

## *Poulantzas and the Capitalist State*

One or two preliminary remarks about this review-article may be in order. In *New Left Review* 58 (November-December 1969), Nicos Poulantzas wrote a very stimulating and generous review of my book *The State in Capitalist Society*; and in the following issue of NLR, I took up some of his comments and tried to meet some of his criticisms. This exchange attracted a good deal of attention, both in this country and elsewhere: obviously, and whether adequately or not, we had touched on questions concerning the state which Marxists and others felt to be important. I thought that the publication in English of Poulantzas's own book on the state<sup>1</sup> (it first appeared in French in 1968) would provide an opportunity to continue with the discussion that was then started, and to probe further some of the questions which were then raised. Unfortunately, the attempt to do this must, so far as I am concerned, be made in a much more critical vein than I had expected. The reason for this is that on re-reading the book in English five years after reading it in the original, I am very much more struck by its weaknesses than by its strengths. This is not a matter of poor translation: a random check

suggests that the team of translators which was required for the task struggled valiantly and not unsuccessfully with an exceedingly difficult French text. It is a pity that the book is so obscurely written for any reader who has not become familiar through painful initiation with the particular linguistic code and mode of exposition of the Althusserian school to which Poulantzas relates. But too much ought not to be made of this: serious Marxist work on the state and on political theory in general is still sufficiently uncommon to make poor exposition a secondary defect—though the sooner it is remedied, the more likely it is that a Marxist tradition of political analysis will now be encouraged to take root.

Nor need a second and different objection that might be made against the book be taken as decisive, or even as particularly significant. This is its abstractness. The sub-title of the book in French (which the English edition does not reproduce) is: *de l'Etat Capitaliste*. But the fact is that the book hardly contains any reference at all to an actual capitalist state anywhere. Poulantzas says at the beginning of the work that 'I shall also take into consideration not simply in research but also in exposition, concrete capitalist social formations' (p. 24). But he doesn't, not at least as I understand the meaning of the sentence. He seems to me to have an absurdly exaggerated fear of empiricist contamination ('Out, out, damned fact'); but all the same, accusations of abstractness are rather facile and in many ways off the point—the question is what kind of abstractness and to what purpose. In any case, and notwithstanding the attention to concrete social formations promised in the above quotation, Poulantzas makes it quite clear that his main concern is to provide a 'reading' of texts from Marx and Engels, and also from Lenin, on the state and politics. Such a 'reading', in the Althusserian sense, is, of course, not a presentation or a collation of texts; nor is it a commentary on them or even an attempt at interpretation, though it is partly the latter. It is primarily a particular theorization of the texts. Poulantzas makes no bones about the nature of the exercise: 'In order to use the texts of the Marxist classics as a source of information, particularly on the capitalist state', he writes, 'it has been necessary to complete them and to subject them to a particular critical treatment.'<sup>2</sup> Similarly, he notes that 'these texts are not always explicit . . . Marx and Engels often analyse historical realities by explicitly referring to notions insufficient for their explanation. These texts contain valuable guide lines, so long as the necessary scientific concepts contained in them are deciphered, concepts which are either absent, or, as is more commonly the case, are present in the practical state'.<sup>3</sup> One may feel a bit uneasy about this 'complementation' of texts and at their subjection to 'particular critical treatment'. But at least, the author appears to be playing fair in declaring what he is doing, and the enterprise is not in itself illegitimate—indeed, there is no other way of effecting a theorization. The question here too is how well the enterprise has been conducted, and

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<sup>1</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (NLB and Sheed and Ward), pp. 357, £5.75.

<sup>2</sup> *Political Power and Social Classes*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 257–8.

whether the 'deciphering' has produced an accurate message. I will argue below that it has not and that much of Poulantzas's 'reading' constitutes a serious misrepresentation of Marx and Engels and also of the actual reality he is seeking to portray.

## 1. Structures and Levels

I want to start by noting that the basic theme of the book, its central 'problematic', is absolutely right; and that Poulantzas, whatever else may be said about his work, directs attention to questions whose core importance not only *for* but *in* the Marxist analysis of politics cannot be sufficiently emphasized. What he is concerned to re-affirm is that the political realm is not, in classical Marxism, the mere reflection of the economic realm, and that in relation to the state, the notion of the latter's 'relative autonomy' is central, not only in regard to 'exceptional circumstances', but in *all* circumstances. In fact, this notion may be taken as the starting-point of Marxist political theory. As with Althusser, 'economism' is for Poulantzas one of the three cardinal sins (the other two being 'historicism' and 'humanism'); and even though his anti-'economism' is so obsessive as to produce its own 'deviations', there is no doubt that 'economistic' misinterpretations of the politics of classical Marxism have been so common among enemies and adherents alike that even some stridency in the assertion of the central importance of the concept of the relative autonomy of the political in Marxist theory may not come amiss.<sup>4</sup>

Still, to insist on this *is* only a starting-point, however important. Once it has been established, the questions follow thick and fast: how relative is relative? In what circumstances is it more so, or less? What form does the autonomy assume? And so on. These are the key questions of a Marxist political sociology, and indeed of political sociology *tout court*. It would be absurd to blame Poulantzas for not having, in this book, provided an answer to all these questions. The real trouble, as I see it, is that his *approach* to these questions prevents him from providing a satisfactory answer to them. In my *Reply* to Poulantzas in NLR 59, I said that his mode of analysis struck me as leading towards what I then called 'structural super-determinism'. I think that was right but that a more accurate description of his approach and of its results would be *structuralist abstractionism*. By this I mean that the world of

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<sup>4</sup> A simple illustration of the point is the common interpretation of the most familiar of all the Marxist formulations on the state, that which is to be found in the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx and Engels assert that 'the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie'. This has regularly been taken to mean not only that the state acts *on behalf* of the dominant or 'ruling' class, which is one thing, but that it acts *at the behest* of that class, which is an altogether different assertion and, as I would argue, a vulgar deformation of the thought of Marx and Engels. For what they are saying is that 'the modern state is but a committee for managing the *common* affairs of the *whole* bourgeoisie': the notion of common affairs assumes the existence of particular ones; and the notion of the whole bourgeoisie implies the existence of separate elements which make up that whole. This being the case, there is an obvious need for an institution of the kind they refer to, namely the state; and the state *cannot* meet this need without enjoying a certain degree of autonomy. In other words, the notion of autonomy is embedded in the definition itself, is an intrinsic part of it.

'structures' and 'levels' which he inhabits has so few points of contact with historical or contemporary reality that it cuts him off from any possibility of achieving what he describes as 'the political analysis of a concrete conjuncture'.<sup>5</sup> 'Everything happens', he writes, 'as if social classes were the result of an ensemble of structures and of their relations, firstly at the economic level, secondly at the political level and thirdly at the ideological level.'<sup>6</sup> But even if we assume that classes are the product of such an 'ensemble', we want to know the nature of the dynamic which produces this 'ensemble', and which welds the different 'levels' into the 'ensemble'. Poulantzas has no way that I can discern of doing this: the 'class struggle' makes a dutiful appearance, but in an exceedingly formalized ballet of evanescent shadows. What is lacking here is both any sense of history or for that matter of social analysis. One example is Poulantzas's treatment of the notion of 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself'. These are described as '1847 formulae' of Marx, which 'are merely Hegelian reminiscences. Not only do they fail to explain anything, but they have for years misled Marxist theorists of social classes'.<sup>7</sup> But what, it may then be asked, is to take the place of these 'Hegelian reminiscences', since we clearly do need some means of tracing the dynamic whereby a class (or a social aggregate) becomes an 'ensemble' in which the economic, the political and the ideological 'levels' achieve the necessary degree of congruence?

Poulantzas sees the problem: 'A class', he says, 'can be considered as a distinct and autonomous class, as a social force, inside a social formation, only when its connection with the relations of production, its economic existence, is reflected on the other levels by a specific presence'.<sup>8</sup> Leaving aside this oddly 'economistic' reflectionism, after so much denunciation of it, one must ask what is a 'specific presence'? The answer is that 'this presence exists when the relation to the relations of production, the place in the process of production, is reflected on the other levels by *pertinent effects*'.<sup>9</sup> What then are 'pertinent effects'? The answer is that 'we shall designate by "pertinent effects" the fact that the reflection of the place in the process of production on the other levels constitutes a *new element* which cannot be inserted in the typical framework which these levels would present without these elements'.<sup>10</sup> This might be interpreted to mean that a class assumes major significance when it makes a major impact upon affairs—which can hardly be said to get us very far. But Poulantzas does not even mean that. For he also tells us, 'the dominance of the economic struggle' (i.e. 'economism' as a form of working-class struggle—R.M.) does *not* mean 'an absence of "pertinent effects" at the level of political struggle'—it only means 'a certain form of political struggle, which Lenin criticizes by considering it as ineffectual'.<sup>11</sup> So, at one moment a class can only be

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<sup>5</sup> *Political Power and Social Classes*, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Political Power and Social Classes*, p. 76. See, in the same vein, his rejection of the notion of true and false consciousness as a 'mythology', pp. 60-1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79 (italics in original).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79 (italics in original).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

considered as distinctive and autonomous if it exercises ‘pertinent effects’, i.e. a decisive impact; next moment, these ‘pertinent effects’ may be ‘ineffectual’. Poulantzas never ceases to insist on the need for ‘rigorous’ and ‘scientific’ analysis. But what kind of ‘rigorous’ and ‘scientific’ analysis is this? Indeed, what kind of analysis at all?

## 2. Class Power and State Power

I now want to return to the issue of the relative autonomy of the state and show how far Poulantzas’s *structuralist abstractionism* affects his treatment of the question. Not only does his approach seem to me to stultify his attempt to explain the nature of the state’s relationship to the dominant class: it also tends to subvert the very concept of relative autonomy itself. Driven out through the front door, ‘economism’ reappears in a new guise through the back. Thus, Poulantzas tells us that ‘power is not located in the levels of structures, but is an effect of the ensemble of these levels, while at the same time characterizing each of the levels of the class struggle’.<sup>12</sup> From this proposition, (which strikes me as extremely dubious, but let it pass), Poulantzas moves on to the idea that ‘the concept of power cannot thus be applied to one level of the structure. When we speak for example of *state power*, we cannot mean by it the mode of the state’s articulation at the other levels of the structure; *we can only mean the power of a determinate class* to whose interests (rather than to those of other social classes) the state corresponds’.<sup>13</sup> Now this, I should have thought, is manifestly incorrect: it is simply not true that by ‘state power’, we can only mean ‘the power of a determinate class’. For this, *inter alia*, is to deprive the state of any kind of autonomy at all and to turn it *precisely* into the merest instrument of a determinate class—indeed all but to conceptualize it out of existence. Lest it be thought that I exaggerate, consider this: ‘The various social institutions, in particular the institutions of the state, do not, strictly speaking, have any power. Institutions, considered from the point of view of power, can be related only to *social classes which hold power*’.<sup>14</sup>

As if uneasily aware of the implications of what he is saying, Poulantzas assures us that ‘this does not mean that power centres, the various institutions of an economic, political, military, cultural, etc, character are mere instruments, organs or appendices of the power of social classes. They possess their autonomy and *structural* specificity which is not as such immediately reducible to an analysis in terms of power’.<sup>15</sup> This half-hearted concession does not dissipate the confusion: it only compounds it. The reason for that confusion, or at least one reason for it, is Poulantzas’s failure to make the necessary distinction between *class power* and *state power*. State power is the main and ultimate—but not the only—means whereby class power is assured and maintained. But one of the main reasons for stressing the importance of the notion of the relative autonomy of the state is that there is a basic distinction to be

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 100 (italics in original).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 115 (italics in original).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 115 (italics in original).

made between class power and state power, and that the analysis of the meaning and implications of that notion of relative autonomy must indeed focus on the forces which cause it to be greater or less, the circumstances in which it is exercised, and so on. The blurring of the distinction between class power and state power by Poulantzas<sup>16</sup> makes any such analysis impossible: for all the denunciations of 'economism', politics does here assume an 'epiphenomenal' form.

This is particularly evident in Poulantzas's scattered and cursory references to the bourgeois-democratic form of the capitalist state. Two instances may be given to illustrate the point. The first concerns the relationship between different elements of the state system. For Poulantzas, 'the actual relation of the state's institutional powers, which is conceived as a "separation" of these powers, is in fact fixed in the capitalist state as a mere *distribution* of power, out of the undivided unity of state sovereignty'.<sup>17</sup> This formulation slurs over some important questions concerning the nature of the bourgeois-democratic form of state. No doubt, in the strong sense in which it has commonly been used, the notion of the separation of powers is a mystification which serves apologetic purposes. But to dismiss the actual separation of power which occurs in this form of state as a 'mere distribution of power' out of 'the undivided unity of state sovereignty' is to ignore processes which it is the task of a Marxist political theory to situate in a proper perspective. Thus, to take a topical example, the constitutional struggles around Watergate may or may not produce large results. But there is something badly wrong with a mode of analysis which suggests that 'the actual relation of the state's institutional powers' (in this case the American state) is 'a mere distribution of power, out of the undivided unity of state sovereignty'. It begs too many questions and leaves too much unanswered.

Similarly, and more important, Poulantzas appears to me systematically to underestimate the significance of the role performed by bourgeois political parties in organizing and articulating the interests and demands of various classes, notably the dominant class. 'The political parties of the bourgeois class and of its fractions are unable', he tells us, 'to play an autonomous organizational role, let alone one analogous to the role of the working-class's parties'.<sup>18</sup> This too is surely an untenable claim. The idea that the Conservative Party in Great Britain or

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<sup>16</sup>This is perhaps best exemplified by reference to an article of Poulantzas, *On Social Classes*, which was published in NLR 78, March-April 1973, in which he writes: 'The state is composed of several apparatuses: broadly, the repressive apparatus and the ideological apparatus, the principal role of the former being repression, that of the latter being the elaboration and incubation of ideology. The ideological apparatuses include the churches, the educational system, the bourgeois and petty bourgeois political parties, the press, radio, television, publishing, etc. These apparatuses belong to the state system because of their objective function of elaborating and inculcating ideology, irrespective of their formal juridical status as nationalized (public) or private.' (p. 47). This carries to caricatural forms the confusion between different forms of class domination and, to repeat, makes impossible a serious analysis of the relation of the state to society, and of state power to class power.

<sup>17</sup>*Political Power and Social Classes*, p. 279 (italics in original).

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 299.

Christian Democracy in Germany or Italy have not played this role is absurd—indeed, they have played it much *more* effectively than working-class parties have played it for the working class. 'In fact', Poulantzas goes on, 'the bourgeois parties, in general, utterly fail to fill that autonomous role as organiser of these classes which is precisely necessary for the maintenance of existing social relations: this role falls to the state'.<sup>19</sup> But in fact the state does not. The state may in various ways *help* these parties to fulfil their role, and also in competing on terms of advantage with their working-class rivals. But the main task to which Poulantzas refers is, in the bourgeois-democratic form of the capitalist state, performed by the parties themselves. It is only in periods of acute and prolonged crisis, when these parties show themselves incapable of performing their political task, that their role may be taken over by the state.<sup>20</sup>

Towards the end of the book, Poulantzas notes the existence of a current of thought, which he sees as originating with Max Weber, and which seeks to present the state 'either as the exclusive foundation of political power, independent of the economic, or as the foundation of political power, independent from, but parallel to, economic power';<sup>21</sup> and he suggests that 'the major defect of these theories consists in the fact that they do not provide any *explanation* of the foundation of political power'.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, the same has to be said of his own text, in so far as what I called in my NLR 59 article his 'structural super-determinism' makes him *assume* what has to be *explained* about the relationship of the state to classes in the capitalist mode of production. There is in this schema a 'derealization' of classes, whose 'objective interests' are so loosely defined as to make possible almost anything and everything;<sup>23</sup> and the same is true of the state itself, whose relative autonomy, as I have suggested earlier, turns into complete instrumentalization.

### 3. Bonapartism

Poulantzas does not really seem interested in the bourgeois-democratic form of state at all.<sup>24</sup> His primary interest is in the form which the

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>20</sup> Here too, confusion is compounded by the contradictory statements which abound in the text. Thus on page 320, Poulantzas notes that 'the predominance of the executive implies an increased state autonomy vis-a-vis these classes and fractions only when it is combined with a characteristic decline of the parties' organizational role *reflected right in the political scene*' (italics in text). So parties which on page 299 fail to play an organizational role do play such a role twenty-one pages later.

<sup>21</sup> *Political Power and Social Classes*, p. 327.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330 (italics in text).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> This may account for, though it hardly excuses, such major errors of interpretation as the attribution to C. Wright Mills of the view that 'the "heads of economic corporations", the "political leaders" (including the heights of the bureaucracy) and the "military leaders", that is to say all the elites, belong to what he (i.e. Mills—R. M.) calls the "corporate rich"' (p. 329). This is a complete misunderstanding of Mills's basic characterization of the 'power elite' and of the interrelationship of its component parts.

capitalist state assumes in crisis circumstances, or rather in one of these forms, namely the Bonapartist state.<sup>25</sup> There is nothing wrong with this: but there is a lot which is wrong, as I suggested earlier, with his treatment of it, particularly in his 'reading' of the work of Marx and Engels on the subject.

Some quotations are required here. 'Constantly throughout their concrete political analyses,' Poulantzas writes, 'Marx and Engels relate Bonapartism (the religion of the bourgeoisie), as characteristic of the capitalist type of state, to its intrinsic unity and to the relative autonomy which it derives from its function *vis-à-vis* the power bloc and the hegemonic class or fraction'.<sup>26</sup> Even more categorically, we are told that 'Marx and Engels *systematically conceive* Bonapartism not simply as a concrete form of the capitalist state, *but as a constitutive theoretical characteristic of the very type of capitalist state*'.<sup>27</sup> Categorical and italicized though these assertions may be, it has to be said that they are untrue. For one thing, the notion that Marx and Engels 'systematically' conceived this or that form of state is inaccurate, as Poulantzas himself, as may be recalled from my previous quotations, suggests at the beginning of his book. But in any case and much more important, there is absolutely nothing in their writings to warrant the assertion that they conceived (systematically or otherwise) Bonapartism 'as a constitutive theoretical characteristic of the very type of capitalist state'. It may be that they should have done: but they did not. Nor is Poulantzas able to adduce the textual evidence needed for so definite a 'reading'.

The evidence upon which he does rely is a latter which Engels addressed to Marx on 13 April, 1866, commenting on Bismarck's proposals for constitutional reform in Prussia on the basis of universal suffrage. The relevant passage, of which Poulantzas only provides an abbreviated version, goes as follows: 'It would seem that, after a little resistance, the German citizens will agree, for Bonapartism is after all the real religion of the modern bourgeoisie. I see ever more clearly that the bourgeoisie is not capable of ruling directly, and that where there is no oligarchy, as there is in England, to take on the task of leading the state and society in the interests of the bourgeoisie for a proper remuneration, a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship is the normal form; it takes in hand the big material interests of the bourgeoisie even against the bourgeoisie, but leaves it with no part in the process of governing. On the other hand, this dictatorship is itself compelled to adopt against its will the material interests of the bourgeoisie'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> At least in this book. For a wider and much more solid discussion of the 'crisis state', see his *Fascisme et Dictature* (English edition, NLB forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> *Political Power and Social Classes*, p. 302.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>28</sup> K. Marx-F. Engels, *Werke*, Berlin 1965, Vol 31, p. 208. Poulantzas's quotation goes as follows: 'Bonapartism is after all *the real religion of the modern bourgeoisie*. It is becoming ever clearer to me that the bourgeoisie has not the stuff in it for ruling directly itself, and that therefore . . . a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship is the normal form; it upholds the big material interests of the bourgeoisie (even against the will of the bourgeoisie) but allows the bourgeoisie no part in the power of government', *Political Power and Social Classes*, p. 259. The italics are not in the original text of Engels.



This is an interesting and a very suggestive text, but no more than that. Poulantzas also claims that 'Engels returns to this point in the famous foreword to the third edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*'. But even the most careful study of this text fails to substantiate the claim. On the contrary, it could well be argued that it makes the *opposite* point, since Engels says there that 'France demolished feudalism in the Great Revolution and established *the unalloyed rule of the bourgeoisie* in a classical purity unequalled by any other European land'.<sup>29</sup> Thirdly, and finally as far as texts are concerned, Poulantzas argues that Marx, in his own 1869 Preface to *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, 'opposes Bonapartism as *the political form of the modern class struggle in general* to the political forms of formations dominated by modes of production other than the capitalist mode'.<sup>30</sup> This is without foundation. There is nothing in the quotation which Poulantzas gives from this Preface, or in the rest of the text, which bears the interpretation he gives to it, on any kind of 'reading'.

Poulantzas lays great emphasis on Engels's reference to Bonapartism as 'the religion of the bourgeoisie'. Even if one agreed to treat a single passing reference in a letter from Engels to Marx as a main pillar in the construction of a Marxist theory of the state, one would be bound to say that Engels was wrong in describing Bonapartism as the *religion* of the bourgeoisie, if this is taken to mean that the bourgeoisie has an irrepressible hankering for such a type of regime. As the extreme inflation of executive power and the forcible demobilization of all political forces in civil society, Bonapartism is not the religion of the bourgeoisie at all—it is its last *resort* in conditions of political instability so great as to present a threat to the maintenance of the existing social order, including of course the system of domination which is the central part of that order.

In this instance, care and scruple in textual quotation are not simply matters of scholarship: they also involve large political issues. The insistence that Marx and Engels did believe that Bonapartism *was* the 'constitutive theoretical characteristic of the very type of capitalist state' is not 'innocent': it is intended to invoke their authority for the view that there is *really* no difference, or at least no *real* difference between such a form of state and the bourgeois-democratic form. Thus

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<sup>29</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow 1950), Vol. I, p. 223. There is another text of Engels, from a pamphlet written in 1865, *Die preussische Militärfrage und die deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, where Engels anticipates, in a modified form, a famous formulation of Marx, in stating that 'Bonapartism is the necessary form of state in a country where the working class, though having achieved a high level of development in the towns, remains numerically inferior to the small peasants in the countryside, and has been defeated in a great revolutionary struggle by the capitalist class, the petty bourgeoisie and the army': *Werke*, Vol. 16, p. 71. Compare Marx's formulation (which Poulantzas quotes in a different context) in *The Civil War in France* that the Bonapartist regime 'was the only form of government possible at the time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation' (*Selected Works*, I, p. 470). Neither Engels's nor Marx's formulation serves to buttress Poulantzas's claims, though, like their other writings on the subject, they are of great interest. For a comprehensive review of these writings, scholarly but weak in interpretation, see M. Rubel, *Karl Marx devant le Bonapartisme*, Paris—The Hague, 1960.

<sup>30</sup> *Political Power and Social Classes*, p. 259.

Poulantzas writes that 'in the framework of the capitalist class state, parliamentary legitimacy is no "closer to the people" than that legitimacy which corresponds to the predominance of the executive. In fact, these are always *ideological* processes in both cases'.<sup>31</sup> But this is to pose the issues in a perilously confusing manner: the issue is not one of 'legitimacy' or 'closeness to the people': it is whether there is a real difference in the manner of operation between different forms of the capitalist state, and if so, what are the implications of these differences. But suppose we do pose the question in the terms chosen by Poulantzas. Both the Weimar Republic and the Nazi state were capitalist class states. But is it the case that 'parliamentary legitimacy' was no 'closer to the people' than 'that legitimacy which corresponded to the predominance of the executive'? Let us not be melodramatic about this, but after all fifty million people died partly at least in consequence of the fact that German Comintern-Marxism, at a crucial moment of time, saw no *real* difference between the two forms of state. Poulantzas also writes, in the same vein, that 'the popular sovereignty of political democracy finds its expression equally well in a classical parliamentarism and in a Bonapartist semi-dictatorship'.<sup>32</sup> But neither is the issue here one of 'popular sovereignty'. This too is to confuse matters and to lend credence to confusions that in the past have proved catastrophic in their consequences.

The point is not, of course, to claim for bourgeois-democratic forms of the capitalist state virtues which they do not possess; or to suggest that such regimes are not given to repression and to Bonapartist-type modes of behaviour; or to imply that the dominant classes in *any* of them are immune from Bonapartist temptations and promptings, given the right circumstances and opportunities. Chile is only the latest example of this. But to say all this is not the same as obliterating differences between forms of the capitalist state which are of crucial importance, not least to working class movements.

To conclude, I have no wish to suggest that the reader will not find useful, suggestive and important ideas in *Political Power and Social Classes*. But I am also bound to say, with genuine regret, that it does not seem to me to be very helpful in the development of that Marxist political sociology which Poulantzas quite rightly wants to see advanced.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.