties with other elements in the dominant classes (*FD*, pp 86-7, 108-111). Poulantzas identifies this crucial step in the rise of fascism as the '*point of no return*', i.e., that points in its growth after which it is difficult to turn it back (*FD*, p 66). He also emphasises that the rise of fascism as a mass movement and its development of effective organisational ties with monopoly capital and the rest of the power bloc should be seen as a *coincidence* linked by a particular conjuncture in the class struggle. He implies that the power bloc increasingly turned to fascism as it became a mass movement *at the same time*) as fascism was seeking to moderate its anti-capitalist and petty bourgeois aspects in order to secure support from the power bloc and parts of the state apparatus (*FD*, pp 108-9). After the point of no return this results in an effective alliance between monopoly capital and the petty bourgeoisie. This alliance is mediated through the fascist party and survives uneasily until fascism is installed in office. During this period fascism also makes concessions to other elements of the power bloc and provides a framework within which the contradictions among its different fractions and classes can be neutralised (*FD*, pp 87, 110-111, 132).

When fascism comes to power there is an initial period of instability. This occurs because fascism pursues policies favourable to monopoly capital whilst seeking to consolidate support from the popular masses and other elements of the power bloc. Thus, even though the 'left wing' of the fascist party is subjected to a massive purge and various organisations and cadres representing the masses are liquidated, certain material concessions are made to the people against the will of the power bloc. During this initial period the petty bourgeoisie becomes the ruling class by virtue of the dominant position occupied by the fascist party on the political scene. It also becomes the class in charge of the state through its veritable invasion of the state apparatus (*FD*, pp 87, 111-2, 132-4, 250-1, 263, 267).

Finally, there is the period of fascist stabilisation. This arrives when the fascist party is subordinated to the state apparatus, the petty bourgeois members of the state apparatus break their representational ties with their class of origin, and monopoly capital combines the position of hegemonic fraction and ruling class (*FD*, pp 87-8, 112-3, 134, 262, 340, 353). This period sees the revival of contradictions within the power bloc as well as attempts by the fascist state to regulate the process of monopoly domination in the interests of social cohesion (*FD*, pp 96-7, 98, 1134, 135, 258, 283, 290, 296).

### **Fascism and the Petty Bourgeoisie**

Although he argues that fascism secures the fundamental long-term interests of monopoly capital, Poulantzas also stresses that these interests face real threats. Thus he notes that the continuing importance of the petty bourgeoisie as class in charge of the state and the peculiar character of fascist ideology mean that fascist policy in the end comes to antagonise big capital (*FD*, pp 88, 113, 250-1). In particular he indicates that the organisation of the war economy is a significant site of contradictions between monopoly capital and the fascist-party state (*FD*, pp 88, 96, 113, 135). More generally Poulantzas insists that it is quite wrong, even during the period of fascist stabilisation, to regard fascism as a simple agent of monopoly capital.

Poulantzas is careful to establish the nuances and contradictions of the relationship between the petty bourgeoisie and fascism. He argues that the old and new petty bourgeoisie can have no long-term political interests of their own, find it difficult to organise politically into a specific petty bourgeois party, and normally act as a 'peaceful' pillar of the 'democratic republican order'. But he also notes that they have a politically unstable nature and can sometimes play an independent political role as an authentic social force (*FD*, pp 243-4). It is just such a role that the petty bourgeoisie plays in the fascist period. This role reflects specific elements in the conjuncture.

At the *economic* level the rise of fascism corresponds to a crisis for the entire petty bourgeoisie. This is due not only to specific conjunctural factors (e.g., 1919-21 and 1929-31 in Italy and Germany respectively) but also to the general structural impact of the growing dominance of monopoly capital (*FD*, pp 247, 259, 265). On the *political* level the representational crisis among bourgeois parties and

their degeneration into ineffective parliamentary cliques meant that they could no longer pay their traditional role in promoting the short-term interests of the petty bourgeoisie. In addition those elements of the new petty bourgeoisie that had inclined toward social democracy became disillusioned with its failure to defend their specific interests.

In this context the petty bourgeoisie turned to fascism and acquired a significant measure of autonomy as a social force through its close links with the fascist party. The organisational, representational, and ideological ties that developed between fascism and petty bourgeoisie (particularly during the first stage of the rise of fascism) meant that the petty bourgeoisie no longer trailed passively behind the bourgeoisie. Instead it could intervene relatively autonomously within the alliance between the monopoly capital and itself. Even when the stabilisation of the fascist state meant the petty bourgeoisie was dislodged from its position as a ruling class, it continued to have an independent role through its position as the class in charge of the state and through the petty bourgeois aspects of fascist ideology (*FD*, pp 247-51, 260, 265-6).

On the *ideological* level the crisis in the dominant ideology had two major repercussions on the ideological sub-ensemble of the petty bourgeoisie. It allowed the specifically petty bourgeois elements to be accentuated at the expense of orthodox bourgeois themes. It also encouraged a more extensive and significant appropriation of working class ideological elements. One result of this is that the 'anti-capitalist' elements of petty bourgeois ideology become dominant in the first period of the rise of fascism. In turn this means that these elements had to be neutralised before fascism could properly serve the interests of monopoly capital (*FD*, p 251).

When fascism came to power the formerly dominant, crisis-ridden bourgeois ideology was displaced by petty bourgeois ideology. This provided a fresh means of 'cementing' the social formation. But it was not 'cemented' together under the domination of the petty bourgeoisie itself. For there are certain affinities between the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie in revolt and the imperialist ideology of monopoly capital. Thus the dominance of petty bourgeois ideology actually serves to bring about the *indirect* domination of big capital. Among these affinities Poulantzas identifies 'power fetishism', statolatry, aggressive nationalism, anti-parliamentarism, corporatism, the cult of the 'leader', and authoritarianism. Moreover, in relation to the new petty bourgeoisie, he also notes a rapprochement

with imperialism on such technocratic themes as the cult of efficiency and the alleged neutrality of technology. In this sense he argues that fascist ideology is marked by a specific adaptation of imperialist ideology to petty-bourgeois aspirations. He concludes that the internal contradictions of fascist ideology stem from the contradictions between the interests of monopoly capital and those of the petty bourgeoisie (*FD*, pp 252-3, 254-6).

### **Fascism in the Countryside**

Poulantzas also offers a brief discussion of the relation between fascism and the class struggle in the countryside. He argues that the rise of fascism corresponds to an economic crisis in the countryside. This is due to the general agricultural crisis and to the transition to monopoly domination in agriculture as well as industry. At the same time there was a deep crisis in the political field. This occurred because of the contradictions in the power bloc between agriculture and industry and because the poor peasantry and agricultural labourers had been betrayed by the social democrats after the Great War. The latter problem was aggravated by the failure of the maximalist tendency of the PSI to seek a class alliance with the peasantry in Italy and the parallel error of the KPD as a whole to seek such an alliance in Germany. In addition the generalised ideological crisis provided fertile ground for the demagogic appeals of fascism to ties of blood and soil, land distribution, the community of soil, and colonisation (*FD*, pp 278-80, 285-7, 291-4).

Poulantzas argues that fascism was able to disguise the basic contradiction between landed property and the popular rural classes through rallying their support against the capitalisation of agriculture as a whole. This was facilitated by the fact that the *ressentiment* of the rural petty bourgeoisie was directed against *urban* capital rather than landed interests. Thus throughout the rise of fascism the ties between fascism and big property were closer in the countryside than in the towns. In this sense Poulantzas sees rural fascism as a military and ideological movement with *direct* ties to large landowners and rich peasants. Thus one should not see it mainly as a movement of the rural petty bourgeoisie that served landed interests, if at all, only indirectly. Nonetheless Poulantzas denies that rural fascism on its own could not have provided the basis for reorganising hegemony and

securing the domination of monopoly capital. Instead he argues that the success of the fascist party was due primarily to its support from the urban classes and to the complicity of the state apparatus (*FD*, pp 281-2).

### **Fascism and the Working Class**

In discussing the complex relations between fascism and the working class, Poulantzas is particularly concerned with problems of anti-fascist strategy. He states that the rise of fascism corresponds to a significant crisis in the revolutionary organisations of the working class as well as to the more general impact of economic crises, the crisis of hegemony, and the generalised ideological crisis. This crisis in the vanguard organisations (*sic*) was already visible in the significant series of defeats suffered in the period of working class offensive in conditions when state power could have been seized (1918-19 in Germany and Italy) or when decisive long-term political gains short of revolution could have been won (1920 in Italy, 1923 in Germany). It was also evident in the failure of the working class to achieve the new, more limited objective of checking fascism during the initial period of bourgeois offensive before it reached the 'point of no return' (*FD*, pp 139-47, 169-71, 198-9).

In presenting the relation between fascism and the working class in these terms Poulantzas clearly implies that fascism received little support from the industrial proletariat. Indeed he emphasises that the mass of the working class remained loyal to their own unions and political parties in Italy and Germany alike. He correctly notes that fascist recruitment was basically confined to salaried staff, workers of recent peasant background in newly established factories, the unemployed (particularly among the young), and declassed lumpen elements (such as veteran soldiers) (*FD*, pp 144, 188-90, 219-20).

This largely non-existent working class support for fascism offers no difficulty for Poulantzas. Given the class nature of the proletariat, it is only to be expected. Moreover, to the extent that working class support did exist, Poulantzas explains it away. He suggests that it is due to the *contamination* of the working class with petty bourgeois ideological elements. These elements include anarcho-syndicalism, spontaneism, and the putschist cult of violence and stand in clear opposition to the allegedly essential working class ideology of

Marxism-Leninism (*FD*, pp 145-6, 176-7, 203-4). According to Poulantzas the real problem is located elsewhere. It concerns the need to explain how fascism managed to secure the *neutralisation* and *passivity* of the mass of the working class in the face of a mounting bourgeois offensive against its organisational bases and political gains. In part Poulantzas attributes this to a judicious combination of specific *ideological* appeals addressed to the working class (most notably in terms of nationalism and corporatism) and organised physical *repression* (typically conducted for its *ideological* effects) (*FD*, pp 165-6, 190-1, 222). But the principal responsibility for the failure to check fascism is placed elsewhere. For Poulantzas attributes the neutralisation of the working class largely to the nature of its economic and political organisations. Thus he refers to the *objective* class nature and role of social democracy in misleading and demobilising the masses and to the theoretical *deviations* and strategic *errors* of the vanguard organisations themselves.

When he wrote *FD* Poulantzas regarded political parties of the social democratic type as an ideological state apparatus whose role is to inculcate bourgeois ideology into the working class and to conduct a policy of class collaboration. During the rise of fascism the influence of social democracy on the working class was maintained and even extended (*FD*, pp 147, 151-3, 174-5, 176, 177-8). Poulantzas advanced various reasons for this. In particular he argues that a defensive step in the struggles of the working class is always accompanied by an upturn for social democracy. This is especially significant when such a step coincides, as it did in Italy and Germany, with a shift to the primacy of *economic* over political class struggle (*FD*, pp 156, 142-3, 154). Poulantzas also notes that the social democratic policy of class collaboration was supported by medium capital. For, threatened by the growing domination of monopoly capital, it was attempting to broaden its base to include the working class (*FD*, pp 93-4, 101, 124, 131, 154-5, 156, 172). Thus significant material concessions could be won through social democratic unions and parties. In turn this helped to consolidate working class support and to confirm the mass integrative role of social democracy (*FD*, pp 141, 152, 172-3, 180).

Nonetheless, as the offensive of monopoly capital gained momentum and the point of no return was reached, the social democratic policy of class collaboration resulted in a gradual capitulation to the fascist movement. This capitulation occurred in two different ways.

On the one hand there was a steady rightward drift as parties of the social democratic type pursued class compromise. In Germany this led to open support for bourgeois party governments as a 'lesser evil'. In Italy it led to the movement of Giolitti's liberals (whom Poulantzas typifies as social democratic) towards monopoly capital (*FD*, pp 107, 124-5, 126-7, 178-9). On the other hand there was a legalistic, 'wait-and-see' attitude. This studiously avoided the use of direct strike, paramilitary, or mass action for fear that this would provoke the authorities and/or the fascists into retaliation. This can be seen in the SPD's refusal to mobilise its armed workers' militia or to support a general political strike in Germany. In Italy it is seen in two areas. First, there was a pact between the socialists and fascists; and, second, the maximalist wing of the PSI suffered from the illusion that it could rely on the political neutrality of the state personnel to check the fascist movement or, in the last resort, could topple fascism themselves through a general strike (*FD*, pp 179, 205-6, 207-8). Finally Poulantzas notes that the social democrats in both countries were internally divided and thereby less able to check the rise of fascism (*FD*, pp 180, 205). He concludes that, although there was no direct collusion between fascism and social democracy, social democracy still bore great responsibility for the fascist conquest of power. This responsibility was all the more grave because the mass influence of social democracy was so great (*FD*, pp 156, 180, 207).

As regards the communist movement Poulantzas is particularly damning about its theoretical and strategic mistakes in the fascist period. Above all he criticises its economism, lack of a mass line, and neglect of class alliances (*FD*, pp 18, 39-40, 44-5, 46-51, 80-81, 157-65). He also notes that the German and Italian communist parties cut themselves off from the masses and suffered from deep internal divisions throughout the rise of fascism (*FD*, pp 144, 174, 175-6). In particular the PCI fell under the influence of the 'ultra-left' Bordigist tendency and ignored the basically correct Comintern mass line laid down in 1919-21. Instead the PCI pursued an abstentionist, sectarian, and blanquist line. At best this confined the PCI to an economic united front and at worst it involved a refusal of parliamentary and electoral activities, savage attacks on the PSI, and a minoritarian, insurrectionary view of the party (*FD*, pp 209-13).

In contrast the KPD adhered faithfully to the Comintern line. But this had meanwhile been marred by a fallacious view of the fascist period as one of working class offensive and a new approach to

alliance strategy based on the theory of 'social fascism'. Accordingly the KPD treated social democracy as the main enemy and concentrated all of its activities on attacking the SPD and social democratic trade unions to the detriment of the struggle against fascism. Moreover, lacking a mass line, even the struggle against social democracy was conducted as a conflict between organisations rather than a political contest for rank-and-file support. In addition to its neglect of mass struggle within the proletariat, the KPD also systematically ignored the poor and middle peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie as potential allies. Finally, despite the clear dangers of a fascist victory, the KPD kept its paramilitary organisation out of the fighting from 1931 onwards and totally neglected to build up an underground apparatus for use once the fascists took power. Its attempts to resist the Nazi regime in the first months were therefore doomed to failure (*FD*, pp 180-7). Overall, although he does not fully absolve the PCI from blame for the rise of Italian fascism (since it did, after all, adopt an inadequate anti-fascist strategy), Poulantzas concludes that the KPD's manifold errors meant that it bore a much heavier responsibility for the victory of national socialism.

### **The Rise of Fascism in Retrospect**

In summarising Poulantzas's views on the rise of fascism we have tried to bring out the complexities of his periodisation of the class struggle in Italy and Germany. Several points are worth stressing.

Fascism comes to power in weak links of the imperialist chain during the transition to dominance of monopoly capital. It serves the interests of the latter in the inter-imperialist struggle for hegemony as well as in the reorganisation of the domestic balance of forces. It acquires this role because normal means for the circulation of hegemony are blocked by complex political and ideological crises and because alternative exceptional means (such as military dictatorship or Bonapartism) are ruled out by the balance of forces (e.g., on the impossibility of military dictatorship, see *FD*, pp 72, 102-3, 110-11, 126, 337).

Given the specific conjuncture fascism is far from a simple tool of the power bloc (let alone monopoly capital in isolation). Indeed it enjoys a marked degree of autonomy. This derives above all from its strong representational, organisational, and ideological ties with the

petty bourgeoisie in revolt. For these ties transform the petty bourgeoisie into an authentic social force. As such it can enter an effective alliance with monopoly capital and act, at least initially, as an equal partner (*FD*, pp 244, 249-51). Subsequently the fascist party is subordinated to the state apparatus and the petty bourgeoisie is reduced to a supporting class of monopoly capital. But both party and class continue to have significant effects on the political dynamics of the fascist state. For there is an obvious contradiction in the fact that a movement that ultimately serves the interests of monopoly capital has a mass base in the petty bourgeoisie intervening as a genuine social force.

Poulantzas also investigates the link between fascism and other fractions and classes. He argues that fascism managed to neutralise the resistance and/or win the active support of other elements in the power bloc. It did so through a series of economic and political compromises in the development of its programme before and after the seizure of power (*FD*, pp 85, 87-8, 91-5, 96, 110-111, 126-7, 133). In addition he notes that fascism also gained support from rich and middle peasants, large landowners, and certain sections of the working class (*FD*, pp 188-90, 219, 280-3, 287-9, 293-4; cf. 1976\*, pp 93-4). Moreover, the special role of the family and educational ISAs in Italy and Germany meant that women and young people in all classes were particularly susceptible to fascist appeals (*FD*, pp 255-6; cf. 1976\*, pp 94-5).

More generally Poulantzas notes that the generalised ideological crisis and the influence of petty bourgeois ideological elements in other dominated classes enabled fascism to neutralise and inactivate the working class and rural lower classes so that they were at least passive by-standers, if not active adherents. In particular he refers to the anti-capitalist side of fascist ideology (especially as articulated by the 'left-wing' of fascism) and what he sees as the ideologically motivated tactic of fascist involvement in the economic struggles of the working class (*FD*, pp 145-6, 165-6, 190-1, 203-4). The nationalist appeals of fascism were also resonant because of the fractured national unity and weak international position of Italy and Germany (*FD*, pp 185, 255, 266 337; cf., 1976\*, pp 98-100). Nonetheless Poulantzas regards these ties as less important and argues elsewhere that the relation 'fascism/masses' is ultimately reducible to the relation 'fascism/petty bourgeoisie' (1976\*, p 94).

Finally we should note that Poulantzas is well aware how

important was the collusion of the state apparatus itself in fascism's conquest of power. In part this reflects the profound political disorientation of the power bloc and the specific weight of the petty bourgeoisie within the lower echelons of the state apparatus (*FD*, pp 73, 243, 327-8). It also reflects the dislocation between formal and real power (analogous to a situation of dual power in a revolutionary conjuncture) in the rise of fascism. This gave many opportunities for the fascist infiltration and dismemberment of the state apparatus. This was particularly clear in the infiltration of the administration, the police, the judiciary, and the army (notably in Germany through appeals to national greatness). It was also evident in the disarticulation of central and local government - with the latter providing important power bases prior to the assault on the central apparatus (*FD*, pp 63, 74, 110, 334-5, 337-9, 350-1).

Nonetheless, although he recognises the significant contribution made by these institutional fissures and the crisis of the liberal parliamentary order, Poulantzas insists that fascism can only be explained in the last instance in terms of the determining role of the class struggle (*FD*, pp 40, 63, and *passim*). This holds not only for the rise of fascism but also for the nature and functions of the fascist state itself.

### **Fascism as an Exceptional State**

In *PPSC* Poulantzas described the fascist state as a complex phenomenon that cannot be inserted into the typological framework of the capitalist state. For it is characterised by an articulation of the economic and political which differs from the theoretically typical form. Since it appears in a capitalist society it obviously displays many features of the capitalist state but it is still sufficiently divergent historically to place it on the *margin* of that type of state (*PPSC*, pp 293-4). This view is repeated in *FD*. For Poulantzas now describes fascism as being located at the *extreme limit* of the capitalist state (*FD*, p 57). But, whereas Poulantzas effectively ignored the fascist state in writing *PPSC*, he later considered it had become sufficiently threatening to warrant detailed examination. Thus *FD* tries to specify the fascist state in terms of three interrelated criteria: the distinction between 'normal' and 'exceptional' states, the general periodisation of the capitalist state, and the different forms of

exceptional regime. Since the first two criteria have already been discussed in chapter four, I will focus here on the *differentia specifica* of the fascist regime.

In *PPSC* Poulantzas considered the capitalist state from three interrelated viewpoints. He discussed the place of the political region in the structural matrix of capitalism, the distinctive juridico-political institutional structures of the capitalist state, and the specificity of the political class struggle in capitalist societies. The structural matrix is the same for fascist states in the period of monopoly capitalism as it is for normal states. Thus *FD* focuses on the peculiar institutional features of fascist dictatorships and on their distinctive function in the political class struggle. In this way Poulantzas maintains his interest in the juridico-political field and the problem of hegemony. Moreover, just as *PPSC* considered that the specific institutional features of the normal state were crucial in providing the framework for the democratic struggle for hegemony, *FD* suggests that the structures of the fascist state were instrumental in allowing monopoly capital to establish its hegemony in a period of political crisis. Indeed Poulantzas now argues quite explicitly that particular forms of state and regime correspond to determinate policies on the part of the bourgeoisie (*FD*, p 154). In this way he emphasises how closely institutional forms and political strategies are connected. This connection also informs our own discussion.

### **Reorganising the State under Fascism**

The fascist regime prosecutes an open war against the working class in order to nullify its earlier political and economic gains and massively to extend its exploitation. It is also involved in reorganising the power bloc and re-articulating the dominant ideology to the advantage of monopoly capital. These objectives call for a much enhanced relative autonomy and this is reflected in the specific institutional features of the fascist state. In particular Poulantzas refers to the centralisation of the RSA. Initially this occurs under the dominance of the fascist party and later under that of an all-pervasive political police system (*FD*, pp 111-2, 318-9, 339-43, 352-3). In tandem with the reorganisation of the RSA there is a substantial reduction in the freedom of ISAs to operate outside party and/or police control. This enables the ISAs to be used to legitimate

fascist mobilisation and repression as well as to rework the dominant ideology (*FD*, pp 315-6, 333). These specifically fascist features are combined with the general characteristics of the exceptional state.

Poulantzas argues that there is a definite rank order of dominance in the stabilised fascist state - political police, administration, and army (*FD*, p 332). The political police establishes its dominance through building parallel power networks. These enable it to infiltrate and supervise the other branches of the state. They permit the police to manage contradictions and conflicts within the state by rapid shifts in the transmission of power. This serves four key functions. It prevents non-hegemonic classes or fractions from entrenching themselves in fixed institutional bastions. It also avoids the political rigidity that would stem from the crystallisation of specific spheres of competence among branches of the state. It also helps to provide a counterweight to the dangers of bureaucratism once parliamentary control through elections and competitive parties is suspended. And, fourthly, it helps the hegemonic fraction to disguise its real power from other elements in the power bloc as well as from the masses (*FD*, pp 329-30).

These features are said to be particularly clear in the case of the SS in Germany. For the SS enjoyed an unlimited sphere of intervention (in the army, the administration, the judiciary, the Nazi Party, and the ISAs) and an (almost) unlimited scope of intervention (ranging from security matters to administrative and military questions) (*FD*, pp 341-3). In Italy the role of the political police (OCRA) and militia (MVSN) was admittedly less marked. But Poulantzas still insists that it occupied the dominant position in the stabilised fascist state (*FD*, p 353). In both cases he considers the political police to be a crucial element in the enhanced relative autonomy of the fascist state. In his view the police apparatus is not controlled by the party as a whole but is fully subordinated to the fascist *leadership*. It is the party leaders' preferred means of pursuing fascist policies and managing the balance of forces (*FD*, pp 343, 353).

The dominance of the political police is also associated with modifications in the juridical system and the role of the judiciary. For law in the fascist state (as in other forms of exceptional regime) ceases to regulate the relations among different parts of the state system. Nor does it any longer set limits to the state's interventions in the wider society. Instead the rule of law in civil and constitutional matters is displaced in favour of the cult of *il Duce* or the so-called

*Führerprinzip*. This breaks down the strict principle of bureaucratic hierarchy and spheres of competence in favour of arbitrary, *ad hoc* control by the political police. At the same time ideological soundness rather than objective guilt is emphasised in the administration of law. This reinforces the ideological role of the state in legitimating repression and reorganising hegemony (*FD*, pp 320-3, 343-4, 353-4).

Poulantzas ranks the army third in importance in the stabilised fascist state. This is because the actions of the police and fascist party confine it to a purely military role in contrast with its more general political and ideological role in the pre-fascist period (*FD*, pp 134, 333, 337, 341, 353). The administration continues to play an important role but it is subordinate to the political police in all areas except the management of the economy. The latter field of state intervention retains a significant degree of autonomy from police controls. This should not be taken to mean that the administration acts independently in the economic field. For Poulantzas notes that the conduct of economic policy is closely controlled by the fascist party leadership and is also subject to the influence of corporatist organisations dominated by monopoly capital (*FD*, pp 112-3, 134, 194-5, 221-2, 344). The relative insulation of the economic from the political police is also reflected in the field of business law. For this remains largely untouched by fascism and retains its formal, rational-legal qualities (*FD*, pp 323-4). More generally Poulantzas notes that the fascist state involves an expansion of job opportunities for the new petty bourgeoisie. This reflects the distinctive weight of the petty bourgeoisie in the fascist movement and is associated with an increase in bureaucratism (*FD*, pp 112, 257, 264, 267-8, 327-8).

### **The ISAs and Mass Mobilisation under Fascism**

Poulantzas also discusses the reorganisation of the ISAs. In common with other forms of exceptional state fascism suspends the electoral principle and eliminates the plural party system. This occurs because they are no longer effective means of mass integration and indoctrination into the dominant ideology (*FD*, pp 324-5). In particular it is essential for fascism to smash not only the revolutionary organisations of the working class but also the social democratic party apparatus. For the latter's role in integrating the

masses and diffusing bourgeois ideology depends on its continuing ability to secure significant 'economic-corporate' concessions for the working class. This is clearly unacceptable at a time when the economic contradictions besetting the dominant classes can only be resolved through increased exploitation (*FD*, pp 151-3). But this does not mean that fascism can rely solely on organised repression to control the working class. It must also establish new ideological apparatuses to absorb resistance and mobilise support. Poulantzas suggests that this essential task cannot fall to the fascist party itself since it is too closely identified - organisationally and ideologically - with the petty bourgeoisie. Thus he concludes that a major role in the ideological offensive of capital against the working class must fall to the fascist trade union apparatus (*FD*, pp 165-6, 195-7, 221-2).

Indeed Poulantzas suggests that, "although the bourgeois state can in principle do without an ideological apparatus of the 'party' type especially intended for the working class ... *it is absolutely incapable of doing without a 'trade union' type apparatus*" (*FD*, p 196, italics in original). The German Labour Front and the 'left' trade unionist wing of Italian fascism thus had major roles in integrating and subordinating the working class. But, since trade unions can only function in this way by acting as a channel for working class demands, the fascist leadership and the bourgeoisie always mistrusted them (*FD*, pp 196, 221). Thus, even if it had not been necessary to reorganise the ISA system to neutralise the resistance and/or mobilise the support of other classes and social categories, fascism would still have needed to adopt additional ideological measures directed at the working class. As it happened there was a general multiplication of ISAs under the control of the fascist party. There was a complex, interconnecting web of associations and organisations covering every class and social category.

In this context Poulantzas argues that the fascist state is based on the permanent mobilisation of the masses through fascist organisations. This mobilisation serves various purposes. In particular it helps to reorganise the dominant ideological cement in the wake of the generalised ideological crisis and to legitimate the increased repression required in an open 'war of manoeuvre' (*FD*, pp 316, 331). Besides the general multiplication of ISAs targetted on different groups there are several other major changes in the ideological sphere. In particular the relative independence of different ISAs one from another is reduced and the ISAs as a whole are

brought under much closer control by the RSA itself.

The fascist party has a major role in this context. For, although it loses its dominant position in the state proper once the fascist regime is stabilised, it still performs two critical ideological functions. It comes to act as a transmission belt for subordinating the ISAs to the RSA and it also serves as a vehicle for centralised coordination of the various ISAs in developing the new dominant ideology. Poulantzas admits that the political police exercises an important ideological function within the RSA itself and that it is always concerned with the ideological effects of its repressive activities within the wider society. But he emphasises that it is primarily through the *fascist party* itself that the ISAs are subordinated to the state (*FD*, pp 333, 340-1, 345-6).

Another distinctive feature of the fascist regime is the role of the mass media (radio, press, and cinema). This reinforces the role of the party within each ISA. It enables the fascist party to communicate directly with the people and to orchestrate their ideological mobilisation from above (*FD*, pp 333, 345-6, 354-5). In addition the regime seeks to infiltrate society at the base by securing at least one 'representative' within each family and by fostering a distinctive fascist family spirit and mode of conduct (*FD*, pp 255, 333, 346-7; cf., 1976\*, pp 94-5). Conversely the roles of the traditional educational system and the religious apparatus are demoted as other means of indoctrination become more important. Their role as bastions of power within the state is thereby undermined and non-hegemonic classes and fractions are further weakened (*FD*, pp 347-9, 354-6). Overall Poulantzas concludes that "*party, family, and propaganda* are the trinity dominating the ideological state apparatus under fascism" (*FD*, p 333, italics in original).

Elsewhere Poulantzas relates the ideological appeal of fascism to its subsequent institutionalisation. He argues that fascism was able to take account of a series of deep popular aspirations more or less specific to each class, fraction, or social category. Among other examples he cites the themes of workers' self-management, socialisation of property, and the ties of blood and soil in the face of urban exploitation. This was associated with a definite dislocation and decentralisation of state apparatuses according to the classes, fractions, and categories to which they principally addressed themselves (1976\*, p 102).

Thus Poulantzas writes that:

"from the *family* to the *school*, to the *youth organisations*, to the *cultural apparatuses* and the *church*, from the fascist *parties* to the fascist *unions*, from the *administration* (the bureaucratic apparatus of the state) to the *army*, from the *SA* to the *SS* (nazism) and to the *political police* (Italian militia), one actually discovers, under the unifying umbrella of the leadership principle and its discourse, a prodigiously contradictory tangle of several regional ideological sub-ensembles: this results in the constant doubling and parallelism of the apparatuses, networks, and transmission belts of power and gives rise to the internal contradictions of fascism' (1976b, p 103, italics in original).

Because different classes, fractions, and categories felt they could use one or more state apparatuses to advance their own interests within fascism, they could be mobilised in its support. But at the same time they would work through these apparatuses to demand the implementation of 'real' fascism as they had understood it in contradistinction to its actual developmental tendencies (1976\*, p 104). Here one might draw a parallel with changes in the RSA. The manifold infiltration of the RSA by the political police simply transforms contradictions *among* branches of the state into contradictions *within* each branch (*FD*, p 329). In the same way the fascisation of the ISAs merely shifts the channels and form of class conflict in the ideological domain. In all cases the management of these internal contradictions depends on the flexible use of parallel power networks and the constant switching of the transmission belts of power (*FD*, pp 329-30). But these contradictions still leave their mark in the state. For the constant changes in the balance of forces require constantly changing concessions to different subordinate groups as the price of consolidating the long-term domination of monopoly capital.

### **How Fascist Regimes Served Monopoly Capital**

Despite the need for compromise and concession on the part of fascism, Poulantzas nonetheless argues that its prime function was to encourage the economic, political, and ideological domination of monopoly capital (*FD*, pp 20-21, 87-90, 111, 135). This occurred

through the restructuring of the state system (including the ISAs) and the reorganisation of the balance of forces. In this way earlier obstacles to monopoly domination were removed and specific measures to the advantage of monopoly capital were adopted.

In the *economic* field this is most evident in two spheres. It can be seen in the development of the war economy (which Poulantzas appears to link to the inter-imperialist struggle for hegemony) and it can be seen in the massive extension of capitalist relations of production into the countryside under the dominance of big capital (*FD*, pp 28, 31, 32, 92, 99, 117-120, 283-4, 289, 294-5). These changes were associated with shifts in the form and content of state economic intervention. Poulantzas suggests that Italy and Germany had skipped the form of the liberal state but adds that the generalised intervention of the pre-fascist state was not sufficiently favourable to monopoly capital. Thus the fascist state concentrates its intervention on big capital more directly than before (*FD*, pp 29, 34). In relation to Germany, for example, Poulantzas writes that "everything contributed to this end - forced cartelization, price stabilization, the denationalization of banks and enterprises, wages policy, fiscal and budgetary policy, public works and state requisitions, and, above all, the war economy" (*FD*, p 95). More generally he suggests that other fractions of capital gained despite their increasing subordination to monopoly capital. For fascism presided over an advance in the capitalist forces of production through industrial development, technological innovation, and an increase in the productivity of labour. In this sense fascism could not be said to be economically retrograde (*FD*, p 96).

Poulantzas also argues that the working class was by no means the principal economic victim of fascism. Indeed it gained from the absorption of unemployment and an increase in real wages (despite the increase in economic exploitation). The role of the fascist unions was also important here. This did not mean that real wages recovered to their former high points (1921 in Italy, 1930 in Germany) and the increase was reversed with the outbreak of depression in Italy and war in Germany. But Poulantzas nonetheless suggests that increased real wages helped to neutralise working class resistance to fascism. In addition the fascist policy of deliberately accentuating the wages hierarchy also divided and confused the working class (*FD*, pp 167, 192, 226; cf. 1976c, pp 97-8).

In contrast to the fascist economic approach to the working class is

the marked impoverishment and exploitation of agricultural workers. This class had the dubious distinction of being the principal economic victim of fascism. Poulantzas indicates that the traditional petty bourgeoisie in countryside and town alike also suffered from the growing economic domination of monopoly capital (*FD*, pp 167, 283, 290, 295). Likewise, although they enjoyed increased job opportunities within the state and industry, the new petty bourgeoisie also experienced a decline in living standards (*FD*, pp 167, 256-7, 263-4, 267). Moreover, although fascism initially presided over a forward rush in the development of production, Poulantzas also emphasises that it culminated in war and the prodigious destruction of the productive forces (*FD*, pp 98-100).

The reorganisation of the *state system* secured the political domination of monopoly capital by establishing the conditions for the 'structural determination' of its hegemony within the power bloc and over the people. This occurred in several steps and through various institutional changes. In particular Poulantzas refers to the subordination or liquidation of SAs that provided bastions of power for other fractions and classes. In this connection he mentions the army, the church, the Italian monarchy, the social democratic ISA, the local government system, and, eventually, the fascist party itself (*FD*, pp 28, 91, 111-112, 123-4, 133, 151-4, 307-8, 333, 336-9, 341, 348, 351, 355). In addition he notes how the stabilised fascist state was dominated by the political police apparatus as the means through which the fascist leadership exerted power on behalf of monopoly capital. These changes were also coupled with a reduction in the mutual independence of the ISAs and their subordination to the RSA through the agency of the fascist party. At the same time Poulantzas suggests that the representatives of monopoly capital increasingly penetrated into the state system through the fascist leadership, corporatist organisations, and the state economic apparatus (*FD*, pp 112-3, 134, 326-7, 342, 344). He also implies that fascism managed to resolve the twin problems of economic and national unity from which both Italy and Germany had suffered hitherto. It achieved this through the dissolution of residual feudal relations of production and the centralisation of state power at the expense of local and provincial governments (*FD*, pp 27, 30, 33-4, 90, 115, 123, 339, 351-2).

In the *ideological* field, fascism secured the domination of big capital in two main ways. It rearticulated the dominant ideology in an

imperialist direction and it reorganised the ISA system. In particular Poulantzas implies that the fascist programme provided the means to reconcile the interests of medium capital and landed property with those of monopoly capital so that the latter could establish its own hegemony within the power bloc (*FD*, p 87). At the same time the populist and nationalist elements of fascist ideology and the various fascist ISAs oriented to the popular masses helped to consolidate the hegemony of monopoly capital over the people. Indeed Poulantzas argues that the failed Risorgimento in Italy and the bourgeois 'revolution' imposed from above in Germany meant that the national unity proper to capitalism was far from realisation when fascism came to power. This enabled the fascist parties to present themselves as champions of national unity and to portray Mussolini as the continuer of Garibaldi and Hitler as the heir of Bismarck. They were also able to exploit ambiguities concerning this nationalism among certain popular classes (especially the rural masses and petty bourgeoisie). Moreover this emphasis on national unity could be linked with the imperialist aggression of monopoly capital through reference to the place of Italy and Germany in the imperialist chain. This is evident in the Italian Fascist theme of 'proletarian nations' or Nazi complaints about the Versailles Treaty and reparations (*FD*, pp 129-30, 190-1, 252, 255; cf. 1976b, pp 98-100).

### **The Resistance to Fascism**

None of this should be taken to mean that Poulantzas sees fascism as enjoying unqualified and universal popular support. Indeed he stresses the 'exemplary heroism' of numerous unknown militants in resisting the Nazi regime and also notes that the resistance of the Italian working class to fascism was stronger and more enduring than the early efforts of the German working class (*FD*, pp 188, 219). But he also insists that fascism had a definite popular impact (albeit with peaks and troughs of support) and that this played a decisive role in the stabilisation of the fascist regimes in Italy and Germany (1976\*, pp 88-89, 95, and *passim*; cf., 1967\*, *passim*, and *CD*, p 71). This is why the question of the most appropriate anti-fascist strategy is so important for Poulantzas. For it affects the labour movement's capacities to check the rise of fascism and to fragment its support when in power.

## The Theoretical Critique offered in *FD*

On a historical level *FD* is structured around a critique of three alternative accounts of fascism. These, as one might expect from someone who is politically engaged, are written from other leftwing viewpoints. Firstly, there is the Comintern 'stamocap' thesis that fascism involves a fusion between the state and monopoly capital to the exclusion of other dominant fractions and classes. A second account suggests that fascism represents the political dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie acting as a third force. Poulantzas describes this as the 'social democratic' thesis. He also considers the recurrent view that fascism is a Bonapartist phenomenon corresponding to a general or catastrophic equilibrium between capital and labour (*FD*, pp 83-5). Poulantzas suggests that each of these accounts errs in its one-sided treatment of one or another feature of fascism.

Thus Poulantzas claims that the 'stamocap' thesis exaggerates the historical function of fascism in consolidating the economic, political, and ideological domination of monopoly capital within the power bloc and over the people by suggesting that this is achieved to the exclusion of other fractions. Likewise the 'social democratic' thesis overemphasises the essentially petty bourgeois character of the initial social basis of fascism during its rise to power and first phase of rule. It then compounds the error by generalising this class character to the very different period of fascist stabilisation. Thirdly, the Bonapartist thesis absolutises the extensive *relative* autonomy enjoyed by the fascist state in its work of social reorganisation for and on behalf of capital. It thereby suggests that the fascist state gained sufficient autonomy to act against the long-term interests of monopoly capital.

Naturally Poulantzas disagrees with all three approaches - although his objections are primarily theoretical rather than empirical. He himself tries to steer a middle course through these approaches. Thus, whilst criticising their one-sidedness, he also attempts to reveal their roots in the particular conjuncture to which fascism corresponds. This involves a transition to the overall domination of monopoly capitalism in the context of a political crisis that prevents monopoly capital from establishing its hegemony through normal democratic politics. This indicates the need for an exceptional state that can only be constructed through a mass movement such as fascism. But the petty bourgeois basis of this movement does not mean that it becomes the dominant class when fascism is consolidated (*FD*, *passim*).

## On the Relative Autonomy and Class Functions of Fascism

In criticising these alternative accounts Poulantzas is on strong historical as well as theoretical ground in relation to the 'stamocap' thesis and the view that fascism is reducible merely to a dictatorship of the petty bourgeoisie. But was he also right to reject more recent versions of the Bonapartist thesis? Whatever the (de)merits of Thalheimer, Gramsci, Bauer, and other pre-war advocates of a Bonapartist account, recent studies suggest that, at least in the German case, the stabilised fascist state gained sufficient political independence to harm the long-term interests of capital (Poulantzas himself cites Schweitzer (1964) and Mason (1968); see also the magisterial study of Broszat (1981)). Indeed it is precisely in the conceptual field of 'relative autonomy' that Poulantzas has made his own that his account of fascism is at its most vulnerable.

In particular Poulantzas implies that fascism did actually solve the problems confronting monopoly capital in Italy and Germany. This approach can only be sustained through two dubious techniques. Firstly, Poulantzas emphasises the *global* political function of fascism. Thus measures against the immediate 'economic-corporate' interests of monopoly capital can be justified in terms of their contribution to an equilibrium of compromise favourable to its *political* domination. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with such an hypothesis. But it must be substantiated conjuncturally. Otherwise the concept of a global political function operates in a purely subsumptionist manner and substitutes a functionalist approach for concrete analyses. Secondly, Poulantzas curtails his analyses before the real contradictions in the management of the war economy and the dynamics of the fascist state become significant. Indeed, although he correctly identifies the war economy as an essential element in consolidating the economic domination of monopoly capital, Poulantzas fails to explore its management and development in any real detail. But it is precisely here that disputes over the 'primacy of politics' and the relative autonomy of the fascist state have occurred and could perhaps have been resolved.

The Nazi party-state did score some initial successes in restoring capital accumulation in the German economy and in consolidating an 'informal empire' in the Balkans. But the subsequent development of the peace-time war economy also introduced new structural disequilibria into the economic system (see, for example,

Farquarson, 1983, pp. 137-51; Overy, 1982, *passim*; Simpson, 1969; Mason, 1975). In contrast the more muted autonomy of the Italian fascist regime appears to have been compatible with the 'forward rush' of capitalism that Poulantzas suggests occurred in both societies. This argument is central to Gregor's account of *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* (1979) and is also sustained in other studies (e.g., Sarti, 1971, and Aquarone, 1969).

A major problem in assessing Poulantzas's economic arguments is that he effectively halts his analysis with the stabilisation of fascism. He dates this at 1925-6 for the Italian case and 1933-4 for the German. He then dismisses the subsequent contradictions between big capital and fascism (which are nowhere examined in detail) as being merely the effects of the juggling 'game' played by fascism in managing the unstable equilibrium of compromise (*FD*, p 113). Likewise the eventual destruction of productive forces and military defeat suffered by fascism are simply treated as an effect of imperialism (*FD*, pp 98-9). Poulantzas makes no attempt to establish whether alternative foreign (economic, military, diplomatic) policies could have averted such destruction and defeat and won a more secure position of international hegemony or domination for Italian or German monopoly capital. In this respect Poulantzas operates with an unreconstructed Leninist approach that sees territorial wars of redivision as an inevitable outcome of imperialism. This is also reflected in his reductionist assumption that the aggressive imperialist elements of fascist ideology are a necessary ideological expression of the interests of monopoly capital (*FD*, pp 104-5, 128, and especially pp 252-3). In neither case does Poulantzas consider alternative imperialist strategies (such as those developed in the current phase of internationalisation of production) or alternative imperialist ideologies.

In discussing the fascist state, therefore, Poulantzas remains firmly committed to his view that 'relative autonomy' is ultimately functional for capital accumulation and bourgeois political domination. He correctly noted the *coincidence* of interests between monopoly capital and fascism but did not conclude that this coincidence might prove provisional and unstable. This leads him to ignore the continuing dynamic of the fascist state after its stabilisation and to suggest that it attained just that degree of autonomy and unity necessary to secure the hegemony of monopoly capital. Thus, whilst demonstrating that fascism initially served the interests of monopoly

capital, Poulantzas denies that 'primacy of politics' subsequently operated against these interests. He therefore rejects evidence about the dysfunctionality of the internal contradictions of the fascist state. And he also suggests that the stabilised fascist state actually succeeded in resolving the various crises that plagued the preceding period.

### **On the Unity of the Fascist State**

Similar problems occur in his analysis of the class unity of the fascist state. Here Poulantzas claims that the reorganisation of the state system under the dominance of the political police secures its reunification after a phase when it had been more or less seriously dismembered (*FD*, pp 333-5). At the same time he recognises the extreme degree of duplication of parallel power networks and transmission belts and argues that the 'internal contradictions' of the exceptional state acquire great significance (*FD*, p 329; cf. 1976\*). Although he insists on the ultimate functionality of this duplication and its ultimate transcendence in a distinctive form of unity, Poulantzas provides no evidence to support this claim nor could he do so.

Indeed recent studies of the Nazi state indicate that it was exactly this duplication of parallel power networks and transmission belts that facilitated the increasing primacy of politics to the detriment not only of the capital but also to the long-term survival of the regime itself. Thus Broszat argues that:

"the Third Reich was only able to conduct systematic and successful policies as long as its radical ideological momentum and the antagonism deriving from this were restrained and contained by the conservative, authoritarian elements of the administration, armed forces, and business, who were bent on preserving their state and power, and as long as the regime's foreign policy kept within the framework of traditional nationalist aims" (M. Broszat, 1982, p xiv).

In many respects Broszat's account of the Nazi state from 1934 to 1937/8 confirms *FD*'s general propositions about the *political* flexibility, increased efficiency, and enhanced power of the fascist state during its second, stabilised phase. Neither Broszat nor

Poulantzas give due weight to the fact that this "jungle of competing and overlapping economic organisations, interest groups and authorities, which was essential for preserving the political power of the Nazi leadership, ... precluded effective economic planning and administration" (Mason, 1969, p 85). But Broszat does indicate the emergence of a *third phase* in 1937/8. In this period the state was continually restructured as the Hitler regime shifted to an expansionist foreign and war policy and implemented more radical measures to realise the National Socialist Order at home. This phase involved a marked proliferation of apparatuses, special powers, *ad hoc* authorities, etc., and produced an increasingly particularistic, fragmented and disunified system of state power. The driving force of this state came from an ever more radical pursuit of National Socialist ideological goals (Broszat, 1982, pp 262-360; Bracher, 1973, pp 423-50, 506-11; Caplan, 1977, pp 89-90, 95-6).

In this sense the 'primacy of politics' in the management of the war economy found its institutional support in a decisive restructuring of the Nazi state itself. It is certainly true that this third phase coincides with the increasing dominance of the political police. It is also true that this occurred, as Poulantzas indicated, at the expense of the party. But it also occurred, contrary to Poulantzas's suggestion, at the expense of the political representatives - Nazi and non-Nazi alike - of the power bloc inside the state (cf. Caplan, 1977).

Poulantzas also misinterprets the nature of the fascist state in Italy in assimilating it to the Nazi regime. In particular he exaggerates the role of the political police (an emphasis which seems to embarrass Poulantzas himself) and also sidesteps the issue of the fascist state's political class unity. The PNF was certainly subordinated to the state apparatus but this did not mean that the political police itself was dominant branch of the RSA. Most recent studies suggest instead that this position fell by default to the traditional bureaucratic apparatus (see Sabbatucci (1979), Aquarone (1965), *passim*, and Aquarone (1964), and Lyttelton (1973), pp 269-30\*.<sup>1</sup> But his attempts to attribute the same structural pattern to the German and Italian fascist regimes are very hesitant (e.g., *FD*, pp 14, 350, 352-6). Indeed Poulantzas himself concedes that the independence of the various branches of the RSA was greater, the influence of the political police less pervasive, the role of 'regular courts' more

significant, the multiplication of apparatuses less evident and the relative autonomy of the various ISAs less severely suppressed, than in the allegedly archetypal case of Nazism (*FD*, pp 353-6).

At the same time he firmly rejects any suggestion that the Italian fascist state can be described as merely a traditional 'bureaucratic' dictatorship or treated as an 'authoritarian' regime in contrast with the 'totalitarian' character of the Nazi state (*FD*, p 354). Poulantzas is quite right to insist upon the continued importance of the PNF as a dynamic element in the Italian state. But, even if the 'authoritarian-totalitarian' distinction represents them in an ideologically distorted manner, it does capture significant differences between Italian and German fascism (see, for example, Linz, 1978, *passim*).

This raises more general problems about the criteria Poulantzas employs in his analysis of different forms of state and regime. Indeed one wonders why he did not adopt his earlier theoretical strategem of suggesting that actual states are characterised by a 'combination' of state forms (*PPSC*, p 144). Even in *FD* he argues that Spanish fascism is a complex form which also belongs to the category of fascism 'but which is definable firstly as a military dictatorship' (*FD*, p 13). It would have strengthened his argument to apply the same argument to Italian fascism and consider it as a combination of fascism and traditional 'bureaucratic' dictatorship.

## Some Unanswered Questions

It appears that Poulantzas is eager to emphasise the functions of fascist regimes for capitalism and to play down its dysfunctions. It is surely more appropriate to consider the exceptional state as a crisis form of state. We could then consider how the crises to which it corresponds are displaced or transformed during the course of its construction, stabilisation, and normalisation. We could also consider how the ways in which one set of crises is resolved determine the form and content of subsequent crises and how they will be resolved in turn (cf. Debray, 1973, pp 147-8).

It would have been particularly interesting to consider at least the following five questions.

1. Did the resolution of the crisis of representation through the liquidation of non-fascist parties generate new representational

crises during the suggested 'third phase' of the Nazi state? To what extent did a similar pattern occur in Italy?

2. Did the resolution of the ideological crisis through the displacement of the erstwhile dominant ideology through petty-bourgeois ideology provide a continuing source of contradictions in Italian and German fascism alike?
3. Did the resolution of the institutional crisis of the liberal state through the suspension of rational-legal forms in favour of the *Führerprinzip* and 'arbitrariness' contribute to the subsequent fragmentation and dismemberment of the Nazi state? And to what extent did a similar pattern occur in Italy?
4. Did the resolution of the economic contradictions within the power bloc produce new structural disequilibria in the management of the 'peacetime war economy'?
5. Given that fascism liquidated independent working class organisations but also installed its own trade union type apparatus, did the fascist commitment to butter as well as guns provoke economic, political, and ideological contradictions?

In *CD* Poulantzas argues that the military dictatorships fell because struggles at a distance from the state intensified their internal contradictions. Mason deploys similar arguments for Nazism. He writes that:

"the Nazi party had been brought to power to end unemployment, and in the later 1930s the government proved unable to make the great reappraisal and reorganisation necessary to cope with its success; secondly, the labour shortage could not be met by economic contraction since this would have slowed down rearmament; thirdly, the built-in need of the totalitarian regime to obtain the constant loyalty and continuous adulation of those classes of society which had most reason to hate it, disabled it from effective intervention in the labour market until internal crisis had made such intervention essential and external crisis had provided the necessary justification" (Mason, 1969, p 85).

Mason concluded that "the only 'solution' open to the Nazi regime for the structural tensions and crises produced by dictatorship and rearmament was more dictatorship and rearmament, then expansion, then war and terror, then plunder and enslavement"

(1969, p 86; cf. idem., 1975, pp 176-88). In short, far from resolving the crises that brought National Socialism to power, its policies seem only to have displaced them. The role of popular resistance and passivity and the inability of the fascist regime to develop a coherent strategy towards the popular masses seems to have played a major role in precipitating the move to a war which ultimately ended in the defeat of fascism. It is not implausible to attribute this defeat in part to the internal contradictions that made it difficult to introduce a planned war economy and encouraged the fascist state to enter an unwinnable war. Because he neglects such possibilities Poulantzas illegitimately reinforces the case for the functionality of fascism.

There are occasional glimpses of these questions in *FD* but they never constitute a decisive problem for Poulantzas. Thus we find the odd reference to the fact that the existence of the fascist party and fascist ideology were crucial factors in the relative autonomy of the fascist state form monopoly capital. There is also the one-off concession that 'fascist policy in the end comes to antagonise big capital' (*FD*, p 113). But the general thrust of his account is functionalist in character and his general conclusion is that fascism secured the conditions for monopoly domination.

### **In Defense of Poulantzas**

In criticising Poulantzas's analysis of the fascist regime in Italy and Germany we have inadvertently neglected the merits of his interpretation of the rise of fascism. It is certainly 'rich in theoretical determinations' (cf. Laclau, 1977, p 81; and Caplan, 1977, p 98). It also provides a necessary corrective to more facile accounts from a Marxist or institutionalist perspective. Poulantzas deals with such matters as the weak links in the imperialist chain, the contradictions of the transition to dominance of monopoly capital, the periodisation of class struggle and consequent rejection of general or catastrophic crises of equilibrium as explanatory factors, the specificity of the political crises to which fascism is one solution, the generalised ideological crisis, the strategic failures of the communist movement, the antithesis between social democracy and the fascist party as ISAs, and the periodisation of the growth of fascism. All of these analyses are insightful and illuminating even where one would want to quarrel with particular theoretical emphases or empirical illustrations.

Recent research has tended to confirm much of Poulantzas's interpretation of the rise of fascism and provided further support for his focus on the dual crisis of hegemony and the ideological crisis confronting the power bloc. More generally Poulantzas's analysis of the rise of fascism develops an approach that breaks with his earlier structuralist pretensions and places the class struggle and specific conjunctures at the heart of his interpretation. Here he also adumbrates a relational approach to class interests and power that is developed more fully in *SPS*. This is particularly clear in his discussion of how the power of monopoly capital depends on the strategic errors of the communist movement and the class nature of social democracy. It also emerges in his analysis of how the interests of the working class shift according to particular steps in the class struggle.

### Concluding Remarks

The emphasis on theoretical and strategic criticism in *FD* means that Poulantzas separates the development of his general propositions from the presentation of historical argument. This leads to an unfortunate lack of integration between theoretical and historical materials. Thus Rabinbach refers to an 'unwieldy dualism' of structuralist method and historical material and Caplan notes that 'extreme theoretical precision is combined with crude empirical inaccuracy' (Rabinbach, 1976, p 148; Caplan, 1977, p 84). Since its fragmented historical narrative is intended mainly to illustrate general theoretical propositions, *FD* cannot really be described as a serious historiographical work. This made it quite difficult to reconstruct anything like a coherent account of Poulantzas's views on the rise of fascism and its subsequent development as an economic, political, and ideological regime. This is most clear in the case of Italy (to which Poulantzas devotes less attention) but also holds true for Nazism in Germany (which he regards as the quintessential illustration of fascism).

However, *FD*'s essentially theoretical character does not mean that we can disregard any historical errors, inconsistencies, or weaknesses in assessing it. This would imply that the theoretical and strategic issues to which Poulantzas addresses himself are valid irrespective of their relevance to specific historical situations. Yet, if Poulantzas

overlooks significant contradictions in fascist regimes, say, or misunderstands the fall of the military dictatorships, his basic theoretical and strategic approach could well be responsible. This would make it irrelevant in other conjunctures. Thus, although we should not concentrate on his historiographical weaknesses at the expense of more general theoretical and strategic issues, we must still consider how well Poulantzas tackles particular circumstances and events. Unfortunately, there are serious difficulties here in both *FD* and (as we shall see later) in *CD*.

In particular Poulantzas's residually structuralist approach to the fascist state prevents him from subjecting fascism in power to the same detailed, conjunctural analyses that he provides for the rise of fascism (Caplan, 1977, p 95). Even in the latter area, where Poulantzas is at his strongest, he tends to fall into a voluntarist or economist strategic approach. Thus in large part he attributes the emergence of fascism to failures of communist strategy - implying that a change in strategy would have been sufficient to avoid fascism - at the same time as arguing that the economism, lack of mass line, etc. affecting these failures was somehow an inevitable product of the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union - implying an economist reduction of these errors (cf. Bensaid, 1973, pp 267-81; Rabinbach, 1976, pp 168-70).

In this sense it is difficult to know what strategic conclusions to draw from *FD*. Both his insistence that there was a 'point of no return' and his economic account of the origins of economism in the Comintern suggest that fascism was inevitable. But, in defending Lenin's theses on the United Front and Dimitroff's views on the anti-fascist Popular Front, Poulantzas appears to argue that a correct political line would have staved off fascism. These issues are, of course, beside the point today. *FD* was written to criticise the survival of Comintern errors in the current line of orthodox communist parties and to argue for a mass line, united front, and popular front in the struggle against dictatorships in Mediterranean Europe. Thus we should postpone further discussion of the strategic (as opposed to theoretical) implications of *Fascism and Dictatorship* until we have considered Poulantzas's views on the military dictatorships of Spain, Greece, and Portugal.

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<sup>4</sup> Lyttelton suggests that the fascist state was a police state but also argues that the political police was controlled by the traditional bureaucracy rather than the party. Thus, although his account provides some support for Poulantzas, this support is heavily qualified.

# 9

## **Military Regimes and Anti-Dictatorial Struggles**

The Greek military dictatorship installed in April 1967 raised crucial political and strategic questions for Poulantzas. Yet these questions were initially separated (along with his political involvement in the anti-dictatorial struggle) from his more general theoretical interests. Later Poulantzas came to see the intimate connection between such questions and more general problems in Marxist state theory. Indeed he admitted that conflicts over political strategy within the Greek left were premised on very different conceptions of the state (1979a, p 197). Two further events gave fresh impetus to his theoretical and strategic reflections. For the Greek regime surprised many on the left by collapsing without any significant direct involvement of the popular masses. Conversely, at more or less the same time, the so-called 'Portuguese Revolution' provided a living laboratory for socialist and communist strategies in a European context. This prompted a lively debate outside Portugal about the course of its struggles for democracy and socialism and their lessons. This was particularly significant in the light of the emerging trend towards Eurocommunism.

Poulantzas analysed the *Crisis of the Dictatorships* to establish the links between political strategy and general state theory. Moreover, on the occasion of its re-publication in 1976 and with the benefit of another year's developments in Greece, Portugal, and Spain, he added some further thoughts on the anti-dictatorial struggle and the struggle for democratic socialism. In particular Poulantzas could comment on the collapse of the Portuguese Revolution following the debacle of the November putsch in 1975 by leftwing elements in the Armed Forces Movement. This gave the two editions of *CD* an immediacy lacking in his work on fascism. In this chapter I discuss

the general argument of *CD* and relate it to Poulantzas's more general views on political strategy.

### **First Thoughts on the Greek Coup**

Poulantzas raised the question of popular struggles against the military dictatorship in his first published comment on the Greek *coup d'etat*. He conceded that the coup had support from the military itself, professional politicians, and the petty bourgeois personnel of the overblown state apparatus. But he rejected the view, widely held on the Greek left, that the military regime could be described as a fascist dictatorship. For it had no popular base, mobilised through a distinctive party and ideology, which would justify its description as fascist. Poulantzas also denied that the general equilibrium of forces necessary for a Bonapartist regime existed in Greece.

At the same time Poulantzas believed that the coup could be consolidated without having acquired a mass base. For it could cultivate support among the personnel of the state so that they became an authentic, independent social force. Thus reliance on 'passive resistance' to deny the military any mass support might not be enough to topple the colonels. Instead Poulantzas called for *active* popular resistance to the regime. This should be combined with an absolute boycott of any organisation that it might create in an effort to attract support from the masses (1967\*, *passim*). Poulantzas does not define what forms this popular resistance should take. But later writings do give some indication of his views at that time. *CD* is particularly interesting here because Poulantzas admits that the fall of the Greek dictatorship did not conform to his earlier expectations (*CD*, pp 7, 9, 73, 78, 87; cf. 1979a, p 197).

### **Dependent Industrialisation in Southern Europe**

In *CD* Poulantzas addresses himself to three interrelated questions. He considers the class character of the military dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece as societies undergoing a process of dependent industrialisation; he examines the various causes of their collapse; and he discusses the nature of the process of

democratisation and its relation to anti-monopoly and national liberation struggles in dependent capitalist systems. Let us consider his answers.

Poulantzas begins by locating these countries in the current phase of imperialism. Although all three countries had long ago embarked upon their own process of primitive accumulation (whether through the exploitation of colonies or the Eastern Mediterranean basin), they later faced various obstacles which blocked further endogenous accumulation and made them dependent on more advanced metropolitan capitals. This was associated with a process of dependent, dominated industrialisation from the 1960's onwards which occurred under the aegis of foreign capital and at the latter's instigation (*CD*, pp 10, 15, 19, 54). In this context foreign investment was primarily concerned to exploit local labour and to secure staging posts for the exploitation of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies and the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Among the distinctive features of dependent industrialisation, Poulantzas mentions the low level of technology, low levels of productivity, the expatriation of profits, a growing volume of manufactured products in the dependent economy's exports, the export of migrant labour and the destruction of pre-capitalist forms of production (*CD*, pp 13-18, 24, 28, 41, 69-70, 115). He also argues that the three dictatorships all favoured this path of dependent development because of the forces (notably a comprador-agrarian bloc or 'oligarchy' in Portugal and Spain and a dominant comprador capital in Greece) whose interests they represented (*CD*, pp 12, 19-20, 47, 50, 56, 104).

At first American capital predominated in this process but later there was growing EEC investment. This produced significant inter-imperialist contradictions (albeit within the framework of continued American hegemony) as the USA and EEC competed for raw materials, export opportunities, protected markets, staging posts, etc. (*CD*, pp 25-30). This encouraged the polarisation of different fractions of the dominant classes towards either US or EEC capital. Disputes also developed within the state apparatus over such issues as Atlanticism or independence in diplomatic and military affairs (*CD*, pp 29-33). Together with other divisions among the dominant classes, this destabilised hegemony in the power blocs and contributed to the emergent political crisis of the dictatorships (*CD*, p 30). Normally this would have provoked US intervention in the internal politics of these regimes to manage the crisis favourably to

American interests. The unstable Soviet-American balance of power in the Mediterranean region and the Arab-Israeli conflict served to discourage such intervention. This novel situation enlarged the space for popular struggles as well as for conflicts within the power blocs (CD, pp 39-40).

### **The Power Bloc in Dependent States**

Poulantzas then discussed how the process of dependent industrialisation prompted growing disequilibrium in the power bloc. In particular it promoted a *domestic bourgeoisie* which is tendentially differentiated from both the comprador and 'national bourgeois' fractions. It is unlike the comprador bourgeoisie because it is not completely subordinated to foreign capital and unlike the national bourgeoisie because it is not completely independent of foreign capital. Thus, although it has significant contradictions with foreign capital and enjoys a margin of manoeuvre not available to the comprador fraction, it cannot participate in (let alone lead) an anti-imperialist struggle that might culminate in real national independence (CD, pp 41-45, 58). More generally its hegemonic capacities are limited by its own internal divisions, its weak economic base (due to its industrial dependency), and the *class-wide* legacy of weak political organisation and limited ideological domination (CD, pp 44-48, 51, 58, 71, 128).

Indeed, whenever the domestic bourgeoisie attempted to enhance its economic importance, it found that the dictatorships typically favoured the comprador fraction tied to US capital. This encouraged the domestic bourgeoisie to distance itself from the dictatorships and to seek support elsewhere. In particular it sought closer links with the EEC as a counterweight to the US/comprador connection and it lent support to the economic demands of the working class. This latter tactic was all the more necessary because it lacked the opportunity for capital flight available to foreign firms and was more dependent on the home market. More generally it pressed for the liberalisation and normalisation of the dictatorships so that it could achieve more effective representation of its specific interests, secure long-term political gains from its economic concessions to the popular masses, and enhance its prospects of reorganising the power bloc under its own hegemony (at the expense of the landed oligarchy and/or

comprador capital) (*CD*, pp 19-21, 30, 41-7, 51-3, 55-8). But these demands merely contributed to the developing political crisis. For the very institutional form of these regimes made it impossible to resolve the growing disequilibrium in the power bloc through a carefully controlled process of liberalisation.

### **Popular Struggles and Political Crisis**

Dependent industrialisation also affected the popular masses. All three societies saw the expansion of the urban working class, the proletarianisation of the peasantry, rural depopulation, an increase in the new middle classes and liberal professions, the decline of the handicraft, manufacturing and commercial petty bourgeoisie, etc. (*CD*, pp 68-70). Moreover, although the urban working class initially enjoyed rising real living standards (despite its increased exploitation), industrial dependency meant that it was particularly vulnerable to attacks from foreign capital during economic crises (*CD*, pp 57, 75-6). Even in the absence of economic crises this pattern of industrialisation aggravated class struggles. Thus, in addition to working class resistance in production and peasant opposition to rural proletarianisation and the encroachment of industry, Poulantzas notes the growth of struggles over health and social facilities, women's liberation, education and the position of students, and the status of intellectuals (*CD*, pp 71-2). He draws particular attention to the involvement of the new urban petty bourgeoisie in these struggles alongside the vanguard role (sic) of the working class. This is significant not only because of the obvious contrast with the fascist case but also because of its major repercussions within the state apparatus (*CD*, pp 71-3, 107-8).

Thus there was an increasing politicisation of economic struggles and also an upsurge in open political struggles of an illegal or semi-legal character. But in no case did a mass movement develop to launch a direct frontal assault to overthrow the dictatorships whether through a people's war or a political general strike or a general insurrectionary uprising. Even the Polytechnic uprising in Athens in 1974 remained relatively isolated within Greece as a whole and it certainly had no direct role in the overthrow of the dictatorship. Likewise, the African liberation movement in the Portuguese colonies was influential only in so far as it operated at a distance to intensify

contradictions within the dictatorship itself and especially in the armed forces (CD, pp 76-7).

Thus it would be wrong to argue that popular struggles were the direct or principal factor leading to the collapse of the dictatorships in Portugal or Greece or the decomposition of that in Spain. Instead Poulantzas claims that the specific forms of popular struggle that developed in these countries were *indirectly determinant* in so far as they precipitated or shaped the internal contradictions of the dictatorships themselves (CD, pp 56, 78-9, 81, 125). This indirect influence occurred because different fractions of the power bloc had different strategic interests vis-à-vis the popular masses. Thus, in the absence of an overarching state apparatus to develop a coherent political approach to the problem of mass integration, the dictatorships implemented 'an amazingly incoherent muddle of policies (economic, repressive, ideological) towards the popular classes' (CD, p 84). In the long run this produced open conflict among leading economic and political circles over the best tactics to adopt towards the masses. This generated further opportunities for mass intervention to add yet more twists to the vicious spiral. These problems in the class unity and relative autonomy of the dictatorships were aggravated because of the contradictory pressures on the middle and lower ranks of the state apparatus. They were torn between allegiance to their political superiors and solidarity with their peers outside the state (CD, pp 79-85).

It is the interaction between increasing disequilibrium within the power bloc and the escalation of popular struggles that produced the collapse or decomposition of the military dictatorships. The first factor alone was not sufficient. For, although such regimes are particularly inimical to the *organic* circulation of hegemony within the power bloc, Poulantzas implies that any purely internal conflicts could have been handled through a series of *mechanical* compromises. Even here it was difficult to establish non-party means of representation for the domestic bourgeoisie through such measures as the liberalisation of the press and publishing. For this would have threatened the balance of forces congealed in the rigid parcellisation of power among different parts of the state (CD, pp 30, 42-4, 91, 94-5, 126). Similar measures were quite impossible in handling the relations between the power bloc and the people. Once it was no longer possible to control the masses through repression, measures were needed to secure popular support (CD, pp 94-5). But there was no

coherence among these measures. Any liberalisation of these regimes threatened them with a mass invasion. They displayed a fundamental rigidity in the face of constant changes in the balance of forces. The growing political crisis was reflected in internal splits and conflicts within the ISAs (such as the Church, education, lawyer's associations, the press and corporatist unions) and in the RSA itself (*CD*, pp 118-124).

## **Democratisation and the Transition to Socialism**

These internal contradictions were particularly acute within the dominant state apparatus, namely, the armed forces, which allegedly acted under the direction (sic) of the hegemonic fraction. Poulantzas argues that the hierarchic, centralised, unitary structure of the military made it especially difficult for them to act as a functional alternative to the plural party system. They found it difficult to ventilate conflicts within the power bloc and to secure flexible, progressive shifts in strategy as the balance of forces changes. Instead of the organic circulation of power among political parties there were clashes between vertical clans, fiefs and camarillas resulting in incoherent policies and abrupt, arbitrary and jerky changes of direction (*CD*, pp 33, 49-50, 157). As the economic and political crises in the dictatorships worsened this led to growing demands for democratisation.

Poulantzas insists, however, that a parliamentary-democratic state cannot develop by a continuous and linear route out of an exceptional form. This parallels his earlier argument that an exceptional form of state cannot develop stepwise out of a parliamentary-democratic state. The process of democratisation is necessarily punctuated by a succession of political crises and ruptures and, indeed, itself provides the site for intense political struggles (*CD*, pp 90-93, 102). Thus Poulantzas insists there is no automatic transition between (let alone a necessary fusion of) democratisation and the development of socialism. Nor was an anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly revolution ever on the agenda in the collapse of the dictatorships. Instead the crucial issues were which class or fraction would lead the struggle for democracy and thus how far the democratisation process would be taken (*CD*, pp 59-60, 73, 87-8, 136). There was a structurally determined possibility of a genuine

tactical alliance between broad sectors of the domestic bourgeoisie and popular forces on the objective of toppling the military dictatorships. But would this struggle for democratisation occur under the hegemony of the domestic bourgeoisie or the working class? The answer to this question affects the prospects for combining democratic struggle with anti-monopoly measures as well as the extent of democratisation itself. This can be seen clearly in the contrast between the 'right-wing' sequel to the dictatorship in Greece and the initial leftward movement in Portugal (*CD*, pp 66, 159, 162).

### **The Portuguese Experiment**

Poulantzas pays particular attention to the Portuguese experiment and considers why the working class failed to maintain its leadership over the transition to democracy. Firstly there was little effort to broaden the anti-dictatorial alliance and support gradually fell away from other classes in both town and countryside. There were also major divisions between socialists and communists in the working class itself (*CD*, pp 138-9). These difficulties arose from the lack of historical experience of open class struggle (due to the longevity of the dictatorship) and from the absence of a revolutionary party with a consistent and well-adapted mass line. The Socialist Party could not play this role because it functioned as a social democratic ISA under the hegemony of the domestic bourgeoisie. In contrast, the PCP could not decide whether the conjuncture was one of democratisation or transition to socialism and oscillated between ultraleftist and rightist tactics (*CD*, pp 64-5, 144-50). In the absence of a mass revolutionary party the Armed Forces Movement played a dominant part. But Poulantzas suggests that this was less helpful than might at first appear. For he claims that a movement originating from within the repressive state apparatus is really suited only for a supporting role in mass struggles that should be located beyond the state. This problem was aggravated by the permanent split within the AFM itself between military ultra-leftism (culminating in the insurrectionary movement of 25th November 1975) and support for the hegemony of the domestic bourgeoisie (*CD*, pp 64, 108-10, 143-4, 149-50).

More generally, Poulantzas concludes that the Portuguese experiment failed because there was no attempt to articulate the embryonic forms of popular power and self-organisation at the base

(workers' control, community and factory councils, peasant committees, etc.) with concerted action to democratise the state and use it in support of the popular movement (*CD*, pp 151-2). He argues that a dual power strategy was sure to fail in a conjuncture objectively limited to democratisation rather than a transition to socialism - even if there had been a vanguard party able to coordinate the various localised forms of popular power.

This means that the working class should have sought support for its hegemony through the existing state apparatus. This should have occurred through the capture of bastions of popular power within the state, the neutralisation of residual bourgeois strongholds (especially the hard kernel of the RSA and the parallel power networks, if any, through which the dominant fraction exercised power outside and beyond formal channels), the democratic reorganisation of the state under working class control and its deployment in support of popular initiatives threatened by the right (*CD*, pp 66, 99-100, 140-2, 152-3; cf. Spain, p 157, and Greece, pp 50, 96, 98). Instead there were attempts either to infiltrate trustworthy individuals into key positions in an otherwise unreconstructed state system (notably through the colonization of the AFM) or to dismember the state in the mistaken belief that socialism had already arrived at the base and the state should be encouraged to 'wither away' (*CD*, pp 149, 152). As a result of these fundamental strategic errors the bourgeoisie remained in control of key sectors of the state and was able to reclaim its position of political class domination. In particular, the domestic bourgeoisie was able to exploit the failure of the ultraleftist military insurrection in November 1975 to attack genuine popular initiatives and to restore its own hegemony over the next steps in the democratisation process (*CD*, p 153).

## **Democratisation - an Overview**

It must be admitted that it is not fully clear how Poulantzas accounts for the collapse or decomposition of the dictatorships. In part this stems from his insistence that democratisation is a continuing process punctuated by successive ruptures and breaks. But it is also due to his theoretical and political need to emphasise the role of the popular masses throughout the process even when this appears counterfactual. Overall he seems to argue that the regimes

underwent a process of internal decay due to institutional rigidities that prevented the re-equilibration of an unstable power bloc. This led significant sectors of the dominant state apparatus (the military) to seek some means of transferring power to civilian authorities. This was supported by EEC-oriented capitals hoping to weaken those aspects of the state system favourable to comprador capital and thereby to win greater political influence to match their growing economic power. There were also increasing tensions and divisions within the state system itself. These were due to ideological and political differences between the power bloc and a state personnel predominantly recruited (even at the higher echelons) from the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry. They were also linked to conflicts among different branches of the state as various apparatuses sought to advance their particular economic-corporate interests (*CD*, p 49). In their opposition to the dictatorships the domestic bourgeoisie entered a tactical alliance with the working class and this in turn encouraged a hesitant petty bourgeoisie to side with the popular masses against the power bloc as constituted under the hegemony of comprador capital (*CD*, p 73).

In these conditions it proved impossible for the armed forces to control the democratisation process from above. But this did not mean that the situation was objectively revolutionary or that a democratic transition to socialism was possible. Indeed the democratisation process was essentially conducted under the hegemony of the domestic bourgeoisie. In terms of political class position, therefore, it challenged neither the overall hegemony of comprador capital nor its compromises with foreign capital. Likewise, in terms of the structural determination of political class power, it was always confined within the limits of the current phase of the bourgeois state. Thus, although some liberals and left activists expected democratisation to produce a genuine liberal parliamentary democracy, the most that could be hoped for was a relatively democratic form of authoritarian statism. In the event the process of democratisation actually left the hard kernel of the RSA unchanged (*CD*, pp 51, 87, 98-101, 117, 128-9, 131-2, 140-3, 157).

Nonetheless, although a democratic transition to socialism was not objectively possible, significant differences would have followed had democratisation occurred under the hegemony of the working class (*CD*, pp 88-9, 133). The failures of the left organisations are important here although Poulantzas declines to consider them in

detail (*CD*, pp 9, 89). Instead he concentrates on the lessons to be drawn from these failures not only for democratisation but also for the most appropriate forms of opposition before the democratic break emerges.

### **Anti-dictatorial Alliances and Democratisation**

The Portuguese example provides important clues to interpreting Poulantzas's views on the process of democratisation *after* ruptures occur in the exceptional state. But the question of how anti-dictatorial alliances should be organised *before* the democratic break can best be understood in terms of his involvement in Greek politics. From the moment when Poulantzas first began to consider the nature of military dictatorships up to the debates within the KKE(I) following the collapse of the junta, Poulantzas was a constant advocate of united front politics and a mass line. He developed his views in opposition to the political line of the orthodox communist parties as well as the reformism of social democracy. Instead he took his basic position alongside Lenin and Gramsci on the United Front. Obviously his views changed during the course of the anti-dictatorial struggle in Greece but the basic outlines remain the same.

#### ***Poulantzas on the United Front***

In general terms Poulantzas subscribes to the strategy outlined in 1921 by Lenin at the 3rd Congress of the Comintern and reaffirmed in 1933 by Dimitrov at the 7th Congress (*FD*, pp 157-8, 162-3; cf. 1970\*). This strategy is based on commitment to a rank-and-file proletarian United Front. This would maintain the independence and autonomy of communist parties vis-à-vis other parties representing the working class. But it would also involve the development of specific *non-party* rank-and-file organisations to cement the union of the working class at the base.

The United Front should certainly not be limited to an electoral alliance between organisations that is pursued only at the top and without reference to the masses. Nor should it be understood in terms of a simple alliance organised around economic-corporate demands and conducted through the medium of trade union struggles under the control of a vanguard party. In this respect Poulantzas suggests

that Gramsci and the *Ordine Nuovo* group were alone in the Comintern in Europe in understanding the problems of the United Front in the field of union-party relations. For, whereas the KPD treated trade unions as the mass organisation and the party as a vanguard, Gramsci saw worker's councils as specific organisations of the rank-and-file that by-passed established unions and parties and served to transfer economic-corporate and reformist struggles onto the terrain of revolutionary politics. In this way worker's councils provide the means to cement the United Front at the base and to translate mass struggles into the political arena (*FD*, pp 157-8, 182-3, 210-18). Such a strategy stands in marked contrast with the electoral alliance between communists and socialists aimed at securing "worker's governments" (*Arbeiteregerungen*) with limited objectives as advocated by the 4th Congress and still evident in contemporary parties such as the PCF (*FD*, pp 158, 169).

### ***Poulantzas on the Popular Front***

Poulantzas also notes that the 7th Congress not only returned to the correct line of the 1921-2 period but also introduced the strategy of the anti-fascist popular front (*FD*, p 163). This was quite appropriate for a defensive step in working class struggle. Accordingly it advocated a broad popular alliance embracing the proletariat, peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie to resist the rise of fascism and/or to secure its downfall.

However Poulantzas criticises Dimitrov's interpretation of the popular front on four separate grounds. First, in offering an over-restricted definition of the class basis of fascism as 'the most reactionary, nationalist and imperialist elements' of big capital, Dimitrov permitted an alliance with other fractions of the bourgeoisie. Second, Dimitrov gave primacy to the popular front over the proletarian United Front and thereby ignored the leading role of the working class. Third, through his fundamental misunderstanding of the representational ties between classes and political parties as somehow pre-given and organic, Dimitrov attached too little importance to communists' own mass work among the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie. Instead he considered that they should be reached through their own parties even where these were under the leadership of the bourgeoisie and big landed interests. Elsewhere Poulantzas argues that exactly the same error informed the view of certain

sections of the KKE towards the Greek peasantry and petty bourgeoisie.

Finally, Dimitrov placed too much emphasis on the 'national' side of political struggle at the expense of proletarian internationalism (*FD*, pp 164-5; cf. 1970\*). This last point is difficult to interpret but it probably refers to the sort of social chauvinism that was manifest in the KPD's agitation over the Versailles Treaty or its adoption of the 'Schlageter' line (*FD*, pp 169-70n; cf. 1970\*). In any event Poulantzas claims that all four strategic deviations are still evident in the frontist electoral alliances favoured by orthodox communist parties. He also suggests that such alliances cannot serve as a vehicle for effective opposition to fascism or as a means for bringing about a transition to socialism and cites the alleged failures of the French Popular Front in his support (1970b).

### **Alliance Strategies for Greece**

In applying these arguments to the Greek case Poulantzas pays particular attention to the relationship between the anti-dictatorial alliance and the anti-monopoly alliance. Initially he saw the United Front as the principal means of launching a direct assault on the dictatorship in preparation for establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat. Drawing on the experience of the Greek resistance to the German occupation and the Greek civil war as well as on the example of the Chinese Revolution, Poulantzas appeared to call for a strategy based on the following four lines. Firstly, a commitment to a protracted 'people's war' based on a mass line as opposed to a fixed strategy of urban insurrection or a classic war of position regardless of the specific situation. Secondly, the primacy of political over military struggle. Thirdly, in contrast with the Stalinist line of the orthodox KKE (which he criticised for clinging through thick and thin to the idea of towns as revolutionary storm-centres), recognition of the overwhelming peasant nature of Greek society and the need for the countryside to encircle the towns. Fourthly, in opposition to the Stalinist mistrust of the peasantry and the associated underestimation of the potential of popular alliances, Poulantzas emphasises the revolutionary possibilities of a worker/peasant alliance based on a proper consideration of the popular masses as a whole (1972\*, pp vii-viii). Given these initial views it is hardly surprising that Poulantzas admitted

later that the manner in which the Greek and Portuguese dictatorships collapsed did not accord with his expectations (*Diabazo*, 1977, p 45). It is in this context that we can locate his shift towards a left Eurocommunist approach to the anti-dictatorial alliance and its relation with the anti-monopoly struggle.

His subsequent views emerge most clearly from his intervention in the 1976 debate over the party programme for the following year's general election. Poulantzas notes that the anti-dictatorial alliance differs from the anti-monopoly alliance in two respects: firstly, it can include sections of monopoly capital as well as non-monopoly capital and, secondly, it can embrace certain rightwing political forces in so far as they represent bourgeois fractions opposed to the dictatorship. He then distinguishes two different views about the appropriate relationship between the EADE (or anti-dictatorial alliance) and the anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist alliance. One view sees the EADE as a tactical alliance to be restricted to the phase of de-juntification and terminated once the dangers of a new dictatorial reaction are eliminated. The other sees it as a permanent feature of the struggle for democratic socialism (anti-monopoly democracy) in the Greek conjuncture.

The first view of the EADE implied the need to engage in day-to-day economic, social and political struggles of the popular masses to prepare for the onset of the anti-monopoly phase. In contrast, the second view overestimates the differentiating elements of an alliance with monopoly capital and rightwing political leaders to the detriment of the autonomous expression and development of popular struggles. In addition the first view emphasises the need for the widest possible popular alliance at the base with the supporters of the anti-dictatorial right whilst maintaining an alliance at the top with its leaders on specific and limited objectives. Conversely, the second view tends to see the alliance at the top as the sole or predominant way of approaching the rightwing popular masses and neglects the opportunities to exploit any contradictions between rightwing leaders and their supporters.

Poulantzas notes, thirdly, that the first view permits continuous reappraisal of the steps in the class struggle and the corresponding shifts in strategy. He contrasts this with the fact that the second view tends to overestimate the danger of military intervention and to eternalise the phase of EADE so that the struggle for democratisation is limited and the preparation of the popular forces for a transition

to anti-monopoly struggles is undermined. Finally, the first view recognises the possibility that the EADE may need to be re-activated but still maintains the long-term objective of a leftward mobilisation of the popular masses in preparation for the phase of anti-monopoly democracy. But the second view ignores the need for a flexible strategy with alternating defensive and offensive steps and somehow expects a continuous, linear route from the EADE to anti-monopoly democracy without ruptures or breaks. In this context adherence to the second view acts as a brake on the development of popular struggles and makes a resurgence of the military forces more likely (1976c).

Within this perspective of rank-and-file popular and united fronts Poulantzas also considered two other problems. From the collapse of the junta in 1974 he was concerned with the strategy of democratisation; and, in the wake of the 1977 elections, that of the prospects of an alliance between PASOK and the 'renovating left'. In relation to democratisation he emphasised how the nature of the current form of capitalist state (i.e., authoritarian statism) limits the scope for democratisation - especially if this is understood as a restoration of an effective liberal parliamentary democracy (CD, pp 129-30; 1976c). But he also argues that it is possible to secure significant democratic gains even in these conditions to the extent that the popular masses can hegemonise the democratisation process. Among the measures Poulantzas advocates are a purge of the armed forces and an end to their isolation from the people, a concerted attack on the 'para-state', and democratisation of education (especially the tertiary sector) (1974If; 1975a; 1975Id; 1978I1). As far as possible these measures should be carried out within the framework of the EADE. This implies real, but conditional and critical, support for the Karamanlis government (1975Ie).

### **Left Unity in Greece?**

After the defeat of the 'renovating left' at the hands of the traditional KKE and the youthful PASOK in the 1977 elections, Poulantzas intervened in the debate over left unity. PASOK was calling for left unity around a common programme shaped by PASOK itself. This provoked a debate within the renovating left concerning the character of PASOK and its implications for a possible alliance. Two

questions were of particular concern. Was PASOK was a populist or a socialist party? And, if it was a socialist party, could it play a role in a transition to democratic socialism? Or would it merely prove to be yet another social democratic type of party - committed to managing capitalism and to authoritarian statism? The answers to these questions had obvious implications for an alliance with the KKE or PASOK. In addition there was some discussion within the renovating left over the role of new social movements in any new alliance. Poulantzas threw his weight behind an alliance with PASOK around a common programme developed by PASOK in association with the 'renovating left' and also called for the involvement of new social movements (1978Ie; cf. 1975Ie). Elsewhere he also drew a distinction between two types of socialist party. On the one hand, there were social democratic parties with experience of government; and, on the other hand, socialist parties in dependent capitalist societies (such as the former military dictatorships) and/or metropolitan societies where they were not yet 'governing parties' (such as France or Italy). This distinction enables Poulantzas to qualify his earlier rejection of social democratic parties as ISAs specially designed to mislead the working classes. For, whereas the former parties were still dismissed as likely to act as dominant mass parties in an authoritarian statist capitalism, the latter could play a role in the struggle for democratic socialism (1979Ia, p 198).

In this context he argues that left unity must be based on alliances at the base as well as the top. For the experience of the French Programme Commun reveals the danger that an alliance limited to organisations for electoral purposes can split before the gates of power. Poulantzas suggests that left unity between PASOK and the 'renovating left' is possible and desirable because of the strategic affinities between democratic socialism and Eurocommunism on such issues as independence from foreign powers, commitment to a democratic road to socialism, opposition to vanguardism, rejection of statism and technocratic solutions, refusal of the Bolshevik notion of production for the sake of production, and support for new social movements and reform of civil society. Through involvement in a common programme with PASOK the 'renovating left' would be able to isolate adherents of the social democratic road. It could also mobilise support from followers of the Union of the Democratic Centre and the orthodox KKE. In short, whilst Poulantzas has certain reservations about PASOK because of its populist features

and lack of internal democracy, he believes that PASOK can provide support for democratic socialism and help to prevent the marginalisation of the renovating left (1978le). In this way the left may be able to move from a phase where democratisation is the primary goal to one where anti-monopoly democracy can be established.

### **A Critical Appraisal of CD**

CD inverts the approach of FD. To show that fascism was ultimately functional for monopoly capital, Poulantzas denies that its internal contradictions were significant. Accordingly he argues that the two fascist regimes disintegrated because they were defeated militarily by other capitalist regimes. He thereby sidesteps the significant question whether the internal contradictions of these regimes played any role in their military defeat. Conversely he overemphasises the internal contradictions of military dictatorships. This is necessary to explain why they collapsed without any direct frontal assault by the popular masses. Thus the internal contradictions of military dictatorships are said to restrict their prospects for stability and 'normalisation'. This means that Poulantzas must ignore the fact that the regimes in Spain and Portugal both survived some four decades before their eventual collapse or decomposition.

Even if we focus only on the last years of the dictatorships, Poulantzas still provides an inadequate guide. For the long-term economic and political costs of the colonial war and impending military defeat in the Portuguese colonies obviously played a major role in the overthrow of Spinoza's regime (Kohler, 1982, pp 174-6). Likewise, the Greek military intervention in Cyprus and the resulting Turkish invasion of that island precipitated the final collapse of the Greek dictatorship. In both cases there is some similarity with the collapse of the two fascist regimes. In contrast, Spain managed the transition to a democratic form of government without serious political crises and/or ruptures. Indeed it lacked even the officially-sponsored *ruptura democratica* that the opposition had demanded. Instead it witnessed a more or less legal transfer of power that was firmly controlled from above by Francoist forces. This shows that it is possible, *pace* Poulantzas, to move from an exceptional to a normal regime without a radical break.

Taking these points together a clear disparity emerges between Poulantzas's analyses of fascist and military regimes. He curtails his analyses of fascism *before* fundamental political and economic crises emerge. This illegitimately reinforces his claim that fascism was functional for monopoly capital. But it is only *after* the onset of serious economic and political crises that he begins his analyses of military dictatorships. This illegitimately reinforces his claim that military dictatorships are a 'brittle' and unstable form of exceptional regime. In this sense we could say that there is a 'functionalist' bias in *FD* that is neatly complemented by a 'dysfunctionalist' bias in *CD*.

The difficulties with *CD* do not stop here. To the general charge of 'dysfunctionalism' we should add the following more specific criticisms. First, Poulantzas does not establish the existence of a distinct domestic or interior bourgeoisie whose conflicts with the comprador fraction provide the dynamic behind the collapse or decomposition of the dictatorships. Recent critics have denied that a domestic bourgeoisie exists in Spain, Greece, or Portugal (e.g., Giner and Salcedo, 1976, pp 360-2, Maravall, 1981, pp 7-8, 17-18n, Munoz et al., 1978; Mouzelis, 1978, p 132; and Kohler, 1982, pp 174-5, 233). Indeed Poulantzas himself concedes that the domestic bourgeoisie is only *tendentially* differentiated from the comprador and national bourgeoisies (*CD*, p 45). He also fails to provide any clear account of how its interests were represented in and through political organisations. This does not mean that the power blocs were not divided on the advisability of continuing the various dictatorships. But these divisions did not coincide with any distinction between an interior and comprador bourgeoisie.

This problem results from an extreme economism going far beyond Poulantzas's general penchant for class reductionist analyses. This is highlighted by Aramberri's comment on the Spanish case. He writes that:

"Poulantzas suffers from an excessive desire, despite his insistence on the relative autonomy of different levels, to find an economic correlation for all transformations in the political superstructure. Undoubtedly, the economic changes that took place during the sixties in the countries of Southern Europe provide the backcloth for the events of the seventies; but to my mind they do so, above all, to the extent that they affect the global relations between classes rather than the transformations that occur from time to time within the ruling classes" (Aramberri, 1979, p 174).

Moreover, even if we followed Poulantzas in focusing primarily on conflicts within the power bloc, we would certainly need to consider how the intra-bloc relations varied across the three regimes. This problem is ignored by Poulantzas.

It is true that Poulantzas distinguishes between the 'collapse' of the Portuguese and Greek regimes and the 'decomposition' of the Spanish regime. But he never explains why this difference existed. Nor does he subsequently consider how the Spanish state was transformed from dictatorship to a democratic 'authoritarian statism' without serious ruptures or breaks. Yet there are a number of clues in *CD* that could have been followed up in this area.

In particular Poulantzas could have considered the extent to which each dictatorship managed to consolidate popular support through mass integrative apparatuses, to establish forms of 'black parliamentarism', and to develop a national-popular ideology to 'cement' together the social formation (*CD*, pp 105, 124-6). The Greek military dictatorship was clearly least successful in this respect and Poulantzas appears to extrapolate incorrectly from this case to Spain and Portugal. This is not the place to present an alternative account but it is appropriate to note the need for more research into phenomena such as corporatist organisations and syndicates, the circulation of hegemony in the stabilised Salazar and Franco regimes, and the flexibility inherent in the syncretic authoritarian ideologies of Salazarism and Francoism (e.g., Giner and Sevilla, 1980; Graham and Makler, 1979; Schmitter, 1975; Wiarda, 1977).

Likewise it would have been interesting to follow up Poulantzas's arguments about the strategic importance of bourgeois hegemony over the democratisation process. For this was particularly clearcut in the case of Spain's carefully controlled movement towards democracy. Popular pressure certainly played a major role in the transition but it was never sufficiently organised to precipitate a real rupture with the dictatorship. Instead of a democratic break there was a series of 'reforms from above'. The political establishment was soon able to secure agreement from the major parties of the left that "it alone would determine the rate and direction of such change, thus ensuring that the mass movement would not go beyond those boundaries" (Aramberri, 1979, p 175; cf. Kohler, 1982, pp 3-10). Above all these boundaries involved acceptance of a constitutional monarchy to guarantee institutional continuity, commitment to maintaining the territorial unity of Spain, and rejection of an interim provisional government in favour of the right of the traditional

bourgeois political class to exercise power up to the elections (Aramberri, 1979, pp 176-196; cf. Maravall, 1981, pp 6-17, 203-8).

Third, because he wishes to emphasise the determinant role of popular struggles in the collapse or decomposition of the dictatorships, Poulantzas tends to underplay the 'economic-corporate' interests of the military in motivating these events. This holds particularly for the Greek *coup* in April 1967 and the *pronunziamento* of the Northern Army in 1974 that toppled the Ionnadis regime (cf. Clogg, 1979, pp 186-99; Mouzelis, 1978, pp 111-14, 125-33). It was also evident in the splits within the Portuguese military over the war in the colonies (Kohler, 1982, pp 176-8).

Finally, given his emphasis on the role of popular struggles, it is interesting to note the extent to which Poulantzas neglects the specific strategies and tactics of the parties on the left. With the exception of the Portuguese case he studiously avoids discussing the strategic errors of the Socialists and Communists in Southern Europe before, during, and after the democratic break. This again would help to understand the anomalous Spanish case (Aramberri, 1979).

## **Strategic Conclusions**

These four issues are certainly important but we should also consider the strategic conclusions themselves. For, as Poulantzas himself commented, strategic disputes within the KKE(I) had clear connections with theoretical analyses of the state. It is only with *CD* that Poulantzas goes beyond simple adherence to the Leninist line on the united front and/or the Maoist commitment to the mass line and protracted war. It is certainly true that his trenchant views on the EADE were far from unique within the KKE(I) (for a more general analysis of the Greek left, see: Papayannakis, 1981). Likewise his more general recommendations on democratic socialist strategy owe much to the influence of Austro-Marxism and the 'Ingrao left' of the PCI. But in other respects his views on democratic strategy are much more distinctive and draw their inspiration from his reflections on the Greek and Portuguese examples.

In *CD* Poulantzas makes a significant departure from his earlier approach. He now emphasises the need for a careful articulation of political struggles at a distance from the state, within the state, and for the transformation of the state. In this respect the Portuguese

experiment proved decisive in revealing the limitations of more orthodox communist and social democratic approaches to democratisation and socialist transformation. Since his conclusions were provisional and underwent further modification in the light of the subsequent failure of left unity in France, however, we should postpone detailed criticism until the final version of his own strategy has been presented.

# 10

## **The Democratic Transition to Democratic Socialism**

In analysing fascism and military dictatorships Poulantzas was often concerned with problems of class alliances. In *FD* and related studies he concentrated on the United Front and Popular Front as vehicles of anti-fascist or anti-dictatorial alliance and their relevance to the contemporary problem of anti-monopoly alliance; in *CD* and related studies this concern was extended to the struggle for democratisation in erstwhile dictatorial regimes and its relevance to the democratic transition to democratic socialism. But it is only in *SPS* and its associated interviews that Poulantzas considered the transition to socialism at any length. In this chapter I review Poulantzas's views on democratic socialism, compare them with Eurocommunism and Austro-Marxism, and present a brief critique. This concludes the detailed review of Poulantzas's work and the remaining chapters consider its more general preconditions and implications.

### **The Decline of Capitalist Democracy**

Poulantzas first emphasised the decline of political democracy in contemporary capitalism when commenting on the crisis of the state (*CDE*, pp 54-58) and its implications for the rise of authoritarian statism (1976d; 1976I.h, pp 133-4). This theme is developed in greater detail in *SPS* and various interviews conducted in his last two years. His discussion is increasingly organised around the theme of authoritarian statism. The specific organisational changes involved in this new form of state have already been detailed in chapter 4. Here I consider its implications for the decline of capitalist democracy.

Poulantzas sees a direct link between the rise of authoritarian statism and the decline of democracy in civil as well as political

society. This is reflected not only in growing socio-economic inequalities (e.g., the rise of the so-called 'new poor') but also in increasing restrictions on the political liberties and *pluripartisme* essential to the smooth functioning of representative democracy. In particular Poulantzas points to the development of a potentially fascistic, anti-popular parallel state apparatus. Its activities overlap with those of the official state system and the parallel state network lives in constant symbiosis with it. It operates to prevent a rise in popular struggles and the dangers this would hold for bourgeois hegemony. More generally Poulantzas argues that authoritarian statism threatens political democracy because it leads to confusion between the appropriate roles of parties and the state administration (*SPS*, pp 208, 210, 216, 239).

Poulantzas writes that authoritarian statism involves 'the emergence of the administrative and governmental apparatus as the dominant state structure and the major centre for elaborating political decisions ... this apparatus perfectly embodies the distance between leaders and led, as well as the hermetic insulation of power from democratic control' (*SPS*, p 226). Thus, at the same time as monopoly capital gains privileged access to the state, the state is so organised that popular interests are excluded from its field of perception (*SPS*, pp 226-7). This is reflected in the transformation of the 'parties of power' into mere transmission belts for official decisions. It is also associated with the increasing extinction of the democratic principle of publicity in favour of the most extreme bureaucratic secrecy (*SPS*, pp 229-30, 237).

Authoritarian statism involves not only new forms of open repression and symbolic violence but also witnesses a significant restructuring of the dominant ideology. Indeed the right actually disguises the growth of repression by integrating into its discourse certain liberal and libertarian themes dating from the 'sixties and thereby demonstrates yet again its capacity to recuperate resistance and integrate it culturally (1979e). This is seen in the new emphases on irrationalism and neo-spiritualism in opposition to the secularism of the Enlightenment as well as Marxism; on the instrumental rationality and the technocratic logic of experts in opposition to themes based on the general will and legality; on neo-liberal, anti-statist themes hostile to the *social* functions of the Keynesian welfare state for the popular masses but defending its *economic* functions for capital in the current crisis; on authoritarian themes embracing the

new discourse of 'law and order' in the name of restraining the abuse of democratic liberties and preserving the security of the citizen; and on the pseudo-scientific theses of 'biological inequality' that inspire racism at the same time as capital pretends to support the idea of a new global economic order and solidarity among different peoples (1979d, pp 178-181; cf. 1979e, and 1979i, p 140).

These changes in the content of the dominant ideology are linked to a restructuring of the channels and apparatuses through which it is elaborated and diffused. From the school, university, and publishing house there has been a displacement to the mass media; and, within the state system proper, there has been a general displacement of legitimation procedures from political parties to state administration. Indeed this redeployment of the mass media in ideological inculcation has proceeded hand in hand with their growing and multiform control by the state administration. Poulantzas adds that both the logic and the symbolism of the mass media now stem overwhelmingly from the state administration (1979d, pp 179-80; cf. 1979e, and 1979i, pp 139-43).

The changing content and institutional mediation of the dominant ideology have profound implications for the role of political parties and capitalist democracy. For parties once played a crucial role in elaborating and transmitting a political discourse founded on the general will and articulated with the institutions of representative democracy and the *Rechtsstaat*. But, when the administration becomes the privileged means of mass integration as well as the principal means through which the power bloc is organised, when there is a growth of neo-corporatist and tripartite organisations alongside the political parties, when there is also a growth of vertical, neo-clientelist politics, then a veritable crisis of representativity affects the party system. The role of political legitimation is displaced to the administration and there is a decreasing resort to democratic discourse. Instead we find a resort to a technocratic discourse that reinforces the authority of the expert at the expense of the people; and to a neo-liberal discourse that regards the state as holding the ring in the face of conflicts among various forces in civil society and thereby provides the state with its own legitimation in the face of democratic demands. In addition, new plebiscitary and populist forms of consent emerge alongside and in conjunction with the closed language of the experts. This means that the dominant political discourse becomes flatter and more uniform, less complex and pluralistic (1979Ic, pp 180-1; 1979g).

Poulantzas argues that representative democracy requires not only a plurality of parties but also their ability to function in an organic manner and at a distance from the core of the state system. But the general statization of social life realised through the above-mentioned techniques of power and control breaks down this essential institutional separation between the public and private spheres (ibid.). In turn this subverts the functioning of the party system and thereby curtails democratic liberties (SPS, p 231).

In general, then, authoritarian statism involves enhanced roles for the state administration, its dominant 'state party', and a new, anti-democratic ideology. This further undermines the already limited involvement of the masses in political decision-making, severely weakens the organic functioning of the party system (even where a plurality of parties survives intact), and saps the vitality of democratic forms of political discourse. Accordingly there are fewer obstacles to the continuing penetration of authoritarian-statist forms into all areas of social life (SPS, p 231). Indeed Poulantzas actually claims "*all contemporary power is functional to authoritarian statism*" (SPS, p 239)

## **Democratic Socialism**

In reaction to this growing statism in the dominant capitalist societies, Poulantzas increasingly came to advocate a democratic struggle for democratic socialism. He criticises Lenin for advocating the destruction of the bourgeois state with all its representative democratic institutions and political freedoms. For Lenin's support for the 'real', direct democracy of the workers' councils culminated, paradoxically, in the dictatorship of the party *over* the proletariat. Whereas Marx understood the dictatorship of the proletariat to mean the total abolition of the state, this concept has also come to mean the idea of a monopoly state and can lead to totalitarianism (1977I.h). In this sense the Eurocommunists' abandonment of the strategy of dictatorship of the proletariat constitutes a decisive guarantee of a democratic road to socialism (1977I.h).

Poulantzas quotes Rosa Luxemburg approvingly for arguing that the abolition of general elections, freedom of the press and assembly, etc., would leave the bureaucracy as the only active element in political life (see Luxemburg, 1917). Thus he suggests that the imposition of a single party system, the bureaucratisation of the

party, confusion of the party and the state, the rise of statism, and the destruction of the soviets, were implicit in Lenin's critique of bourgeois democracy. For his critique allegedly rests on an instrumentalist view in which the class character of the state depends on the class whose party controls its summits. This implied that all the institutions of the bourgeois state, including representative democracy, serve bourgeois interests and are inherently repressive. In addition Lenin underestimated the distinctive interests and contribution of the allies of the working class in a transition to socialism and also wrongly believed that the working class itself was essentially unified. Thus, since the working class represents the interests of all the people and since the working class is already unitary, only one party is needed to represent the interests of the whole people. Thus, for Lenin, smashing the capitalist state means substituting a soviet system that becomes proletarian precisely in so far as the proletarian party controls it. Yet monopartism leads to absolutism (1977I.h; cf. *SPS*, pp 252-4; 1980I.a).

Poulantzas rejects the false dilemma in which one must:

*"either maintain the existing State and stick exclusively to a modified form of representative democracy - a road that ends up in social-democratic statism and so-called liberal parliamentarianism; or base everything on direct, rank-and-file democracy or the movement for self-management - a path which, sooner or later, inevitably leads to statist despotism or the dictatorship of experts. The essential problem of the democratic road to socialism, of democratic socialism, must be posed in a different way: how is it possible radically to transform the state in such a manner that the extension and deepening of political freedoms and the institutions of representative democracy (which were also a conquest of the popular masses) are combined with the unfurling of forms of direct democracy and the mushrooming of self-management bodies?"* *SPS*, p 256).

### **Direct and/or Representative Democracy?**

This poses clear problems of political strategy. Poulantzas suggests that there is no reason to believe that dual power is the only form of political crisis that can result in a transition to socialism. Indeed the

democratic road to socialism in the West requires a protracted struggle to exploit the internal contradictions of the state rather than to develop a new monolithic bloc to oppose another. This involves "the spreading, development, reinforcement, coordination and direction of those diffuse centres of resistance that the masses always possess within the state networks, in such a way that they become the real centres of power on the strategic terrain of the state" (*SPS*, p 258).

In advocating this strategy Poulantzas consciously distances himself from Gramsci's views on the distinction between a frontal attack (or war of manoeuvre) and a war of position. For he argues that the latter strategy implies the encirclement of a state that is still seen as a fortress (*SPS*, pp 256, 258). Instead he emphasises that it is essential to penetrate the state itself and, through a series of breaks and ruptures, to swing the balance of forces within the state round to the popular masses. This involves more than the winning of parliamentary majorities and must extend to the state apparatus as a whole - including not only the ISAs but also the police and army with all the difficulties this entails. The key to success in this endeavour is to be found in the development of struggles at a distance from the state, the expansion of self-management, the proliferation of democratic organs at the base. Conversely, once power has been seized, it is essential to deepen and extend representative democracy (*SPS*, pp 258-62).

Nonetheless Poulantzas remains deeply pessimistic about this strategy. The long process he foresees gives many opportunities for the bourgeoisie to boycott and disrupt the democratic transition to socialism. At the same time it poses real problems in sustaining mass support and popular alliances. Without active popular involvement (as opposed to a 'passive' revolution) two dangers are posed. Not only is the danger of bourgeois intervention increased; but so is the danger of a statist rather than democratic form of socialism. Poulantzas suggests that it was the Popular Unity government's failure to sustain the alliance between working class and petty bourgeoisie in Chile that provided the opportunity for the military coup that overthrew Allende. But he provides no ready formula for the tasks involved. Much remains to be resolved (*SPS*, pp 262-5). Indeed, following the publication of *SPS*, as we have already noted, Poulantzas continued to modify his views without ever reaching a stable and sustainable position.

## The Crisis of Political Parties

This argument clearly involves a re-evaluation of the role of political parties in the transition to socialism. Poulantzas argues that the development of authoritarian statism affects the western communist parties as well as the parties of government. For the former are just as present on the terrain of the state as the dominant parties and are necessarily affected by changes in the state system. Thus the growth of plebiscitary legitimation and the personalisation of power reinforce the inherent bureaucratic tendencies of communist parties and encourage them to use the new means of communication to regiment their own membership and rank-and-file in the same way as the dominant parties (1979e). Indeed all parties in Western Europe face the dangers of Americanisation. In addition there is a specific crisis affecting the mass parties of the working class, especially the CPs but also the social democratic parties, and which has repercussions on their political strategy, their ideology, and their identity (ibid.).

Thus Eurocommunist parties increasingly question the Stalinist model inherited from the Comintern and its implications for the basic form of the party and the nature of socialism. Likewise, the socialist parties (especially those in France, Spain, and Italy) increasingly interrogate the model of social democracy in the light of their growing disillusion with Keynesianism and the 'planning state' (*Planstaat* or *L'état planificateur*) and the reduced economic opportunities for compromise between the dominant and dominated classes. This has produced numerous hesitations about the appropriate road to socialism and how it can be distinguished both from Stalinism and social democratic statism (1979e).

But the fundamental cause of these crises in working class parties is rooted in the very form of the party. For communist and socialist parties are equally organised as workers' parties - even though they were never exclusively workers' parties but merely predominantly so. They are also structured around the contradictions of the productive apparatus (the factory) and the relatively homogeneous working conditions that characterise it. This engenders a twofold division between parties and unions, state and enterprises.

This division of labour is undermined by the changes involved in authoritarian statism. For the displacement in the state's legitimation affects not only the political sphere but also the form and content of social struggles. The state now penetrates all areas of everyday life -

notably the reproduction of labour power and the sphere of consumption - and deploys its administrative procedures everywhere. This is associated with the crises in the economy and the Keynesian welfare state system. All this provokes a rampant crisis of legitimation without producing a consensual, ruptural unity opposed to the system of class domination. Instead there are specific social movements corresponding to particular forms of impact of statism - among youth, women, immigrants, particular regions, and so forth. Thus many social movements of direct concern to the working class itself are actually located at a distance from the sites of production (e.g., students, feminism, regionalism, ecological, etc.) and are also necessarily *pluriclassiste* in character (1979g).

The forms of struggle adopted by such movements are also new. The strategy of the general strike or the formulation of a global political project to unify different forms of protest have atrophied compared with the period of savage economic crises in the 1930s. In commenting on the global political project in these terms, Poulantzas clearly has in mind the exclusive role of the communist party as the 'modern prince' (see below). In this sense changing forms of social, economic, and political struggle have also called into question the leading role of the communist party in a socialist transition. Moreover, even inside the factories themselves, the strike weapon has become less significant. Instead such struggles are refracted into diffuse forms of popular protest and transposed into the cultural domain: student movements, feminist movements, ecological movements, regionalism. These movements certainly express the contradictions involved in the expanded reproduction of capital, *pace* the views expressed by Alain Touraine, and do not pose alternatives to the class struggle. But they also retain their own specificity and are certainly not reducible to class contradictions (1979e; cf. 1979I.a, p 30, and 1983I.a, pp 39-40).

Thus social movements outside the factory involve different social classes and reflect a diverse, heterogeneous field of everyday experiences and living conditions. This diversity also reflects the considerable expansion of the popular strata - the new petty bourgeoisie, technicians, lower management, skilled workers, etc. - who are mainly concerned with their own social mobility and the search for individual rather than collective advancement. This means they are less interested in the party form of politics and/or with solidary action and actually find the new modes of interest representation

and neo-corporatist forms of action more convenient. Nor is this diversification confined to the middle classes. Even within the factories divisions have grown between skilled and unskilled, immigrant and native, and, indeed, within each group (1979e).

Thus, at the very moment when their presence in society and the field of social movements appears ever more necessary, the mass workers' parties are experiencing serious crises induced by the self-same fundamental social changes that have created this need. These crises can only be resolved by developing a new political strategy and a new road to socialism. Above all the search for a democratic socialism must articulate a deepened and broadened representative democracy with the sites of self-management in a system of direct democracy. And the vehicles for articulating these forms of democracy should be the mass workers' parties (1979g).

A measure of the confusion and uncertainty with which Poulantzas approached these issues is found in an interview conducted earlier in 1979. Here he rejected the view that the communist party must play a crucial role in organising, centralising, and homogenising social differences in order to articulate direct democracy and representative democracy. Instead he called for a plural party system and representative democratic organs (1979I.a, p 201). This could be seen in the Italian case, for example, where some regional assemblies enjoyed joint communist and socialist majorities whose activities were co-ordinated without the central direction of the local or national communist parties (*ibid.*). On either view, however, a key role does devolve to individual parties and/or the party system.

### **New Social Movements and Democratic Socialism**

This poses the problem of how mass parties should be involved in social movements. For there is a risk of a particularistic, corporatist degeneration and consequent recuperation of these movements into the dominant political order if they are left outside the mass workers' parties; but, equally, there is a risk of major conflicts between social movements and mass parties if they interact. To avoid such problems would require a fundamental transformation of these parties themselves (1979d, pp 180-2). Among the reforms required are internal democratisation, modification of the traditional relations

that obtain between mass organisations, and recognition of the social diversity that exists at the heart of their membership. But this in turn poses problems of how far the parties can change without becoming populist.

Analogous problems are posed for social movements. For Poulantzas now suggests that they have a crucial role to play in developing democracy at the base. At the same time he notes that they risk being recuperated through the neo-corporatist and neo-clientelist institutionalising strategies of the state and thereby smothered under its repressive tolerance. A parallel risk occurs in their relationship with the mass workers' parties. Thus one must ask both how social movements should be related to the state and to the mass workers' parties.

In relation to the state Poulantzas sides with Ingrao against Deleuze, Foucault, and Guattari. For, whereas the latter argue that single 'micro-revolts', scattered resistances, and isolated experiments are the only way to avoid a strategy that imprisons new social movements in the snares of statist politics and to preserve their autonomy, Ingrao emphasises that such an approach threatens social movements with degeneration into fragmented 'economic-corporate' concerns that have become depoliticised and only pursue egoistic or socio-professional interests (e.g., Deleuze and Foucault, 1973, pp 103-109; Guattari, 1984. pp. 208-61; Ingrao, 1977 and 1979).

But Poulantzas also criticises Ingrao for proposing that the social movements be integrated into and subordinated to the institutions of a democratised (as opposed to authoritarian) state. He suggests that this strategy was attempted by the Austro-Marxists and that it failed. For the Austro-Marxists tried to articulate direct democracy and representative democracy by incorporating the former into the latter; their experience allegedly shows that the institutions of direct democracy were eventually absorbed into the administrative circuits of the state. Thus Poulantzas wonders whether it is not worthwhile permitting a certain irreducible tension between social movements and parties, direct democracy and representative institutions, in the transition to democratic socialism and, indeed, asks whether or not such a tension is an integral element in the dynamic of a democratic transition to democratic socialism (1979I.c, pp 176-7).

Poulantzas also asks how far new social movements can be integrated into mass workers' parties whilst retaining their unique

flexibility and democratic character. For integration involves the risk that social movements would lose their individuality and even be dissolved. Thus, although he had initially argued for the leading role of the (vanguard) communist party in coordinating the various struggles for democratic socialism, Poulantzas later demands a measure of autonomy and 'creative tension' between social movements and parties (1979g).

These various arguments clearly develop *SPS's* views on the need to articulate representative and direct democratic forms in the transition to democratic socialism. These critical concerns are taken further in his last ever interview. Here Poulantzas not only recalls that Leninism already contained elements that encouraged the emergence of Stalinism but also argues that, for all his theoretical and strategic innovations, Gramsci himself remained within a fundamentally Leninist problematic of the state. Thus Poulantzas alleges that Gramsci still saw the state as something to be conquered and that even the 'war of position' is premised on a strategy of 'dual power'. He also suggests that Gramsci failed to appreciate the importance of representative democracy, pluripartism, and the rule of law for a transition to democratic socialism. This is supposedly associated with a certain 'panpoliticism' in Gramsci that is reflected in his treatment of the whole of civil society as intrinsically political and his view of the communist party as the centre through which all the various 'private' spheres are coordinated and subordinated to a global political strategy. In opposition to these alleged problems in Gramsci, Poulantzas calls for a Copernican revolution in socialist political thought.

He argues that one must recognise that "not everything is political", that there are limits to politics and politicisation' (1983I.a, p 40). He calls for certain social spaces in which groups would be free to develop new collective projects that escape the political embrace, which maintain a distance from the political. In this context he now insists that social movements must maintain a clear structural distance from political parties, including the mass parties of the working class. The Eurocommunist parties may have abandoned Stalinism but they have not yet established an appropriate relation to social movements. Thus Poulantzas concludes that these parties must develop new forms of presence in civil society (1983I.a, pp 38-41).

## The Working Class and Political Democracy

He also concluded that Eurocommunist parties could no longer claim a privileged role in the transition to socialism on the grounds that they represented the working class. This represents another crucial break from his earlier positions on the transition to socialism. For, even when Poulantzas saw that there was a necessary disjunction between any theory (including Marxism) and its practical application, he continued to believe that communist parties were still the most appropriate organs for the practical application of Marxism in capitalist societies. However, following the break-up of the Union de la Gauche at the instigation of the PCF before the 1978 elections, Poulantzas became disillusioned with the 'actually existing communist party' in France. He therefore began to reflect on other roads to socialism and to abandon his erstwhile 'bolshocentrisme': communist parties were no longer seen as the only pathfinders, nor simply as the privileged guide, for the democratic road to socialism (1983I.a; cf. Lindenberg, 1983, pp 42-3).

Eventually Poulantzas even came to question the privileged position of the working class in this transition. Thus, in his final interview, he concedes that it is essential fundamentally to rethink the concept of working class hegemony. Indeed he now completely rejects the Marxist tendency to treat working class support for political democracy as natural and 'spontaneous'. He argues that there is no class at all whose inherent class character predestines it to guarantee political liberties; and he suggests that they can only be protected through conscious political intervention. Indeed Poulantzas also notes that the complex internal divisions and stratification of the working class mean that it needs democratic institutions not only to defend itself against its 'enemies' but also for defence against itself at the very moment when it has secured political power. This makes it even more urgent to develop a political theory of the democratic transition to socialism (1983I.a, p 41).

## Poulantzas and Left Eurocommunism

The strategic conclusions of *SPS* and subsequent interviews are light-years away from those of *PPSC*. From an orthodox Leninist

viewpoint that calls for the overthrow of the bourgeois state with its merely formal 'political liberties', Poulantzas has moved to a defence of these liberties and their necessity for democratic socialism. From an orthodox Leninist claim that the hegemonic force in any transition to socialism will be the working class and that it must be led in turn by the communist party, Poulantzas has moved to a *pluriclassiste* approach that also emphasises the role of non-class movements and to a *pluripartiste* approach that downplays the privileged role of communism and insists on an irreducible autonomy for social movements alongside parties. These changes clearly involve a re-appraisal of the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Indeed Poulantzas now describes this as "a notion of applied strategy, serving at most as a signpost" and argues that it "obscures the problem of combining a transformed representative democracy with direct, rank-and-file democracy" (*SPS*, p 256). Accordingly it should be abandoned.

We can pursue this point by considering the Leninist model in more detail. It has been succinctly summarised by Henri Weber, a member of the Trotskyist organisation, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, and a participant in the Melusine circle gathered around Poulantzas, in the following terms. He writes that the Leninist model:

"implies the sequence: pre-revolutionary crisis; paralysis and then progressive decomposition of the state apparatuses; duality of power; conquest by the revolutionary party of the majority at the heart of the structures of workers' counter-power; general insurrectionary strike; arrival of the republic of councils" (Weber, 1983, p 52).

Both Weber and Poulantzas agree that the nature of modern state precludes any chance of realising this model in advanced capitalism. It is based on a catastrophist account of crisis and an instrumentalist theory of the state. By virtue of the active role of the modern state in crisis-management, its complete and catastrophic breakdown is unlikely (except in cases of military defeat). Nowadays, moreover, the popular masses are mobilised in unions, parties, etc., rather than in a conciliar pyramid. Thus substituting a revolutionary and monolithic counter-state power for the existing bourgeois state in a dual power situation is implausible.

At the same time Poulantzas clearly rejects left social democratic strategies. Weber summarises them equally pithily as follows:

"these schemas pose the sequence: expansion of the salariat; electoral advance of the socialists; progressive conquest of local, regional, then national instances of popular sovereignty; progressive occupation of administrations; formation of a government dominated by socialists, basing itself on strong institutional positions in society (unions, associations, mass movements) and in the state; 'revolution by law', by means of 'reforms of structures', while respecting legitimate interests" (Weber, 1983, p 53).

These models presuppose the good will of the bourgeoisie - they depend on its legalism, social pacifism, and democratic self-denial. They are based on an apologetic view of neo-capitalism and an essentialist view of the state as a subject embodying the general will. Poulantzas condemns this model on the grounds that capital can switch the centres of power and will certainly resort to force to safeguard its interests. In addition, of course, he rejects the view of the state as subject.

In arguing in this way Poulantzas seems to have moved to a Eurocommunist position. He clearly rejects any advocacy of a frontal assault or general insurrectionary strike. He also rejects a simple social democratic position. More precisely he openly adopts a left Eurocommunist stance. We can distinguish between left and right Eurocommunism as follows. Rightwing Eurocommunists tend to view the democratic transition to socialism as gradual and progressive, based on an anti-monopoly class alliance under the leadership of the communist vanguard party, content to leave the ISAs largely unchanged on the grounds that they are neutral, and concerned to strengthen parliamentary control over the state and economy and to introduce trade union participation in plant management and economic planning. In short they see democratic socialism coming about through a 'long march', slow and steady, through the institutions of civil and political society. Leftwing Eurocommunists tend to view the transition as a long series of ruptures and breaks, based on a national-popular, broad democratic alliance involving new social movements as well as class forces and organised in a pluralistic manner, committed to a fundamental

transformation of the ISAs as part of the democratisation process, and concerned to restructure the state and economy so that there is extensive democracy at the base as well as an overarching, unifying parliamentary forum (cf. Poulantzas, 1979I.a, pp 177-8; Jessop, 1982, p 14). The latter position is that at which Poulantzas eventually arrives before his death - with continuing efforts at reappraisal and specification throughout his last years. This is most evident, as we have already seen, in his changing views on new social movements.

### **Poulantzas and Austro-Marxism**

Can we also argue that Poulantzas has adopted an Austro-Marxist perspective on left Eurocommunism? In a sense this question involves a *contradictio in adjecto*. For Austro-Marxism was a left *socialist* approach developed within the Austrian social democratic movement to provide, *inter alia*, a 'third way' between the Second and Third Internationals. It was not a Communist position. Nonetheless the Austro-Marxists emphasised the integral links between socialism and democracy in a manner very similar to that of contemporary Eurocommunism. It was Max Adler and Otto Bauer, after all, who first proposed the need to combine parliamentary and council forms of democracy. Both argued that workers' councils could not be the alternative state form through which the dictatorship of the proletariat would be realised. But they also recognised that councils offered new forms of class struggle and self-government for the working class. Council forms needed to be supplemented with parliamentary democracy. Only in this way could one combine political democracy with socio-economic democracy. Only in this way, did they believe, could one avoid the twin evils of social democratic and Bolshevist statism. But, whilst recognising the subsequent deformation of the Russian Revolution, they did not dismiss it as having no value. They were prepared to defend certain progressive aspects of the Soviet Union. Yet they also insisted that there were several alternative routes to socialism. Likewise they supported a polycentric view of international socialism rather than a unilateral subordination of other parties and countries to the Soviet Union.

Despite the similarities between their positions, it is unlikely that Poulantzas deliberately and self-consciously adopted an Austro-Marxist

approach. Firstly, there are several points at which his position differs from Austro-Marxism and, secondly, there is little direct evidence that he read the Austro-Marxist debate in this particular context. Thus, contrary to Poulantzas's own account of the rise of Soviet statism (at least as outlined in *SPS*), Adler and Bauer did not explain the deformation of the Bolshevik Revolution only in terms of the destruction of liberal democracy. They also emphasised the unfavourable social conditions prevailing in Russia during the revolutionary period. Perhaps this is why Poulantzas cites Rosa Luxemburg in this context rather than Bauer or Adler. Moreover, as noted above, Austro-Marxism emerged as a left social democratic position rather than an explicitly communist position. At this time, however, Poulantzas was still committed to the Communist movement.

Nonetheless Austro-Marxism was certainly influential in various political and strategic discussions during the late 'seventies. This can be seen in the Italian state debate among Socialists (such as Bobbio) and Communists (e.g., Ingrao, Magri, Gruppi, Ochetto) alike. It also influenced the approach of CERES and the CFDT in France (e.g., Rosanvallon and the autogestion current), the PCF (notably in the case of Christine Buci-Glucksmann, a close collaborator of Poulantzas), the PCE in Spain (notably Carillo, Sartorius), PASOK in Greece, and the PS in Portugal (see Albers, 1980, p 51). Thus, although Poulantzas did not directly cite the Austro-Marxist debate, it could have exerted an indirect influence through these more recent channels. In this sense we could say that Austro-Marxist themes (even when not invoked explicitly) were very much current in the period. Moreover, in so far as Poulantzas was attempting to bring about the theoretical foundations for left unity and to find a 'third way' between social democratic and soviet statism, a rapprochement between council communism and representative democracy would seem an obvious route to take. In short it is likely that Poulantzas's affinities to Austro-Marxism are coincidental rather than deliberate.

### **Some Unresolved Difficulties**

Unfortunately Poulantzas does not take the debate much further than the Austro-Marxists themselves. Neither Poulantzas nor the Austro-Marxists were clear about the precise relationship that should exist

between direct democracy and representative democracy. Both emphasise the complementarity of these forms of government and both stress the need for their mutual support and restraint. But it is unclear how potential conflicts and contradictions between these different types of government should be resolved. Here I want to explore Poulantzas's suggestions.

As a communist Poulantzas started out with a preference for an exclusive system of direct democracy and an uncompromising critique of representative democracy and its juridico-political norms and institutions. He ends by advocating the articulation of direct and representative democracy and strongly defends so-called 'bourgeois' liberties. But he also recognises that, if a catastrophic equilibrium or a situation of dual power is to be avoided, one pole of this democratic relation must be dominant (1977I.e, p 13). Thus he eventually concedes priority to representative democracy - albeit to a system that has been extended and deepened. The organs of direct democracy should not be reduced to purely consultative, 'participationist' appendages. For, together with popular struggles outside the state, they have a crucial role to play in sustaining leftward pressures on the central government. But nor should they be allowed to undermine the latter's effectiveness either as a means of elaborating a national-popular hegemony or as a means of providing central government support to sustain local democratic initiatives. For, given the difficulties of coordinating dispersed and fragmented democratic organs at the base without relating them organically to representative democracy, they may become strong enough to short-circuit the initiatives of a left government without ever acquiring the strength and cohesion to rule alone (see particularly Poulantzas's critique of the Portuguese experiment, *CD*, pp 135-55; 1977I.k, pp 4 and 10; 1977I.e, p 13).

In this context Poulantzas also suggests that direct democracy requires 'bourgeois' liberties to avoid bureaucratic degeneration and that direct democracy might give rise to corporatism and egoism if it is not tempered by the general perspectives emerging from representative democracy (1977I.k, p 8). On a local and/or micro-level, organs of direct democracy would propose, ratify, and implement policies in a complex system of self-management. On a national level with its macro-political concerns, however, such organs might suggest policies but the parliamentary assembly would retain the power to enact them. This procedure allows different particular interests to

qualify each other and also generates a true national-popular perspective. In this sense parliamentary institutions would remain the principal site for elaborating national-popular hegemony around democratic socialist projects.

This argument is curiously one-sided. For there is surely no more reason to believe that council communism necessarily leads to corporatism than there is to believe that parliamentarism inevitably gives rise to parochialism (cf. Weber, 1978, p 12). To emphasise the dangers of corporatism in this manner implies that the organs of direct democracy could only arrive at a general orientation through the mechanical addition of the allegedly particularistic, fragmentary viewpoints of the different units at the base of the conciliar pyramid. If this were the case, then direct democracy could only produce a 'will of all' rather than a 'general will'. But there is no reason to believe that organs of direct democracy can only operate in the light of their individual experience. Surely they could also pronounce on propositions, general orientations, and political options put forward by conflicting parties and currents of thought with broader social experiences. Nor is there any reason to believe that direct democracy must be constructed around a single basis of political representation. Surely specific mechanisms could be established to enable different political parties and/or social movements to be represented in the councils and to give them the right to comment on different arguments and propositions. Moreover, should a mixed franchise be established, party representatives could even have the right to vote. In this sense it would be possible to emphasise the sovereignty of council communism and still recognise the crucial role of *pluripartisme*. Indeed some council communists argue quite explicitly that council democracy can only operate effectively where a plurality of parties exists (cf. Bensaid, 1978, pp 180-3, and Vincent, 1983, pp 70-2; on the mixed franchise more generally, see Hirst, 1982).

It is also essential to consider the problems involved in developing a national-popular orientation within representative democracy. Poulantzas often stresses the flexibility and effectiveness of parliamentarism in securing bourgeois hegemony. But he also notes that the effects of institutions are always overdetermined by the class struggle and describes how crises of hegemony can occur within capitalist democracies. He provides no reason to believe that things will change with the transition to democratic socialism. We have

already seen that Poulantzas cast increasing doubt on the structural guarantees of bourgeois rule. Indeed he eventually emphasised the prodigious incoherence and diversity of micro-policies in capitalist societies and failed to provide a convincing account of the postulated macro-necessity of bourgeois political domination. Exactly the same problem emerges in his account of democratic socialism. He casts increasing doubt on its purported structural guarantees in an appropriate combination of direct and representative democracy and also gives growing recognition to the irreducible diversity of class struggles and social movements. He goes further in noting that direct democracy is prey to particularism and that no single party can provide the global political orientation that might unify and give direction to the many, incoherent micro-struggles that could be relevant to democratic socialism. In turn this means that a successful transition depends crucially on the *strategic selectivity* of the transformed democratic socialist state. But this issue of institutional design is never adequately confronted. In this sense Poulantzas never fully accepted the implications of his own relational perspective on state power.

Poulantzas recognised only some of these difficulties. In various interviews conducted after the publication of *SPS* he admitted that he was still working out the most appropriate forms of linking social movements and parties and/or articulating direct democracy and representative democracy. Among other problems he noted that representative democracy presupposes a relative institutional separation between public and private, the state and the productive system. He then asks how this separation could be transformed in a democratic socialist system (1979I.a). This question is clearly crucial but it is unanswered. It is a measure of Poulantzas's enduring politicism that this issue is raised so late and that he had previously concentrated on the problems of articulating different forms of democratic governance rather than on the more general constraints (economic and ideological as much as political) involved in the social division of labour under contemporary capitalism.

In general Poulantzas seems to place an excessive faith in democratic miracles. He is far from sharing in the 'parliamentary cretinism' of social democrats and vigorously rejects the belief that socialism can be legislated into existence once an electoral majority has been won. But his case does ultimately rest on the role of representative democracy and its associated liberties in sustaining the

pluralism that would enable direct forms of democracy to operate in a democratic manner. Thus, as Weber notes, Poulantzas emphasises the need for a *dialectic* between direct democracy and representative democracy. There needs to be mass mobilisation, movements at the heart of the state, the development of general, non-corporatist claims. This would drive a left government on without directly opposing it through dual power (which would divide the working class, disaggregate its alliances, displace the centre of gravity to the right, etc.). The democratic road to socialism depends on the dialectic between the mass movement and left government - the former pushes on in advance of the latter, the latter consolidates the conquests of the former, legalises them, and makes further advances possible (1977L.k, p 12; cf. Weber, 1983, p 57). Together they produce democratic socialism.

### **The Dilemmas of a Democratic Socialist Transition**

This emphasis on the dialectic between direct and representative democracy suggests a new approach to the dilemmas of a transition to democratic socialism. In an important essay Przeworski argues that any mass workers' party must make three choices about its strategy for achieving democratic socialism. First, it must decide whether to work exclusively within the institutions of bourgeois democratic government or to engage in forms of direct action such as the general strike or armed struggle. Second, it must decide whether to organize only the working class or to engage in inter-class alliances (such as a popular front) or even supra-class alliances (based on non-class as well as class antagonisms). And, third, it must decide whether to adopt a maximalist strategy of non-negotiable demands for an immediate transition to socialism or to adopt a gradualist strategy of piecemeal reforms that would eventually culminate in a radical transformation of capitalism. These choices constitute dilemmas because they must be confronted continually, because both alternatives involve problems, and because choosing either option intensifies the problems associated with the other option (Przeworski, 1980, *passim*).

The first dilemma involves two risks. Talking about the need for armed conflict, a final politico-military resolution of the balance of forces, could undermine confidence in one's commitment to electoral

struggle and the democratic road. But, since the repressive apparatus itself certainly anticipates such eventualities and the state is prepared to infringe its own legality in the name of reasons of state, some would question the wisdom of the left being less prepared for violence than the state. Whether this means that the left should prepare for a pre-emptive or reactive general strike, widespread civil disobedience based on a popular and united front, or a protracted people's war is unclear. To make such preparations casts doubt on the left's commitment to representative democracy; not to make them leaves the left vulnerable to counter-revolutionary violence from the armed forces or rightwing reaction. This is an ever-present dilemma for those committed to the democratic road and Poulantzas resolutely gambles in favour of a peaceful strategy.

Poulantzas is remarkably silent in *SPS* on revolutionary violence. In *FD* he had castigated the left's failures to fully prepare and then deploy its paramilitary formations *after* the point of no return as well as its failure to organise United and Popular Fronts to check the rise of fascism *before* this point (see chapter 8). Likewise, in relation to Greece, Poulantzas seems to have advocated a protracted people's war in which the countryside should surround the towns (see chapter 9). But he later abandoned not only a Leninist frontal assault but also a Maoist people's war. At best he now puts his trust in a widespread transfer of active support by the armed forces to the side of democratic socialism. At worst he seems to rely on a simple paralysis of the armed forces through internal divisions and the political mobilisation of the masses (1977I.k, pp 5-6; 1979I.b, pp 136-7).

In a late interview Poulantzas claims that, as a revolutionary, he is not opposed to armed resistance in principle. But he adds

"it is better to do things without resorting to force and even to wait if necessary in order to accomplish things without violence at a later date rather than use coercion to overcome more quickly. For, if one once starts to use force, the moment eventually comes when one no longer knows whether one will ever stop using it" (1979I.b, pp 135-6).

Force was appropriate to resist fascism but there is no threat of fascisation in the metropolitan state. This means that terrorism is to be rejected in today's circumstances - especially as it further

justifies the state's own use of force and the resulting loss of freedoms. Thus Poulantzas prefers to place the emphasis on exploiting the state's weaknesses and contradictions through a left Eurocommunist strategy (1979I.b, pp 136-7). In this respect Poulantzas recognises that he is taking an historical gamble. For there is an "obvious risk - and everyone is aware of it - that the great majority of the repressive state apparatuses will polarise to the right, and therefore crush the popular movement" (1977I.k, p 6; cf. SPS, p 265).

Poulantzas also recognises the second dilemma and also changes his attitude towards it. Initially Poulantzas opted for a strategy based on United and Popular Fronts and thus on an inter-class alliance among the dominated classes. Indeed, since he defined the working class so restrictively that it comprised only a fifth or quarter of the population in the advanced capitalist states, a democratic road to socialism had to be based on an alliance strategy. Later he came to extend this strategy to embrace supra-class alliances based on new social movements as well as more obvious class forces. But he did not confront the dilemmas thus posed. For, the greater the emphasis on inter- or supra-class appeals, the more vulnerable are the mass workers' parties to a haemorrhage of working class support to workerist parties on their left and/or to similar inter- or supra-class appeals emanating from parties to their right. The more insistent such parties are on their immediate concern with working class interests, however, the less likely are they to secure an electoral majority since the working class itself is in the minority.

Poulantzas always gave greater priority to the second horn of this dilemma. It informs both his initial support for frontist strategies based on the mass line and his more recent discussion of the crisis of the mass workers' parties. Indeed his analysis of the impact of economic changes and the rise of authoritarian statism in contemporary capitalism led him to insist even more strongly on the need for *pluriclassisme*, *pluripartisme*, and an irreducible role for new social movements. Yet pursuing this line has seriously weakened Poulantzas's own party (the Communist Party of the Interior) in Greece to the advantage of the orthodox KKE and/or PASOK. And, more generally, Poulantzas failed to recognise that a supra-class alliance strategy also opens opportunities for the plebiscitary, 'authoritarian populist' politics of the new right. This does not mean that the democratic socialist left must abandon the struggle for popular democratic government in favour of crude workerist politics. It does

mean that the problems involved in a transition to democratic socialism are more complex than Poulantzas himself recognised.

As regards the third dilemma, Poulantzas always insisted on the need for a careful analysis of the conjuncture. Thus his account of the collapse or decomposition of the military dictatorships in Greece, Portugal, and Spain specified the political conjuncture as one of democratisation of the capitalist state rather than an immediate transition to democratic socialism. This emerges most clearly in his comments on the EADE strategy in Greece after the collapse of the junta (see chapter 9). It is also evident in his dismissive comments about the ultra-leftism and putschism of key sections of the Portuguese left as well as the putschism and maximalism of the communists in the Weimar Republic. But, in rejecting maximalism and insisting on careful conjunctural analyses, did Poulantzas leave a space for a retreat from democratic socialism to the traditional social democratic response of crisis-management on behalf of capitalism? This response has occurred in the Mitterrand regime in France and in Papandreou's PASOK government in Greece.

Whether or not Poulantzas resolves this third dilemma is crucial for his account of democratic socialism. For there is little choice in advanced capitalism but to stress a non-violent road to democratic socialism or to emphasise alliance strategies that go beyond the small and far from unified working class of the metropolitan capitalist economies. His approach to the third dilemma also has major implications for the success of his response to the second. It is in this context that Poulantzas calls for a threefold strategy based on struggle at a distance from the state, struggles within the state, and struggles to transform the state. Let us consider this in more detail.

### **Is a Democratic Transition Possible?**

In confronting these dilemmas Poulantzas's strategy would depend crucially on the intensification of splits and contradictions within the state apparatus. By no means does it demand a left turn by all high functionaries. But it does rely on growing polarisation and ruptures in the state together with a left turn by a sufficient number of the state elite to paralyse or neutralise other, rightward-leaning functionaries - including the police, judiciary, and armed forces but also embracing the dominant economic state apparatus and all other

power centres (1977I.e, p 14; 1977I.k, 6). It is only in this context that the popular struggles outside the state can have the desired effects. But the dialectic between the mass movement located at a distance from the state and the contradictions within the heart of the state must itself be managed through the role of the party system. Left to itself, the mass movement would either push towards maximalism or else collapse back into corporatism. Conversely, if it is unpressured by the mass movement, a socialist government would push towards a social democratic stabilisation (1977I.e, p 14; 1977I.k; cf. Weber, 1983, p 59). For a long time Poulantzas appears to have believed that this dilemma could be resolved through the leading role of the communist party - with a little help from the extreme left (e.g., 1977I.k, p 12). For the Communists would provide the global political perspectives to avoid both maximalism and reformism and would thereby manage the dialectic between mass movement and government action. But, he eventually abandoned this belief, as we have seen, and provided no satisfactory alternative solution.

This approach also involves a more general problem, which has been well expressed by Henri Weber. For it subordinates the mass movement to the need to maintain a left government, to the imperative of securing a vertical polarization of the state. It seems to depend on a series of partial confrontations that would supposedly add up to a revolutionary rupture. Yet this ignores the cyclical nature of popular mobilisation and the counter-offensive capacities of the dominant class - facts that Poulantzas himself acknowledges as problematic in his own strategy as outlined in *SPS*. It means neglecting the dangers of demoralisation, demobilisation, and privatisation among the popular masses. And it is to ignore the danger of an active preparation of a bourgeois counter-offensive aided by capital's continuing positions of strength in the state and internationally (Weber, 1983, p 60).

Indeed, although Poulantzas adopts a left Eurocommunist position, *SPS* actually provides telling arguments against it. Thus elsewhere Weber records how Poulantzas suggests the following crucial objections to his own position. Firstly, Poulantzas notes that the dominated classes hold, at best, a marginal position in the state system. They can occupy centres of *resistance* outside the core of the RSA but they do not control real centres of power. Secondly, the flexibility of the state system and the manoeuvrability of the dominant class mean that capital can switch the real centres of power

whenever the popular masses threaten to win hitherto important positions. Thirdly, when confronted with an adverse shift in the balance of forces, the dominant class(es) are able to reverse it. Fourthly, although some state employees may be polarised towards the left, they remain unreliable allies in the struggle for democratic socialism. For they are still committed to maintaining the division between mental and manual labour on which their special status and privileges are premised. Fifthly, owing to the continuing rise of authoritarian statism, all these unfavourable factors have been accentuated. In short, the prospects for the long-term war of position advocated by Poulantzas are, to say the least, none too bright (Weber, 1978, pp 9-10; cf. *SPS*, pp 137-9, 142-3, 156-8, 203-47).

Not all these arguments are equally strong. Most telling are the threats posed by the progressive consolidation of authoritarian statism and the problems involved in the role of state functionaries in the mental-manual division of labour. But the transition to democratic socialism is a protracted process and offers opportunities for the consolidation of socialist power centres as well as the recuperation of bourgeois domination. Much here would depend on the ability to counteract the cyclical character of mass mobilisation and extra-parliamentary pressures. More generally it would be wrong to exaggerate the manoeuvrability of capital and underestimate the relative autonomy of the institutional structure of the state system. All political forces must manoeuvre on the same institutional terrain and progressive changes in this system could circumscribe the room for manoeuvre available to capital. This is why Poulantzas's strategy involves changes in the state as well as struggles at a distance and struggles within it. It also explains why he insists on transforming the institutional separation between state and economy to reduce the limits on political control over economic activities and on transforming the mental-manual division of labour. In all these cases it is also important to note that the overall conjuncture and balance of forces are not always unambiguously favourable to capital. Economic and military crises, crises of hegemony, and crises of the state would each in their various ways weaken capital. Whether the left can take advantage of these crises is another issue and much would depend on its own hegemonic capacities.

The overall prospects are nonetheless far from bright. This can be illustrated from the experience of the Solidarity movement in Poland. For, in certain respects, this represents a test for Poulantzas's strategy.

Solidarity involved a series of movements at a distance from the state, that were committed, inter alia, to self-management; it exploited splits and contradictions within the state system; and it developed a mass movement to coordinate the different struggles. Nor did it make the mistake of destroying the existing state apparatus before it had constructed an alternative system and thus deprive itself of the means to consolidate gains won through mass pressure at the base. Similarly it avoided any direct confrontation with the armed forces and always acted so as to minimize any risk of foreign intervention by the Soviet Union. Yet Solidarity fell victim to the cyclical character of mass mobilisation, the ability of the state to offer concessions whilst preparing to reverse the balance of forces, the ability of the state to play the card of armed Soviet intervention, and the uncertainties in Solidarity itself as to its appropriate role. If the relevance of this example is contested, it should be remembered that Poulantzas himself considers the Eastern bloc countries to be capitalist as well as statist and that his strategy is meant to be appropriate to both East and West.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In certain respects left Eurocommunism involves the same difficulties as social democracy in seeking a transition to democratic socialism. Both movements are committed to a majoritarian, non-violent, and democratic road to socialism. Thus both movements must enter class alliances and popular-democratic struggles, eschew the use of violence, and be prepared for reverses. But this involves dilemmas. How can one avoid diluting the socialist content of a democratic socialist programme in seeking alliances with the peasantry and/or new petty bourgeoisie? How can one avoid class reductionism in eschewing simple populism or Jacobinism in seeking alliances with new social movements? How justified is abandoning armed struggle without any reciprocal commitment on the part of the dominant class(es) and repressive state apparatus? Is it wise to forego possible opportunities for a violent road should some future conjuncture favour a politico-military route to socialism? How can one avoid the pressures to become managers of capitalist crisis rather than precursors of democratic socialism? Poulantzas is well aware of these dilemmas but usually provides only outline or gestural

solutions. Often he describes the grounds on which a solution must be found but does not provide a full account of the strategy to be followed. Perhaps it is in their nature as *dilemmas* that no solutions are possible. But part of the problem also surely lies in the relational character of state power and the fact that democratic socialism will depend on an indeterminate interaction between institutional design and the balance of forces.

If Poulantzas does not solve these dilemmas, he does confront many key problems involved in a democratic transition to democratic socialism. He offers an uncompromising critique of Leninism as well as social democracy and eventually moves on to a critique of the Gramscian approach involved in right Eurocommunism. In returning again and again to the problems of the democratic transition he engages in continual self-questioning and eventually modified all the fundamental strategic positions with which he was identified. In this respect he demonstrated his own commitment to the critical role of the intellectual in politics (see chapter 7). Moreover, if he sometimes displayed a pessimism of the intellect, he also followed Gramsci in maintaining an optimism of the will.

There is little doubt that Poulantzas, whatever his optimism that a democratic socialism was worth struggling for, was also pessimistic about the prospects of achieving it. He concludes *SPS* with the comment that history has not yet given us a successful experience of the democratic road to socialism. But he adds that this does not mean that it is impossible - only difficult. Democratic socialism is not guaranteed by iron laws of historical inevitability nor by the purportedly international proletarian and fraternal support of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless Poulantzas insists that one thing is certain: "socialism will be democratic or it will not be at all". He admits that there are serious risks involved. In particular democratic socialists could be heading for camps and massacres as appointed victims rather than as self-elected executioners. But he replies that this would still be "preferable to massacring other people only to end up ourselves beneath the blade of a Committee of Public Safety or some Dictator of the Proletariat" (*SPS*, p 265). With this conclusion there can surely be little disagreement. This makes it all the more urgent to build on the insights of Poulantzas and rethink the dilemmas of democratic socialism.

## **Part V**

# **Retrospect and Prospect**

## Further Remarks on the Three Sources

We have now completed our detailed review of Poulantzas's theoretical and strategic development and it is time to present some more general reflections on his work. In this chapter I return to a theme introduced in chapter one, namely, the three sources of Poulantzas's theoretical and strategic innovations. It will be recalled that these are French philosophy, Italian Marxism, and Romano-German law. I now want to consider their influence on Poulantzas's work in more detail. Particular attention will be paid to the influence of three French philosophers - Sartre, Althusser, and Foucault. But I shall also consider how these intellectual sources were brought to fruition through Poulantzas's political involvements.

### The Originality of Marx and Poulantzas

It is a commonplace that the originality of Marx is found in his unique synthesis of the 'three sources of Marxism': German philosophy, French politics, and English economics. This synthesis involves not only three contrasting theoretical traditions but also the historical background and political realities to which they correspond. It is less often remarked that this synthesis was developed in quite specific political conditions. For Marx was actively involved in class struggles and was trying to comprehend the context and conditions for a movement to socialism. But even this does not explain how Marx was able to achieve this synthesis when others did not. In seeking an answer to this question Louis Althusser suggests that Marx's theoretical breakthrough occurred because he adopted an absolutely new, *proletarian* class position. This in turn led him to adopt a new approach to the three sources (Althusser, 1974, pp 156-7).

Thus Althusser remarks that:

We see the young Marx at the same time change the *object* of his thought (roughly he moves from Law to the State, then to Political Economy), change his *philosophical position* (he moves from Hegel to Feuerbach, then to a revolutionary materialism), and change his *political position* (he moves from radical bourgeois liberalism to petty-bourgeois humanism, then to communism). Although these changes are not completely in phase, there are profound links between them" (p 158).

Althusser then suggests that, although Marx's move from one theoretical object to another was determined by his changing orientations in the class struggle, these changes in turn were realised and expressed in new philosophical positions. The claim that changes in Marx's political position were *expressed* in changes in philosophical outlook is not that surprising. What is crucial is Althusser's argument that changes in philosophical position were the fundamental *precondition* of Marx's breakthrough in the analysis of political economy. Without the politics, nothing would have happened. But, without the philosophy of revolutionary materialism, the politics would not have found its proper theoretical expression (pp 158, 160).

The present study is not concerned with Marx. But it is concerned with a theorist who claimed to have completed (if not to have discovered) the Marxist theory of the state. Whatever the merits of this particular claim, Poulantzas certainly made major contributions to Marxist political analysis. Moreover his work reveals shifts in *theoretical* object that are remarkably similar to those of Marx himself. Both men moved from law to the state and thence to political economy. The shifts in Poulantzas's *political* position might seem less radical but they are nonetheless important. From an existentialo-marxist approach he attempted to combine Althusserian and Gramscian positions within an essentially Marxist-Leninist outlook and then went on to adopt a left Eurocommunist position similar to that of pre-war Austro-Marxism. Naturally the shifts in their respective *philosophical* positions are also rather different. Poulantzas moved from a Sartrean approach through Althusserian structuralism to a revolutionary materialism different in several respects from that of Marx. But it is significant that his theoretical and political shifts were more or less closely associated with shifts in philosophical position.

In this context the interesting question is, of course, whether these philosophical shifts were as important for Poulantzas as for Marx. What were the influences that permitted Poulantzas to change his theoretical object and to develop his radically new and important contributions to Marxist state theory? What role did politics play within this movement? To what extent did his shifts in philosophical position express and/or realise the theoretical innovations? It is these issues that I now discuss.

## **Poulantzas and French Philosophy**

### ***Poulantzas and Sartre***

Although there are three sources of Poulantzas's thought, most commentaries see his work in a one-sided manner. In this way they miss its originality by reducing his arguments to those of one or another of his three sources. This is most apparent in relation to French philosophy. Indeed most anglophone commentators and many others reduce Poulantzas's work to the baleful influence of Althusser. More recently there has been some recognition of the influence of Foucault. But the influence of Sartre is almost wholly ignored outside the context of legal philosophy even though it survives Poulantzas's transition to Althusserian structuralism and continues to be significant in his last works.

Indeed it would not be too misleading to say that Sartre anticipates all of Poulantzas's early arguments concerning the state. For he clearly identifies its role in transcending the internal divisions within the dominant classes, emphasises the links between its institutional unity and its position as the site of sovereign power, notes how this unity depends on the seriality (isolation, mutual separation) of the dominated and dominant classes alike, refers to the heterogeneity (institutional separation) and autonomy of the state in pursuing the national interest, and observes how the state's role in maintaining the established order also serves the interest of the dominant classes (Sartre, 1960/1978, pp 635-42).

Thus Sartre argued that:

*"the State* constitutes a mediation between conflicts within the dominant class, in so far as these conflicts run the risk of weakening

it in the face of the dominated classes. It embodies and realises the general interest of the dominant class over and above the antagonisms and conflicts of particular interests. This amounts to saying that the ruling class *produces its State* (that its internal struggles produce the possibility and the exigency for a group to arise to defend the general interest) and that its institutional structures will define themselves in terms of concrete reality (that is to say, in the last analysis, in terms of the mode and relations of production)" (Sartre, *CDR*, p 638).

Likewise Sartre argues that the state must take a totalising view of the social ensemble and may well need to impose its own sense of *national* policy against the dominant classes even when this serves their long-term interest. He writes that:

"the State cannot take on its functions without positing itself as a mediator between the exploiting and the exploited classes. The State is a determination of the dominant class, and this determination is conditioned by class struggle. But it affirms itself as a deep negation of the class struggle. .... The State therefore *exists* for the sake of the dominant class, but as a practical suppression of class conflicts within the national totalisation" (Sartre, *CDR*, p 639).

Sartre also refers to the autonomy of the state, its institutional separation as a heterogeneous structure distinct from the structure of the economic system, and the possibilities of manoeuvre implied in the serialised class struggle. Thus he notes that the state

"*already* posits itself for itself in relation to the class from which it emanates: this united, institutionalised and effective group, deriving its internal sovereignty from itself in and through itself as an essential national *praxis*, by acting in the interests of the class from which it emanates and, *if necessary*, against them)" (Sartre, *CDR*, p 640).

He adds that the "real contradiction of the state is that it is a class apparatus pursuing class objectives and, at the same time, posits itself for itself as the sovereign unity of all" (p 642).

These arguments are similar to those of Poulantzas concerning the state's role in forming a power bloc, the importance of the 'isolation

effect', the relative autonomy and class unity of the state, and the state's role as a factor of cohesion.

The most important of these similarities is that between Sartre's notion of seriality and Poulantzas's concept of the 'isolation effect'. For both Sartre and Poulantzas clearly relate the role of the state as a totalising ensemble (or factor of societal cohesion) to the mutual separation among individual members and 'series' (fragments) within both the dominant and dominated classes. They differ in locating this phenomenon. For, whereas Sartre tends to ascribe these characteristics to the state in general and to see seriality as inherent in the alienated human condition, Poulantzas relates them to the structure of the capitalist mode of production and the specific institutional and ideological features of the capitalist state. Thus, whereas Sartre tends to essentialise these characteristics as universal features of the state, Poulantzas tries to relate them to specific forms of exploitation and domination. In reacting against this *sur-ontologisme* in Sartre, Poulantzas is clearly influenced by Althusser (cf. Poulantzas, 1965a, pp 104-5, 106n).

### ***Poulantzas and Althusser***

It is as an Althusserian structuralist that Poulantzas is most often presented. This reading emerges clearly in two areas. It is most obvious in the Poulantzas-Miliband-Laclau debate over state theory and the various commentaries it has provoked in the anglophone world. It is also evident in the discussion of Poulantzas's contributions to the analysis of social classes.

This reading actually fits ill with Poulantzas's frequent protestations that he could attach no scientific meaning to structuralism and that he had never been fully committed to Althusserian theses. Indeed, Poulantzas published an early and incisive critique of Althusser's *For Marx* (1966c) and also criticised Balibar's account of modes of production (PPSC). Moreover, whilst he followed their methodological precepts in his late 'sixties work on law, the state, and ideology, he also took pains to differentiate his substantive positions on political theory from those of Althusser and Balibar (see chapters three, five, and seven above). This reading also fits ill with Althusser's reciprocal disquiet with PPSC and refusal to publish it in his own series of books for the Maspero publishing house. These critical attitudes continued

thereafter and Poulantzas went on to disagree with Althusser's views on ISAs, the articulation of modes of production, and political strategy.

This does not mean that Poulantzas was uninfluenced by Althusserian Marxism. It provided the basis of his critique of alternative positions for their economism, historicism, and humanism; and it provided the epistemological justification and the theoretical matrix for his regional theories of economic, political, and ideological structures. There is much irony in the fact that Poulantzas's best known piece of work, his initial critique of Miliband's own theory of the state in capitalist society, was the most structuralist of his contributions to state theory<sup>5</sup>. For this has encouraged widespread misreading of *PPSC* and *CCC* as well as neglect of his other studies. In fact he gave greater weight from the beginning to the class struggle than other structuralist Marxists and progressively eliminated structuralist overtones from his work. In general it is much better to focus on the threefold structure of Poulantzas's work than to treat him one-sidedly as a structuralist.

Indeed, by focusing on Poulantzas's relationship to Althusserianism, one ignores many other significant themes and arguments. It also provides limited insight into the changes that occurred in his work between 1966 and 1979. It is no help in understanding the sources of the substantive concepts in his approach to the state. It makes it difficult to understand how Poulantzas came to give priority to the class struggle over structural causality and to consider the state as a social relation. And it makes it difficult to see what prompted Poulantzas to seek a rapprochement with the work of Foucault and what made their convergence possible.

### ***Poulantzas and Foucault***

In discussing the 'crisis of Marxism' which is supposed to have emerged in the 'seventies, Poulantzas remarked that other disciplines should be exploited to help overcome the impasse. He usually mentioned linguistics, psycho-analysis, and the work of Foucault (1979c, pp 14-5; 1978I.e; 1979I.k). In practice Poulantzas himself ignored linguistics and psycho-analysis and only

made use of Foucault's studies. Even here he was careful to distinguish between Foucault as an epistemologist and general theorist and Foucault as a particular theorist of specific techniques of power and aspects of the state. It is the latter Foucault whom Poulantzas found useful and he rejects Foucault's more general epistemological and theoretical project.

Indeed there are three different ways in which the work of Poulantzas relates to Foucault. Firstly, there are direct and explicit borrowings from Foucault and his colleagues. Secondly, there are convergences between the two theorists. These generally enable Poulantzas to specify his own approach more clearly and/or to relate it to the current intellectual mood in France. And, thirdly, despite some clearly stated differences, some hidden parallels exist between their respective approaches to power and the state. Let us begin with the direct borrowings.

In the field of ideological domination Poulantzas draws on Foucault's distinction between 'specific' and 'universal' intellectuals (see chapter seven). More significantly, he takes up Foucault's discussion of 'power' and 'knowledge'. In relation to the state itself Poulantzas also deploys Foucault's notion of disciplinary techniques and 'normalisation' as well as his analysis of 'anatomy-politics' and the recomposition of the body politic (see chapter 5).

Even when making explicit use of Foucault's work, however, Poulantzas typically modifies it. This can be seen in his interpretation of the relation between 'power' and 'knowledge', his account of disciplines and normalisation, and his discussion of the political constitution of corporeality. Thus Poulantzas links the power/knowledge couplet to the capitalist division between mental and manual labour and suggests that the capitalist state is the institutional embodiment *par excellence* of intellectual labour separated from manual labour (see chapters 5 and 7). He also criticised Foucault for overemphasising the role of disciplines and normalisation at the expense of the continuing importance of law and coercion in the capitalist state. Likewise he related corporeality to capitalist relations of production as well as the state (see chapter 5).

This process of insertion-modification is facilitated by the convergences between Poulantzas and Foucault. For these provide the points of articulation between their respective approaches and enable Poulantzas to draw on Foucault's work without falling into simple eclecticism.

There are five main areas of convergence. First, Poulantzas has a

long-standing concern with different forms of individuality and the juridico-political constitution of the 'isolation effect'. Likewise Foucault is much concerned with individualisation and normalisation. Second, both theorists adopt a relational approach to power and explore the links between power and strategies. Third, they also consider that power is productive rather than simply repressive and negative. This is related to their mutual interests in the articulation between power and knowledge whether in terms of the mental-manual division of labour or the role of disciplines. And, fifth, Poulantzas and Foucault are both interested in 'micro-revolts', struggles at a distance from the state, and rank-and-file movements.

These convergences do not mean, however, that Poulantzas and Foucault are in complete agreement. Indeed, as we have seen on several occasions above, Poulantzas insists on several crucial differences from Foucault. In particular Poulantzas emphasises how these five phenomena are related to the capitalist division of labour and the class struggle rather than deriving immediately from disciplinary techniques as such. Poulantzas also insists that modern state power is still based on repression and that law is not merely repressive but also has a role to play in producing consent. And, rather than placing weight on the dispersion and heterogeneity of micro-politics, he stresses throughout the central role of the state in organising global political domination (see chapters 5 and 7).

The hidden parallels between the work of Poulantzas and Foucault occur in the following areas: firstly, their insistence respectively on the immanence of power within social relations and on the ubiquity of the state inside the mode of production; secondly, their approach to diachronic relations in terms of a primitive source of resistance in plebeian qualities or 'class instincts'; and, finally, their inability to cope with the relation between 'micro-' and 'macro-levels' of power other than in terms of a fortuitous interaction between micro-powers and tactics on a meso-level strategic terrain which culminates in macro-level class domination (for a more detailed account of the relation between Poulantzas and Foucault, see: Jessop, 1984).

### **Poulantzas and Italian Politics**

The influence of Italian politics is usually recognised when commentators consider Poulantzas's thoughts on hegemony. It is also

apparent in Poulantzas's subsequent support for Gramsci's approach to the United Front (see chapter nine). And, at a still later date, Poulantzas draws on the work of the Ingrao left in developing his own Eurocommunist strategy. But the influence of Italian Marxism can also be overemphasised, as we shall see.

Poulantzas was generally rather hesitant about Gramsci. The latter was often seen in Italy and France as a historicist who stressed the role of political class struggle to the exclusion of material circumstances and structural constraints. Thus, although Poulantzas acknowledged Gramsci's contributions to the analysis of hegemony, he also sought to distance himself from the charge of complicity in the latter's supposed historicism. In particular he emphasised the institutional or structural foundations of class power and the different modalities and possible disjunctions among levels of class struggle.

Poulantzas certainly urged communists to intervene in class struggle in order to polarise political forces around a communist programme under working class hegemony. But, as a committed Marxist-Leninist for much of his political life, he also argued that such hegemony could only be consolidated *after* the proletarian revolution. For the economic, political, and ideological apparatuses had first to be reorganised to underwrite working class power in the transition to socialism. Moreover, whereas Gramsci tended to focus on state power and political struggle to the exclusion of the specific institutional form of the capitalist state, Poulantzas also paid great attention to the state apparatus and its institutional forms. This reflects his legal training. Indeed implicit in his later work is the realisation that hegemony must be examined not only from the viewpoint of class position but also from that of the *structural* determination of the exercise of class hegemony. This same concern emerges in Poulantzas's subsequent claim that Gramsci's war of position strategy is still Leninist because it treats the state as a monolithic entity to be encircled. In contrast Poulantzas sees the state as an institutional ensemble that crystallises class contradictions and conflicts within itself and can therefore be undermined from within (see chapter 10).

An interesting early assessment of Poulantzas as a Gramscian can be found in a critique by Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1968). This influence has also been emphasised in my earlier accounts of Poulantzas's work (e.g., Jessop, 1982a, 1982b). These reviews are favourably inclined to the Gramscian influences. But Poulantzas and his disciples have also been criticised for 'fractionalism'

in their emphasis on the circulation of hegemony among different fractions of capital. For this allegedly involves neglecting the basic problem of how *capital in general* is reproduced and, *a fortiori*, of how particular fractional interests are related to the capitalist system as a whole (e.g., Clarke, 1978). There is some merit in this criticism as applied to followers of Poulantzas. But it overlooks Poulantzas's interest in the structural determination of hegemony. It also ignores his emphasis on the organic nature of the power bloc and its constitution through a general orientation to the needs of capital. This depends in turn on looking beyond the modalities of the class struggle to see how they are condensed in the specific structural form of the state. Moreover, in studying state forms, Poulantzas is particularly concerned with its institutional and legal structures - a topic often neglected in Gramsci's work.

Concern with Gramsci's influence should not lead us to ignore other currents in Italian Marxism. Poulantzas seems to have been particularly affected by the 'Ingrao left' of the Italian Communist Party. In addition to several references to Ingrao in his discussions of the party, social movements, direct democracy, representative democracy, etc., Poulantzas also secured the translation of Ingrao's work on *Masses and Power* in his collection for the Presses Universitaires de France. It is through the influence of the Ingrao left among others that the Austro-Marxist themes in Poulantzas's work were introduced and he also engaged in critical debate with Ingrao's own positions (see chapter 10).

### **Poulantzas and Romano-German Law**

In relation to Romano-German law, overemphasis is not a problem. For there is a remarkable neglect of the enduring significance of Poulantzas's training in law. Not only did Poulantzas take his first degree in law but he also went on to do postgraduate research in law in Germany and France. He also made his early academic contributions almost exclusively in the fields of law and legal philosophy. It is true that Poulantzas himself seemed to suppress his erstwhile legal consciousness in subsequent work. He even refused to countenance the re-publication of his doctoral dissertation on the grounds that it exemplified such deviations as humanism and

historicism. But it is also true that, when Poulantzas began to study the state more generally, his legal training remained much in evidence.

He always argued that the normal form of the capitalist state was that of a *Rechtsstaat*, i.e., a constitutional state based on the rule of law. He paid much attention to the role of private and public law in shaping class practices in liberal democracies, facilitating the exercise of hegemony, and helping to unify state power. He also emphasised how juridico-political ideology provided the matrix within which struggles for hegemony occurred. In many respects his analyses of the institutional structure of the capitalist state are influenced by legal theory. This can be seen in his discussion of legal sovereignty, the separation of powers, the relations between executive and legislature, bureaucratisation, the role of public law, the constitutionalisation of violence, etc. Indeed there are indications that his ideas about the class unity of the state and relative autonomy of the state owe something to the sort of *Normlogik* favoured by Kelsen - despite Poulantzas's general criticisms of the neo-Kantian approach of the Kelsen School with its separation of fact from value (see chapter two). In addition Poulantzas discussed the rise of 'authoritarian statism' and the various 'exceptional' forms of state in terms of their opposition to *rechtsstaatlich* forms and the transformed role of public and administrative law within them (see chapters 5 and 10).

There is one notable exception to the neglect of Poulantzas's concern with law. Alan Lewis has written an interesting critique in which he claims that Poulantzas raised crucial issues in state theory but failed to resolve them because he did not follow up his legal insights. Thus Lewis correctly notes that Poulantzas discerned the specificity of the political level in capitalism in terms of its juridical structure, functioning, and ideology. But he adds that, "on the basis of this emphasis I believe we should expect a more sustained analysis of the law and legal institutions as well as analysis of the process of legislation, as political modes basic to the capitalist state" (Lewis, 1981, p 29). This failure means that Poulantzas is forced to assert the autonomy of the capitalist state by *fiat* rather than grounding it theoretically in the nature of bourgeois law (Lewis, 1981, p 31). To a limited extent these problems are surmounted in later work (notably *SPS*) but Lewis is still largely correct in his assessment. Nonetheless I would suggest that, without this admittedly underdeveloped concern with the juridical field, Poulantzas would not have advanced as much as he did in state and political theory.

## The Three Sources Combined

Finally we should note that these different schools or traditions are combined and developed in a quite specific manner within the context of Marxist political economy. For Poulantzas was firmly opposed to the traditions of the Second International and the Comintern. Both allegedly reduced the nature of the state to reflections of the economic base and/or suggested that the political class struggle followed the course of economic development. More generally Poulantzas notes that there was a systematic neglect of the question of the state in orthodox Marxist theory. He attempts to remedy this. In particular Poulantzas emphasised the *sui generis* nature of political class struggle and the relative autonomy of the state. This is particularly evident in capitalist societies that Poulantzas characterises in terms of their institutional separation between the economic and political regions. His initial justification for this was found in the Sartrean approach to structural analysis. Thus he employs the 'internal-external' dialectic to explore the complex internal organisation of different social structures and their differential determination by external factors. Later Poulantzas justified his concern with the political in terms of Althusser's account of the relative autonomy of the political within a complex structure in dominance determined in the last instance by the economic. Eventually he justified this approach in terms of his own distinctive account of the state as a social relation, i.e., to an account of state power as a form-determined condensation of the balance of forces in class struggle.

During the course of his theoretical development Poulantzas came to link these arguments more closely and coherently with traditional Marxist themes in economic analysis. The latter had largely been ignored in his early work. Indeed, as he himself readily admitted, he was not an expert in economics. Economic themes only came to prominence in his work on *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*. By the time that his last major work on state theory was published, however, Poulantzas had managed to synthesise the three sources of his approach firmly within the framework of classical Marxist political economy. But he also brought new insights to this framework. In particular he considered the labour process in terms of a complex economic, political, and intellectual division of labour and examined social classes from the viewpoint of their *expanded* reproduction (sic) rather than in restricted economic terms. At the

same time he remained trapped within classical Marxist political economy. This appears paradoxical. For, although Poulantzas made crucial innovations by breaking with crucial elements in orthodox Marxist accounts of the state, he failed to consolidate them by breaking with equally crucial elements in orthodox accounts of the economic and ideological regions. Only in his last year did he begin seriously to question them and try to move beyond them.

It would seem that many difficulties in Poulantzas's work stem in part from this trenchant commitment to Marxism. At a time when there was a general hue and cry about the 'crisis of Marxism', Poulantzas continued to support its fundamental tenets. This meant that he was unusually slow to question such fundamental assumptions as the ultimately determining role of the relations of production, the inherently revolutionary potential of the working class, and the vanguard role of the communist party. Although he abandoned the claim that Marxism could provide the key to all theoretical and social problems, he still maintained Marxism at the centre of his approach. At most he conceded the need to *supplement* Marxism with linguistics, psycho-analysis, and a Foucauldian micro-physics of power. This immobilism was reinforced by his assessment of the implications of changing his position on the most fundamental issues at stake. For it would have seemed to be admitting that either the *nouveaux philosophes* on the right and/or the libertarian socialists (such as Castoriadis) on the left were correct in their criticisms of Marxism-Leninism (on his attitude towards Castoriadis, see 1977a; more generally, 1979I.a).

### Changing Philosophical Positions

I hope the *prima facie* relevance of the 'three sources' for Poulantzas's theoretical innovations has now been established. Can one attribute equal weight to each source in explaining his theoretical development or is Althusser right in focusing on the question of philosophical preconditions? It is one thing to note that Poulantzas drew on French philosophy; it is another to claim that this constituted the decisive precondition of his theoretical innovations. But the latter claim does seem plausible because of the obvious changes in Poulantzas's philosophical position - changes that are more visible in his debts to French philosophy than Italian politics or Romano-German law.

In exploring this question I will first consider the implications of these changes with special reference to the Althusserian and Foucauldian perspectives. Then I will consider whether they constitute the decisive preconditions of changes elsewhere in Poulantzas's work.

The emphasis in Poulantzas's philosophical development oscillates between primarily ontological and primarily methodological concerns. In his Sartrean phase most emphasis was given to the simultaneously ontological and *deontological* problem of establishing the unity of fact and value. But Poulantzas also drew on the method of dialectical reason to establish the complex 'internal-external' determinations of specific social instances. In switching from an existentialist marxism to an Althusserian approach Poulantzas was primarily seeking a justification for developing a *sui generis* Marxist political theory. Thus, although Althusser's structuralism involves specific commitments to a realist ontology and epistemology, Poulantzas restricted his own ontological considerations to arguments about the relative autonomy of the political region under capitalism. But he did draw heavily on Althusser's methodological arguments concerning the movement from abstract to concrete and the overdetermination of concrete conjunctures. On the other hand there was little mileage to be derived from Althusser's philosophical position in developing the substantive concepts for a theory of the state. Here Poulantzas needed to supplement Althusserian concepts with others drawn from legal theory and Italian Marxism. It is this that produces the characteristic triple structure of his regional theory of politics (see chapters three and five).

Ontological considerations once again become important in the final phase of Poulantzas's theoretical development. This occurred with his adoption of a *relational* theory of social classes and political power. When Poulantzas claimed to have discovered at last the Marxist theory of the state, he had in mind the view that the state is a social relation. This involved a fundamental philosophical shift for Poulantzas and a return to the revolutionary materialism of Marx. For it was Marx who elaborated the paradigm thesis (and arguably more general claim) that capital is a social relation. In progressively abandoning structuralism Poulantzas was certainly influenced by Foucault (see especially chapter five). But the real origins of his philosophical shift are to be found in the dynamic of his own thought and political involvements. Indeed the seeds of his later relational approach are already sown in his first major text on the state (*PPSC*).

But it was only with the full flowering of this approach that Poulantzas could specify his distinctive contribution to state theory.

### **Althusser, Foucault, and Poulantzas**

Poulantzas suggests in a self-commentary on *SPS* that he turns to Foucault in his attempt to break with dogmatic marxism such as that incarnated in Althusserian structuralism. He recognises that he adopts a new language in comparison with his earlier works and attributes this to the fact that 'I am approaching some new problems and that I am thus at a stage of exploration'. He adds that 'it is especially in discussing the theses of Michel Foucault that I have been led to 'coquette' my language and that this is particularly true when it comes to the analysis of the techniques of power' (Poulantzas, 1978). Does this mean that Poulantzas could only have arrived at his final theoretical and political position in *SPS* and subsequent reflections through his reading and appropriation of Foucault?

There were already many points of convergence between the work of Poulantzas and Foucault before Poulantzas turned his attention to his analyses of power. And, as Poulantzas stresses at many points in *SPS*, when he chides Foucault for neglecting the social division of labour and class struggles or corrects his tendency to absolutise the distinction between the repressive, sovereign state and the normalising, disciplinary state, there are still important points of difference between their two approaches. But there is much more to the Poulantzas-Foucault relation than a simple, selective, mechanical addition of Foucauldian themes and concepts into an established theoretical framework that might make it more complete but leaves the basic assumptions and principles of explanation intact. For, in drawing on Foucault, Poulantzas introduces major tensions into his own thought, which are not satisfactorily resolved in *SPS* and continue to trouble him after this work appeared.

Theoretically these tensions are most apparent in the micro-macro problem and the nature of global strategies. In the end Poulantzas failed to develop an adequate account of hegemonic strategies, to consider their relation to accumulation, and to connect them to the process of class formation. He continued to refer to hegemony and its crises as if these involved problems of class leadership. Yet he denied that the state could formulate a global strategy for the power bloc and

eventually rejected his long-held belief that the communist party could do so for the popular masses. In practical terms he displaced the question of hegemony to the nature of the state as a strategic terrain and the manner in which it condensed incoherent micro-policies and tactics into macro-political class domination. This did not solve the micro-macro problem already evident in his analyses of relative autonomy and class unity but simply made it more complex and opaque through the introduction of Foucauldian concepts (see chapter 5).

Politically these tensions are most evident in the problematic relationship between class forces, political parties, and new social movements in the democratic transition to democratic socialism. Thus, although Poulantzas came to recognise the autonomous role of new social movements and no longer reduced them to specious class movements, he rejected the Foucault-Deleuze position on the strategic importance of maintaining their mutual independence and resisting integration into the web of state power. In this respect he was closer to Ingrao's position of linking the new social movements in and through the party. Yet he eventually rejected this view too and emphasised the benefits of the irreducible tension between political parties and social movements (see chapter ten). This merely identifies the site of a problem, however, without resolving it.

Thus Foucault's influence on Poulantzas was quite different from that of Althusser. Above all Althusser provided an epistemological justification for developing a *sui generis* political theory; he also provided a critique of alternative Marxist positions and a limited number of structural Marxist concepts. In contrast Poulantzas explicitly rejected Foucault's contributions to epistemology. Instead he treated Foucault's work in the same way as Gramsci's. From Gramsci he took the concept of hegemony as the typical form of political class struggle in capitalist societies and such correlative notions as the power bloc. From Foucault he took the analysis of power and knowledge, disciplines, and strategic codification as well as specific concepts such as universal and specific intellectuals. As far as possible these were integrated into his own Marxist framework and any tensions thereby engendered were not resolved in a Foucauldian manner.

In this sense we can agree with Poulantzas's own assessment of Foucault's theoretical and political influence on himself. He drew on Foucault to think through new problems and to help resolve the current crisis of marxism but he certainly did not embrace Foucauldian positions *in toto*. Foucault served mainly as an intellectual catalyst. He also provided some new concepts that Poulantzas modified to suit his particular purposes. At the same time it is clear that there was no one of comparable intellectual stature working on these problems in France and Foucault's influence was correspondingly crucial in redirecting Poulantzas's researches.

### **Philosophical Preconditions?**

We can now consider the role of these philosophical changes in Poulantzas's more general development. It is quite clear that Poulantzas's changing theoretical and political positions were *expressed* through changing philosophical positions. Now, in dealing with similar developments in the case of Marx, Althusser attributes Marx's supposed scientific breakthrough to his adoption of specific class positions in philosophy as well as politics. He argues that the three theoretical sources could only produce the break because Marx took up proletarian political positions and proletarian philosophical positions. Do similar considerations hold for Poulantzas? Did his changing philosophical views merely express changes elsewhere or did they constitute their basic precondition?

This question is difficult to answer in quite the same terms as those adopted by Althusser. For I do not share his conviction (which was also Lenin's before him) that one can ascribe an essential class belonging to philosophical positions. I am even less convinced that revolutionary materialism (whatever this might mean for Althusser) is the only true *proletarian* philosophical position. More important is the fact that Poulantzas also rejected such essentialist readings of philosophy. Indeed, even at the peak of his Marxist-Leninist phase in 1968, Poulantzas denied that adopting proletarian values spontaneously produces objective social science: it can also lead to anarchism, economism, or populism. In short, "to say that the adoption of the cause of the proletariat is a sufficient condition for producing science, as if proletarian consciousness automatically included science, is false" (1969b, p 56). At most he conceded that adopting the proletarian cause might be the simultaneous effect of producing

objective social science rather than its precondition (ibid.). In addition, some ten years later, Poulantzas argued that there was an inevitable gap between the formulation of a theoretical or philosophical position and its practical implementation. There was no more reason to read the Gulag into Marxism than there was to read the Spanish Inquisition or Franco's Spain into Catholicism (*SPS*, pp 22-3). For our purposes this means that the links between Poulantzas's changing philosophical positions and his theoretical and political positions must be established with due regard to their complexity.

I do not think that these philosophical shifts constituted absolute and exclusive *preconditions* of Poulantzas's more general theoretical and political development. But nor did these more general changes simply find one of their *forms of expression* in such philosophical shifts without being affected by them in turn. Instead they provided fundamental *mediations* with their own effects. For, although Poulantzas was primarily concerned with political rather than philosophical questions, changing ontological and/or methodological assumptions were crucial in mediating his changing positions in state and political theory. In the specific conjuncture in which Poulantzas was working on *PPSC*, for example, it is impossible to think his theoretical innovations without presupposing Althusserian structuralism. There are some elements of his later approach in his early work on law, other elements in his preliminary remarks on hegemony. But the synthesis of these institutional and political elements required their location at different levels in the movement from abstract to concrete as well as their location within the matrix of the CMP. In the intellectual and political conjuncture of France in the mid-sixties this framework could only be provided by Althusser. In this sense, just as Marx needed Feuerbach to move beyond Hegel, Poulantzas needed Althusser to move beyond Sartre. But it is also true that Althusserian structuralism in its initial form constituted an obstacle to further theoretical and political advance. Thus Poulantzas needed to go beyond Althusser and to rediscover Marx's revolutionary materialism (or at least its 'relational' kernel) to develop his mature theory of the state.

I think that this stress on revolutionary materialism is correct. For, if Poulantzas's subsequent shift towards a relational theory of the state and a left Eurocommunist politics were associated with a move towards Foucauldian positions, the latter are nonetheless best interpreted as means through which new ideas were expressed rather

than their essential precondition. Certainly Poulantzas acknowledged that he took up Foucauldian language and ideas to think through new problems. But he also stressed that it was Foucault as an analyst of power - not Foucault as an epistemologist or methodologist - that inspired him. His philosophical breakthrough was his own. It involved both a fundamental return to Marx and a partial movement beyond him.

### **The Primacy of Political Involvements**

But what drove Poulantzas to adopt changing philosophical positions in and through which his theoretical and strategic innovations could be achieved? What drove him beyond a philosophy of law written from the perspective of 'existentialo-marxisme' to a hybrid Althusserian and Gramscian account of the state and thence to a leftwing Eurocommunist position? The key to this movement appears to be his involvements in Greek and French politics. Without this, as Althusser might say, nothing would have happened. But it is equally clear that not all those involved in Greek or French politics developed Poulantzas's theoretical framework. His innovations also presuppose both his involvement in three distinctive theoretical traditions and his commitment to a particular, Marxist method of theoretical and political analysis. Without these additional influences, as Poulantzas might say, anarchism, economism, or populism could have happened. Thus we are dealing with a complex, interactive process rather than a simple causal chain - a Foucauldian genealogical process rather than a unilinear, predestined evolution.

Indeed, if his political involvements provided the motor force behind these changes, they were necessarily complex and historically conditioned. For these involvements depended on the course of political events beyond Poulantzas's control. Marx had to await the Paris Commune before he was finally able to work out his views on the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. The 'unity' of theory and practice was equally complex in the case of Poulantzas. He once noted that, "from the viewpoint of theory, only a real experience - meaning also experimentation - such as the class struggle of the working class can lead to science" (1969b, p 56). In his own case he had to await the Greek junta and its collapse before he could finally develop his views on the 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie' and its implications for

socialist strategy. He had been increasingly aware that political disputes in the Greek left over anti-dictatorial strategy were premised on theoretical conflicts over the nature of the capitalist state (1979I.a). Poulantzas believed these disputes were settled by real experience and his views were further reinforced by the Portuguese experiment.

Moreover, if Marx's adoption of proletarian political positions really did help him to make his major scientific breakthrough, a major factor in Poulantzas's development was surely his partial abandonment of a pure proletarian class position. The latter position characterised his lengthy Marxist-Leninist phase and prevented him from fully understanding the nature of politics in modern societies. Only later did he seriously consider popular-democratic struggles and the activities of the new social movements with their 'pluriclassiste' character. The changing course of political events was also crucial here. Above all the experience of the Union de la Gauche and its collapse before the gates of power brought home the crisis of the mass workers' parties and the need for a fundamental reappraisal of his political strategy. Not until then did he embark on the most self-critical and dynamic phase of his political development in an effort to chart a democratic transition to democratic socialism.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Poulantzas's breakthrough in state theory depended on his location at the confluence of three contrasting theoretical streams. For his originality lies in his unique synthesis of three intellectual sources somewhat different from those that inspired Marx himself. In the case of Poulantzas these theoretical traditions were French philosophy, Italian politics, and Romano-German law. And he went on to synthesise them in a unique manner within the overarching framework of Marxist political economy. This is not to suggest that Poulantzas was uninfluenced by other theoretical sources (far from it). But it is to argue that other sources were filtered through these three principal traditions. This can be seen in the way in which the German phenomenological concept of 'die Nature der Sache' was appropriated through French philosophy. Similarly Maoist themes were taken up through an Althusserian perspective. Likewise, although one can discern certain Austro-Marxist themes in his later work, these were appropriated through their influence in Italian political debate.

Poulantzas's originality also depended on his attempts to understand and influence the course of political events in Greece and France. Thus he was concerned to understand the Greek military dictatorship, the conditions leading to its overthrow, the absence of working class hegemony in the democratisation process, and the prospects for moving from an anti-dictatorial alliance to an anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly alliance. His concerns in French politics ranged from the rise of authoritarian statism to the problems of left unity around an anti-monopoly, democratic socialist programme. It was in working through the problems of class alliances for a democratic socialism that the mutual implications of Poulantzas's three sources became apparent.

One can only comprehend Poulantzas's work by considering the tensions produced therein through the attempt to combine his three sources. They were continually adapted and modified under the impact of his participation in political struggle. But they are by no means easy to reconcile; and tensions remain with each successive stage in his theoretical, political, and philosophical development. The most integrated period of his thought occurred when Poulantzas worked within an existentialo-marxist framework. For he had not yet discovered Italian Marxism and considered its implications for Marxist philosophy or communist politics. From that moment tensions were introduced into his analyses that continued to work themselves out for the rest of his life.

The switch in philosophical position from Sartrean existentialism through Althusserian structuralism to Foucauldian perspectives could not eliminate these tensions and their dynamic effect on his work. But they did enable Poulantzas to give more adequate expression to his theoretical and political innovations. Nor could the movement away from a Marxist-Leninist reading of Gramsci to a radical Eurocommunism filtered through the 'Ingrao' left eliminate them. But this shift within 'Italian politics' did enable Poulantzas to give greater weight to the institutional determinations of state power and to link these to problems of political strategy. This emerges very clearly clear in the one element in Poulantzas's intellectual sources, which *appears* to be constant. For, spurred on by the shifts elsewhere in his intellectual and political positions, he continually reappraised the class nature and implications of law, liberty, and legal institutions.

This creative tension holds as much for the gaps and theoretical

problems in Poulantzas's work as for its more positive aspects. This can be seen in his exaggerated concern with political factors. Each of his main intellectual sources contains a 'politician' potential: the Althusserian notion of relative autonomy and the Foucauldian emphasis on power; the concern with the global role of the state and party in Italian politics; the focus of Romano-German law on juridico-political institutions. Combining these sources powerfully enhances the 'politician' potential of each and reinforces the neglect of economic determinations and the specificity of the ideological. This is reflected in Poulantzas's theoretical concern with the central role of the state and his strategic concern with problems of institutional design for a democratic socialism. For a long time Poulantzas neglected the complexities of civil society and subsumed them under the rubric of 'ideological *state* apparatuses'. Only in his last year or so did he consider the specificities and autonomous contribution of class and non-class struggles located beyond the state. The major economic problems involved in democratic socialism were ignored until the end. This is not to decry his contributions to political analysis but it is to suggest they are one-sidedly concerned with the state system.

Paradoxically, although this politicisation stems from the combination of his three main sources, Poulantzas did not fully exploit the separate contributions of each tradition. Perhaps this failure occurred because he was oblivious to the complexities of his theoretical formation. Indeed he admitted that no one could ever be fully contemporary with his/her own theoretical development. By considering their mutual implications more fully and consistently he could have drawn out their implications in an even more creative manner.

There are three specific areas where this would have been helpful. First, Poulantzas failed to exploit the (neo-)Gramscian approach on political class struggle and focused instead on the structural determinations of state power. Second, in exploring these determinations, his legal training was under-utilised. For it would have been very productive to consider how juridico-political institutions and practices underpinned the state's relative autonomy and institutional unity. This is not to suggest that law itself is a sufficient explanation of the dynamics of state form. For, as Poulantzas recognised in *SPS*, state power rests on illegality as well as legality. But it would have been helpful to provide a more detailed analysis of the contribution of law to the institutional matrix of the state and thus to

its role in condensing and transforming the balance of forces.

Lastly, as he moved progressively away from Althusserian structuralism, Poulantzas could have drawn more fully on the Foucauldian approach to power and strategy. This is true not only for Foucault's genealogical approach, with its clear antagonism to the residual structuralist elements in Poulantzas's work; it also holds for his micro-physics of power and his more conscious strategic-theoretical approach. As it is Poulantzas's key insight that the state is a social relation remains elliptical and underdeveloped. It is to this issue that we turn in the concluding chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> Poulantzas actually wrote an earlier critique that is more favourably inclined to Miliband's book: it is also less influenced by structuralist Marxism. See Poulantzas, 1970a.

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## Beyond Poulantzas

We have now completed our detailed review of Poulantzas's work and reconsidered its theoretical and political sources. It is time to draw some general conclusions and to look beyond Poulantzas's own studies to the problems he left unsolved. This concluding chapter presents a brief appreciation of Poulantzas's self-assessment as a Marxist theorist and considers the principal merits and demerits of his contribution to the analysis of the state. It then outlines Poulantzas's own research agenda for future work on the state and society and assesses its implications for the future direction of his work. It also suggests an alternative approach to developing this work and consolidating his contributions. It is now some five years since his death and sufficient time has passed to place Poulantzas in perspective.

Poulantzas himself had little doubt about the contribution he had made to Marxism. He claimed to have resolved the problems of the theory of the capitalist state. This is indicated in his throwaway comment that *SPS* would present his final statement on the capitalist state and that he would seek a new project thereafter - perhaps to write fantasy novels in the manner of Ann Radcliffe (1980I.a). But it is also clearly expressed in his remark that he had produced a new theory of the state. In his opinion this was the only true Marxist theory and had not been developed in the Marxist classics, nor in its present form, in the work of Gramsci (1977I.c, p 10; cf. 1976I.b, p 44). This theory was based on the idea that the state is the material condensation of a relation of forces between classes and it is most fully developed in his final book.

### **The State as a Social Relation**

What does it mean to treat the state as the material condensation of a relation of forces among classes? Poulantzas argues that the state is a

social relation in exactly the same way as capital is a social relation. This approach excludes any treatment of the state either as a simple instrument or as a subject. In its crude versions instrumentalism considers the state as a neutral tool that is equally accessible to all (class) forces and equally applicable to all purposes. Now, although Poulantzas obviously stresses the importance of the changing balance of class forces in his approach to state power, he equally emphatically rejects the idea that the state is somehow neutral as between classes. Instead it should be seen as the *material* condensation of the balance among class forces. For the state actually helps to constitute that balance and does not simply reflect it. At the same time Poulantzas rejects the view that the state can be seen as a subject. It neither represents the general will or national interest in a rational and non-contradictory manner nor is it a simple legal subject with its own unity. The state should be seen as an *institutional ensemble* rather than as a unitary political subject. It is shot through with contradictions and has no political power of its own. The power of the state is the power of the class forces that act in and through the state.

The diacritical role of this approach to the state is reasonably clear. Less obvious is its positive theoretical content. Poulantzas himself never fully explicates it. Perhaps the best way to understand it is to consider the meaning of the paradigm (and equally elliptical) proposition that capital is a social relation. More precisely this means that capital *accumulation* is a *form-determined* social relation. For the accumulation of capital is the complex resultant of the changing balance of class forces interacting within a structure dominated by the different moments of the value form. It is impossible to understand the historical specificity and peculiar dynamic of capitalism without reference to the complex ramifications of the value form.

The value form comprises various elements organically interconnected as moments in the overall reproduction of the capital relation. In the sphere of circulation, we find the commodity, price, and money forms through which the exchange of goods and services is mediated. Likewise capitalist production is organised as a process of valorisation ("value adding") and is subordinated through competitive pressures to the requirements of reduced costs and/or increased production. In turn labour power is commodified, subordinated to capitalist control in the labour process, and remunerated and reproduced through the wage form. More generally, the value form is linked to the law of value. This governs the allocation of labour

time among different productive activities according to the fluctuation of market prices around prices of production, which are determined by the socially necessary labour time embodied in different commodities. In capitalist economies this law is mediated through fluctuations in profits (market price less cost price) and the uncoordinated decisions of competing capitals about the opportunities for profit associated with different patterns of investment and production. Together these elements define the parameters for capital accumulation and also delimit its possible crisis forms. But the dominance of this form does not itself fully determine the course of capital accumulation. This depends on the balance of class forces engaged in economic and economically-relevant struggles within the limits set by the value form. What is more, it is only in and through the class struggle that the value form itself is reproduced.

In the same way Poulantzas suggests that the state should be seen as a social relation. This elliptical proposition implies that state *power* (not the state apparatus as such) should be seen as a *form-determined* condensation of the balance of forces in political and politically relevant struggle. This requires us to consider two aspects of the state system. We need to examine the state form as a complex institutional ensemble characterised by a specific pattern of 'structural selectivity' that reflects and modifies the balance of class forces. And, secondly, we need to consider the constitution of these class forces themselves.

Poulantzas always considered the state form at different levels of abstraction. Thus *PPSC* examines the state in terms of the overall articulation of the economic, the political, and the ideological in the pure CMP; the juridico-political aspects of the state considered as an institutional ensemble; and the balance of forces in political class struggle. At the most abstract level it considers the state in terms of its institutional separation from the economic sphere and discusses the implications of this relative autonomy for the political class struggle in capitalist societies. Later work extends this approach to include the social division of labour more generally. But Poulantzas was also concerned with more concrete levels of analysis. These range from the theoretically typical capitalist state regardless of periodisation through its various stages (such as the liberal, interventionist, and authoritarian statist states) to the normal and exceptional forms of regime both in metropolitan and dependent capitalist societies. In every case Poulantzas attempts to specify the effects of these state forms on the balance of class forces.

This shows how Poulantzas sets himself firmly against any crude instrumentalist account. Yet he does not reduce the class nature of the state to its form. After *PPSC* he rejects the crude class reductionist thesis that all capitalist states are equivalent dictatorships of the bourgeoisie. Instead he examines the nuances of class power in different forms of state and is increasingly concerned with the possibilities that each state form offers for working class struggle in alliance with other class forces. This clearly prioritizes the political class struggle and its repercussions on the class nature of the state but, in so far as these are influenced in turn by the different forms of state and regime, it is far from simple instrumentalism. It is the nature of this struggle and its repercussions within the state itself that concerned Poulantzas in his later work and motivated his search for a new political strategy. He was proud of his contributions to the Marxist theory of the state but he was also well aware of how much further work needed to be done.

### **Poulantzas's Theoretical Agenda**

Indeed, in an interesting draft research note published posthumously, Poulantzas set out the essential problems and themes that should guide research on the state and society. After reaffirming the importance of the modern state as an historical phenomenon and a theoretical object, he identified six broad areas on which research should be concentrated.

The first area concerns the general nature of the state, politics, and power. Among its subsidiary themes are: whether power is reducible to the state and/or the political, whether the state is simply the RSA or includes 'private' bodies, what are the principal relations between the economic and the political, what is the character of the state as 'a field of manoeuvre within which power relations between classes are condensed', what are the specific technologies and disciplines through which the state exercises power, does the state machinery have a specific institutional form which is not reducible to class relations even though it has a class pertinence? This part of his theoretical agenda is clearly influenced by Foucauldian themes as well as more traditional Marxist concerns. It is particularly interesting to note that Poulantzas nowhere refers to the old structuralist themes of relative autonomy or class unity and that hegemony is now considered largely in terms of its organisational

form. This confirms the shifting focus of Poulantzas concern with the state and his interest in developing a relational approach.

The second area concerns the typology of states. It focuses on the structural similarities and divergences between metropolitan capitalist states, actually existing socialist states, and dependent capitalist states. Linked to this is the general question of the structural links that exist between these three main types of contemporary state. The third area is even more specific and concerns the similarities and differences among normal and exceptional regimes. Poulantzas once again emphasises the dangers of totalitarianism here - an issue which had become increasingly urgent in his practical reflections on the modern state. The fourth area concerns the international dimension of state relations. Here Poulantzas is particularly interested in the state, the nation, the nation-state, and the present phase of imperialism. He repeats his view that the 'nation-state is still the core, and the kingpin of domination' (1980a, p 605). This presumably justifies a continued emphasis on national roads to democratic socialism but Poulantzas hardly touches on questions of socialist strategy.

The fifth area concerns the current institutional changes in the state and the emergence of authoritarian statism as a new state form. Poulantzas reiterates the principal features of authoritarian statism and adds only a reference to the growing role of computers and electronics in the new technologies of political control. These changes should be linked to the worsening crisis of crisis-management in the economic field and its implications for the nature of the crisis of the state. Finally, Poulantzas briefly refers to a sixth area. This concerns the decline of representative democracy and civil liberties and the new claims for direct democracy and self-management (1980a, pp 600-8).

## **Poulantzas and the Concept of Strategy**

This agenda is significant because it confirms the general direction of Poulantzas's researches before his untimely death. We have already seen in earlier chapters that the crucial concepts in Poulantzas's work - relative autonomy, class unity, hegemony, and class struggle - involve serious theoretical problems at each stage of his theoretical development. His research agenda does not mention the crucial structuralist concepts that animated his earlier work on the state.

Instead it focuses on the micro-physics of power and the nature of state form as a strategic terrain. It also treats hegemony much more in terms of the state's organisational form as a system of political class domination than in terms of a specific type of global political project. This confirms the importance Poulantzas attached to the idea that the state is a social relation - the material condensation of a balance among class forces. In addition his agenda concedes that power is not exhausted by the state, that the state is not exhausted by its class significance, and that political forces are not exhausted by class movements. These concessions mark an important advance on his earlier positions.

But Poulantzas does not specify the theoretical approach to be adopted in pursuing this research agenda. He merely summarises essential problems and themes and only hints at the need for adopting a relational approach. This raises the question of how one can build on Poulantzas's insights into the nature of the state as a social relation without sharing his residual penchant for essentialism and class reductionism.

In my view the key to moving beyond Poulantzas is to concentrate on the notion of strategy. We have already seen how the significant theoretical shifts in his views on the state are correlated with shifts in his strategic outlook. Moreover, as he moved away from the Althusserian notion of structural causality towards Offe's notion of structural selectivity, he also treated the state itself as the crystallisation of political strategies. This is particularly clear in his analyses of fascism and military dictatorship but is also evident elsewhere.

In *PPSC* explicit notions of strategy are restricted to the stance adopted by the vanguard party *towards* the state: it was not something already inscribed in the state as part of the material condensation of the balance of forces. From his initial reaction to the Greek *coup d'état* and, more significantly, with his interest in the Comintern and fascism, there is increasing interest in problems of strategy as they affect the state itself. Indeed he argues quite clearly in *FD* that social democracy and fascism represent different strategies on the part of capital towards the working class. Thus medium capital favoured the strategy of class collaboration with the labour movement during the rise of fascism but big capital was hostile towards social democracy and supported a fascist solution. This interest is linked with the concept of structural determination through the claim that one cannot discuss class

practices, methods, or strategies without reference to the apparatuses that support them (*FD*, pp 78, 153-4). The recognition that state forms represent specific material condensations or codifications of political strategies is very important.

Similar ideas are developed in *CCC* and *CD*. In both texts Poulantzas discusses how class contradictions are reproduced inside the state system. Moreover he sometimes links class *contradictions* to conflicting class *strategies*. Indeed his approach requires exactly this sort of strategic intermediation between structural determination and class positions. Issues of strategy as well as structure also emerge in Poulantzas's contrast between fascist and military dictatorships. For he argues that only the former were able to elaborate a reasonably coherent political line towards the masses that the state apparatuses could then specify and implement (*CD*, p 83). Similar arguments underpin Poulantzas's emphasis on the role of the dominant state party in authoritarian statism as the vehicle of strategic elaboration and coordination.

These concerns culminate in the claim in *SPS* that "the *strategic* organisation of the state destines it to function under the hegemony of a class or fraction located within it" (p 137, my emphasis). Poulantzas also argues here that the relative autonomy and class unity of the capitalist state should be seen as the resultant of the complex interaction of micro-policies and strategies. In short Poulantzas moves step by step towards a strategic-theoretical approach to the state and thereby prepares the ground for a decisive break in Marxist political analysis. But these occasional allusions to the inscription of strategic conflicts within the state apparatus are generally outweighed by a more general emphasis on the simple reproduction of class contradictions. It is easy to overlook the fact that these class contradictions can only be understood through strategic concepts.

Poulantzas defined class interests in terms of the horizon of action of class forces and such interests can only be defined strategically and conjuncturally (*PPSC* , pp 111-13). Moreover, in a brief statement in *CCC*, Poulantzas clearly identifies the need for strategic concepts. He suggests that "the articulation of the structural determination of classes and of class positions within a social formation ... requires particular concepts. I shall call these *concepts of strategy*, embracing in particular such phenomena as class polarisation and class alliance" (*CCC*, p 24). Thus Poulantzas was well aware of the need for strategic concepts to mediate between the abstract level of structural determination and the concrete modalities of the class struggle in

specific conjunctures. Unfortunately Poulantzas does not expand on this proposal. He refers only to the two purportedly strategic concepts of the 'power bloc' and the 'people' as forms of class alliance. Since he emphasises the role of the state in constituting the power bloc and alludes to its role in disorganising and/or hegemonising the people, these strategic concepts must refer not only to classes but also to the state itself. But, since he did not develop these arguments at length and generally focused on the institutional underpinnings of hegemony without reference to strategic concepts, he failed to bridge the gap between abstract structural determinations and actual positions adopted in the class struggle.

### **Towards a 'Strategic-Theoretical' Approach**

For too long in Marxist state theory there has been a dichotomy between 'capital-theoretical' and 'class-theoretical' approaches. For the 'capital-theoretical' or 'capital logic' theorists, the *capitalist state* is the political support of the imperatives of capital accumulation. The form of the state corresponds to the current stage in the development of the relations of production and its functions correspond to the current needs of bourgeois class domination. In addition the 'capital-theoretical' approach tends to work on the unstated assumption that there is only one logic of capital at any given stage of capitalist development. This means that there is only one set of imperatives. For the 'class-theoretical' analysts of *the state in capitalist society*, its form and functions reflect the changing balance of class forces in struggle. But class struggles themselves are analysed in more or less mechanical fashion with little regard for the distinction between economic-corporate or particular interests and the interests of capital (or the working class) in general. In turn this means that the 'class-theoretical' approach lacks any concern for the dialectical relation among these interests. Its proponents focus on specific struggles without regard to their implications for the overall reproduction of the social formation and/or take such reproduction for granted in focusing on questions of class hegemony at the most abstract levels of analysis.

Thus we are confronted with a false dilemma. *Either* we emphasise the abstract logic of capital with its iron laws of motion, that is, its structurally-inscribed tendencies and counter-tendencies. *Or* we concentrate on the concrete modalities of a class struggle considered in a

purely empiricist manner and have no way of explaining how this class struggle tends to reproduce capitalism rather than produce a collapse into barbarism or a transition to socialism. Between the two approaches there is little attempt at mediation. Yet the notion of strategy seems ideally suited to this purpose.

'Strategic-theoretical' concepts can be employed to link these two modes of analysis. They can be used to dissolve the abstract, unitary, and essentialised laws of motion and needs of capital constructed by the capital logicians into a series of more concrete, competing, and contingent logics of capital. And they can be used to overcome the 'class-theoretical' tendency to focus on the concrete modalities of socio-economic struggles in such a way that *form* is neglected in favour of content. Yet the restriction of class struggles to specific forms (such as trade union struggle within the limits of market rationality or party political competition within the limits of bourgeois parliamentarism) is an important element in securing their compatibility with the expanded reproduction of bourgeois class domination. But these forms themselves represent, *inter alia*, the crystallisation of different class strategies and must be reproduced in and through class struggle. At the same time attention must be paid to how particular class-conscious and/or class-relevant struggles are related to more general problems of maintaining social cohesion under bourgeois hegemony. This requires one to go beyond particular struggles to see how different particular interests and concerns are coerced and/or hegemonised into conformity with a viable national-popular outlook and programme. In this context it must be realised that, just as there are alternative capital logics, so there can be alternative hegemonic projects. And, as Poulantzas indicated (if never fully explicated), hegemony must be seen in terms of its dual determination by structures and strategies.

Thus we could say that strategic concepts provide the "middle-range" concepts needed to bridge the gap between the 'capital-theoretical' and 'class-theoretical' approaches. Firstly, they provide the means to examine alternative *logics of capital*; and, secondly, they help to understand why the interplay among particular class struggles does not produce a collapse into 'barbarism'. In this context I would like to suggest that the alternative logics of capital should be examined in terms of competing *accumulation strategies* and that the field of class struggles should be examined in terms of competing *hegemonic projects*. In both cases it is essential to consider these phenomena from the dual perspective of *structural determination* and

*class position*. In turn the moment of structural determination should be considered as the crystallisation or material condensation of past strategies (both successful and unsuccessful). Likewise the elaboration of class strategies (class positions) should be related to the constraints imposed by existing forms of class domination as well as the prevailing balance of forces. In the absence of this it would be impossible to distinguish adequately between strategies that are 'arbitrary, rationalistic, and willed' and those that stand some chance of becoming 'organic'.

In developing this approach I think that one remains faithful to Poulantzas's own theoretical endeavours. Indeed we would be following up a number of direct hints in his own work as well as the more general underlying thrust of his studies. Above all it gives us a new way to approach Poulantzas's proposition that the state is a social relation. For this implies just such a strategic-theoretical approach. But one must also go beyond his own formulations and relate them to other theoretical and strategic innovations in postwar Marxist state and/or political theory.

### **Forms of Class Domination**

How would introducing strategic concepts help us to build on the theoretical advances of Poulantzas? I want to argue that they will help to understand the meaning of class domination in different fields of class struggle; to clarify the crucial distinction between class domination and class hegemony; to refine the distinction between class movements and class pertinent movements; and to illuminate the problem of the transition to democratic socialism. Let us explore this further.

In CCC Poulantzas restricted the definition of the structural determination of class to the relations of production. He thereby abandoned his earlier definition of classes in terms of their respective places in the juridico-political and ideological superstructures as well as in the economic system. In this way he created the opportunity to explore different forms of class domination (see chapter six). Further indications along these lines can now be suggested.

First, the economic class domination of capital would exist to the extent that it enjoyed the structurally-mediated ability to impose the *value form* on the working class. In this context capital and proletariat

should be defined in terms of their economic class determination. Capitalist economic domination involves not only the reproduction of formally free wage-labour but also its real subsumption under capitalist control in the labour process. In part this expanded reproduction of capitalist class relations is structurally mediated through the dominance of the commodity, money, wage, price, and other variants of the value form. But it also depends on the specific strategies and tactics adopted in the economic and economically relevant class struggles that take place within the framework of the value form and the law of value. In this sense economic domination must be understood as a form-determined social relation.

Second, bourgeois political domination would exist to the extent that capital (or its representatives) can operate on the terrain of a given state form to secure the various political preconditions of capital accumulation. In relation to the capitalist state this would involve, at a minimum, the ability to deploy *constitutionalised* violence (and not repression *tout court*) to this effect. For, whereas all states have some command of armed force, it is the constitutionalisation of violence that distinguishes the capitalist state. Thus, where the economically dominant class must resort to non-judicial force (e.g., through death squads or private paramilitary groups), there is a veritable crisis of state power and not merely a crisis of political hegemony.

Bourgeois political domination in this sense does not require that the class in charge of the state and/or the ruling class (as defined by Poulantzas) should belong to the bourgeoisie. These positions could be occupied by non-capitalist forces (such as the feudal nobility, Tsarist autocracy, or petty bourgeoisie) or even by social and political categories with no immediate class belonging (such as the political police or other 'state managers'). Finally it should be noted that political domination can be enjoyed in their own interests, at least in the short term, by non-capitalist or even non-class social and political categories. How long capital suffered from this situation would depend on the nature and degree of structural determination of bourgeois hegemony inscribed within the state system.

Third, bourgeois ideological domination would consist in the ability of capital (or its ideological spokesmen) to create the ideological conditions necessary for capital accumulation. At a minimum this would consist in the ability to maintain the mental-manual division of labour in its capitalist form. In referring here to the mental-manual

division of labour I want to distinguish between the structural determination of ideological domination and the position of class leadership that can be won through the struggle for ideological hegemony.

In all three cases domination should be considered as a form-determined balance of class forces that is consistent with the expanded reproduction of the capital relation. Class domination can only be established *ex post* and in relation to particular spatial, temporal, and strategic horizons of action. It refers to the *effects* of the dominance of particular structural forms and their overdetermination by the class struggle. Thus equal attention must be given to the specific forms involved (value form, state form, the forms assumed by mental and manual division of labour) and to the specific forms of class struggle. Their conjoint effects are always provisional, partial, and unstable. Indeed, short of a total eco-disaster, these effects can never be final. Instead they define the conjunctures in which class struggles are continually renewed and their significance is continually reconstituted in and through these struggles.

Poulantzas was generally sensitive to the nuances of forms of state and regime, but he did not always relate class domination to the particular class strategies in and through which class interests are defined. Nor did he recognize that class struggle should be understood in the first instance in terms of the differential impact on class relations of the interaction among various class-*relevant* forces. To assess class domination in this way requires an appropriate specification of the conditions for the extended reproduction of class relations (cf. Jessop, 1982, pp 213-20). In turn this depends on strategic calculation as well as knowledge of the various conditions of existence of these relations. In this sense it is only of secondary importance whether these class-relevant forces actually identify and/or organise themselves as class-conscious forces. What is crucial is that the balance of forces, however constituted, self-identified, and organised, is conducive to the reproduction of a specific form of class relations (cf. Jessop, 1982, pp 241-3).

### **Class Hegemonies and Class Strategies**

That a situation of class domination exists does not imply that the dominant class also enjoys a position of class hegemony. Indeed one theoretical advantage of adopting this approach is precisely to break with the

tendency to conflate hegemony and domination. I have already indicated that Marxism-Leninism tends to reduce state power to political domination (sometimes even to repression alone) and that Poulantzas tends to ignore repression and political domination in favour of the structural determination and class leadership moments of hegemony. In contrast I believe that it is important to maintain distinction between domination and hegemony in all fields of class relations. In turn this requires us to define specific forms of hegemony in each field and to consider how these are related to forms of class domination. For the sake of presentation I assume that there are only three fields of class struggle (economic, political, and ideological) but a more sophisticated analysis should consider the many different terrains of struggle that exist in any given society.

*Economic hegemony* would come with the formulation of an *accumulation strategy* which defines a specific economic "growth model" complete with its various extra-economic preconditions and outlines the general strategy appropriate to its realisation. To be successful such a model must unify the different moments in the circuit of capital (money or banking capital, industrial capital, commercial capital) under the leadership of one fraction (whose composition will vary *inter alia* with the stage of capitalist development). This fraction will enjoy hegemony to the extent that the growth model advances the particular economic-corporate interests of other fractions of capital at the same time as it promoted its own long-term interests in controlling the allocation of money to different economic activities. An accumulation strategy must respect the *determination* in the last instance) of capital accumulation by the circuit of productive capital but it need not involve the economic *dominance* of productive capital itself within the power bloc (cf. Poulantzas, CCC, pp 92-7, 132, 211-2).

In this sense the exercise of *economic hegemony* by a fraction of

capital should be distinguished from two other forms of economic relation. It must be distinguished from simple *dominance* over the allocation of money capital among different fractions of capital; and it must be distinguished from *economic determination* in the last instance by the circuit of industrial capital (for further discussion, see Jessop, 1983a, 1983b). All four forms of macro-economic relations can be analysed in terms of the economic, political, and ideological moments of the relations of production that Poulantzas distinguished in *CCC* and subsequent studies.

In general terms we can say that an accumulation strategy that is not to be merely 'arbitrary, rationalistic, and willed' must take account of the dominant form of the circuit of capital – liberal, simple monopoly, or state monopoly; of the dominant form of the internationalization of capital – commercial, banking, industrial; of the specific international conjuncture confronting particular national capitals; of the balance of social, economic, and political forces at home and abroad; and of the margin of manoeuvre entailed in the productive potential of the domestic economy and its foreign subsidiaries. Within these constraints there may well be several economic strategies that could be pursued (especially if we abstract from more general political and ideological considerations) with contrasting implications for the different fractions and dominated classes. This sort of space for conflicts over economic hegemony and/or dominance exists not only for national economies (even supposing these could be completely isolated from the world economy) but also for the integration of the global circuit of capital under the leadership of one (or more) national capitals. Where various national strategies are compatible with the global hegemonic strategy, the conditions will have been secured for accumulation on a world scale (for an important discussion of this, see Aglietta 1982).

In this context it is worth noting that *economic hegemony* may best be secured where it is backed up by a position of *economic dominance*. Thus the expanded reproduction of capitalist economic relations can be said to depend on economic class-leadership underpinned by a structurally-determined economic dominance. The skilful use of a position of economic dominance can bring recalcitrant capitals into line and/or encourage activities beneficial to the overall integration and expansion of the circuit of capital. With the transition from

liberal capitalism to simple monopoly and state monopoly capitalist forms, the state comes to play an important role here. In particular we see an enhanced role for the public sector, taxation as a mechanism for the redistribution of surplus-value, and state credit as a mechanism in the allocation of money both as capital for investment and as revenue for collective consumption (cf. Poulantzas, *SPS*, pp 166-79; Fine and Harris, 1979, pp 104-45).

In the field of political class relations hegemony would involve the formulation of a national-popular political project that meets two requirements. The first requirement is that it must typically secure the *substantive* institutional unity of the state apparatus. Indeed, as Poulantzas sometimes recognised, the state's formal unity does not guarantee its organisational cohesion and reproduction (*SPS*, pp 134-7). In this context substantive unity can be narrowly or broadly interpreted. Narrowly interpreted it refers to the preservation of the state system itself as a form of political domination in the face of resistance from within and without. In particular this concerns its capacity to use constitutionalised violence to reproduce its own institutional system and to secure compliance with its policies. Broadly interpreted the substantive unity of the state involves the successful performance of its *global* political function.

The second requirement is that the national-popular political project should infuse this substantive unity with a definite *class* unity. For, notwithstanding Poulantzas's assumption that the institutional unity of the capitalist state is necessarily a class unity, this is far from certain. Indeed one source of conflict between state managers and the dominant or hegemonic class (fraction) concerns precisely the articulation between these two types of state unity (*PPSC*, pp 188, 230, 239, 262, 277, 282, 289). But a national-popular project which successfully linked institutional and class unity would transform the state managers into the political *Träger* of capitalist interests and enable them to function in the way Poulantzas indicated in *PPSC*. Indeed one source of conflict between state managers and the dominant or hegemonic class (fraction) concerns precisely the articulation between these two types of state unity. Without such a political 'cement' state managers themselves might constitute the unity of the state around its narrow political functions at the expense of the global political function. Worse still the unity of the state, always provisional, unstable, and tendential, might collapse completely.

Unfortunately Poulantzas never investigated the precise role of national-popular projects in constituting the dual unity of the state and securing the narrow and/or global political hegemony of the dominant class or fraction. Moreover, once the state's several

functions are recognised, the concept of class unity becomes quite problematic. In *PPSC* Poulantzas distinguished three specific and one global function. Economically, the state must secure the general external conditions of capitalist production (law, money, etc.) and those general and/or particular conditions of production necessary to underpin the dominant accumulation strategy. Politically, it must reproduce itself as a functioning institutional ensemble in the face of various constraints and resistances. Ideologically, it must maintain the general external conditions for 'private' ISAs to reproduce the mental-manual division of labour in its capitalist form and also undertake those specific ideological functions that cannot be adequately secured through the 'private' system of ISAs. Finally, it must maintain the balance among these three specific functions and thereby secure the overall cohesion of the social formation. It is an interesting question whether the state can really be said to have an in-built capacity to juggle these often mutually contradictory functions in such a way as always to realize its global functions.

In dealing with these issues one must also consider the extent to which *form problematises function*. This means that the specific institutional forms of the state present fundamental obstacles to the effective performance of its alleged functions for and on behalf of capital (cf. Offe, 1975, 1984). Poulantzas neglected this issue in discussing the relative autonomy of the capitalist state and taking its class unity for granted. For he saw relative autonomy as the institutional *guarantee* of political class domination rather than as a potential institutional *obstacle* thereto. But, if an institutional complex standing outside the circuit of capital is *necessary* to maintain the technico-economic, ideological, and political conditions of capital accumulation, this externality is certainly *not* a *sufficient* condition and actually constitutes a source of fundamental problems.

For how is a state form, from which class is constitutively absent and whose political dynamic is organised around the 'isolation effect', to guarantee capital accumulation? It is one thing to argue for an inevitable structural selectivity in the operation of state institutions, modes of policy formation, governmental procedures, etc. But this does not establish that the 'non-neutrality' of state structures is *ipso facto* a class (as opposed to gender, ethnic, regional, bureaucratic, or whatever) 'bias' or, indeed, that it does not simply interpose a random noise or interference in the processing

of political demands. Moreover, given the class-neutral form of the state, why should political forces have a necessary class belonging? In other words, what is to stop the emergence of political forces identified and organised in ways antagonistic to capital accumulation and capable of using state institutions and resources against the interests of capital? And what is to prevent the 'state managers', endowed with their own relative autonomy by virtue of the relative autonomy of the state, using their political positions to advance their own economic-corporate interests at the expense of capital? Such questions do not mean that one must reject Poulantzas's solution. Indeed, given that the institutional form of the capitalist state problematizes its functionality, the latter must be related to the global political struggles that attempt to imbue it with a specific class content.

Hegemony can also be defined for the ideological field itself. This would consist in the formulation of a national-popular project that successfully articulated a wide range of ideological elements espoused by different social forces into a relatively unified ideological ensemble at the same time that it reproduced the mental-manual division of labour in a form favourable to the hegemonic fraction. Poulantzas himself provides little insight into the constitution of ideological hegemony. In this respect more recent work in the discourse-theoretical analysis of ideology is more significant and provides important theoretical guidelines for studying this aspect of intellectual and moral leadership (see especially Laclau and Mouffe, 1984). Nor did Poulantzas advance the study of the mental-manual division of labour to any great extent. But he did provide the important theoretical argument that the capitalist state represents the supreme institutional embodiment of mental labour in its separation from manual labour. There is still much to be accomplished in this area.

Each type of hegemony has been defined in terms analogous to those adopted by Gramsci. Gramsci suggested that state power should be understood as "hegemony armoured by coercion". This implies that hegemony is most effective where it is backed up by the corresponding form of class domination. In the case of economic hegemony, this is control over the allocation of money capital; in the case of political hegemony, control over constitutionalised violence; and in the case of ideological hegemony, control over mental labour in its capitalist form. Individual forms of class domination should also be supplemented, however, by more general *strategic* calculations concerned with the coordination of different

strategies and tactics on a national and international level. Without such attempts to construct a 'general will' (best secured through a pluralistic politics) the diversity of specific micro-policies will indeed be characterised by nothing more than prodigious incoherence.

### Some Points of Clarification

Before concluding there are several points about the proposed "strategic-theoretical" approach which should be clarified. These concern the relation between different Marxist approaches to the state; the possibility of a general theory of strategy; the need for a more complex approach to social relations than that indicated hitherto; the possibility of a global strategy; and the question of whether a "strategic-theoretical" approach is necessarily idealist.

First, I am not suggesting that it can simply be added on to existing "capital-theoretical" and "class-theoretical" approaches. This bridge does not leave its two supports unchanged. Even at the most abstract level of analysis the logic of capital must be reconsidered. One can certainly posit a single logic of capital at this level of analysis - consisting in the self-expansion of capital in the form of M-C-M'. This summary formula refers to the outlay of money as capital (M), the production of a commodity embodying surplus-value (C), and the exchange of this commodity at a price that realises the surplus-value it embodies (M'). But this circuit of capital is contradictory and can be understood in terms of *strategic dilemmas* inherent in the capital relation and its conditions of existence.<sup>1</sup> Thus, even before we introduce the dilemmas posed by the distinction between capital in general and particular capitals, there are dilemmas at the level of capital in general. There is the dilemma concerning the appropriate balance between value and non-value forms of capitalist reproduction. And there is the dilemma posed in the dual character of wages as variable capital and as revenue, i.e., as money laid out to purchase labour-power as the sole source of added value and money received as remuneration for labour-power and used to purchase consumer goods. Finally the circuit of productive capital involves the labour process that is itself the site of problems of economic class strategy (on these issues, see: Jessop, 1983, pp 146-8). Because these contradictions appear in the form of strategic dilemmas they are never resolved once and for all (cf. The comments on the dilemmas of

democratic socialism, chapter ten). They are continually reproduced and they must be continually re-confronted. Likewise, as Poulantzas noted in his account of class determination and class position, the introduction of strategic concepts transforms orthodox concepts of class interests, class struggle, and class power.

Second, just as the "capital-logic" and "class-theoretical" approaches contain concepts other than those relating directly to capital and class respectively, so will a "strategic-theoretical" approach involve more than concepts of strategy. This approach is identified as "strategic-theoretical" only in contradistinction to the "class-" and "capital-theoretical" approaches. But it is not exhausted by concepts of strategy and emphasises instead how they transform other concepts. Concepts of form and class struggle are both crucial and much can be learnt from Poulantzas's analyses of state form and regime.

Third, although I have stressed the dichotomy between the 'class-theoretical' and 'capital-theoretical' approaches, Marxist state theory is certainly not exhausted by these perspectives. There has recently been growing concern with the relative autonomy of state managers (e.g., Block, 1977) and the specificity of international conflicts among nation-states (e.g., Skocpol, 1978). Problems of strategy have also received increasing attention. Indeed several recent Marxist contributions besides those of Poulantzas anticipate in one way or another a 'strategic-theoretical' approach to the state (e.g., Aglietta, 1978; Hall and Jacques, 1983; Hirsch, 1983; Holloway, 1982; Lipietz, 1982; Marramao, 1980).

Fourth, in urging a "strategic-theoretical" approach, I am not calling for a general theory of strategy. This is no more plausible or possible than a general theory of the economy, the state, ideology, or classes. Instead a "strategic-theoretical" approach aims to produce theoretically informed analyses of strategic calculation and practices and the ways in which these overdetermine social relations more generally.

Fifth, although my comments imply that there are only three fields of class struggle and that each has its own pre-given unity awaiting only some global hegemonic project for a 'society effect' to emerge, it is essential to recognise the different fields of struggle and to consider the problems involved in their articulation (cf. Hindess and Hirst, *seriatim*). A more sophisticated analysis would demand attention to the ways in which different fields of struggle are constituted,

demarcated, separated, articulated, etc. But this should not lead to neglect of the state. It is still necessary to run the risk of politicism by considering the global political function of the state. For, as Poulantzas always emphasised, it is in and through the state that global hegemony must be secured. In turn this means that political class struggle has the central and primary role. If I have differed from Poulantzas here, it is because he concentrates too much on global hegemony and ignores its other forms as well as the nature of domination.

### **Are there Global Strategies?**

Finally, whilst advocating the use of strategic concepts in social analysis, I am not suggesting that there is an effective global strategy of domination or hegemony that encompasses all social relations. In this respect I differ from Foucault as well as Poulantzas. Each implies that societies should be analysed '*as if*' there were a global strategy (see chapter five). For both theorists there is a process of global strategic calculation without a calculating subject. But, in the absence of a *globally calculating subject*, can one really posit a *global strategy* and/or a *global site* of strategic calculation? In short can a strategic-theoretical approach really explain the facts of class domination?

The notion of a global strategy presupposes a specific social space within which that strategy has its effects. But the boundaries of a social formation are even less singular, homogeneous, and coincident than those of the state system. Even if we follow Poulantzas in privileging the nation-state as the effective site of global strategies, it must still be recognised that national spaces are themselves the crystallisation of past strategies and struggles. More generally, the uneven development of economic, political, and ideological relations means that there is no homogeneous space (sub-national, national, or supra-national) within which global strategies might operate. This applies as much to the temporal as to the spatial organisation of social relations. Thus any social formation is the tendential product of conflicting strategies of unification around different social boundaries.

The problem has been well expressed by Gary Wickham in a recent comment on power and strategy. He accuses Foucault of essentialism

for suggesting that some sites of power relations (the micro sites) are incorporated into global sites, defined in terms of global strategies. Wickham implies that there is no more reason to assume that micro-sites can only acquire societal significance through their incorporation from the bottom up into a particular (but *necessary*) global strategy than there is to assume that a pre-given global strategy endows them with meaning from the top down. Essences do not cease to be essences just because their constitution as uniquely necessary points of unification and signification proceeds from below. Wickham argues for an alternative, non-essentialist view of the macro- or global sites of power relations. He says that they should be understood as specific intersections of practices around specific operational policies that are granted the status 'global' because of the number of other sites that they are systematically concerned to manage or influence. The latter sites are by no means fully incorporated or subsumed, have no necessary connection with the global sites, and still exist separately - even if they are subsequently oriented towards some aspect(s) of these more global sites (Wickham, 1984, p 481).

In these terms we can say that a 'global strategy' is a strategy that attempts to subtend and articulate a number of smaller sites of power relations within its orbit. But these smaller sites continue to have an independent existence (to enjoy their own 'relative autonomy', if you like) and to constitute potential sites of structural recalcitrance and/or social resistance to the 'global strategy'. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Poulantzas suggests that the state assigns a class-pertinence to non-class relations. Different global strategies will seek to reproduce different smaller sites so that the global sites on which these strategies operate will also differ. In this context the notion of 'global' must be understood relatively, i.e., a strategy is global only in relation to its own smaller sites. A global strategy may itself constitute a 'smaller' site for an even more ambitious strategy.

This means that there is no macro-necessity in social relations. All we have are attempts to constitute contingently necessary global systems on different sites and in relation to different sets of smaller power relations. Alternative global strategies will condense and transform *different sets* of conflicts and contradictions in and through a state system whose precise nature will vary according to the problems it confronts. This does not mean that the state is the only factor of cohesion nor that it has the capacities necessary to secure cohesion. As Marx recognised a century or so ago, there

is no such thing as *the* present state' but only a 'motley diversity of present states' (cf. Marx, 1875, p 26). In short we must think in terms of a plurality of possible global strategies even within the framework of one national state - whose precise character, social boundaries, cohesive capacities, and dynamics will differ according to which global strategy (if any) becomes dominant.

This plurality of global strategies is further complicated by the variety of tactics within a given strategy. Moreover, even where there is a dominant strategy we can expect to find supplementary or countervailing strategies. There are various possible strategies with different degrees of support within and across different social forces. At the same time it is important to recognise that there will be several tactics that can be followed in pursuit of a given strategy. The availability of alternative tactics (even if they are not all equally preferred) is essential for the flexible implementation of strategies in the face of constantly recurring strategic dilemmas and contradictions (cf. CCC, *passim*). Moreover, in so far as alternative tactics will have dissimilar effects on different social forces, tactical flexibility is crucial in securing the provisional, unstable equilibrium of compromise(s) on which depend accumulation, political power, and ideological sway. At the same time this plurality of tactics creates a margin of manoeuvre for subaltern forces to pursue their own 'economic-corporate' demands. This may pose threats to the successful implementation of the dominant accumulation strategy, national-popular political project, or national-popular ideology. However, if these interests are pursued within the framework of the dominant strategy (thus moderating the demands of all), it is more likely to contribute to the equilibrium of compromise.

## **Structure and Strategy**

In emphasising a 'strategic-theoretical' approach as one way forward in analysing the state one risks being accused of voluntarism or idealism. One should not side-step this charge simply by talking in 'as if' terms or introducing the concept of strategic calculation without a calculating subject. If a 'strategic-theoretical' approach is to be employed, it must refer to real strategies, calculations, and calculating subjects. This need not involve voluntarism for the following reasons.

1. We deny that a single global strategy can penetrate and unify a given set of social relations in an essentialist manner. At most we are positing relative, contingent, partial, and provisional 'global strategies' that seek to manage and tendentially unify smaller sites of social relations. In this sense we reject the idea that the juridico-political boundaries of the national state necessarily coincide with a real, unified social formation. The boundaries and relative unity of any global site must be established conjuncturally rather than in any *a priori*, essentialist fashion.

2. Moreover, in rejecting the idea of an essentially unified social formation, we also reject the idea of a global calculating subject that invests that formation with its own unity. This would resurrect the view that societies are unified through the dominance of a particular ideological *Weltanschauung* corresponding to the dominant class - a view which Poulantzas criticised so vehemently (see chapter seven). But this does not mean that we reject the idea of calculating subjects. On the contrary we believe that it is nonsensical to talk of strategies without referring to calculating subjects. But, once an essentialist notion of social formations is abandoned, they need no longer be endowed with the omnipotence and omniscience of the global calculating subject.

3. Indeed it should be emphasised that calculation and strategies can be mistaken and/or unsuccessful. No strategy (let alone global strategies) can be implemented just because some force or other wills it. Instead one must distinguish between 'organic' strategies with some prospects of success and those that are 'arbitrary, rationalistic, and willed'. A successful strategy must be adapted to the structural constraints and conjunctural opportunities available in given circumstances and the prospects thereby entailed for creating, transforming, or maintaining particular sites of social relations. The more global the strategy, the fewer realistic possibilities exist. It is for this reason that it is possible to generalise about regimes of accumulation, the nature of the capitalist state, ideological domination, patriarchy, and so on.

4. Nor are strategies reducible to goals and ideas. Instead they must be understood in terms of their materialisation in specific organisations, forces, tactics, concessions, etc., with all that this implies for their structural determination and material underpinnings. Poulantzas distinguished implicitly between the structural determination of hegemony and the aspect of leadership or class

position. This distinction applies to strategies more generally and can be encapsulated in the idea of 'strategic selectivity'.

5. Lastly, strategies alone cannot secure economic, political, or ideological class power. This should already be clear from our comments on the relation between hegemony and domination. But it also holds for strategies aiming only at economic, political, or ideological *domination*. Other stabilising and destabilising factors must also be examined. These will be rooted in the emergent *structural properties* of social relations. Among such factors we could cite market forces and the law of value, the nature of the *Steuerstaat* or *tax-state* as a constraint on political power, the logic of different electoral systems as a constraint on party competition, the forms of the mental-manual division of labour, and so forth.

In short we wish to examine social order as the product of a complex dialectic between structures and strategies. This reflects Poulantzas's insistence that the state is a social relation, i.e., that state power is a form-determined condensation of the balance of forces. But it modifies this approach in two key respects. Firstly, it puts a more consistent emphasis on analysing form-determination in terms of strategic selectivity; and, secondly, it stresses that the balance of forces be related to strategically calculating subjects. In this light we can now indicate the nature of the dialectic between structures and strategies.

The effectiveness of strategies depends on their adaptation to the margin of manoeuvre inherent in the prevailing structures and their repercussions on the balance of forces. But it is through exploiting this margin of manoeuvre that the balance of forces and structures themselves can be changed in the medium and longer term. It is for this reason that I insist on the relational, conjunctural approach to the analysis of capital, the state, etc., as form-determined condensations of balances of class-relevant forces. And it is for this reason that I insist on the relational, conjunctural character of horizons of action, interests, and class-relevance itself. This holds not only for the balance of forces themselves but also for the analysis of structures. For there is no absolute, ontological distinction between structural constraints and the field of contingency within which specific strategies can make a difference.

Structures are themselves the crystallisation of past strategies as well as the product of emergent properties of social interaction (cf Jessop, 1982, pp 252-4). In turn their constraining power will depend on the strategies

adopted towards them. It is in this sense that Poulantzas's approach to the state as a strategic terrain and as a social relation is best interpreted.

### **An Exceptional Western Marxist?**

I have now considered some continuing problems in Poulantzas's work, outlined his own research agenda, and recommended a 'strategic-theoretical' approach to state theory. In criticising Poulantzas's work and suggesting how to move beyond it, I am not claiming that his contributions to postwar Marxism were trivial. Indeed he produced important insights into many fields of enquiry. In particular I would draw attention to his analysis of the economic, political, and ideological moments of the social relations of production and their implications for the expanded reproduction of social classes; to the dialectic of power and knowledge (a theme also developed by Foucault); to the importance of the mental-manual division of labour for the nature of political and ideological class domination; and to the relational analysis of class interests, class power, and class practices. But an overall assessment must concentrate on Poulantzas's state theory and its continuing relevance, if any, to the analysis of the state. For it is this topic to which Poulantzas devoted most of his theoretical and political work; it is here that he established his international intellectual reputation; and it is here that he achieved his most significant and lasting impact on postwar social and political theory.

It is important to recall here that Poulantzas did not develop just one theory of the state. His approach changed from a regional theory to a relational theory and many key concepts were transformed in consequence. Tragically Poulantzas did not manage to develop many of the implications of the positions to which he was being drawn theoretically and politically. This is why the concluding chapter has somewhat immodestly indicated some solutions to the problems that his work leaves unsolved. For I believe that the best of Poulantzas's insights can be incorporated into a strategic-theoretical approach that would also resolve some of their difficulties. This is one way to develop his real contributions to the crucial political issues in Western Marxism.

First, Poulantzas was always interested in the real nature and structure of bourgeois democracy as a type of State system. He always

argued that national-popular, representative, democratic government was the normal form of political class domination in capitalist societies. He attempted to show why it was theoretically typical for capitalism, why it could function as a means of political class domination even though class was constitutively absent from its institutional and ideological organisation, and what it implied for political struggle in capitalist societies. He tried to periodise the normal, democratic state so that assumptions about the liberal, nightwatchman state and parliamentary representation did not deform socialist strategy towards the authoritarian statist form of democratic government. And he also considered the different forms of exceptional as well as normal states. Indeed it is one of his principal contributions to have explored more systematically than other Marxists the distinction between the normal and exceptional states. In turn this involved a detailed analysis of the specificity of political and ideological crises and their articulation with economic crises.

Second, Poulantzas was always concerned with problems of revolutionary strategy in the West. Initially he subscribed to an unthinking Marxist-Leninist strategy and then flirted with Maoist themes. But, at a time when other Marxists saw the revolutionary storm clouds in the East, Poulantzas continued to emphasise the prospects for revolution in the West. In particular he focused on problems affecting his native Greece and, more especially, France after de Gaulle. He was to the left of the mainstream communist movements in both countries and continually questioned the strategies and tactics that they advocated. This can be seen in his views on the anti-dictatorial alliance and the anti-monopoly alliance, the nature of American imperialism, the specificity and significance of the petty bourgeoisie as opposed to the peasantry in revolutionary struggles, and the dangers of social democracy. But in offering these criticisms he typically sought to provide a soundly-based theoretical justification for the emerging Eurocommunist strategy rather than to reject communism in its entirety because of its Stalinist deformations. Increasingly he questioned the understanding of the revolutionary rupture and the dual power strategy drawn from the Russian experience. Likewise he dismissed the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as a tactical issue rather than a fundamental tenet of Marxist theory. More generally Poulantzas was one of the leading theoreticians of leftwing Eurocommunism and the problems of a democratic transition to democratic socialism.

Third, Poulantzas was concerned with the institutional forms of socialist democracy in the West. His views here were similar to those of interwar Austro-Marxism but gave greater weight to the role of social movements as well as workers' councils and other forms of self-management. In particular he advocated a combination of rank-and-file democracy and parliamentary democracy and a plural party system. In many respects his views on socialist democracy were only loosely specified and did not pay sufficient attention to the problems of economic as well as political organisation in a post-capitalist society. But there can be no doubt about his vehement hostility towards authoritarian statism in its Stalinist and social democratic versions as well as its conservative forms.

More significantly Poulantzas increasingly saw these issues in their interconnection. The nature of the current phase of imperialism and authoritarian statism had clear implications not only for the development of bourgeois democracy but also for the appropriate revolutionary strategy in the West. In turn these had major implications for the institutional form of socialist democracy. In this respect Poulantzas was not a typical Western Marxist and shows the extent to which the Western Marxist tradition can be developed in a revolutionary socialist direction.

If one asks why Poulantzas is an 'exceptional' Western Marxist, the answer must be found in part in another exceptional feature. In commenting on Western Marxism Anderson notes that it was divorced from the working class movement and revolutionary practice. There are obvious problems with this argument if it implies that only a detailed, day-to-day involvement in working class struggles and practical experience of making a revolution can produce real theoretical and political breakthroughs in Marxism. For this would exclude Marx himself from consideration. If it means that Western Marxists typically failed to identify with working class and revolutionary struggles, i.e., did not adopt what Althusser described as a systematic *proletarian* philosophical and political position, then it still causes problems (Althusser 1976, p 160). For, as Poulantzas himself noted, adopting proletarian positions does not guarantee correct theoretical views (1969b, p 58). Thus Anderson's comment is best interpreted in terms of a more general unity of theory and practice.

This was well expressed by Poulantzas himself in a caustic comment on the intellectual fashion for self-criticism. He noted that this was particularly grotesque because it took place entirely in

the domain of theory and thus occurred in a vacuum. For rectifications only make sense in the course of concrete analyses.

Those who have still not learnt this, those who give themselves the luxury of continually 'self-correcting' their eternal preliminary remarks (préalables) without giving themselves the means to do so, that is, without ever having been capable of producing even the shadow of a concrete analysis, these people will never learn anything (1974a, p 140).

In contrast Poulantzas himself had rectified his positions in the course of concrete analyses (*ibid.*). To this we might add that these rectifications were also made in the light of increasingly urgent political and strategic concerns with the current political situation in France and Greece.

Thus Poulantzas's contributions to Western Marxism derive from the historically contingent interaction of two crucial sets of factors. They depended on the complex dynamic of the three sources of his thought; but they were also closely linked to his growing involvement in political struggles in Greece and France. Together these intellectual and political forces generated a series of conceptual and practical anomalies whose resolution required continual changes in his theoretical and strategic position. In this sense there was a clear link between democratic socialist theory and democratic socialist practice in Poulantzas's life. If this link was not consolidated in his own work, the tragic foreshortening of his life is partly to blame. But the advances he did record and his influence in theoretical and political debate will hopefully inspire others to continue his work. In particular one should follow the mature Poulantzas and relate theoretical work to concrete analyses and practical concerns. For, with the onward march of authoritarian statism in East and West alike, the need is ever more urgent for a coherent account of the capitalist state, revolutionary strategy, and socialist democracy.



# Bibliography for Poulantzas

In the following bibliography I give a partial list of the works of Poulantzas. In the first section I list his books; the editions cited above are indicated by the appropriate acronym (e.g., *RDM*). The second section lists collections of essays and interviews that may prove useful and also cites the one book which Poulantzas edited. A third section lists Poulantzas's articles in the first language in which they appeared and/or their first English translation; occasionally, where a major work appears in another language under a different title, this has also been listed. But in general I have not tried to exhaust the list of all translations of articles into whatever language. A fourth section lists the principal published interviews, debates, and round-table presentations given by Poulantzas. Since many of these items simply repeat or popularise themes presented more fully in Poulantzas's main books and articles, I have indicated with an asterisk (\*) those that appear significant for Poulantzas's theoretical or political development. I cannot claim that this list is definitive and would welcome further references if readers know of them. Finally I would note that a few of these articles and interviews have not been discussed above and are mentioned only for the sake of reference.

## 1. Books

- 1962 'La renaissance du droit naturel en Allemagne apres la seconde guerre mondiale' (*RDM*), Paris: memoire photocopié.
- 1965 *Nature des Choses et Droit: essai sur la dialectique du fait et de la valeur (NDC)*, Paris: R. Pichon et R. Durand-Avzias
- 1968 *Pouvoir politiques et classes sociales*, Paris: Maspero
- 1970 *Fascisme et dictature*, Paris: Maspero
- 1973 *Political Power and Social Classes (PPSC)*, London: New Left Books
- 1974 *Fascism and Dictatorship (FD)*, London: New Left Books
- 1974 *Les classes sociales dans le capitalisme d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Éditions Seuil
- 1975 *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism (CCC)*, London: New Left Books
- 1975 *La crise des dictatures*, Paris: Maspero

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- 1975 *Fascisme et dictature*, Paris: Editions Seuil (omits Parts VII.5 and VII.6 and appendix on 'The USSR and the Comintern')
- 1976 *La crise des dictatures*, 2nd edn., Paris: Maspero/Seuil
- 1976 *The Crisis of the Dictatorships*, 2nd edn., (CD), London: NewLeft Books
- 1978 *L'état, le pouvoir, le socialisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France
- 1978 *State, Power, Socialism (SPS)*, London: New Left Books

## 2. Collected Essays and Interviews

- 1969 *Hegemonia y Dominacion en el Estado Moderno*, Mexico: ediciones pasado y presente (with preface dated 13th December, 1967) (includes 1964a, 1965b, 1966b, 1967a)
- 1974 *Sobre el estado capitalista*, Barcelona: editorial laia (includes 1965b, 1966b, 1967a, 1969a)
- 1976 *La crise de l'état (CDE)*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France (includes 1976h and 1976i)
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- 1978 *El problema del estado y la dictadura del proletariado*, Puebla, Mexico: Universidad autonoma de Puebla (includes 1976I.g and 1977I.i)
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- 1963c 'O. Ballweg: Zu einer Lehre von der Natur der Sache (compte rendu)', *Archives de Philosophie du Droit*, 8, pp 339-41
- 1964a 'L'examen marxiste de l'état et du droit actuels et la question de l'alternative', *Les Temps Modernes*, 219-220, pp 274-302
- 1964b 'Dialectique et nature des choses', *Annales de la Faculté de Droit de Toulouse*, 12 (i), pp 247-55
- 1964c 'Vers une ontologie juridique actuelle', *Archiv fur Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, 50 (i), pp 183-205
- 1965a '*La Critique de la Raison Dialectique* de J-P Sartre et le droit', *Archives de Philosophie du Droit*, 10, pp 83-106
- 1965b 'Préliminaires a l'étude de l'hégémonie dans l'état', *Les Temps Modernes*, 234, pp 862-96, and 235, 1048-69
- 1966a 'La dialectique hégélienne-marxiste et la logique juridique-moderne', *Archives de Philosophie du Droit*, 11, pp 149-58
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- 1966d 'Themes of the Marxist Conception of the State' (lecture delivered at the second week of contemporary thought, Athens, 4-15 May, 1966) in *Marxismos kai Episteme*, Athens: Ekdoseis Themelio, 1966, pp 281-326 (in Greek)
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- 1969b 'Political Ideology and Scientific Research', in Lars Dencik, ed., *Scientific Research and Politics*, Lund: Studentenlitteratur, pp 48-61 (plus interventions on pp 68-70, 183)
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- 1972d 'Les classes sociales', *L'Homme et la Société*, 24-25
- 1972e 'Social Classes', *New Left Review*, 78, pp 10-35 (translation of 1972d; a revised version appears in CCC)
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- 1973c 'Las clasas sociales (parrafos corregidos)', *ibid.*, pp 154-5 (corrections in the light of criticism to 1973b)
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- 1977f 'L'Intelligentsia et le pouvoir', *Le nouvel observateur*, 10 May
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- 1977h 'A self-commentary', *Vima*, 6 November (in Greek)
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- 1977j 'Socialism. Yes! But following what road?', *Ta Nea*, 28, 29, and 30 November (Greek extracts from postscript of SPS)
- 1978a 'Towards Socialism with a long-term Amortisation of the State', *Eleftheria*, 5 March (in Greek)
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- 1979d 'Is there a Crisis in Marxism?', *Politis*, 25, March-April (revised version of 1979b)
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- 1979g 'La crise des partis', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 26 September
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- 1975I.d 'The Rapprochement between the Right and the Junta', *Ta Nea*, 8 September (in Greek)
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- \*1976I.c 'La Crise de l'Etat', *France Nouvelle*, 1 November
- 1976I.d 'Entre la social democratie et le cesarisme social', *Politique-Hebdo*, 8 November
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