

Claus Offe, "The Crisis of Crisis Management: elements of a political Crisis Theory", in Claus Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (London: Hutchinson, 1984) pp. 35-

61

*bildungsreform - Eine falsche uwer ne...* especially Chapters 3 and 6, where Offe discusses the systematic limits upon different forms of state planning, with particular reference to unsuccessful Social Democratic Party attempts to rationalize the provision of vocational training.

15 Jürgen Habermas' most recent restatement and elaboration of this subject appears in the two volumes of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt 1981).

16 cf. Offe's analysis of these unintended consequences of corporatism in 'Die Institutionalisierung des Verbandseinflusses - eine ordnungspolitische Zwickmühle', in Ulrich von Alemann and Rolf G. Heinze (eds.), *Verbände und Staat* (Opladen 1979), pp. 72-91; the introductory remarks to Rolf G. Heinze, *Verbandspolitik und Neokorporatismus: Zur politischen Soziologie organisierter Interessen* (Opladen 1981), pp. 7-9; Wolf-Dieter Narr and Claus Offe, 'Was heißt hier Strukturpolitik? Neokorporatismus als Rettung aus der Krise?', *Technologie und Politik*, 6 (1976), pp. 5-26; 'The attribution of public status to interest groups: observations on the West German case', in Suzanne Berger (ed.), *Organizing Interests in Western Europe* (Cambridge 1981), pp. 123-58; and (with Helmut Wiesensthal) 'Two logics of collective action: theoretical notes on social class and organizational form', *Political Power and Social Theory*, Vol. 1 (1980), pp. 67-115.

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1 'Crises of crisis management': elements of a political crisis theory\*

The concept of crisis

While there have been numerous attempts in political science to increase the reliability of strategies of political-administrative intervention through the improvement of information, organizational, planning and legal techniques, there are hardly any studies which proceed from the opposite point of view. The question of why the capacity of late capitalist societies for political regulation is so slight and their capacity for 'planned social change' so defective is either not asked or implicitly dismissed by conceiving the well-known limitations of state regulation as due to factors of a contingent nature which may in future be brought under control through improved administration and budgetary management.

This point of view, which dominates political science, and particularly its new branch of 'policy sciences', is justified neither by practical successes nor by theoretical reasons. The following contribution thus examines the interventionist, welfare state regulatory strategies of late capitalist societies not from the standpoint of how their effectiveness could be increased but rather from that of why their effectiveness is - in spite of all attempts at improvement - so limited. The object of this study is to theoretically comprehend the limits of the 'policy-making capacity' of the capitalist state, as well as to establish these limits through a discussion of specific examples.

This kind of theoretical approach, which amounts to a critique (in the sense of the determination of the limits) of the regulatory capacity of the capitalist state, is also a legitimate continuation of

\* The following essay summarizes the theoretical approaches which guided a research project on the 'limits of administrative conflict management and control', conducted during 1971-2 at the Max-Planck-Institut, Starnberg. It originally appeared in Martin Jänicke (ed.), *Herrschaft und Krise* (Opladen 1973), pp. 197-223. An earlier translation was published in *International Journal of Politics*, 6 no. 3 (Fall 1976), pp. 29-67.

the kinds of questions asked by the Marxian critique of political economy. Today its subject has undergone a peculiar change. For Marx, the point was to examine the 'laws of motion' of capital in order to prove that capitalism as a social formation was – contrary to the usual belief in harmony of vulgar economics – in fact a 'dynamic', historical and transitory social formation. Today, by contrast, the tantilizing and baffling riddle (in a political as well as a theoretical sense) is why capitalist systems have so far been able to survive – in spite of all existing contradictions and conflicts – even though an intact bourgeois ideology that could deny these contradictions and construct the image of a harmonious order no longer exists. The usual (or, more precisely, temporary) answers to this riddle either take the form of references to the postponement of the point in time at which the internal contradictions of the system 'ripen' and develop their transformative power or, conversely, of making the state responsible for the achievement of a permanent stabilization. However, both responses are defective. They abstract from their appropriate historical contexts and erroneously ascribe absolute validity to either a traditional concept of crisis or its opposite, the 'panacea' of administrative intervention and regulation. A theoretically useful and practically relevant way out of this dilemma may lie in the attempt to see neither 'crises' nor 'crisis management' but rather 'crises of crisis management' as a constant – in the attempt, in other words, to systematically anticipate and analyse the deficiencies and limitations of the stabilizing activity of the state.

In a preliminary way, crises can be defined as processes in which the structure of a system is called into question. This formulation immediately prompts the following question: what are the analytical conditions for structures being 'called into question'? It is possible to answer this question in two different ways.

Crises endanger the identity of a system. According to a first approach, identity can be defined in relation to the total range of events possible in a system. Seen from this first point of view, the system would be endangered whenever events occur that lie 'outside' the boundaries determined by the system. To conceive a 'crisis' as an event foreign to the system or destructive of that system is to rely upon a *sporadic crisis concept*. The point of departure of a sporadic crisis concept is the notion that crises are particularly acute, catastrophic, surprising and unforeseeable events which, consequently, necessitate a 'decision-making process under the pressure of time' (K. W. Deutsch). The crisis is thus seen as an event

or a chain of events confined to one point in time or a short period of time. This makes it difficult to describe the *tendency towards crisis* or *crisis-proneness* of a social system. This type of crisis concept fails to systematically link events with the structures of the system, in the sense that the crisis event or the defencelessness against it is not seen as a characteristic quality of the system.

A sporadic crisis concept is at best suitable for the analysis of well-demarked *subsystems*: for instance, a business enterprise goes bankrupt because it is confronted by its environment (banks, customers, competitors, etc.) with data and events incompatible with its continued existence. In analyses of society as a whole, however, any conceptual strategy which conceives of crises as 'events that are neither anticipated nor provided for' encounters difficult problems. Logical distinctions between, on the one hand, events provided for and those which are not and, on the other, between events compatible with the system and those which are not can hardly be operationalized. These difficulties indicate the need for an alternative concept of crisis.

The alternative approach conceives crises not at the level of events but rather at the superordinate level of *mechanisms that generate 'events'*. According to this second definition, crises are processes that violate the 'grammar' of social processes. Such a definition favours a *processual* concept of crisis. Crises are developmental tendencies that can be confronted with 'counter-acting tendencies', which means that the outcome of crises is quite unpredictable. Moreover, this processual crisis concept has the advantage of making it possible to relate the crisis-prone developmental tendencies of a system to the characteristics of the system. In contrast to the first type of crisis concept, such developmental tendencies need not be seen as catastrophic events having a contingent origin.

The price that must be paid for the greater precision of this second approach to the concept of crisis is the difficulty it encounters in identifying and defining the boundaries of such event-producing mechanisms. Some guidelines might be drawn from Dahl and Lindblom,<sup>2</sup> who distinguish exchange, political choice, bureaucracy, and bargaining processes as four ways social events are produced in industrial societies. If one disregards the fourth type as a problematic intermediate case,<sup>3</sup> the remaining three organizational principles can be reconciled with a typology developed by Etzioni<sup>4</sup> for the classification of formal organizations. This

typology differentiates social processes according to whether they are based on *normative structures, exchange relationships* or *coercive relationships*.

Now, capitalist societies are defined by the fact that in them — on the basis of an unequal distribution of property resulting from precapitalist 'primitive accumulation' — the organizational principle of the exchange (of equivalents) is *universal*. This principle of exchange, which also includes the commodification of labour power, becomes *dominant* because it is freed from normative and political-coercive restraints. To be sure, a society organized by means of exchange relationships can never be organized *solely* through exchange relations but, rather, requires 'flanking subsystems': even in a purely competitive-capitalist social system, individuals must be socialized in normative structures, while the established rules of social intercourse must be sanctioned by sovereign power. *A society based on market exchange cannot function without the family system and the legal system.*

If the dominant organizational principle of the social processes of every capitalist society is that of exchange, a theory of the crises of capitalist society can identify those processes which challenge the dominance of this central principle. This, in turn, can be done in two ways.

1 The theory of historical materialism attempts to show that processes organized and formed through exchange lead to results that cannot be dealt with by the exchange process itself. *Economic crisis theories* in a narrow sense, such as the theorem of the historical tendency of the rate of profit to fall, reconstruct the processes of self-negation of the exchange principle that potentially result in the revolutionary transformation of the entire ideological and political 'superstructure'.

2 As an alternative to this approach, a theory of the *system crises* of capitalist societies would examine crisis-prone developments not in the exchange sphere itself (i.e., in the form of an *economic crisis theory*); rather, it would concentrate on the *relationship* between the three fundamental organizational principles of society as a whole. Not the self-negation of the exchange principle but its restriction and questioning by the other two organizational principles would serve as the criterion of crisis processes.

In order to consolidate this second possibility, a distinction may be made between two different kinds of relationship that can exist

between the three organizational principles. This distinction reflects the manner in which the normative and political-coercive subsystems are subordinated to the dominant organizational principle of exchange in capitalist societies.

One kind of relationship is that of *positive subordination*. By this I mean a relationship between the economy and the normative and political-administrative systems in which the latter are structured in such a way that they *positively contribute* to, and create the pre-conditions for, the functioning of the dominant organizational principle and the sphere of the economy determined by it. The distinctive feature of this type of positive subordination is the *adjustment of the content* of the normative and political subsystems so that they conform to economic processes. This form of subordination takes place through the norms and ideologies that bring individuals into harmony with the functions within the framework of the economic system, or through a political-administrative system that coordinates state policies and the requirements of the economic system.

The *negative subordination* of both the subsystems outside the exchange sphere must be distinguished from the first type of subordination. In this second case, the ideological and state power systems are related to the capitalist economic system in such a way that they are *limited* by, and *insulated* from this economic system without, however, being able to substantively contribute to its ability to function. Successful negative subordination consists of the protection of the sphere regulated by exchange against overlaps and interferences, which are a possible consequence of the development of the normative and political subsystems. The way in which such overlaps result from capitalist development will be discussed below. The aim here is merely to contrast two types of subordination. The production of complementary functions is what matters in positive subordination. In contrast, in negative subordination the dominance of the economic system over the two subsystems depends on whether — given the possibility of the partial functional irrelevance of these two subsystems for the economic system — the boundaries between the respective systems can be stabilized, so that the economic system is able to *prevent* the alternative organizational principles of the normative and state power systems from interfering with its own domain of the production and distribution of goods. In accordance with these considerations, one would have to characterize processes as crisis-prone if they made the demarcation of the economic system from the other two systems more difficult.

**The growth of non-market organizations**

In order to develop these quite formal attempts, at conceptualization with a few material hypotheses, I would like to describe in greater detail the process of the formation and expansion of 'extra-territorial', or non-market areas of the capitalist social structure – a social structure regulated by exchange relationships. In terms of the structural type of positive subordination discussed above, capitalism can be described as a social structure which – apart from 'residual' feudal elements – is entirely determined by the dominant structural principle of exchange relationships. We can also express this circumstance in a different way: in such a structure, all elements are 'necessary' from the standpoint of the creation of surplus value. However, closer examination immediately indicates that this concept of necessity mixes together two elements that must be distinguished from each other if one wants to avoid hypostatizing the concept of necessity.

First, the relationship between the economic system and the normative or political systems can be necessary in the sense that the structures of the latter are genetically dependent on the economic system. Necessity here means a genetic relationship of determination. The concept of necessity can also acquire a completely different meaning, namely, that the ideological and political systems are necessary for the reproduction of the economic system. One can speak of positive subordination in the above sense only if both elements of the concept of necessity coincide; in other words, only if the conditions of the ideological and political systems are not only *produced* in a capitalist society but are also *required* for the reproduction of a capitalist economy.

On the other hand, the problems associated with negative subordination – the interference of the logics of subsystems and their insulation from each other – arise only when the genetic and functional aspects of 'necessity' no longer coincide. This non-coincidence is characterized by the 'necessary' production of phenomena and structures which are nevertheless not 'required' by the capitalist economic structure that produces them. The empirical thesis I would like to tentatively advance below is the following: the movement of capital systematically, cumulatively and irreversibly produces social phenomena and structural elements which are functionally irrelevant and of no value for the continuation of capitalist development. While this thesis requires much more

empirical evidence, I contend that the nonintegrable by-products of capitalist development are systematically increasing, and that these by-products are having their effects only as impediments, threats, and as 'ballast', without any longer usefully contributing to the process of the creation of surplus value.

The difference between this developmental pattern and the early capitalist pattern of development is obvious. The development of early capitalist systems was defined by the creation of the conditions for universal capitalist growth: labour power was freed from its pre-capitalist agrarian bonds, mobilized and made available for absorption by capitalist industry; the transportation and communications network was rationalized by the evolution of nation states and territories and adapted to meet the requirements of the capitalist socialization of production; the same was true of the legal and fiscal systems, customs and international economic relations, science and technology, the family and urban development, and so on. While this is evident, many of the social results and structural transformations of the developed capitalist economies are in a general sense destined to play only a subordinate and unimportant – in any case ambivalent – role as functional prerequisites of the economic process.

This thesis could be exemplified in detail with respect to the crisis of the theory of imperialism. That the conditions of military oppression and intervention, of induced impoverishment and forced underdevelopment which characterize the contemporary Third World are a direct *result* of the strategies of the developed imperialistic nations seems to be as certain as the fact that the *functional* explanation of this set of circumstances has become questionable and implausible. The American war in Indo-China and, in general, the dependence of the countries of the Third World on the industrialized capitalist nations hardly conforms to a theoretical schema that attempts to interpret the imperialistic strategies as *means* for both the fulfilment of the present needs of the system and the creation of necessary pre-conditions for the further existence of the imperialist countries. The purpose of these strategies is not to create or expand the necessary economic pre-conditions for the continued existence of capitalist economies by opening up raw materials, labour, investment and export markets;<sup>3</sup> rather, their purpose is to *abstract* processes of emancipation that are seen to threaten capitalist hegemony.

The course of development of capitalist industrial society seems

to cumulatively produce phenomena and structural elements that are not determined by the interest of individual capital units in the creation of surplus value, and that can be linked to the 'interest of capital as a whole' only in a highly ambivalent way. These phenomena and structures contain the seeds of non-capitalist organizational forms, and for this reason are of interest to capital primarily from the *negative* standpoint of how their independence can be restrained. Consequently, it is not the offensive opening up of sources of value and conditions for the creation of surplus value but, rather, the defensive exclusion, prevention and avoidance of 'extra-territorial' or non-market structures that is characteristic of the 'system problems' of capitalist development today.<sup>6</sup> The development of the internal social structure of the capitalist countries is also characterized by the appearance of phenomena which are functionally irrelevant or useless for capitalist growth. In order to maintain the stability of the system, priority must be given to minimizing the possible disruptive effects of these phenomena on the dominant system of surplus value creation.

This structural transformation of capitalist development – from a type of development that produces the indispensable conditions for its own continuation to one that necessarily behaves *defensively* towards its own outcomes – can be analysed more precisely by investigating the organization of social labour power. In certain phases of early capitalist development ever greater portions of social labour were rendered as 'free wage-labour' and thereby made into the raw material of industrial exploitation. Today, however, a different development is taking place in which an ever smaller portion of labour time and 'life time' is directly subsumed under the capital relation. In order to illustrate this developmental tendency – which could also be characterized as a relative decline in the organizing potential of the wage-labour-capital relationship *vis-à-vis* total social labour power – the following argument draws upon a sector model that represents the relative absorption of the total available labour time and of 'life time' in the various sectors of the capitalist system (see Figure 1). The model comprises the monopoly sector (M), the competitive sector (C), the state sector (S), and a sector of 'residual' labour power (R).

The *monopoly* sector is characterized by a high degree of organization of the retail and capital markets. Price competition plays – at least in national markets – a subordinate role. The organic composition of capital is high, i.e., labour costs account for a relatively small

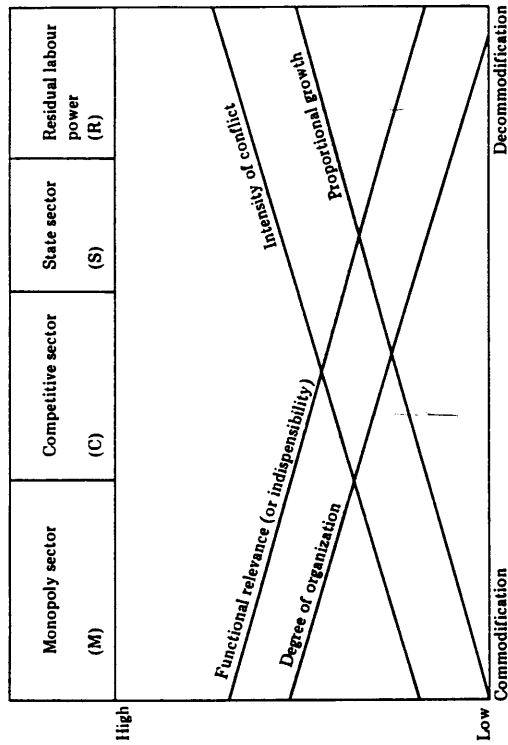


Figure 1 *Four sector model of the capitalist system*

share of the total costs. As a rule, the labour power within this sector is represented by strong trade unions with a high degree of organization. The fact that wage levels in the monopoly sector are relatively high is the combined result of this sector's structural ability to pass on higher labour costs through price increases, the degree of trade union organization, and the small share of its total costs accounted for by labour costs.

Within the *competitive* sector price competition plays a significantly greater role. Labour power is organized to a lesser extent in trade unions, and the likelihood of companies yielding to wage demands is therefore smaller. The competitive sector is dependent on the monopoly sector; this relationship of dependency is determined not by competition but rather by administrative power relationships. Only superficially can this relationship be described as one between market partners enjoying equal rights, because the room for manoeuvre of small- and medium-sized businesses is determined, both qualitatively and quantitatively, by the degree to which they are able to function as suppliers and distributors for the large corporations, for whose patronage they can only compete. The characteristic feature of such a 'dual' economic structure

(Averitt, O'Connor) is the fact that the small- and medium-sized businesses operating on a competitive-capitalist basis are limited to an area the large capital blocs let them have for technical and organizational reasons. Accordingly, the cost structure and profitability of firms in the competitive sector are predetermined by the administratively enforced decisions of the banks and big capital. Moreover, the strategic variable upon which the economic survival of small- and medium-sized businesses (including agriculture) depends is not the innovative behaviour of the 'creative business enterprise' (Schumpeter); rather, it is the mobilization of *political-administrative protection*. In this sector, an adequate economic existence depends upon such non-market means as subsidies, preferential tariffs and tax measures.

Thus, for both the self-employed businessmen and the entrepreneurs of the 'independent' middle class, as well as for the wage-earners working for them, not *all* material conditions of life are determined by bodies and organizations defined by *exchange* relationships. In fact, in this sector the conditions of production and the exchange of labour power are – to an increasing extent – determined through direct economic and political *power* relationships (i.e., relationships which are no longer exchange relationships).

For that portion of social labour power organized in *state bureaucracies and institutions*, either as civil servants or as salaried employees, it is obvious that sovereign political organizational principles predominate over those of exchange. In this sector, labour power still belongs to the 'wage-dependent' category. However, the payment of wages in private industry differs qualitatively from the payment of wages in private industry because of the fact that, in the case of civil servants, an 'equilibrium price' between partners in an exchange transaction is not arrived at. The state does not 'buy' the labour performed by its civil servants and salaried employees, just as it does not 'sell' the products of this labour. The mass of funds from which salaries are paid constitutes 'revenue' and not capital, and it is only an 'external' consideration (namely, that the state must compete with the private economy for labour power) that produces a tendency towards the equalization of public and private wage rates. This indirect dependence of the state upon the private economy cannot, however, disguise the fact that the payment of state personnel with public funds is decided through sovereign power budgets (and not through decisions about the investment of variable capital). The regulation of the relationship

between the state and the public 'servant' through labour legislation is also in accordance with the fact that 'obligations of loyalty' and restrictions upon labour's right to strike are the counterpart of the special wage, employment and social security status often enjoyed by state employees. The limited degree to which labour performed in the state sector can be mechanized, the correspondingly high intensity of labour, as well as the impossibility of calculating the value of this labour in terms of 'productivity' or market prices also rule out wage determination through exchange as a practical possibility in the state sector. In this sector, in short, the mode of allocating material resources is only indirectly determined by the exchange relation.

Finally, in the sector of '*residual*' labour power, labour power does not – even in a formal sense – receive its material basis of existence as compensation for some sort of work performed; its existence is maintained through official allocations of financial and material resources and life chances. In the monopoly sector, labour power is *sold* in the strict sense of the word; in the competitive sector it is in fact sold, albeit at prices determined by power relationships and political-administrative measures; while in the public sector labour power is remunerated under conditions only indirectly dependent on the market. In the realm of 'residual' labour power life is virtually 'decommodified': transfer payments to unemployed persons, invalids and old-age pensioners, the living conditions of school pupils, college students, drafted servicemen, full-time housewives and the occupants of prisons, hospitals and other 'total institutions' are determined directly by political or institutional means. Here, the market-mediated relationship of correspondence between work performed and remuneration plays no role as a criterion of equivalence and equity.

The four sector model sketched above can thus be interpreted as a way of classifying sectors according to their relative 'degree of commodification'. In order to measure the qualitative (and changing historical) relationships between these sectors, it is necessary to specify not the numbers of persons who are members of each sector but, rather, the proportion of the total available social labour time or 'life time' accounted for by each sector. Thus it is a matter of arriving at a 'two-dimensional' quantity by multiplying the number of individuals by the number of units of time during which their labour power is organized in one of the sectors. This procedure has the additional advantage of making it possible to incorporate into

the calculation of the quantitative ratios those portions of 'free time' (for example, time spent on travelling to and from work, and on leisure, vacation and further education) structured not by individual expenditures of earned income but, rather, by administratively determined programmes which take place independently of commodity exchange.

#### **Late capitalism: some hypotheses**

This scale of the 'degree of commodification' only becomes significant if it can be shown that there is a relationship between it and other analytically informative variables. In the accompanying model (Figure 1), four such possible relationships – which depend on the variables of 'proportional growth', 'degree of organization', 'functional relevance' and 'intensity of conflict' – are described. I intend to briefly explain the four hypotheses that illustrate these relationships. I will set aside the serious difficulties associated with the operationalization and empirical measurement of these hypotheses and, instead, advance the proposition that the four relationships in question are steadily becoming more and more prevalent throughout the developed capitalist industrial world.

The hypotheses are as follows:

1 In all developed industrial capitalist societies, *sectoral growth rates* (measured in terms of their share of the total fund of available social labour, discussed above) increase as one moves from sector M to sector R. There are several reasons for this: the stagnation or perhaps even absolute decline of the share of labour time absorbed in sector M; the relative growth of service and distribution functions organized by private enterprise (C); the even greater growth of state-organized services and infrastructures (S); finally, sector R grows most rapidly because it includes the institutional training of labour power (and, thus, increases in the number of pupils and the length of attendance within the school system), as well as the material provision of labour power either temporarily or permanently incapable (for physical, psychic, institutional or economic reasons) of being absorbed elsewhere.

2 The *functional relevance* of each of the sectors (measured in terms of the threats to the further existence of the whole system which would result from dysfunctions within that sector) decreases as one moves from M to R. The prosperity of the system as a whole

depends quite substantially on the contributions to growth, the potential for innovation, and the market strategies of sector M. As a result, disturbances within this sector have direct and far-reaching consequences for all of the other sectors. The converse is not equally valid: the dysfunctioning or even revolutionary transformation of schools and universities would not, for a relatively long time, endanger the monopoly capital blocs.

3 The *degree of organization* of class and interest groups (expressed as the ratio between actual and potential membership) decreases as one moves from sector M to sector R. The trade unions in sector M – not to mention the business associations of the corresponding large corporations – are in a position to organize a greater proportion of their potential membership than is possible at the other end of the scale. This means that the economic and organizational power and resources at the disposal of various class and interest groups are not mutually counterbalancing (as has been claimed by Strachey, Galbraith and others). It rather means that – within the framework of the given organizational paradigms of the political system of capitalist societies – these resources and powers accumulate in the positive as well as the negative sense.

4 The manifestation of *militant conflicts* (measured in terms of the utilization of extra-legal means and/or the articulation of non-integrable objectives) is greater in R than in M. If one also considers the ambivalent potential of populist and Poujadist middle-class movements, as well as the political strike movements among French and American public employees, militant conflict most probably increases through the intermediate sectors as well. This comparative statement does not indicate anything about the significance which should be attributed to the militant conflicts (and their strategies) fought out in sector M. It only suggests that the conflicts fought out in this sector have the greatest potential for disrupting the whole system, and that this sector therefore possesses the most effective safeguards against endogenously produced conflicts. The examples of the militant Italian, French (May 1968) and American strikes in large-scale manufacturing plants seem to confirm this assumption. These strikes typically omitted the 'endogenous', economic phase of the development of classic strikes by drawing upon 'external' impulses, which industrial workers had applied to their own job situations: either the struggles of student and intellectual groups and/or those of the subproletarian strata (Italy, USA) provided models and stimuli (May–June 1968), or the

structure of domination within the plant was challenged by suddenly and abruptly appealing to 'anti-authoritarian' motives. In any case, strikes exhibiting these patterns of development most probably outnumber conflicts in which strikes for higher wages 'organically' outgrow their original goals and become more and more politicized.

On the basis of these brief reflections, I draw the paradoxical conclusion that in late capitalist societies the processes of exchange-regulated capitalist accumulation are simultaneously dominant and 'recessive'. Although exchange processes are decisive for the stability of the system as a whole, they have become increasingly obsolete as their potential to organize social life has been restricted to a small core area. This leads to the creation of a new problem for the system of late capitalist societies: the problem of preventing the regulatory processes of *administrative power* (which are 'foreign to capital' and yet upon whose permanent expansion the monopolistic sphere of the economy is dependent) from becoming autonomous and controlling private exchange relationships, either through paralysing them or subverting them in revolutionary ways. The increasing utilization of the regulatory medium of non-market, state power cumulatively produces weak points that facilitate intrusions into the system by non-capitalist structures. The closing of these vulnerable points through mechanisms of 'negative subordination' consequently becomes the main problem of late capitalist social systems.<sup>7</sup>

The distinction between positive and negative subordination, or between the substantive subsumption and formal exclusion of non-exchange principles of organization can now be utilized for a phase model of capitalist development. At the most abstract level, the dynamic pattern of development described by this phase model contains four stages.

1 The dominance of the sphere of exchange triggers *processes of socialization* (in the Marxian sense of *Vergesellschaftung*, the 'increasingly social' character of privately controlled production relations), that is, a growing division and differentiation of labour and other functions as well as a growing interdependence<sup>8</sup> between the elements of the social system. Differentiation and interdependence are resultant problems that can no longer be dealt with adequately by the dynamics of market processes. The process of 'socialization', which is pushed forward by the dominant economic

subsystem, is determined by three criteria. First, socialization is triggered by market exchanges between the owners of commodities; second, it creates social conditions that threaten to obstruct this exchange; third, these conditions cannot be compensated through exchange processes themselves. This tendency is characterized by historical materialism as the contradiction between private appropriation and socialized production.

2 As means which deal with the problems generated by capitalist exchange processes, the 'flanking subsystems' (normative structures and state power) become increasingly important. In order for them to be able to compensate for these problems, it becomes functionally necessary for these subsystems to partially emancipate themselves from the relationship of positive subordination. The more that steering problems result from the failure of the exchange mechanism to integrate the process of socialization, the greater is the degree of independence or relative autonomy required by the political-administrative centre if it is to repair, or compensate for, these problems.

This relationship results from the 'anarchic', competitively-regulated movement of capital as a whole. Since 'capital as a whole' exists only in an ideal sense, i.e., is incapable of articulating and perceiving a common and unified class interest, it requires special guidance and supervision by a fully differentiated political-administrative system. Only a fully harmonious economic system that did not trigger self-destructive processes of socialization could tolerate the complete positive subordination of the normative-ideological and political systems to itself. As soon as the exchange process requires compensatory regulation, a process of autonomization, which dissolves the positive relationship of subordination, becomes indispensable. To the extent that the process of market exchange between commodity owners is forced to ensure its survival by subjecting itself to state control, the former relationship of subordination must be loosened, and the regulatory medium of state power must be utilized and conceded. In general, the capitalist state has the responsibility of compensating for the processes of socialization triggered by capital in such a way that neither a self-obstruction of market-regulated accumulation nor an abolition of the relationships of private appropriation of socialized production results. The state protects the capital relation from the social conditions it produces without being able to alter the status of this relationship as the dominant relationship. To do otherwise would



saction such mechanisms as the 'investment strike' which would make the therapy more harmful than the illness it was designed to cure. This precarious double function of the capitalist state continuously demands a combination of intervention and abstention from intervention, of 'planning' and 'freedom' – in short, it demands an 'opportunism' (Luhmann) whose adherence to its own principles is absolutely unswerving.

State power subject to such contradictory demands can determine its own strategies neither through a general consensus of citizens nor through technocratic calculation: its opportunistic actions can neither be willed nor calculated. However, this interventionist power does not draw quietly or exclusively on its own resources; it is constantly in danger of succumbing to the competitively-regulated movement of individual capital units. Consequently, it must procure for itself a basis for overall legitimization. Thus, because of the autonomization of the political-administrative system, the normative system must also break free from the relationship of positive subordination and become variable so that it can in turn satisfy the need of the political-administrative system for legitimation.

3 The autonomization of non-market-regulated ('extra-territorial') subsystems and regulatory principles induced by the failure of the exchange principle as an organizing principle for the whole society creates *problems of demarcation* (described above through the concept of negative subordination). The maintenance of the rules governing the creation of surplus value and the retention of the exchange principle as the dominant organizing principle of society necessitate the establishment and growth of subsidiary regulatory principles. These principles must then be prevented from intruding into the domain of private production. This problem of demarcation is determined by the contradictory nature of capitalist 'socialization'. In order to be able to maintain its dominant position, the sphere of exchange needs to be safeguarded through external regulatory principles whose expansion – especially in cases of 'overregulation' or an 'overdose of therapy' – threatens the survival of this sphere. Hence, corporatist tendencies towards *reprivatization* continuously counteract state-capitalist tendencies toward 'global regulation'. In view of this contradictory problem of demarcation, all processes are crisis-prone<sup>8</sup> which call into question and impede a balance between mechanisms of positive subordination (i.e., the totality of positive contributions coming from non-

market subsystems) and negative subordination (which prevent non-market processes from encroaching on the dominant principle of exchange and of surplus value creation).

4 In principle, economic crisis theories are inadequate for the analysis of these crisis-prone processes because they only examine 'first order crises' – in other words, crises that can be described as a cumulative self-obstruction of the process of surplus value creation by means of the effects triggered by this process. On the other hand, the crisis tendencies related to the problem of demarcation (discussed above) take the form of 'second order crises' which are connected with the utilization of regulatory principles external to both capital and the market. In the current phase of capitalist development, second order crises are more relevant than those of the first order, although they are, of course, produced by the latter. This supposition is based on the hypothesis (sketched above) concerning the general pattern of capitalist development: the more the capitalist economy is forced to utilize 'external regulatory mechanisms', the more it is faced with the difficult problem of surviving against the inner dynamics of these encroaching mechanisms.

### Problems of the capitalist state

If this problem henceforth serves as the frame of reference for our analysis, it becomes both possible and meaningful to define more precisely the concept of the 'capitalist state'. The capitalist state can no longer be characterized as an *instrument* of 'the' interest of capital (an interest which is neither homogeneous nor 'generally understood'); rather, this state is characterized by constitutional and organizational structures whose specific selectivity is designed to reconcile and harmonize the 'privately regulated' capitalist economy with the processes of socialization this economy triggers. The more actual and problematic this attempt becomes, the greater the legitimacy of a theoretical perspective that seeks to conceptualize the *objectivity* of capitalist development not at the level of the inherent crisis cycles of the economy but, rather, at the level of those formal structures and 'conversion processes' with which the sociology of organization and administration are concerned. This important connection between political-sociological categories and the categories of the sociology of organization has already been emphasized by Selznick and others in many fruitful studies of the organizational pathologies of the political-administrative system.

While this connection also helps overcome the uncertainties and immense difficulties associated with the Marxian theory of value, it is not merely one of convenience. It is a consequence of assumptions about second order crises, whose emergence is necessary and irreversible, and whose significance can be determined only with the help of such political-sociological-organizational categories. This crisis potential (as well as its 'counteracting tendencies') must be analysed in relation to the structural problem of 'negative subordination', i.e., in relation to the problem of whether the political-administrative problem can politically regulate the economic system without politicizing its substance and thus negating its identity as a capitalist economic system based on private production and appropriation.

The success or failure of the attempt to balance contradictory imperatives depends upon the organizational linking or mutual insulation of three 'subsystems' (Figure 2). Depending on the specific regulatory media involved, three subsystems can be distinguished: the economic system, the political-administrative system, and the normative (legitimation) system. The economic system depends on continuous state intervention for the elimination

of its internal malfunctions; for its part, the economic system transfers – by means of taxation – portions of the value produced in it to the political-administrative system. The political-administrative system is linked to the normative system by the expectations, demands and claims ('specific demands', according to Easton) with which it is confronted and to which it reacts through welfare state and organizational services. On the other hand, the autonomy and capacity of the political-administrative system to act is dependent on 'mass loyalty' ('diffuse support'). These functional legitimization processes are determined by the political system itself, namely, by its welfare state, ideological (Poulantzas, Miliband) and repressive functions, as well as by autonomous, 'pre-political' changes in the system of norms, ideologies and class consciousness. The problem facing the political-administrative system is not merely that of maintaining a specifically 'positive balance' between essential regulatory services and fiscal inputs (left side of the diagram) or between mass loyalty and welfare state or repressive policies (the right side). It also consists in dealing with these two problem complexes (the avoidance of economic malfunctions and political conflicts) in such a way that one type of problem is not solved by aggravating the other: malfunctions must not be allowed to turn into conflicts, and vice versa. In order to solve this problem, the political-administrative system must undergo an internal 'disjunction' that allows it to achieve a relative insulation of the problems represented on the right-hand side of the diagram from those on the left-hand side. Given that the maintenance of the dominant, capitalist organizing principle of exchange constantly *requires* – and is *challenged* by – political-administrative regulation, the following question must now be answered: why cannot this dilemma be permanently prevented from assuming true crisis proportions so that a relatively problem-free path of development lying between the 'necessary' and 'dangerous' levels of intervention is maintained? This path would correspond to the field between the lines AB and CD (Figure 3).

Any attempt to clarify the concept of crisis must be supplemented with the identification of empirical phenomena and processes which meet the criteria of this concept. There is a need, in other words, to develop hypotheses that can be tested empirically and that allow us to decide whether there exists a problem-free path of development for the processes of state regulation. In order to generate such hypotheses, we will use a co-ordinate system whose x-axis indicates

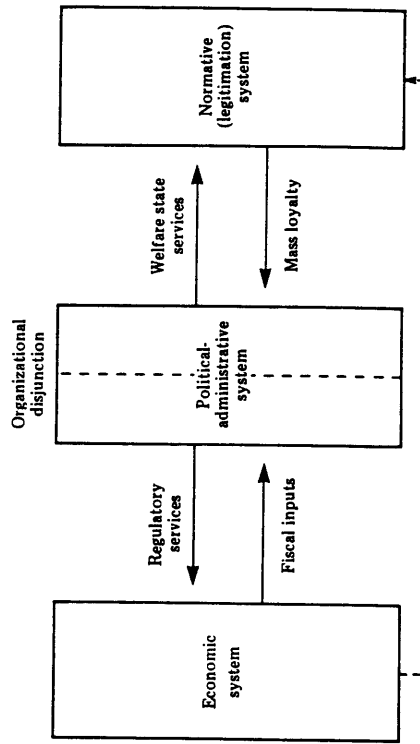


Figure 2 *Three subsystems and their interrelationships*

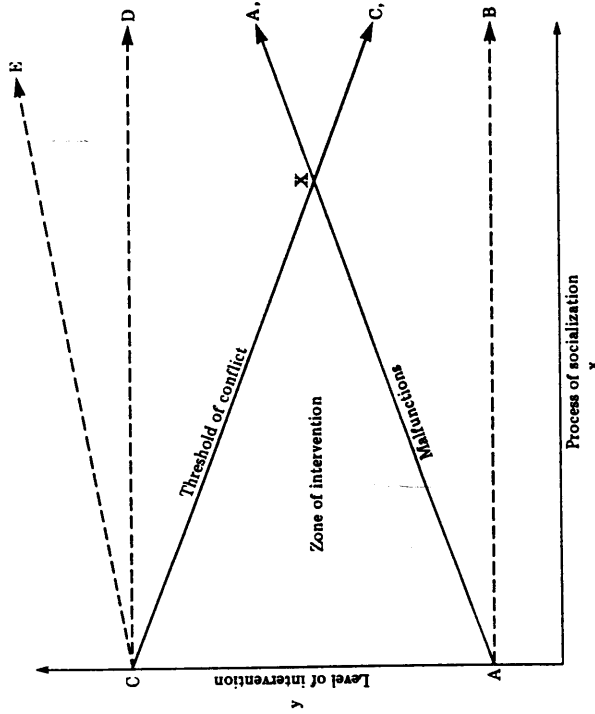


Figure 3 *Thresholds of state intervention*

a process of historical development and whose y-axis indicates the level of state intervention, i.e., the number and scope of regulatory services performed by non-market bodies. For each and every phase of development (i.e., for every point along the x-axis) there is a minimum and a maximum level of intervention.

The *minimum* level of intervention is defined by the 'inventory' of problems produced by the economic system. These problems potentially endanger its existence, but cannot be 'processed' and solved by this economic system. At the same time, a *maximum* level exists for every point on the x-axis; beyond this point, regulatory services and initiatives cease to compensate for the defects of the market-regulated process of creating surplus value, by in fact over-compensating, and thereby challenging the identity of the system regulated by exchange principles. In other words, beyond this maximum point interventions stimulate interpretations of needs which are both antagonistic to the system and which potentially subject the exchange system not merely to subsidiary political control but to actual political control. In the case of a level of

intervention lying below the specific minimum threshold in question, the *process* of capitalist reproduction would be threatened. On the other hand, in the case of a level of intervention lying above the maximum threshold, the *form* of this process, i.e., the form of regulation through production for profit, would be violated.

Drawing on the theorem of the growing socialization of capitalist production, it can be argued that in the course of capitalist development the minimum threshold of the required level of intervention rises in a long-term sense (line AA). This argument is well substantiated by empirical evidence (the rising share of GNP processed by the state, etc.). However, the important (and open) question is whether the development of the specific maximum level in question also exhibits an equal (or perhaps even greater) rate of ascent. If this were the case, one could expect the 'zone of intervention' to remain constant (CD), or to expand, and the crisis concept deduced above would remain empirically unverified. Now the interesting hypothetical case is the one in which the upper threshold value of the level of intervention remains constant in the long run or – and this would be the toughest hypothesis – falls in the long run (CC). According to this hypothesis, there would have to be a point X at which the minimum and maximum thresholds intersect. This point would have to be interpreted as one at which the interventions necessary for the material reproduction of capitalist society are, at the same time, the kind which stimulate interpretations of needs which negate the capitalist form of social reproduction as such. This 'vanishing point' is however useful only for purposes of illustration. As stated at the beginning, I do not wish to use the concept of crisis to produce statements about 'events' which are external to, or which 'break into' the system. Rather, my aim is to identify laws of motion that can be represented as an inverse development of the minimum and maximum thresholds of the level of intervention in the process of capitalist socialization.<sup>10</sup> It is possible to identify five hypotheses that describe the interaction between those interventions necessary for preventing malfunctions and those which relate to conflicts (maximum threshold):

- 1 Lowi's formula, 'policies determine politics', can be interpreted as a lowering of the maximum threshold in reaction to a raising of the minimum threshold: the more numerous and visible the regulatory activities of the political-administrative system, the more intense the conflicts constituted by policies. The commitment of the

'process of policy formation' to giving preferential treatment to the functional problems of the capitalist economy – a commitment guaranteed by objective, political-organizational channels and mechanisms – implies material, social and temporal 'biases', i.e., privilege-granting rules whose effects in turn play an essential role in 'delegitimizing' political conflicts. The analysis of these biases depends not only on empirical verifications of the connection between the limited 'potential for considering problems' and its resultant conflicts; it also requires detailed genetic accounts of the production of political conflicts by the bias-structure of policies.

2 The second hypothesis refers to the 'overburdening' of policy-making capacity by political conflict. As a way of pacifying and isolating centres of conflict the political system adopts strategies which either underregulate or overregulate (and therefore endanger) the system. In this case, the above-mentioned relationship between policies and politics is subject to obstructive repercussions.

3 The use of fiscal resources (for example, subsidies and transfer payments) can remedy as well as exacerbate problems at the level of malfunctions.

4 The use of legitimization resources can likewise be described by means of a double-sided hypothesis: a distinction must be made between the positive and negative results of their utilization.

5 As a regulatory resource, administrative rationality relates to the problem of disjunction, i.e., to the possibility or impossibility of separating and insulating developments of the minimum or maximum threshold.

The last three hypotheses are versions of the argument in support of the thesis of the self-obstruction of regulatory resources, which will now be explained. The 'environment' of the political-administrative system comprises the *economic* subsystem, which is determined by the developmental processes of the capitalist economy, and the *normative* or *legitimation* subsystem, which is determined by the dynamics of conflict and consensus processes. It is not necessary here to secure the concept of an 'organized system of action' against misunderstandings by referring to theories of action and decision-making. Rather, the concept of *regulatory resources* must at this point be examined more closely. The hypothesis that all three of the resources discussed below are subject to a process of cumulative self-obstruction will also be defended and illustrated. Finally, I shall try to characterize more precisely those deficit phenomena

which result from the relative failure of regulatory resources in an environment that is characterized by self-contradictory processes of capitalist socialization.

The three resources, mentioned in Figure 2, include: the fiscal means of the political-administrative system, administrative rationality, and mass loyalty.

### *Fiscal resources*

The socialization of production organized by the state apparatus depends upon the conversion of large and generally increasing portions of the gross national product into 'revenue' by withdrawing it from the process of surplus-value creation. This is accomplished through direct and indirect taxation, tariffs and state borrowing. Facing this conversion process on the side of expenditures are a great number of economically relevant functions of the state, which can be divided into:

- 1 activities that create the *pre-conditions* for capitalist production (for example, the socialization of private costs through infrastructure investments, the mobilization of capital);
- 2 the absorption of the side effects and costs of capitalist production;
- 3 the absorption of surplus capital (as defined by Baran and Sweezy) and the organization of surplus labour power through transfer payments or 'institutions'.

The crisis-prone deficits of this regulatory resource can – in agreement with James O'Connor – be conceptualized in the following way. Budgetary decisions concerning revenues and expenditures have the double function of creating the conditions for maintaining the accumulation process as well as partially hampering this accumulation process by diverting value from the sphere of production and utilizing it 'unproductively' in the capitalist sense. There can be discrepancies between these two functions – discrepancies that appear to be of a systematic nature. Apart from the numerous and complex reallocation processes which are evidently the result of budgetary strategies, and aside from the consequences these reallocations have for the problem of mass loyalty, the following types of discrepancies can already be discerned in the areas of economic regulation and programming:

- 1 It is possible that the state-funded infrastructural investments required to guarantee the viability of national capital at the international level grow to an extent which is incompatible with the short-term stabilization of economic growth. (This can be explained with reference to the anarchy thesis: capital is itself incapable of perceiving and realizing its long-term and collective conditions of existence.)
- 2 Another discrepancy is manifested in the inability of the state to achieve a synchronization of decisions in the areas of economic policy and fiscal planning.
- 3 Finally, the universal subsidization and regulation of economic processes via the state budget has a contradictory effect: while these subsidies become irreversible, their contribution to stabilization decreases through time.

The liberal assumption that social policy is a temporary 'aid to self-help' is no longer valid today. Similar views in the areas of economic policy and structural policy are equally unconvincing, for stabilization policy organized via state budgets produces ever more far-reaching demands and claims. This contradictory process can be seen as analogous to that of physiological addiction: the addict requires ever larger drug doses at the same time as the potential withdrawal phenomena that would follow a reduction of these doses become more and more crucial.

#### *Administrative rationality*

Administrative rationality, the second category of regulatory resources, is the ability or inability of the political-administrative system to achieve a stabilization of its internal 'disjunctions'. There are five preconditions for a 'system policy' that is 'rational' in this sense:

- 1 'Distance': the political-administrative system must be sufficiently isolated from its environment – the economic system and the process in which political demands and support is formed – in order to be *relatively* independent of its functional requirements or specific political demands.
- 2 In addition to this external differentiation, the political-administrative system must exhibit an internal differentiation which prevents interference between those institutions responsible for its legitimation and steering functions.

- 3 In spite of this necessary, two-sided differentiation, the political system requires co-ordination which prevents its various agencies and departments from acting in mutually contradictory ways; particular policies must not be allowed to cancel each other out.
- 4 The political system must have at its disposal sufficient information about the processes that take place in its environment, and which are relevant both for safeguarding the system and for avoiding conflicts.
- 5 Finally, the state must exhibit a forecasting capacity whose chronological range is congruent with its own 'planning horizon'.

All these conditions seem to be systematically undermined by the expansion of state functions. The *external differentiation* (or distance) requirement is impeded by the fact that the administration is compelled to enter into a symbiotic relationship of dependency with specific groups in order to be able to implement its policies at all. As a result, the distance required at the level of the formulation of policies is forfeited at the level of their implementation. The need for *internal differentiation* is – given the expansion of state functions – limited by the fact that the uncoupling of the administrative system from the political system is continuously blocked by the administration's need for support, or by the governing political parties' strategies for retaining power. It is obvious that *co-ordination problems* are multiplied by the expansion of the scope of state activity. Scharpf's suggestion that mutual non-interference could be guaranteed by delimiting only certain spheres of life as political is implausible because it would, in practice, merely amount to the selective non-consideration of already existing relations of interdependence. While the *capacity for processing information* can, in a purely technical sense, be readily increased, the reliability of information is reduced by the unpredictable strategic counter-reactions of co-participants within the environment of the state administration. Finally, these strategic counterreactions seem to produce a wide gap between the expanding chronological 'planning horizons' and the *actual forecasting capacity* of the state. These considerations can be summed up in the following hypothesis: the substantive, temporal and social expansion of administrative action is necessarily accompanied by an internal irrationalization of the organizational structure of the state administration.

*Mass loyalty*

The third regulatory resource, mass loyalty, can be described as the ability of the administrative system to win genuine acceptance for its structures, processes and actual policy outcomes. This ability is ultimately dependent on the cultural norms, symbols and self-understandings that the political system is capable of mobilizing. Of the mechanisms which can be assumed to *reduce* this ability, the following are important:

1 The political-administrative system must not only factually but also avowedly and programmatically assume the task of regulating and guiding the living conditions and actual life chances of the mass of the population in accordance with accepted and acknowledged norms and expectations. This necessity leads to pretensions and to the assumption of responsibilities whose non-fulfilment is much more clearly visible and attributable than was the case in phases of social development in which the state actually assumed tasks of regulation and stabilization that were not in fact part of an avowed programme.

Thus, it is not the reduced level of success but the increased level of pretension of, say, social democratic social policy which subjects this policy to a permanent 'reality test' at the hands of the voting public. Accordingly, the level of articulated disappointments and public 'suits' rises.

2 In developed capitalist societies, it is to be expected that pre-industrial and primary group norms and symbols will be increasingly eroded. For this reason, the recourse to such norms and symbols for the purpose of political socialization and integration is (in post-fascist societies) less probable, or at least less successful. The reservoir of integrative symbolism evaporates. The extent to which it can be replenished by a growth- and prosperity-oriented 'substitute programme' seems to be limited by some of the following considerations.

3 Drawing upon the thesis of the tendency of capitalist societies towards anomie (Brückner), it can be expected that the formal inconsistencies between simultaneously held expectations and norms will lead to the destabilization of the political culture. While one would have to refer to studies of political socialization and political culture (for example, those of Free and Cantril), it appears that the coexistence of the Protestant ethic and hedonism, of individualism and norms of solidarity, and of acquired and ascribed

criteria can no longer be accommodated within the boundaries of social identity.

4 One further consideration, which is emphasized particularly by conservative authors, concerns the 'commercialization of the production of meaning'. The decisive structural element of norms is their possession of counterfactual validity. This is suspended by the process of commercialization. The validity of symbols and of their corresponding life-styles comes to depend on their actual ability to establish themselves in markets. As a result, it might also be expected that politically integrative symbols become superficial and subject to constant recall.

5 Finally, the growing 'decommodification', i.e., the withdrawal and uncoupling of an increasing number of social areas and social groups (surplus labour power) from market relations, might be expected to affect the discipline of the population by the commodity form of industrial labour. The socializing effects of exchange relations and capitalist structures of domination undergo a relative decline in importance.

**Towards a political crisis theory**

While the hypothesis that state regulation has a self-obstructing character clearly requires more empirical evidence to be plausible, it does provide a conceptual framework for a *political crisis theory*. This theory enlarges the field of vision of traditional economic crisis theories in so far as it no longer traces the origins of crises exclusively to the dynamics of the sphere of production. Instead, it explains crises with reference to the inability of the political system to prevent and compensate for economic crises. In summary form, this inability results from the self-contradictory imperatives of state policy: while it must organize the dysfunctional social consequences of private production, state policy is not supposed to infringe on the primacy of private production. If state policy is to be adequate, however, it is forced to rely on means which either violate the dominant capital relation or undermine the functional requirements – the legitimacy and administrative competence – of state regulation itself.

## Notes and references

- 1 For the definition of this concept, see the introduction to W.-D. Narr and Claus Offe, *Wohlfahrtsstaat und Massenloyalität* (Cologne 1975).
- 2 Robert Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics, Economics and Welfare: Planning and Politico-Economic Systems Resolved into Basic Social Processes* (New York 1971); see also, J. Stohler, 'Wirtschaftswachstum und Wohlfahrtsstaat', *Zeitschrift für Nationalökonomie*, 24 no. 4 (1964).
- 3 The type of activity encountered in bargaining processes contains normative, exchange-based and hierarchical elements. Because it lies on a different logical level, it can be neglected here – and not because of any wish to ignore its significance as a heterogeneous type. The question of whether this triad of social regulatory media is complete could be answered negatively by referring to the category of 'knowledge' or 'truth'; as is well known, this category plays a central role not only in the works of the theorists of 'post-industrial society' (Bell, Etzioni, Touraine), but also in sociological systems theory such as that of Luhmann. Here, however, instead of granting this category a measure of analytical autonomy, I prefer to deal with 'knowledge' as an element within the self-objectification or self-programming process through which social systems generate a 'practical contingency' over themselves.
- 4 A. Etzioni, *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations* (New York 1961), pp. 23–40.
- 5 See the elaboration of this thesis in S. M. Miller *et al.*, 'Neo-imperialism critique: do the rich nations need the poor?', *New York University Center for International Studies Policy Papers*, 4 no. 5 (1971).
- 6 This can be illustrated by a thought experiment: if a strangely selective natural catastrophe were to suddenly strike and physically destroy India, Indo-China, large parts of Latin America and Africa – and even if such a catastrophe were also to extend to the ghettos of the large American cities and the poverty areas of the USA itself (or comparable areas of Europe, for example, Naples and southern Italy) – American imperialism would be confronted with medium-sized and intermediate-range problems of adaptation with medium-sized and adjustment. (Obviously, the same was not true of colonialism in its classic form.) This fact alone makes conceivable policies of unrestrained genocide, such as those pursued by the USA in Indo-China.
- 7 This conclusion is suggested by the following question: since the Second World War, which groups and social strata have been the

principal objects and victims of the coercive apparatus of the state and its domestic protection and defence functions? Certainly neither the organized working class nor the trade unions (whose 'disciplining' functions often resemble those of the police). The industrial working class as such has not been the object of the majority of acts of direct repression, and even the radical workers' parties have certainly not been the focal point of such repressive measures. Rather, the more groups are irrelevant for the maintenance or expansion of the material production process, the more systematically and frequently have they been the object of direct repression (cf. the student revolts and other institutional rebellions, the combating and control of ghetto resistance, and citizens' action groups who deviate from the 'rules of the game'). As is also shown by the 'incidence profile' of acts of state repression, the problem of preserving the system is a problem of warding off non-integrable elements on the periphery of the capitalist social structure.

8 This concept of 'interdependence' is itself in need of elucidation. It is normally taken to mean that the execution of every action, including the labour process, is not self-sufficient, but rather presupposes the execution of other (superordinate, co-ordinate or subordinate) actions. It follows that the disruption of the execution of one action produces a chain of resultant disruptions whose range increases as the amount of interdependence within the system increases: the system becomes more fragile and susceptible to disruption. These implications of the concept of interdependence are common to organic, mechanical and social systems. However, a social-scientific concept of interdependence must take into consideration the fact that social systems can make their own interdependence the subject of further development and full differentiation through the development of 'reflexive mechanisms' (Luhmann). Through such mechanisms, they acquire the ability to control their own susceptibility to internal disruption. This control is achieved, for example, through the temporary suspension of certain relations of interdependence, and the utilization of functional equivalents for a precarious function. This dimension of the concept of interdependence is applicable only to social systems, and it is important only in so far as social systems acquire a 'practical contingency' over themselves; in other words, they must possess elements sufficiently *autonomous* to be able to exercise control over other elements (and their mutual disruption). These formal considerations have an interesting consequence for the relationship between interdependence and autonomy: the larger the network of relations of interdependence

which is developed in the process of capitalist socialization, and the more susceptible to disruption the system formed by these relations consequently becomes, the greater the need for autonomous elements which manipulate and reflexively control the amount of disruption within the system.

9 At this point the type of crisis concept being utilized here should be recalled. The capitalist state, which can neither let the dominant economic system take care of itself nor seriously restrict or impinge on that system, exhibits a tendency to stray from the 'path of balance' defined by those contradictory conditions. This *tendency* is indicative of, and conducive to, crisis. The same logical configuration of simultaneously valid but contradictory functional imperatives serves as the basis of the theory of the historical tendency of the rate of profit to fall (i.e., individual units of capital can only accumulate by increasing their organic composition – but this is precisely what they must avoid doing in the interest of maintaining their rates of profit and thus their accumulation). In both cases, the use of this crisis concept does not prejudice questions about either the availability and effectiveness of 'counter-acting tendencies' or the *If* and *When* of 'the breakdown'. Of course, just as little can be said conclusively about the quality of the social results of this crisis tendency: for instance, whether it will result in the establishment of a socialist society or in a continuing process of historically unproductive decay. This depends upon political practice which, although it can draw upon knowledge of crisis tendencies, cannot hide – lying in wait, as it were – behind knowledge of the certainty of the collapse of the system.

10 There is an obvious connection between, on the one hand, the inverse development of the thresholds determining the minimum and maximum possible levels of state intervention and, on the other, the crisis concept explained above: capital utilizes state organizations and regulations whose own inner dynamics – which are of course dependent on legitimation – cumulatively exacerbate the demarcation problem of 'negative subordination'.

## 2 'Ungovernability': the renaissance of conservative theories of crisis\*

A number of structural similarities exist between neo-conservative theories of the 'ungovernability' of the state and society and the socialist critique of late-capitalist social formations.<sup>1</sup> For obvious reasons these similarities are not emphasized by either side. Such parallels become clearer when we compare the theoretical and practical constellations that determined the debate in 1968 with those ten years later. The comparison indicates that in both macro-sociology and political science, theories of crisis have undergone a radical change in their socio-political 'base' or 'clientele'.

In 1968–9 *Leftists* were the ones who advanced the theoretical arguments and held the practical conviction that 'things cannot go on like this'. They assumed that class contradictions, in however modified a form, and the ensuing struggles must result in the dissolution of the basic structure of capitalism, together with its corresponding political constitution and cultural-ideological system. In a perhaps overly enthusiastic 'dismantling' of the corresponding basic assumptions, Koch and Narr have shown that the Left today lacks a solid foundation in crisis theory, something they claim can be found at most in the efforts of a few manipulators of scholastic concepts.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the theoretical positions employed to defend the existing order, which was so strenuously affirmed in 1968, have been almost totally silenced. Today bourgeois consciousness is everywhere engaged in doomsday ruminations over its fate. The limits of growth and of the welfare state, the world economic, financial and environmental crisis – including the crisis of legitimation or 'the crisis of the authority of the state' – have become standard topics, presented in every conservative or liberal newspaper to characterize the national and international condition of society. The conviction that 'things cannot go on like this' today

\* This essay first appeared in Jürgen Habermas (ed.), *Stichworte zur 'Geistigen Situation der Zeit'* (Frankfurt 1979), pp. 294–318.