

Week 2. January 26, 2017
Classical Marxism – the base/superstructure model
DISCUSSION AGENDA

Definition of the state

1. What is the implicit definition in Sweezy? What is the most relevant definition for these readings? (Courtney)

AUTONOMY & POWER

The concept of power

2. What precisely does Elster mean by saying that Marx has a “pre-strategic” conception of power? How is this connected to the problem of state autonomy? (Tamara)

Class unity of the capitalist class & state autonomy

3. How does the existence of conflicting fractions of the capitalist class bear on Elster’s account of the problem of state autonomy? (Pete, Janaina)

Explanatory autonomy

4. Is Elster’s definition of “explanatory autonomy” a good one? Should “perceived interests” in his definition replace “actual interests.”? (Aaron)
5. Elster concludes that the scope of autonomy is strictly an empirical issue. Is this plausible? (Loren)

The general base/superstructure model

6. Is the Cohen reconstruction of the B/S model a persuasive approach to social relations? (Griffin, Kris, Masoud). What is the relationship of the B/S model (the struts & roof) to the issue of “privileges economic *interests*” and are there other interests which could be at the core of these explanations? (Samina)

Reformism and the state

7. Sweezy both says that the state would never implement reforms that threaten capitalism and that democracy gives the working class an opening to organize for socialism. How are these views compatible? (Sarah)

The broad, general problem of the relationship of the state to classes

8. Alternative conceptions of the relationship between the state and classes: (1) the state is an extension of the capitalist class; (2) the state is a balancer of class interests. (Kaan)

The personnel of the state

9. Why would anyone want to work in the state? What are their interests for being the functionaries of the state, given Elster’s arguments about abdication? (Benny)