

**Interrogations #5. Sociology 924. Przeworski
October 12, 2011**

1. Ayca Zayim

There are three issues I would like to discuss. The first one pertains to the definition of the working class, on which Przeworski's entire analysis is built. Przeworski defines working class in a narrow way as "manual wage-earners employed in mining, manufacturing, construction, transport, and agriculture, persons retired from such occupations, and inactive adult members of their households" (p.104). As he underlines, this definition leaves out salaried employees and 'workers of brain'. Moreover, he argues that "the fact that lower-salaried employees vote less often for left-wing parties than manual workers confirms the validity of our definition" (p.126). Does this political outcome arise because they do not belong to the 'real' working class or because of other ideological mechanisms/processes that reduce the salience of class? Related to this, Przeworski rightly highlights that "the organization of politics in terms of class is always the result of conflicts in which multiple forces strive to maintain or to alter in various ways the existing social relations" (p.101). Hence, the salience of a particular 'identity' is 'conjunctural' and relational. If we can say so, it is not clear to me why the working class is defined *a priori* in such a narrow way? How could we incorporate the ideological processes of 'identity formation' or 'ideological apparatuses' in Przeworski's framework (only the role of the political parties, and especially the left parties, is mentioned in this process)? **[You have correctly identified a tension in Przeworski's analysis: on the one hand he says that class struggles are struggles over class before they are struggle between classes; on the other hand, he does posit some kind of objective notion of the working class, as you indicate. One way of thinking about this is that there is a multidimensional space of objective material conditions of existence of people within capitalist employment. These do determine some kind of objective space that shapes material interests and collective action, but it only actually affects collective action once classes become collectively organized through struggle. What Przeworski defines as the core working class constitute those positions *most easily* formed into such a collective identity because the various objective dimensions all line up together. Other categories are more difficult and pose increasingly sharp trade-offs.]**

Secondly, in many passages, Przeworski argues that the working class never constitutes the majority and hence the socialists had to appeal to potential allies in supraclass terms. He even argues that this constitutes a major trade-off. Does this trade-off necessarily need to arise? In other words, does 'supraclass' need to refer to or incorporate the class interests of other classes (i.e. potential allies)? **[The trade-off is inherent, I think, in Przeworski's analysis, but the *intensity* of the trade off can be affected by ideological processes, historical legacies, and all sorts of contingencies.]**

Thirdly, I would like to discuss how we could apply Przeworski's analysis of class compromise (and the conditions under which it breaks down) to the post-1980 era of capital mobility. Przeworski contends that the conditions of class compromise are that capitalists would invest profits, workers consent to profit as an institution, and capitalists commit themselves to some rate of transformation of profits into wage increases and some rate of investment out of profits (p.182). **[Your formulation here is not quite precise: the agreement is to transform to some extent *productivity increases* into *higher wages* rather than have all productivity increases translated into *higher profits*. If there is stagnant productivity and a given rate of profit, the compromise does not dictate that some of the stagnant profits should be turned into *higher wages*.] Capital mobility, by definition, violates one of the conditions of this compromise: continued investment in national territories. **[Capital mobility per se does not violate this: you can have both capital mobility and investment within the national territory. Indeed, in Lenin's theory of imperialism and the aristocracy of labor, this is precisely what happens: returns on****

imperialist super-profits get redistributed to national workers.] By class compromise, what Przeworski has in mind is the social democratic Keynesian compromise (see p.203 and p.181). If, as he notes, the role of the state under Keynesianism is to ensure that the class compromise is maintained and there are no deviations from it by both “organized workers” and capitalists (p.202), then it would be interesting to discuss as well the state’s role in light of the economic/social/ideological/political changes of the last three decades. Furthermore, what could be the potentially ‘successful’ strategies of social democratic parties under globalization?

2. Emanuel Ubert

1. Political party strategies and voting behavior

In chapter 3 Przeworski claims that “individual voting behavior is an effect of the [competing] activities of political parties”, and that, as a result, “the salience of class as a determinant of voting behavior [and political outcomes] is a cumulative consequence of strategies pursued by political parties of the left” (p. 100). In turn, one should expect patterns of class voting to vary depending on i) the strategies pursued by left-wing parties, ii) the severity of the class coalition trade-off, and iii) the existing class structure.

He presents two broad lines of evidence for above hypothesis:

1) Comparing a model “characterizing the process of electoral recruitment” (equilibrium conditions for workers voting socialist) to surveys since 1950s, he finds that “the extrapolations derived from the model bear a statistical relation to survey results”. He takes this as sufficient support for the claim that strategies of political parties (targeted class composition of voters) and other organizations have cumulative consequences for the way people vote (p. 123).

2) Survey studies he refers to seem to show that there “exists a trade-off between the support by allies and the recruitment of workers”, and that “the intensity of the trade-off with salaried employees cannot be distinguished with the available information from the trade-off with other groups” (p. 126).

I am wondering to what degree especially the first line of evidence supports the hypothesis that the (interactive) strategies of political parties essentially “effect” (the salience of class in) voting behavior and thus influence political outcomes. While above model provides equilibrium conditions for the proportion of workers voting socialist (and a corresponding equilibrium condition of electoral class composition for party leaders to target), I cannot see how the model’s statistical relation to survey outcomes shows that the direction of causation flows from political leaders’ strategic choices of voters’ class composition to voter behavior (even if those choices were fully realized). Could structural influences (e.g. class) or other omitted variables not shape electoral behavior (and attitudes) to which political leaders in turn would only be reacting? **[Of course the causation could go in both directions. Przeworski has done computer simulations in which he models overtime changes of electoral behavior of voters as a function of party strategies, class structure environments, and ideological class loyalty of voters (basically a measure of the intensity of the recruitment/defection trade-off), and he can model the trajectory of voting pretty well with this. This shows a consistency of data with the model, but does not rule out alternative models. The burden in non-experimental macro-contexts like this is then to imagine some kind of data structure which would clearly differentiate the two explanatory structures.]**

-> What is the evidence that political party strategic behavior shapes (the salience of class as a determinant of) voting behavior and political outcomes in general?

-> What is the evidence that political party behavior is indeed rational (and thus strategic) and not simply the non-autonomous, determined outcome of structural forces, i.e. what is the evidence

that consequences of actions are (historically) determined but the organization and outcome of conflicts are not (p. 160)?

2. Reductionism and political parties

It seems that Przeworski, in comparison to earlier readings this semester, shifts the explanation for the content of the state (policy) and (to some degree) also the form of the state (“reforms”, etc.) from the structural/ functional level to the strategic agent level (political parties; e.g. “consent which underlies the reproduction of capitalist relations does not consist of individual states of mind but of behavioral characteristics of organizations”, p. 145). Political parties (and similar organizations) and their (rational) strategies seem to form the fundamental unit of analysis in the book. **[But of course they are acting under structurally determined rules of the game, which are in general not the objects of strategy.]** I found that unit under-theorized. According to the rationalist logic employed by Przeworski, are parties, their actions and their outcomes in turn not reducible to the actions and (rational) interactions of their individual members? In order to “really” explain political parties’ choices and (interactive) strategies and their role in aggregating individual to collective political preferences, should we not “break up” and disaggregate the units of political parties (from Przeworski’s perspective)? Why, for example, could political parties’ quest for electoral success be “circumscribed by an autonomous concern for class loyalty”? Where does that concern come from? **[You are right, absolutely right, that there is really two game theory problems in play here: a classic collective action problem internal to the party – how does the party get members to people who share the goals of the party to overcome free riding tendencies – and a power/bargaining game between the party and the collectively organized capitalist class. I think it is legitimate for some purposes to assume that organizations have solved through one mechanism or another the internal problem, and focus on the bargaining problem, even though ultimately both problems are real. In Przeworski’s case the individualistic part of the model is reflected in the defection/recruitment trade-off problem, but this is a problem which assumes away the free-riding problem: that is, people are going to vote, and the question is how to convince them to vote for party A or B; voters don’t act like free riders (which would lead them to stay home). They act as if they have some autonomous commitment to voting and choose a party on the basis of their interests.]**

-> How (and why) are political parties organized and what is their internal decision making process?

3. João Alexandre Peschanski

Is Przeworski right in emphasizing the study of voting over the study of voters? On chapter 3 (100-101), he takes a clear stand that what defines political outcomes is the strategy of political parties. That emphasis rests upon the assumption that voters’ preferences are either objectively granted or shaped by political parties; in any case, they are less relevant than party strategies on his account. I disagree with Przeworski on this point. A theory of voting appears to be insufficient to explain important political phenomena, such as the rise of extremist right-wing parties in Europe. Workers’ preferences in Europe -- given high levels of immigration and unemployment -- appear to have led to workers’ defection from the ranks of the Left (socialist, communist) and passed their votes to the anti-immigration right. In Przeworski models, I do not see how a theory of voting could explain a defection from the left to the right; the defection seems to go from socialist to communist parties on his framework. **[Przeworski might say something like this: the left parties in Europe had ceased to organize workers as workers long ago; they ceased to be class-forming parties. This creates a kind of identity-vacuum, in which other identities become potential bases for mobilization. There is a place in the book where he discusses the issue that individuals can be organized on the basis of all sorts of potential cleavages/categories: as Catholics, Bavarians, workers. I think the issue here would be that the material interests of individuals as taxpayers and perhaps as labor market participants makes**

them available to political mobilization on the basis of nationality under conditions of stagnation and austerity.]

Is Przeworski right in ruling out alliances across classes as a strategy for workers to improve their material conditions? In his models on pages 106-11, support of the working and middle class voters are in an inverse relation for socialist parties, which implies that material interests of workers and the middle class are not only different but inversely different. On p. 106, Przeworski refers to a critique made by Erik that some policies could be in the interest of both workers and the middle class, such as honest government. Erik's critique relies on the idea that the two classes might have a substantive issue that makes them align with each other. The working and middle class might come together just because they have a rational incentive to prevent the electoral success of a right-wing party. In other words, if their alliance -- and a shift of the socialist toward a center-left agenda -- is the only means to prevent the winning of a party that does not represent their interests, why don't they act rationally, reach a compromise and guarantee a suboptimal outcome for both of them? **[Ruy Teixeira argues in his study of Milwaukee socialists that it was only when the socialists started appealing to middle class voters that workers started voting for the party at higher rates. It is true that the party's class identity declined – instead of its vote being made up of 95% workers it was made up of 75% workers and 25% middle class, but the percentage of workers who voted for the party increased dramatically. The party's density in the working class increased while the working class density in the party declined. This runs pretty strongly against the Przeworski model.]**

What are state strategies to enforce worker-capitalist compromises? On chapter 5, Przeworski puts the 'state' on the title, yet the role of the state remains under-specified. In any worker-capitalist compromise, capitalists have the strong hand, as Przeworski puts it, since they have the power of future investment. The state appears to be the means toward reaching a successful compromise, one that guarantees that capitalists will not defect from. To look at what the state can do to guarantee class compromise appears to be of fundamental importance. One answer could be state interventions that generate benefits for capitalists (Jessop's Keynesianism); another answer could lie on building institutions and laws that enforce the compromise. **[This is what I would stress: blocking the low road to pave the high road.]**

4. Aliza Luft

I like this a lot. Przeworski argues that the core dilemma facing social democratic parties in the twentieth century is the decision of how to participate in electoral politics. Once socialists decide that social reform must result from political change, they become trapped: how can socialists obtain an electoral majority, necessary for socialist parties to effect a transition to socialism? Each of the two available options have coterminous detriments: organizing as a class (option a) means organizing only a minority of the population. Organizing as a supra-class (option b) means weakening the salience of class for workers, and thus playing in to the bourgeoisie ideal of workers and others as individuals first. This is a real problem indeed.

My questions have to do with Przeworski's theory of why people vote in favor or not in favor of their class interests. I agree that this is a question of salience, but I'm not so sure that individual voting behavior is only- or even mostly- an effect of political parties' activities. I think it is also a matter of (1) what other social and political processes are currently happening that may heighten the salience of other kinds of identification for politics (for example, the kinds that might push people into fighting for rights within capitalist systems, like civil rights as opposed to social rights-- see Fraser and Gordon 1992), and (2) whether workers are forced into a temporary set-back (not just *willing* to commit to a temporary set-back, which is what Przeworski writes) instead of profiting from competition during times of crisis. Since Przeworski thinks that the shift to socialism requires a "valley of transition" that generates economic crisis, maybe what is needed is not for workers to voluntarily opt for socialism and temporarily put their

own material conditions on the back-burner, but for the economic crisis itself to force workers into material conditions so stunningly bad that they have no choice but to identify as workers and mobilize along that line of cleavage over and above other forms of identification (i.e. race, gender, religion, for example). Brubaker (2002) suggests that one way in which group-making happens is through the occurrence of dramatic events that galvanize a potential group, making them recognize their common position and inspiring them to mobilize as such. Maybe, then, it is not just a matter of choice in response to political parties' activities but also an outcome of strategies of provocation by capitalists that can result in the unification of workers and proletariats along class lines. Certainly, looking to the diverse array of actors at OWS in NYC and around the world seems to testify to this possibility. **[This is an interesting issue around the formation of political identities – the role of dramatic moments and events vs the ordinary operation of politics. In Przeworski's analysis this issues comes into play through the back door in explaining the variation across political systems in the party loyalty parameter that shapes the intensity of the trade-off of the recruitment dilemmas. For example, the role of the communists in resisting the Nazi's in WWII and supporting the Partisans in Italy cemented a very powerful loyalty coefficient for workers in Italy and France, which meant that the parties didn't face sharp problems of defections when they tried to expand their base. Przeworski treats these historical-ideological processes as contingent and exogenous, as not really being the objects of strategy, but a parameter of strategy.]**

5. Bob Osley-Thomas

Przeworski provides a history of social democratic movements in Europe, which among other things notes that workers never reached a majority in any given democracy and that social Democratic leaders were faced with a choice between striving for class purity (which would inevitably lead to electoral failure) or striving to include peoples other than workers (which inevitably led to the dilution of the class character and class conflict components of the parties). He argues that the Social Democrats made a compromise in which they agreed to permit capitalists to accumulate profit just as long as the some portion of private profits were to be saved and reinvested, and the resultant gains would be partially shared. This was the Keynesian system. A structural constraint on this system is that state interventions depend upon the profits of capital.

I am interested in exploring the virtues of employing equations and graphs to understand these concepts and historical developments. In what sense do these equations and graphs help to elucidate his points. In some instances they appear to be fairly helpful. For instance in the chapter on voting he is able to compare a particular model with actual voting survey data. In other instances the graphs appear fairly confusing. For instance the graphs on pages 154 and 155 chart the evolution of wages and compare different degrees of militancy. It shows that militancy brings in nearly immediate increase in wages but over the long-term wages are flat. By contrast wages grow slowly but steadily when labor is not militant. I'm not sure where these curves are coming from. **[These are all computational estimates derived from computer simulations based on formal models of one sort or another. This are trajectories based on different parameters for militancy in a system of simultaneous equations with feedback. It is a bit like estimating global warming based on the amount of carbon emission militancy.....].** The same is through four figure 1 on page 224 in the article Popular Sovereignty, State Autonomy, and Private Property. Incidentally the chart which describes consent would likely be slightly improved by pointing out that consent can differ by population.

6. Yotaro Natani

I would like to explore the similarities and differences between Przeworski and Poulantzas/Therborn. My question is, aside from the mode of explanation (with its focus on class/party agency and compromise), is Przeworski's account of the capitalist state substantively in agreement with Poulantzas and Therborn's theories of the state?

We have learned from Therborn that the state apparatus is an expression of class struggle, and that state power has class character through its effects (of reproducing ruling class domination). According to Poulantzas, the state is the site where contradictions and class struggle are solved or played out, and the state has the function of maintaining cohesion of the system as a whole and allowing for system reproduction.

Przeworski departs from functionalism by placing an explanatory role in real agents, namely classes and parties, and in the process of class compromise within the state – it is through compromise between these historical agents, and the series of choice dilemmas faced by specific parties, that the state comes to have specific regime/form and set of policies. This mode of explanation seems superior to the abstract (and potentially ad hoc) accounts of the state which explain the state form or policies through a decontextualized non-agential view of class relations and systemic functional requirements.

Nevertheless, Przeworski asserts that the state and its policies are an *expression of class compromise*, and the compromise reached allows the state to *reproduce capitalism* successfully. **[But note: Przeworski does not claim that class compromise is itself inevitable or even likely, just that it is possible and that it can constitute an equilibrium if achieved. Capitalists can adopt despotic means of reproducing capitalism, which might even be better for their interests. But they may also be prevented from doing so by the strength of opposition. I think Przeworski probably thinks that in general in mature capitalisms, some degree of class compromise will be in the overall best interests of capital – it is a better equilibrium than a despotic equilibrium.]** Successful reproduction of capitalism reproduces the institutions of bourgeois representative democracy (which stifles revolutionary socialist strategies), and perpetuates ruling class domination. So, it seems to me that the explanatory emphasis is different between Przeworski and Poulantzas/Therborn; but the substantive conclusions about the reproduction of capitalism and class relations are the same or very similar. If this interpretation is correct, do we consider Przeworski's approach stronger because it does not evade detailed explanation by resorting to the abstraction of functionalism?

7. Naama Nagar

From the point of view of capitalists, it seems to me that some forms of organizing the “surplus labor” are more prone to struggle than others. Thus, for instance, to have a large population of ‘permanently excluded’ or a large reserve army (if - and of course, that is a very big IF - we ignore its racial/ethnic/gendered/geographical character, ideology, etc.) might seem less ‘sustainable’, from the point of view of the capitalist state, than a distribution of the surplus labor over the work span of an individual, or underemployment. 1968 France is one case where, if we accept Bourdieu's analysis, for instance, the social movement originated in the influx of surplus labor into universities, and the creation of a bottle-neck at their exit. **[Three points here: (1) The May 1968 revolt by university students in Paris cannot plausibly be regarded as a revolt of a marginalized population constituting permanently excluded surplus labor. There may have been frustrations and bottlenecks in the labor market for university students, but this was a period of economic growth, expansion, increasing employment opportunities for the educated. 2) When “surplus labor” – nonexploitable labor – takes the form of a marginalized population, sheer repression is usually an effective way of dealing**

with the problem. 3) marginalized populations of surplus labor may have deeper grievances, but they also almost always face great obstacles to collective action because of lack of organizational capacity – I see you mention this below.]

My question is: why, then, do capitalist governments, parties and bodies not try to adopt more “quiet” forms of organizing the surplus labor? Again, France is a good example - I am thinking of the conservative “victory”, two years ago, over the leftist parties and the trade unions, which resulted in a decision not to shorten the work week. **[I am not sure why you see this as a puzzle. Are you asking why the capitalist state and other capitalist bodies do not try to incorporate surplus labor in a more integrative way? Isn't it enough to say that this is inherently costly and that unless they are forced to do so, other strategies are more congruent with their interests?]**

I can think of several explanations. One (would say Offe, probably), is that this would be yet another example of capitalists working against their own long-term interests, out of ignorance of a potential crisis in legitimacy.

Another explanation is that in fact, the most impoverished/excluded forms of ‘surplus labor’ (the contemporary ‘lumpenproletariat’, if you will) often lack resources to mobilize which people in more incorporated “places” have access to. [There was actually an interesting discussion about this within the J-14 movement in Israel, since the leaders of the movement are students from middle or upper-middle class Ashkenazi background, whereas similar efforts of mobilization in recent years, led by unemployed middle-aged Mizrahi persons from the periphery, never fully materialized and haven't reached a similar scale. Of course timing is another variable there, but the material point is that the latter explicitly acknowledged that it takes a ‘privilege’ to be able to lead such a struggle, and bear the costs of its consequences].

I'd like to discuss my hypotheses and/or any other ideas regarding this puzzle.

8. Michael Billeaux

I would raise the following issues: 1) assumptions made with respect to voting behavior, and 2) assumptions made with respect to consent.

1) The model Przeworski constructs and the ensuing discussion on voting behavior is incredibly stimulating, both from an intellectual and a more directly political point of view. The model itself is unassailable (at least, as far as I can gauge, which is not very far when formulas get involved); but the fundamental causal mechanism being posited – that there is a rather specific relationship (uniquely determined for each country by class structure) between the number of workers and non-workers voting for Left and Socialist parties. Specifically, with some qualifications, workers will tend to stop voting for Left/Socialist parties to the extent that non-workers vote for them. **[This is not quite the precise idea, although close: the idea is that the rate of recruitment of new worker-voters will be reduced if the rate of recruitment of non-workers increase. The trade off is at the margin. There may also be a problem of defections of existing working class voters, but mostly that is not the problem. Also: Przeworski is not exploring a more complex model in which there are two working class parties competing with each other in addition to competing with non-class parties.]** I got the impression that the justification for this was underdeveloped, despite the fact that it “works” for the argument. Other possibilities are not addressed: reasons beside the parties' search for non-worker allies may explain workers' declining tendency to vote for them; the changing strategic orientations of *other parties* is notably absent from the argument, which may be a factor in rising non-worker votes for Left/Socialist parties; and so on.

An aside on this point: Przeworski makes a convincing argument *against* the electoral strategy for socialists, while apparently maintaining a commitment to the socialist project. Did Przeworski write off social democracy as a viable socialist strategy? **[Przeworski does not really argue against the electoral strategy since he feels a nonelectoral strategy is even less promising. What he says is that the electoral strategy ends up not being a strategy for socialism but for class compromise within capitalism. Social democracy is rejected as a socialist strategy but not as a successful strategy for realizing working class interests within capitalism.]**

2) A similar issue can be raised about Przeworski's discussion of consent. Specifically, are the restrictions of the model so strong that it actually has little to offer? He assumes a simplistic economy which is not crisis-prone by *any* – not just Marx's – mechanism. His argument for doing this – in order to determine effects on the profit rate by legitimation crises – is well-taken. What follows is a definition of consent which hinges exclusively on the proportion of wages to profits. While, again, this is necessary for the sake of building a simple model, it seems to be problematic. Clearly there are other factors which figure heavily into consent and its breakdown besides wages (or even the “social wage”), some of which are excluded by the preclusion of economic crises. While I also found this chapter to be very engaging and impressive, it could certainly be asked whether the model presented is so restrictive as to answer little. **[The economic crisis problem only becomes a serious problem for the model if the time horizon within a crisis becomes sufficiently long that the class compromise ceases to have any traction. Ordinary cyclical crises can be treated, I think, as noise since they interrupt, but do not destroy, the material basis of consent.]**

9. Matt Kearney

Przeworski constructs a rational choice theory of how workers consent to continued capitalism, in both the workplace and ballot box. Throughout, he takes for granted rather than critiques a socially constructed version of rationality, and thus of consent. In general and in the models, consent is the absence of militancy (145-6), militancy is the absence of consent (e.g. 150), and “'legitimacy' is the suspension of withdrawal of consent” (146). This is a tautology at the core of his argument. You can't have exhaustive categories that are defined by one another. **[I do not think the argument is a tautology. Militancy has an autonomous definition as seeking to make maximum possible immediate gains from the exercise of collective power. In his models he charts the trajectory of wages over time under militant strategies – i.e. strategies in which workers take full advantage of their ability to capture as much of a share of profits as possible. Consent then is refraining from exercising that option.]**

There's nevertheless a lot of good stuff here, and maybe we can draw on the good stuff to revise the less good. The worker experiences a set of potential employers as given (e.g. work for Walmart or starve). The Labor Party experiences a set of potential policies as given (in brief, promote capitalism or crash the economy). How they came to appear as given takes us back to that social construction of rationality. They are only given if you assume instrumental rationality is the only way to make decisions. **[I don't think this is correct. The dilemmas are real dilemmas given by the chains of consequences set in motion by alternative strategies. It is not just a question of being instrumentally rational. The instrumental rationality might explain why you actually choose class compromise rather than maximum militancy which risks long term disruptions of the economy, but that these are the consequences of the alternative strategies is not a question of “social construction” (if by this you mean the ideological processes of belief formation, etc.). Or, perhaps I should say that this is not an issue of social construction so long as you regard capitalism as a structure of real constraints imposed on capitalists – (i.e. profit-maximizing is not just a social construction by investors who could, with alternative beliefs and values simply agree to use their power for the common welfare of all).]**

Why don't labor parties and other left parties propose economic policies that promote other ways of making decisions, different normative orientations? They could do this in the worker-employer relationship or in the political process. Are they unable to imagine such policies because of de facto indoctrination? **[Suppose a socialist party proposes that firms be reorganized as deliberative democracies in which the goals of the firm are endogenously discovered through a full and open deliberation by all stakeholders. Profit maximizing to increase shareholder value could be a goal, but this would only happen if quasi-consensus emerges out of dialogue. What do you think would be the fate of such a proposal? What would be the obstacles to its implementation? Do you think it is plausibly described as being opposed simply because of socially constructed preferences of owners of capital?]** Do they think that there's something about the capitalist context that makes those policies necessarily unviable? Some other reason? The agenda item-esque version of this question might be: how do we approach Przeworski's problem differently if we don't take instrumental rationality for granted?

10. Alex Hanna

Przeworski lays out an argument for the difficulties of social democratic parties in capitalist democracies, and of worker militancy both in achieving higher wages and making a grab for socialism. I found his methodological individualist approach to be helpful in elucidating strategies of parties and workers' organizations.

A few things came to mind when reading his book. He discusses briefly the formation of voting preferences based on identity, and how the capitalist class effectively can dodge looking particularistic by appealing to universalist principles. This makes workers' parties look particularistic when making worker-based appeals. I feel that his argument would have been strengthened if he had some kind of social psychological exposition on preference formation, between the worker-identity, religious-identity, ethnic identity, etc. Furthermore, although I know his model of party appeals is a simplification, it may have been more realistic if he had some of these variables of ethnic composition and competing particular identities that compete for voter appeals. Voting preferences seem to be in real life more of a field, competing for voters' attention, than merely between one particularity and universalism. **[The one place where, implicitly at least, the issue of other identities enters the analysis is in the party loyalty parameter, which indicates how culturally anchored are the preferences of workers for the working class party. This could be weak for all sorts of reasons, one of which is the strength of other identities. The problem with attempting to build into the formal model a multidimensional space of identities is that it not only becomes intractably complex, it also ends up losing any explanatory capacity.. The theory becomes something like: voting for ethnic parties rather than class parties is strong where ethnic identities are stronger than class identities. You can still have, of course, a descriptive model of the form: identities → preferences → voting. But I think it ceases to be very interesting.]**

Second, the premises on which his model of strategy consent surprised me, especially the claim of "Wage-earners who are not militant end up materially best-off after a sufficiently long time" (p. 151). This doesn't seem to bear out at all in the real world. In a country like the US with weak trade unions and ones that are reluctant to use labor-halting strikes, we are seeing the gap between wages and profits shooting up at alarming rates. **[I think that there is in a way two kinds of arguments weaving themselves together in these texts around the issue of militancy. In one argument, there is something which almost sounds like a neoliberal point: maximizing the rate of economic growth is the thing which best assures long-term welfare for workers, so anything that undercuts growth is in the long term bad for workers, so militancy is in the long term bad for workers since it implies redistributing some profits from growth/investment to wages. I don't think, however, that this is really the core thread here. In the main argument "Not militant" does not mean "completely**

passive”. It just means, “Refraining from demanding as much as you can get at every stage of struggle.” There are really three ideal-type strategies for workers: hyper-militant (always struggle for as much as possible); optimally militant (struggle for productivity-wage linkage – class compromise); passive (refrain from struggle). The main argument in Przeworski is for the second strategy.] Under his model, he seems to say that crises in capital are crises of consent, ones in which workers demanded too much and capitalists were not able to appropriate excess product back into production. [I don’t think Przeworski’s arguments need to imply that this is the only source of capitalist crisis, but just that a productivity-wage bargain is the best possible long term deal for workers, rather than a maximally militancy strategy.] But that’s just untrue. In the modern era capitalists are investing profit in investments like mortgage-backed derivatives (and all those buzzwords one hears in the news these days) that fail horribly and leave millions poor and destitute. So he rejects an endogenous theory of crisis that is not premised on the “falling rate of consent,” compared to Marx’s theory of the falling rate of profit, something that I don’t think bears out in actuality.

11. Sarah Stefanos

I am having a hard time understanding the idea of “class-in-itself” becoming transformed into “class-for-itself.” Przeworski first brings up Kautsky and his (and others’) notion that “one way or another, sooner or later, objective class relations *spontaneously* find expression at the level of political activity and consciousness” (51). Przeworski debunks the idea of spontaneity, arguing that for class consciousness to emerge, particular people or organizations, agents if you will, are involved in creating this consciousness. In this way, Przeworski takes exception to Poulantzas’ a-historicism, saying that “history proceeds from relations to effects without any agency (68).

Agents *are* critical in transforming and producing class-consciousness, but this still doesn’t resolve the idea of *class* consciousness and *class* struggle. That is why I am intrigued by the question that Przeworski poses: “can there be a historical period in which means of production are privately owned, yet in which no class struggles occur, or is it true by definition that there are always class struggles, whether or not the participants are classes?” (80). [By “participants are classes” he means, of course, “participants are organized as collective agents defined in class terms”]

It seems that Przeworski is taking a somewhat Gramscian approach to his (admittedly rudimentary answer): to understand the “objective” conditions and “objective” consequences of “concrete” struggles. He thus states that “‘class’ ..is a name of a relation, not of a collection of individuals” (81). But he still talks of *collectivities*: “occupants of places” or participants in “*collective*” actions and the relations between them (emphasis added).

I am very intrigued by the relational idea of class, but I still have a fundamental, maybe naïve question: Przeworski has difficulty with the idea of *class* struggle and what it means to be a member of the proletariat, but what is meant by *struggle*? Is latent discontent without collective action a struggle? I am thinking here of how a socialist revolution occurs, and if it happens from “above,” where is the *struggle* located? I don’t know the literature well enough to understand how this class *struggle* could occur under a transition from feudalism to socialism. [Przeworski also states that class struggle is a struggle *over* class before it is a struggle *between* classes. I think by this he means that the first needs to be a struggle to organize people into collective organizations defined in class terms before such organizations can engage in collective actions that in a meaningful way represent class interests. In this formulation, then, struggles are always between collectively organized bodies. There can be conflict between persons, but struggle is a term of collective action. (He doesn’t discuss this systematically enough to know how he treats things like shop floor resistance to exploitation that relies on worker networks and solidarities, but I assume he would say to the extent this actually relies on solidarities it is a form of collective action and thus struggle). The model therefore sees

there being some group of people who act as organizers – individuals with purposes and goals and strategies who group together to try to form such collective organizations. This could be called “cadre” in some frameworks, or activists in others, or political entrepreneurs. Class struggle is initiated when such agents attempt to form classes as collective actors. Where these activists come from, how they are formed, is not something he discusses. These could be Gramscian organic intellectuals, perhaps.]

12. Kathryn Anderson

A psychological perspective on Przeworski:

Following p 148, Przeworski seems to be relating proletarian consent to the ratio of wages to profits (independent var = ratio, dependent var = consent), and at the same time relating wages to militancy in a feedback system (independent var = militancy (consent), dependent var = wages (ratio)). This seems contradictory. **[I don't see where the contradiction lies. You are mixing together strategies – how militant to be – with the goals of strategy – generating a class compromise. A class compromise, which requires a specific kind of wage/profit ratio, then generates consent (legitimacy). So the causal structure is: optimal militancy → class compromise anchored in a productivity/wage bargain → consent.]**

Moreover, the whole analysis seems simplistic in that it ignores individual psychology as it determines both productivity of laborers (and thus profits) and the decision to engage in militancy. Underlying this whole section, and much of the book, is the question of whether workers' satisfaction is determined by absolute level of welfare or relative level of profits. The underlying premise is that welfare (whether level or relative) determines proletarian militancy. I guess, from a psychology point of view, I question this whole notion. Could it not be that as conditions deteriorate, workers feel so disempowered and have so much less time and resources to participate in militancy and/or organize militancy, that there could be a direct relationship between material conditions and militancy within certain critical and not insignificant ranges of welfare? And that this leads to a paradox wherein lower welfare actually reduces militancy? **[You are right that Przeworski has a pretty thin psychological theory of workers. The reason why the wage/profit ratio is so important is that it indexes how high workers wages could potentially be given the productivity of the economy. He is assuming, therefore, that workers understand that there is only so much income generated in a system to be divided between wage earners and capitalists, so the maximum possible demand is that all profits should go to workers. Pulling back from that demand is the result of two forces – the balance of power and the realization that so long as the system remains capitalist (i.e. the means of production are privately owned by capitalists) workers need capitalists to invest, and this means that they need to control profits. It could be that workers really only care about their absolute wages – their material conditions of life – but still their strategies have to take into account the wage/profit ratio, at least if they aim for long-term improvement.]**

13. Paul Pryse

I'd like to discuss the conception and role of crisis in Przeworski. In his discussion of the transition costs of opting for socialism, Przeworski seems to assume that capitalism will continue to reproduce itself uninterrupted, barring the possibility of 'excessive' militancy on the part of workers. His graph showing

the transition trough, depicts capitalism as rising steadily on a curve. I'm not sure how Przeworski can make this argument about the potential transition costs without taking into account the periodic crises endemic to capitalism. Earlier in the book, Przeworski discusses Keynesianism as the ideology of Social Democracy in power, but world system proscribed by Keynes has since gone into crisis. Does Przeworski believe that capitalism can go into crisis, even under circumstances of a class compromise? My feeling on this is that, although there is no 'final crisis' of capitalism, certain aspects of Marxist crisis theory, such as the tendency for capital to consolidate and centralize, thereby making crises more severe over time, make the choice of opting for socialism more plausible than Przeworski allows for. **[If there was an extended crisis that suggested a long term, permanent decline in the material conditions of life of workers, this would certainly erode the “material conditions of consent” and make a transition trough less of an obstacle. However, it is far from clear that the result would be likely to be concentrated struggles for socialism: 1) Even in conditions of prolonged stagnation of real wages – such as the US economy over the past three decades – the media worker has seen his/her wages pretty steadily increase over the course of their careers. That is: the average 55 year old wage earner today earns more in real terms than they earned when they were 35. So, stagnation of average or media wages does not mean that individuals don't have a positive trajectory. 2) A transition trough could still make matters much worse for people for a very extended period of time, so they have to have some degree of confidence that things will get better at the far end of the transition. How patient are people likely to be? How vulnerable to reversal?]**

14. Chris Carlson

I think Przeworski's argument comes down to a few key ideas. First, workers were simply never the majority of the electorate. This meant socialist parties were forced to build cross-class coalitions, and compromise the “purity” of their political program by appealing to the middle classes. In addition, this meant that workers' parties were simply never capable of legislating the nationalization of the means of production, and therefore had to adopt an alternative economic program. This economic program, since it could not build socialism, was forced to not only surrender to capitalist logic but to actively promote profitability for capitalists. Another central idea to the argument is that ideological hegemony must rest on material bases to be successful. And the argument in chapter 5 is also related to this idea in the sense that workers will be less likely to opt for socialism as long as their material conditions continue to improve under capitalism.

So I think there are two general ideas I would like to explore about this argument. First, many of these ideas aren't necessarily true for third world countries, so how do we explain the reproduction of capitalism there? Regardless of how you define “workers”, most third world countries have a much larger “base” for socialism, and in fact outright socialist parties have won at the ballot box in many countries. In addition, there is much less “material basis” for capitalist hegemony in the third world, and material conditions do not continue to improve for a vast portion of the population. In other words, many of the central ideas of Przeworski's argument are false for third world countries, yet third world states still generally serve to reproduce capitalism. How do we explain this? **[Of course, Przeworski is asking the specific conditions of how capitalism is reproduced under bourgeois democratic processes. The mechanisms of blocking socialism would be different in authoritarian regimes, like China or much of Africa. But still, there are relatively stable democracies in parts of the Global South, and generally radical anti-capitalist parties don't do very well there. Where such democracies are stable, however, I suspect that something similar to Przeworski's mechanisms are in play – there are rules of the game constraints, class heterogeneity dilemmas, short-term vs long term trade-offs, etc.]**

The second general idea I would like to explore is the basic logic of Przeworski's argument. Is it necessarily true that a socialist party, just by seeking to appeal to a larger electorate, will inevitably lose the support of some of their base? Would it not be possible for a socialist party to appeal to a larger electorate by simply focusing on common "enemies" of both the workers and middle classes? Many bourgeois parties are successful by being fairly ambiguous about their real political program in order to appeal to as large a sector of the population as possible. Why can't socialist parties be successful this way? **[Sometimes this may be possible, but can it result in a durable coalition sustainable over time? This is especially a problem if they happen to win elections and have to do something – the actual policies will have a class content to them and class effects, so coalitions are likely to be undermined. This is also a problem the right faces when they forge purely negative coalitions.]** And what about the "maximalist" strategy that Przeworski refers to? Would it not be possible, once in power, to push an agenda that exposes the narrow interest of capitalists and brings class conflict to the surface? **[The pivotal problem here is the time horizon of elections and the time horizon for dealing with the transition trough credibly.]** Is it true that the social democratic parties did the best they could given the conditions, or is it possible that other strategies could have been more successful?

Additional interrogations, Przeworski readings

15. Taylan

The first issue I would like to discuss is the second phase of the dilemma socialist/social democratic parties face: the strategy of policy once in power. Once in power, how can we understand the relations between the social democratic government and the state apparatus? Winning the elections does not necessarily confer the political power to the social democrats. The bureaucracy in general sense could develop a resistance against the elected party. The most dramatic example of this is what happened in Chile after the election of Allende as president.

Second question I would like to discuss is whether we can reformulate Przeworski's claim given the diminishing turnout in elections, as well as other forms of political participation, especially among dominated classes. In United States, historically, the turnout rates among impoverished classes are higher. It was the contrary in Western Europe. However, recently participation to elections has been decreasing in Europe as well. Can we think of other political institutions, besides the bourgeois ones in order to promote political activism for workers and poor?

Thinking about the more radical, communist critiques of social democracy as an ideology, are the social democratic parties the mediating organizations of capitalism in order to curb the working class discontent? Do they forgo the interests of working class all together via compromise with other classes? Or even go further and implement neoliberal recipes after the crisis of the European welfare model?

Finally, I would like to discuss the way Przeworski defines working-class. According to his analysis working class is composed of manual wage-earners, and their families there of, as well as the retirees. Then he discusses the gap of interest/preference, whatever you call it between the working class and 'workers of brain.' Actually the only country, where the party of working class, which is defined in limited terms, came to power is Germany. So, it represents an "exceptional" case in that sense in comparison to other ones. My first question is whether an alternative formulation of working class is possible? In relation to this, whether we can analyze Przeworski's second dilemma of policy making, as a

‘within-class compromise,’ where in which the interests of manual wage-earners are articulated with those of other wage-earners. In other words, can we develop Przeworski’s analysis by linking it to the ‘within wage-earner’ politics of working class parties?

16. Mitch Schwartz

Although Przeworski is largely concerned with manifestations of capitalist interests and struggles within democratic institutions, I was drawn to some of the implications regarding democracy in general. Speaking of the inability of social democracy to produce socialism, Przeworski said, “Even if workers would prefer to live under socialism, the process of transition must lead to a crisis before socialism could be organized. To reach higher peaks one must traverse a valley, and this descent will not be completed under democratic conditions” (p. 43-44). He then went on to describe how even when socialist leaders are elected, they avoid instigating economic crises for fear of losing power. So in this sense, I understand the underlying problem that within an electoral system, leaders must always operate with reelection as a priority. But does Przeworski mean that socialism can only be achieved through some sort of dictatorial coup? Is he saying that the transition to socialism requires a leader/political apparatus that willingly instigates severe economic crises? Or is he more commenting on a need to reform democratic political institutions?

There are other times, though, when Przeworski seems to imply an irredeemable corruption of democracy. Building from Gramsci, Przeworski points to democracy as the forum in which capitalists make concessions in order to maintain hegemony. However, he simultaneously refers to democracy as the means through which conflicts are executed and resolved. Democracy organizes conflict such that it reduces the range of possible outcomes, but those outcomes are not predetermined. So it is conceivable that anti-capitalist progress can be made via democracy, even if democracy generally serves to bolster capitalist hegemony.

But I am unclear on Przeworski’s final position regarding democracy. Does he believe that socialism cannot be achieved through egalitarian, deliberative, participatory processes, i.e., democracy? Or by *democracy* is he referring to particular configurations of political institutions through which socialism cannot be achieved precisely because they are not egalitarian, deliberative, and participatory? And as such, should the focus then be on reforming political institutions to make them truly democratic? Or does Przeworski believe the socialist transformation requires revolution outside democratic political institutions? Would this require physical confrontation?
