

VIEWS OF MARX ON THE STATE WITH A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE OF THE STATE BY MILIBAND AND POULANTZAS

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ABSTRACT

It is believed that the state was created as a result of a social contract Hobbes (1651), Lock (1690), and Rousseau (1755), between the citizens for a peaceful coexistence so as to preserve everyone from the brutish realities of 'state of nature' for their 'prosperity' and to attain the 'general will.' The view of Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883) differs in this regard, as he looked at the 'state as an instrument of the dominant economic classes to oppress the other sections of society.' He "rejected the dichotomy between the civil society and the state provided in the Hegelian philosophy, and concluded that the state and bureaucracy didn't represent universal interests"¹. Karl Marx looked at the 'state as a tool at the hands of the bourgeoisie classes' working for them to preserve their long-term interest by fooling the proletariat that the state represents them as well which in reality it does not, Amit Bhaduri (2008) also makes similar claims in his work. The debate of Miliband and Poulantzas over the nature of the 'State' provides a different insight concerning the functioning of the state.

The first part of this article deals with the views of Karl Marx on the 'State' the relationship between the state, the bourgeoisie, and the plight of the proletariat.

The second part discusses the debate between Miliband and Poulantzas over the 'nature of the state' how they perceived the state works and how it helps the cause of the bourgeoisie.

The last part of the article concludes with an argument that the state is a tool created by the Bourgeoisie for the Bourgeoisie

Keywords: State of Nature, Social Contract, State, Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.

The state comprises of four elements: Citizens, Territory, Government and the Sovereignty. But how does the state formed? Earlier thinkers believe that earlier there was no such institution called the State and everyone lived in the 'State of Nature,' which meant that no one was under the control of anyone and everyone was free to do anything that s/he wished to do.

The Social Contract

In 'the state of nature,' everyone had the ultimate freedom to do what they wanted to do but this unlimited freedom ultimately lead to problems as now everyone had the right to every resource, and no guiding institution was there to decide how the limited natural resources will be distributed.

In this regard, **Thomas Hobbes (1651)** described the 'state of nature' as the 'state of war,' he stated that to prevent this state of war people decided the creation of an higher institution that will be able to resolve their conflicts. In this regard a social contract was created between the people leading to the emergence of the higher institution called the State.

John Locke (1690) had a slightly different belief than Hobbes about the 'state of nature,' as Locke believed that the State was created not because the state of nature was not peaceful but because it lacked 'established laws' and therefore was not able to protect the natural right to property of the people. Hence, the creation of a higher institution was needed so that the right to property can be secured.

¹ "A history of Political Thought : Plato to Marx" by Subrata Mukherjee pg.454,

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1755) believed that the State was created for a very different purpose, which was not to protect the individual from a ‘state of war’ or to protect their ‘right to property’ but to attain their ‘general will.’

While different thinkers gave different views on the formation of the State but on one point all of them agreed that the state was created as a result of a social contract amongst the individuals and which was supposed to work for all not for a selected few.

Karl Marx

Karl Henrich Marx had a very different way of looking at the creation of the State. He stated that society remained divided into two classes throughout history and that ‘the State was a creation of the ‘haves’ class for the protection of their interest from the ‘have not’ class’ i.e. the class which holds the resources and the class which gets exploited.

Historical Materialism: He defines the evolution of the human society in the following manner:

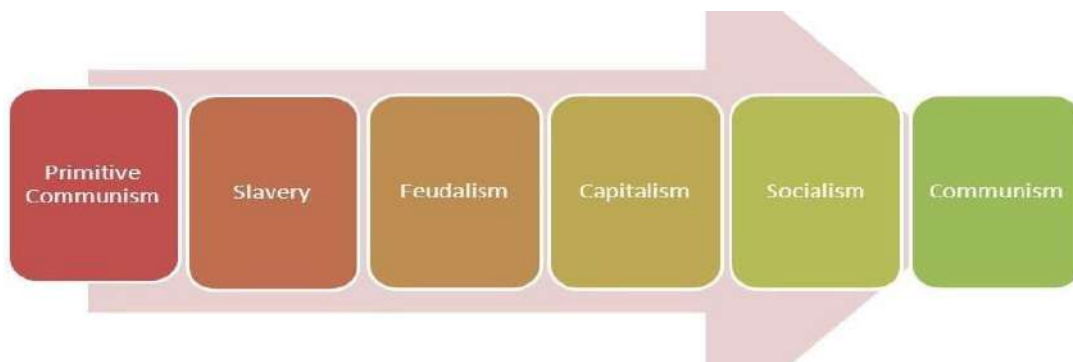


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He provided seven stages of historical materialism beginning with the ‘primitive communism’ stage of the past and ending with the ‘communism’ stage of the future.

He stated that earlier there existed a ‘Primitive Communism’ stage which was peaceful as no division of classes was there but slowly accumulation of resources started which led to the emergence of the ‘Slavery’ stage in which the ‘masters’ and the ‘slaves’ were there. In this stage the State worked for the ‘masters’ and protected their right to property in which even the slaves were considered as the property of the masters. The State in this stage made sure that the slaves does not get the hold of the resources, but when unrest started amongst the slaves against their exploitation then the system changed to ‘Feudalism.’ In the ‘Feudalism’ stage there existed the ‘landlords’ and the ‘landless labourers’ and in this stage the State made sure to protect the land rights of the landlords thus making sure that the landless labourers never get hold of the resources. Later when the landless laborers started calling out the State for its discriminatory behaviour state a new stage emerged called ‘Capitalism’ in which the State stated that everyone had the equal opportunity to prosper, everyone had the freedom to enter or to exist in any contract. In this stage too there were two classes ‘the bourgeoisie and proletariat’ in this stage the State gave the right to proletariat to exist any contract at anytime thus fooling the proletariat that the State is working for them too. As the proletariat does not have the liberty to leave the contract because to survive they need food and for that they have no other option but to sell their labor.

Marx pointed out that throughout the working classes is exploited by the capitalist and in future when this exploitation will reach its extreme point then the workers will revolt and this will mark the beginning of a new stage i.e. the socialist stage. He believed that when the Socialist stage will come the class division amongst the individuals will end and in this stage each one will get according to their contribution in the society not according to their status.

According to Marx, the socialist stage will ultimately lead to the ‘Communist stage.’ In communism, the individuals will come out of their greedy nature created by the ‘haves’ class and in this stage, a system will prevail in which each will get according to their needs. He believed that when people will co-exist peacefully in the communist stage then slowly after a period of time even the State will ‘wither away’ as its services will no longer be required.

Karl Marx views on the State

Marx idea about the state can be divided into ‘three subject areas i) pre- capitalist states, ii) states in the capitalist era and iii) the state in the post-capitalist society. Marx’s idea about state changed as he grew older, differing in his early pre-communist phase, the “Young Marx” phase and its mature phase.’

In his work “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Rights” (1843) the basic concept was that ‘the state and civil society are separate’ as he says that: “the political state everywhere needs the guarantee of spheres lying outside it.” But when he wrote *The German Ideology* (1846), ‘he viewed the state as a creature of the bourgeois economic interests.’ Later, this idea was expounded in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) too in which he stated that ‘the executive branch of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie’ he also rejected the idea that there is a dichotomy between the civil society and the state.

The ideas of Marx are similar to the economist’s interpretation of history as they argue that ‘the forces of production determine people’s production relations: their production relation determines all other relations, including the political ones.’ Marx states that ‘it is the bourgeoisie who control the economy, therefore they control the state,’ and the economist sees the state as an ‘instrument of class rule.’ He states that the bourgeoisie adopts the state for both ‘internal and external purposes for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests.’ With the development of ‘commerce and industry, individuals grew richer and the state at the same time fell ever more deeply into debt.’ The state remains dependent on the bourgeoisie for the money and therefore it works according to their wishes. Therefore, the State helps the bourgeoisie in further exploitation of the proletariat, and at the same time, it stops the proletariats from revolting against the bourgeoisie by creating a false belief amongst them (the proletariat) that the State is there for protecting the interest of all the classes.

According to Kennedy (2006), both Marx and Engel hoped that the proletariat can become the new ruling class. As “in the ‘Communist Manifesto’, Marx and Engels wrote: that, on the one hand, ‘the executive of the modern state is but a committee for the bourgeoisie’, and that, on the other hand, ‘the proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class. So for Marx and Engels the state can be relatively autonomous even within internal relations of capitalism”. Hence “the capitalist state has the capacity to become relatively autonomous from its primary functions as the instrument of the ruling capitalist class to become the vehicle to derive forward the dictatorship of the proletariat as a new ruling class in the transition to socialism which will also lead to the eventual destruction of the state”².

Amit Bhaduria explains the relation of the capitalist and the State:

To explain the point made by Karl Marx that how the State functions in favor of the Capitalist let’s take the help of Amit Bhaduri’s work.

The work done by Amit Bhaduri ‘Predatory Growth’ (2008) shows how the ruling class controlled the state, making it work in their favor resulting in favourable policies for the bourgeois class creating profit for them but at the cost of Proletariats. He put forward his argument with reasonable points in his work i.e. “the Indian billionaires increased from \$106 to \$170 billion in just one single year 2006-2007. This 60 percent increase in wealth says Amit Bhaduri- would not have been possible, except through the transfer of land from the state and

² “Marxism and the relative autonomy of the capitalist states” by Kennedy Peter pg. 4

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the central governments to the private corporations in the name of ‘public purpose’ for mining, industrialization and SEZ’S.”³

The market-oriented policies and reforms continue to widen the gap between the rich and the poor the bourgeois and the proletariat, as well as among regions. The market is expanding for the goods like air-conditioned malls, and luxury hotels but “more than three in four Indians do not have a daily income of \$2, they are hardly part of this growing market.”⁴ People are “forced to migrate to cities as fertile land is diverted to non-agricultural use, water and electricity are taken away from farms in critical agricultural seasons to supply cities.”⁵ While according to some thinkers, the State is created by individuals to make their lives easy as pointed out by Hobbes and Locke but according to others the State was created by some privileged individuals to protect their interests and to enjoy their monopoly over the resources as pointed out by Marx and Engels. Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas also debate about the nature of the State, both of them critic each other for lacking some or the other fact.

The contemporary debate on state between Miliband and Poulantzas

The real issue between Miliband and Poulantzas is methodological one⁶. Both Miliband and Poulantzas debated on the nature of state while Miliband argues for an institutional model of the capitalist state, whereas Poulantzas takes a structural position.

Miliband in his work “The State in Capitalist Society” says that the ‘state functions to serve capitalist interests. He provided two important points for this, he stated that the state does so because of a) the social origin of members of the state government and b) the personal ties and influence between members of the state government and ruling class elites.’

Different from this view Poulantzas adopted a structural position. He claims that the ‘state is objectively a capitalist entity, which can serve no purpose other than preserving the capitalist mode of production. He says that if the ruling class are the same people managing the state then it is merely a coincidence: the state serves capitalist interest regardless of who is in charge.’ He Criticises Miliband position, as he claims that: “the relation between the bourgeois class and the state is an objective relation. This means that if the function of the state in a determinate social formation and the interests of the dominant class coincide, it is by reason of the system itself: the direct participation of members of the ruling class in the apparatus is not the cause but the effect.”⁷ He further criticizes Miliband for reproducing bourgeois ideology theorization by confining his critique of bourgeois accounts to their empirical adequacy⁸. Poulantzas also added that the argument of Miliband relies on bourgeois notion of facts and reality.

In response to this argument Miliband counters that Poulantzas, states that ‘he allows no space for agency, and is therefore too limiting. He states that the point of views given by Poulantzas does not allow individuals to make their own decisions based on their own free will, but rather, their decisions are determined solely by the structure of society.’ He further criticised Poulantzas for his failure to focus on the main issue itself. He says that “Poulantza’s theoretical commitment lead to structuralism which fails to establish knowledge of concrete states

³ Bhaduri, A. (2008). Predatory Growth. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10-14. p. 12

⁴ Bhaduri, A. (2008). Predatory Growth. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10-14. p. 12

⁵ Ramoo. (2009, February). *Campaign against ‘Conspiracy of Silence’ on Agrarian Crisis*. Retrieved from Agrarian Crisis: <https://agrariancrisis.wordpress.com/category/economy/>

⁶ “The specificity of the political: the Poulantzas – Miliband debate’, by Harris Dave pg. 1

⁷ “The problem of capitalist State Ch. 11 by Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband pg. 247

⁸ “Marxism, Sociology and Poulantzas Theory of the State by Simon Clarke pg. 4

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and the ways in which particular states are able to develop a certain relative autonomy – ‘structural superdeterminism.’”⁹

Milliband points out that the views of Poulantzas is one-sided as “he goes much far in dismissing the nature of the state elite as of altogether no account. For what his exclusive stress on ‘objective relations’ suggests is that what the state does is in every particular and at all times wholly determined by these ‘objective relations.’ In other words, that the structural constraints of the system are so absolutely compelling as to turn those who run the state into the merest functionaries and executants of policies imposed upon them by ‘the system.’”¹⁰ Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas debate over the view that the capitalist states has a relative autonomy from the capitalist relations’.

While Miliband viewed “state as an instrument of the ruling capitalist with a relative autonomy from capitalist social relations of production in order to execute that rule.”¹¹ In terms of ‘intra- state conflicts at the level of social agency, he argues that the capitalist state has a considerable degree of autonomy in capitalist society (despite the fact that the sources of autonomy are not fundamentally opposed to the capitalist class).’ He argued that state and the capitalist are quite interlinked as “the state has autonomy from the capitalist class and the state and the capitalist class form a distinct partnership ‘between two different separate forces, linked to each other by many threads, yet each having its separate sphere of concerns.’”¹² While Poulantzas believes that the state in the class struggle functions to sustain and build unity at the “boundaries of the ensemble of economic, societal and political structures and relations, and, along with the flexibility for working class and instance, act to enforce unity in the interests of the ruling class and the maintenance of the capitalist system. Thus the state is perceived as an institution external to capitalist relations, from which it is able to derive its position of relative autonomy to act as a crucial stabilizing and unifying role towards an otherwise ensemble of contradictory social regions”¹³.

“While Miliband reduced the relative autonomy of the state-economy relation to the act of social agents. Poulantzas reduced this relation to the ensembles of social structures, abstracted from the capitalist social relations of production”¹⁴.

CONCLUSION:

The State is that higher authority that has control over all its citizens till the time it has their consent the moment it losses their consent it ceases to exist. The social contract theorist believes that the State is created by individuals via a social contract to ease their life in one way or the other way. Karl Marx is of the view that the State was created by some privileged group for their own selfish interest and the underprivileged were tricked to give consent in the formation of the State by making them believe that the State is a neutral body that works for all. Marx believes that a time will come when there a ‘class consciousness’ will develop amongst the proletariat and they will fight against this exploitative system leading to a stage in which the State will ultimately ‘wither away.’ The argument between ‘Miliband and Poulantzas over the nature of the state is a methodological one.’ While Miliband argues for an institutional model of the capitalist state, whereas Poulantzas takes a structural position. The argument can be concluded with accepting both theorist ideas as Miliband and Poulantzas both are in their own spaces. And while trying to understand the nature of the state and how the state gains autonomy we need to look at both the theorist views to have a better clarity. The views of Marx points out how the State is working for

⁹ “The specificity of the political: the Poulantzas – Miliband debate’, by Harris Dave pg. 1

¹⁰ “The problem of capitalist State ch 11 by Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband pg. 258-259

¹¹ “Marxism and the relative autonomy of the capitalist states” by Kennedy Peter pg. 5

¹² “Marxism and the relative autonomy of the capitalist states” by Kennedy Peter pg. 6

¹³ “Marxism and the relative autonomy of the capitalist states” by Kennedy Peter pg.7

¹⁴ “Marxism and the relative autonomy of the capitalist states” by Kennedy Peter pg. 7

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the bourgeoisie class and the views of Miliband and Poulantzas further explains the nature of the state and how it exploits the proletariat class.

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