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## ***‘In all essentials wrong’?: Miliband’s critique of pluralism revisited<sup>1</sup>***

**By**

**Paul Wetherly**

### **Framing the debate**

In *The State in Capitalist Society*, Ralph Miliband claims that ‘the pluralist-democratic view of society, of politics and of the state in regard to the countries of advanced capitalism, is in all essentials wrong’.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, substantiating this claim is ‘one of the main purposes’ of the book. The essence of pluralism is set out by Miliband in terms of the substantive claims it makes about the distribution of power and the responsiveness of government to competing interests, in the following terms. It is assumed

that power, in Western societies, is competitive, fragmented and diffused. ... As a result .. no government, acting on behalf of the state, can fail, in the not very long run, to respond to the wishes and demands of competing interests. ... In short, the state, subjected as it is to a multitude of conflicting pressures from organised groups and interests, cannot show any marked bias towards some and against others; its special role, in fact, is to accommodate and reconcile them all.<sup>3</sup>

Such a view of dispersed power and responsive government is a ‘profound obfuscation’<sup>4</sup> of reality. ‘Its first result is to exclude, by definition, the notion that the state might be a rather special institution, whose main purpose is to defend the predominance in society of a particular class’.<sup>5</sup> In these terms Miliband sets up an essential opposition between the pluralist-democratic and Marxist views of the state in terms of the substantive claims they make about its ‘special’ nature and role.

However the purpose of this paper is to explore the extent to which these opposed claims are arrived at through a similar route in terms of the way power is conceptualised and investigated. In this sense, some of the ‘essentials’ of pluralism are incorporated in Miliband’s rendition of the Marxist theory of the state. The paper examines the pluralist elements already contained in Miliband’s approach, and argues that the opposition between the pluralist-democratic and Marxist views cannot be sustained in a simple form.<sup>6</sup>

One of the essentials of pluralism can be characterised as power structure research involving an agent-centred approach, which is also an essential of Miliband’s approach. Power structure research is defined by Barrow as ‘a methodological approach which views the organized control, possession, and ownership of key resources as the basis for exercising power .. [C]ontrol over these key resources is institutionalized through specific ... organizations of the economy, society, government, and culture. What is important is that institutions organize power in a society by vesting the individuals occupying certain

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positions with the authority to make decisions about how to deploy the key resources mobilized by that institution'.<sup>7</sup>

It follows from this that central to politics is the struggle between individuals, groups and social forces to occupy these positions in order to exercise the power that they embody and/or to control or influence those that do. As Miliband expresses this point at the start of *The State in Capitalist Society*, they must 'seek to influence and shape the state's power and purpose, or try and appropriate it altogether. It is for the state's attention, or for its control, that men compete'.<sup>8</sup>

Although power structure research foregrounds a notion of 'structure' and sees power resources as 'institutionalised through specific organizations' (power containers), and thus implies that the form or nature of these organizations may influence and constrain, as well as facilitate, the exercise of power, at the same time power is understood in terms of the capacity of agents in positions of authority to make decisions about the deployment of these resources. In other words, what Miliband shares with the pluralist view he criticises is an instrumentalist approach to power. An instrumental conception of the state claims, roughly, that 'the state, and state power, may be controlled or influenced by external agents or social forces and used to realize their interests or purposes, as against rival or conflicting interests'.<sup>9</sup> Defined in this way Miliband shares with the pluralist view an essentially society-centred analysis of state power.<sup>10</sup>

That Miliband and the pluralists occupy this common ground is unsurprising since any account of politics and the state that accords an explanatory role to agency is to that degree instrumentalist. The idea that the state can be 'used to some effect' is, as Jessop acknowledges, 'the whole point behind political struggle'.<sup>11</sup> Disregarding decisions by agents in their struggles to use state power to realise some intended purpose or effect leads in the direction, to use Miliband's phrase in his critical response to Poulantzas, of an untenable 'structural super-determinism'.<sup>12</sup>

In fact Miliband is not, of course, on exactly the same ground as the classical pluralists because of the distinctive conception of agency in Marxist theory in terms of class analysis. Thus political struggles have to be understood in terms of underlying class interests and the development of classes as collective actors ('class-for-itself'), and so classes are seen as the principal actors. It is this analysis that supports a view of state power in terms of class bias. And it is this that seems to be the central issue at stake in Miliband's critique of pluralism - not the claim that agents and their intentions matter but the question of the distribution of power among them. Thus, on the face of it, the Miliband-pluralist debate can be characterised roughly as follows: they can be fruitfully compared in terms of instrumentalism, but contrasted in terms of pluralism. Or, in other words, the debate is, as a first approximation, between class instrumentalism and pluralist instrumentalism.<sup>13</sup>

However it can be argued that any plausible account of the state in capitalist society must be pluralistic to some extent. In that case it would be helpful to reframe the Miliband-pluralist debate so that, instead of the two approaches being counter-posed, the difference between them, though still substantial, is more a matter of degree. This requires interrogating Miliband's presentation of a Marxist theory of the state in capitalist society with a pluralistic sensibility: to what extent does the theory already incorporate pluralistic thinking? And, to what extent might a further opening up in this direction be fruitful? Indeed, it might be better to think of pluralism not as a separate theory to be

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contrasted with Marxism but as a descriptive concept used to characterise particular phenomena and that can be utilised within a variety of theoretical contexts.<sup>14</sup>

There are many forms of pluralist theory spanning philosophy, the humanities and social sciences and these are mostly beyond the scope of this paper. This protean quality makes a precise definition elusive. At the most general level what they have in common is an emphasis on multiplicity or plurality, and therefore what they stand against is monism. Pluralism resists reductionism, which is the tendency to reduce a range of phenomena to one essential type. Conversely pluralism seeks to ‘open up’ or expand monistic theories or descriptions to show multiplicity or plurality. Thus, according to McLennan, the ‘root meaning’ of pluralism in all its varieties indicates ‘an opposition to monism, and the recognition/celebration of multiplicity’.<sup>15</sup> This paper is concerned specifically with political pluralism, which means the ‘recognition of multiplicity’ in relation to politics and the state in capitalist society. In other words, the recognition that these societies are characterised by a multiplicity of actors competing ‘for the state’s attention, or for its control’.<sup>16</sup> The key issue at stake in the Miliband-pluralist debate is the nature of this competition and the distribution of power in society.<sup>17</sup> Who is able, in Miliband’s terms, to gain the state’s ‘attention’, to ‘influence and shape’ its power and purpose, or to ‘appropriate’ and ‘control’ it? And, in whose interests is such power exercised? To pose these questions in such terms is to put actors or agents at the centre of analysis and in this respect, as already noted, Miliband occupies the same ground as the pluralists. There is no single pluralist answer to these questions because there is no single pluralist perspective. However, with important qualifications or nuances, it is possible to say that the general answer to the question of the distribution of power remained constant across these variants of pluralism: power is dispersed among the multiplicity of actors competing in the political process. It is this claim that is generally seen as the hallmark of political pluralism and in opposition to which Miliband set out his restatement of the Marxist approach.

Yet this fundamental tenet of pluralist theory also constituted, in the decade after publication of Miliband’s work, one of the key points of departure of neo-pluralism. Indeed this critical turn was influenced in part by the very confrontation with Marxism in which Miliband’s work stands out.<sup>18</sup> In a substantial qualification of the ‘recognition of multiplicity’ and the dispersal of power thesis Lindblom identified an ‘unusual kind and degree of control over governmental policy making’ exercised by business. This is explained by the greater power resources deployed by business in the political arena but, in addition to the advantages business enjoys as an actor, its ‘privileged position’ also has a structural dimension. In fact it is the structural dimension that is highlighted in Lindblom’s account. In these two innovations – recognition of corporate power allied to a structural explanation – there appears to be an affinity with a Marxist view of the state. On the face of it there is, terminology apart, no great difference between Miliband’s claim that the capitalist class is able to control state power in its own interests and Lindblom’s assertion that ‘policy making .. comes under a special control by business’.<sup>19</sup> Each claim seems amenable to the same shorthand expression: policy making is controlled largely by business / the capitalist class and its interests. Furthermore, in explaining this outcome Miliband also identifies both the role of actors and a type of structural constraint on the policy process.<sup>20</sup>

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It is apparent that there is more going on in the encounter between pluralist theory and Miliband's restatement of the Marxist theory of the state than the simple opposition that is suggested in *The State in Capitalist Society*. The initial framing in terms of class instrumentalism versus pluralist instrumentalism appears too simplistic. The class/pluralist contrast is brought into question by recognising that all state theory must be pluralistic to a degree and by the recognition of the privileged position of business in neo-pluralism. The characterisation of the two approaches as instrumentalist is qualified by the structural dimension in both Miliband's account and neo-pluralism.

### **Miliband's critique of pluralism**

Miliband's critique of pluralism – what he terms the 'democratic-pluralist view'<sup>21</sup> – is a kind of pre-ambule before he gets going with the main purpose of the book, which is a restatement of the Marxist theory of the state. This involves both the resurrection of the state as an object of analysis, and the recovery of a Marxist analysis of this object. The first point draws attention to an important apparent contrast between pluralist and Marxist perspectives, for writers in the former tradition tend to reject this concept in favour of notions such as government, the political system or the policy process. This suggests that Marxism and pluralism are not strictly comparable since they are concerned with different analytical objects. However, without offering very much in the way of a conceptual discussion of the state, Miliband asserts that pluralists do in fact operate with an implicit concept of the state. The point is that 'it is precisely the theory of the state to which they do ... subscribe which helps to account for their comparative neglect of the state as a focus of political analysis. For that theory *takes as resolved* some of the largest questions ... about the state, and makes unnecessary .. any special concern with its nature and role in Western-type societies'.<sup>22</sup> Here, then, the second point comes in – the recovery of the Marxist theory of the state. Miliband's analysis is intended to show that Marxism does address the 'largest questions' and thereby provides a plausible account of the nature and role of the state. But in order to refute the pluralist approach it is also necessary to recover the Marxist theory of the state from its neglect and ossification within the Marxist tradition.<sup>23</sup> Thus the tasks of *The State in Capitalist Society* are: to resurrect the state as an object of political analysis; to renew the Marxist approach by elaborating the classic texts so as to 'confront the question of the state in the light of the concrete ... reality of actual capitalist societies' (p.6); and, thereby, to provide a decisive refutation of the reigning democratic-pluralist orthodoxy.<sup>24</sup>

Miliband eschews a detailed critique of pluralist theory, dealing with it in a few pages at the start of the book, and only referring to the work of one pluralist author, Robert Dahl.<sup>25</sup> His method is rather to show that pluralist theory is 'in all essentials wrong' by demonstrating the plausibility of its Marxist rival. In adopting this approach Miliband takes pluralism to be a specific theory of politics and the state and not a general intellectual orientation, and very clearly counterposes Marxism and pluralism as rival perspectives, as we have seen.

Thus the 'large question' that is assumed to be resolved is that of power in society<sup>26</sup>. It is not the society-centred approach that is wrong but the substantive claim that power is dispersed. If government is conceived as merely responding to competing interests and power is dispersed among these interests then it seems to follow that government cannot show any marked bias towards any particular interest. The dispersal

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of power in society finds its correlate, in this view, in the dispersal of political power and influence and the dispersal of the benefits of the policy process. 'In the end, everybody, including those at the end of the queue, get served'.<sup>27</sup> Against this, Miliband's principal theoretical move is to assert a different substantive claim about the distribution of power in society. Instead of being dispersed, power is concentrated in the hands of an economically dominant class. Assuming the same society-centred notion that the state responds to competing interests in society, it follows that government will show a systematic bias towards the interests of this class. In the end it is the capitalist class that is at the front of the queue and gets served to the exclusion of other interests<sup>28</sup>. This is what Miliband means by pluralism lacking any 'special concern' with the nature and role of the state – simply, that it lacks any concern with the connection between political power and the structure of economic power in Western societies. But in fact the difference seems to boil down to contrasting substantive claims about the distribution of power in society within a society-centred account of the state (rather than a different notion of the connection between social power and the state, ie that the latter basically reflects the former). On this reading both theories seem to lack any special concern with the nature of the state as a specific institutional order.

However Miliband does devote a chapter of the book to the state as an institutional order, as distinguished from the related concepts of 'government' and 'the political system'. The state refers to a specific and delimited institutional order that is narrower than the political system and broader than government. Seeming to echo pluralist writers such as Easton (who is quoted earlier in the study) who have argued that the state cannot be defined in a way that renders it useful for political analysis, Miliband also notes a problem of definition. This stems from 'the fact that 'the state' is not a thing, that it does not, as such, exist. What 'the state' stands for is a number of particular institutions which, together, constitute its reality, and which interact as parts of what may be termed the state system'.<sup>29</sup>

The key point here is that 'the state' cannot be assumed to be a single unified actor since it is actually a set of institutions that interact one with another, suggesting that each particular institution has some degree of autonomy and may be regarded, in power structure terms, as mobilising specific power resources under the authority of individuals in command positions within that institution. This recognition of plurality cautions against a too simple attribution to 'the state' of a single centre of authority, or a particular role or function. In other words, the unity of the state cannot be assumed to be pre-given but has to be achieved, if at all, through political action. On the other hand, 'the state' does denote a set of institutions that have in common more than that they are institutionally differentiated from civil society or the 'private sector'. The set of institutions that comprise the state does exhibit a relatively high degree of system integration and a hierarchical arrangement of power.

The six institutions, or institutional clusters, which make up 'the state' are identified by Miliband in conventional terms as 'the government, the administration, the military and the police, the judicial branch, sub-central government and parliamentary assemblies'.<sup>30</sup> However, within this set Miliband's principal emphasis is on the crucial distinction between the elected 'government' of the day and 'the state' as a whole, emphasising that the former is just part of the latter. The point here is, of course, that to fail to make this distinction entails equating governmental power with state power,

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whereas ‘the fact that the government does speak in the name of the state and is formally *invested* with state power, does not mean that it effectively *controls* that power.’<sup>31</sup> Again, the critique of pluralism is that it tends to take this question as resolved by accepting the formal constitutional account of state institutions and personnel, particularly the administrative and bureaucratic complex and the coercive apparatuses (police and military), as servants of government.<sup>32</sup> Thus Miliband’s critique of the essentials of pluralism is two-fold: in claiming that power in society is dispersed it ignores the concentration of economic power and the implications for its view of government as responding to competing interests in society, and in focusing on government it too readily assumes that government controls state power. Miliband’s restatement of the Marxist theory of the state then revolves largely around these two questions. Miliband refutes the pluralist claim, as he characterises it, that government ‘cannot show any marked bias towards some [interests] and against others’ by showing, externally, that it is not ‘subjected ... to a multitude of conflicting pressures from organized groups and interests’ but faces a concentration of power in society, and, internally, that government power is not equivalent to state power and the state system is dominated by the interests of the economically dominant class.<sup>33</sup>

### **‘The state’ and ‘the policy-making process’ in capitalist society**

There are two difficulties with this contrast between Miliband’s focus on the state as an object of political analysis and its neglect in pluralism. It is not clear how far this is merely a semantic issue since, as Miliband suggests, a theory of the state is implicit in pluralist writing. Second, it can be argued that Miliband himself tends to rely on something of a ‘black box’ conceptualisation of the state.

While not utilising the concept of ‘the state’ it can be argued that pluralism addresses the same set of substantive concerns as the Marxist theory of the state. As already noted, if this were not the case it would not be possible for Miliband to set out his account as a rival to pluralism. It seems clear, then, that both can be considered under the label ‘state theory’ and, more specifically as theories of the liberal-democratic form of state in Western capitalist society. In both perspectives ‘the state’ (whether or not this term is used) is defined (at least implicitly) as a set of institutions concerned with making and implementing/enforcing collective decisions within the society. In other words they are both concerned with public policy and what Lindblom terms the ‘play of power’ in the policy-making process.<sup>34</sup> Who are the principal actors? What are their interests? How do they influence or control policy? Classical pluralism is commonly criticised for its limited focus on decision-making and the claim that power can be measured by observing which of the competing interests in play in specific decision contexts prevails.<sup>35</sup> However the problem is not the focus on decision-making *per se* but the limited conceptualisation of just one ‘face’ or dimension of power. In this respect, as well as retaining a concern with the observable exercise of influence by organised interests, Miliband enriches his analysis by reference to other faces of power, but his focus is still the policy-making process.<sup>36</sup> As theories of the liberal-democratic form of state, Miliband and the pluralist perspective can also be seen as concerned with evaluating the democratic ideal or promise against the reality of the political process in Western capitalist societies, that is as theories of ‘imperfect democracy’.<sup>37</sup>

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Classical pluralism has often been criticised on the basis that the state, or government, is seen as more-or-less passive, even a ‘cipher’<sup>38</sup>, simply reflecting the competing interests in civil society, acting like a ‘weathervane’<sup>39</sup> or as ‘a kind of switchboard which separate interests plug into’.<sup>40</sup> This is the version of pluralism put up by Miliband to be the target of his critique.<sup>41</sup> While by no means a straw man, it does not represent the only or even dominant image of the state in pluralist writing, particularly in neopluralism. For example, Lindblom analyses the policy-making process as a play of power in which actors inside the state system are active participants.<sup>42</sup> Policy makers constitute an elite comprised of ‘chief executives, cabinet members, members of parliament or legislature, policy-making members of the bureaucracy, upper levels of the judiciary, and in some systems, higher levels in the military’ and constituting ‘a tiny proportion of the .. population’.<sup>43</sup> This concept essentially matches Miliband’s concept of a ‘state elite.’<sup>44</sup> Lindblom also identifies a number of other elites involved in the policy-making process. These are: ‘knowledgeables’ or those directly engaged in policy analysis and able to wield power through expertise; businesspeople, who occupy a ‘privileged position’ in the policy-making process, and with which the separately identified ‘elite of wealth’ tends to merge; and interest group leaders, especially ‘those to whom policy makers grant actual authority’.<sup>45</sup> Thus Lindblom’s analysis is a form of elite pluralism, though the plurality of identified elites is quite restricted and particular emphasis is given to the business/wealth elite. For the moment, though, the point is that ‘the state’ (a term not used by Lindblom) is by no means a mere mirror – policy making reflects a play of power between elites both inside and outside the state system.

It can be argued that Miliband does not entirely dispense with the mirror in his own analysis of state power, rather that the society that holds the mirror up to itself has a different appearance. Look in the mirror and you see that ‘the economic and political life of capitalist societies is *primarily* determined by the relationship, born of the capitalist mode of production, between ... the class which on the one hand owns and controls, and the working class on the other. ... In fact, the political process in these societies is mainly *about* the confrontation of these forces, and is intended to sanction the terms of the relationship between them’.<sup>46</sup> In a society based on the capitalist mode of production the main competing interests in society are not multitudinous but those of the two main classes, and political struggles mirror this class conflict.<sup>47</sup> Although this conception may involve a shifting balance of pressure from ‘above’ and ‘below’, Miliband follows the classical Marxist claim that the ‘main purpose’ of the state is to sanction the terms of this class relationship (i.e., defend the predominance in society of the capitalist class) because policy-making mirrors the greater capacity of business, through various mechanisms, to influence or control state power.

However Miliband does give some emphasis to the separation of the state as a distinct institutional order from civil society and capitalist relations of production, and suggests that for this reason the translation of economic power into the influence or control of state power cannot be seen as straightforward or automatic. The capitalist class is involved in a ‘relationship’ with the state which it confronts as ‘a separate entity’, and this relationship ‘cannot be *assumed*, in the conditions which are typical of advanced capitalism, to be that of principal to agent.’<sup>48</sup> Reinforcing this point, state power ‘in its different manifestations’ is in the hands of a ‘state elite’, which is made up of ‘the people who occupy the leading positions’ in the state system and is separate from the capitalist



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class. In accordance with power structure research, it is these people who make decisions about the deployment of the power resources controlled by these institutions. Miliband's caution against *assuming* that state managers or policy-makers are agents of the capitalist class means considering the potential for the state to exhibit some degree of autonomy or independence from that class, and for the decisions of state managers to be guided by other interests. Furthermore, the plurality of institutions that make up the state system suggests the potential for different interests to be influential in different parts of the system.

Indeed Miliband identifies two contexts in which the autonomy of the state from the capitalist class can be observed, one of which is routine and the other exceptional.<sup>49</sup> The routine circumstance is that governments 'have often been forced, mainly as a result of popular pressure, to take action against certain property rights and capitalist prerogatives'.<sup>50</sup> In other words the balance of power between the two main classes does shift, and the subordinate class is able to influence state power in its own interests in order to 'help redress *somewhat* the balance between capital and labour, between property and those who are subject to it'.<sup>51</sup> The exceptional circumstance, exemplified by Fascist regimes, is when the capitalist class has to 'submit to a dictatorship over which ... [it has] .. no genuine control at all', in which the state is able to act 'quite independently' of this class.<sup>52</sup>

However in both of these circumstances policy-making is still about class interests and, more specifically, the main purpose of the state to defend the predominance of the capitalist class is never in question. In the case of responding to popular pressure, reform 'is not in 'fundamental opposition' to the interests of property' but is a 'ransom' by the payment of which 'governments render property a major service, though the latter is seldom grateful for it'.<sup>53</sup> In effect, because the capitalist class cannot see that the infringement of 'certain property rights and capitalist prerogatives' is necessary in order to safeguard its predominance in society, the state must have some degree of autonomy from this class in order to serve its interests.<sup>54</sup> Even in the exceptional circumstance of Fascism, Miliband follows Marx's assessment of Louis Napoleon, that the main purpose of the state was still 'to safeguard the bourgeois order'.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in effect, the state is an agent and the capitalist class is the principal.

In these formulations the state is a kind of mirror of the balance of power in civil society. Although it has some independence in decision-making, it has no independence in terms of the purposes such decisions serve.<sup>56</sup> To support this conception of the state, Miliband's argument relies heavily on evidence of the social origins and milieu of the state elite and the presumption these origins allow concerning the ideological dispositions of this elite. Apart from the entry of businessmen into policy-making, the main argument is that members of 'the state elite proper' are 'predominantly, not to say overwhelmingly, drawn' from the same classes to which businessmen belong, the 'upper and middle classes'.<sup>57</sup> This means that the state elite is suffused with a conservative bias which means that the notion of serving the 'national interest' is equated with maintenance of capitalist relations of production. This is a powerful argument but it has certain limitations. 'Upper and middle classes' is a rather vague concept and seems out of kilter with Miliband's emphasis throughout the work on the two main classes. Although the concept of middle class is utilised by Miliband in his description of the class structure of advanced capitalist societies (consisting of professionals and SMEs) it is distinguished

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from the ruling class, made up of owners and controllers of large scale enterprise.<sup>58</sup> This enumeration does not include members of the state elite, and there is a basic conceptual difficulty in their incorporation. In the Marxist scheme class interests are based on position and role within the economic structure, so it is problematic to argue that members of the state elite who are outside of this structure share the same interests as members of the capitalist class proper. What is more, Miliband's approach assumes that the interests of members of the state elite are carried into the state system from outside and are not at all related to the roles they perform within the state. In other words there is no room for state managers to have their own interests.

Miliband also ends up, despite the emphasis on the plurality of institutions that make up the state system, with a monolithic conception of the state. The ideological dispositions of the state elite are sufficient, in this view, to determine the class bias of the state as a whole and thus to secure its effective unity. We can talk about 'the state' as though it is a single unified actor after all. The exception to this is the government-state distinction. But the point of this is that in the event of a radical government being elected the rest of the monolithic state system would act as an inhibiting influence on its reforming ambitions. Although the reality of the state system consists of the interactions of the institutions that make it up, Miliband does not analyse the nature of these interactions, the relative importance of different institutions for the realisation of capitalist interests, or the possibility of conflict between different parts of the state system. In equating the exercise of state power with occupancy of the 'leading positions' within the state system, Miliband has little to say about the role and interests of those in lower levels of the bureaucracy/administration and the potential for resistance, or the potential for rival values/purposes to be promoted. The state elite is in effective control of state power.

Finally, the emphasis on the social composition and ideological dispositions of the state elite suggests a neutral conception of the state in the sense that its class bias is determined by this composition. Members of the state elite are vested with authority to make decisions about how to deploy the power resources controlled by state institutions. This emphasises the facilitative role of these institutions as power containers, but does not examine the ways in which the institutional order may also impose constraints on the exercise of power. In other words, in this work Miliband does not consider the 'structural' or 'strategic selectivity' of the state.<sup>59</sup>

### **'Ruling class' and 'privileged position of business'**

Marxism and pluralism are often seen as rival theories of the state or policy-making and, as already noted, Miliband counterposes his restatement of the Marxist approach to the pluralist orthodoxy of the time. However this suggests a false dichotomy. The idea that there is scope for dialogue, or even convergence, between the two approaches is suggested not only by developments within each since the publication of *The State in Capitalist Society*, but also by reflection on the simplistic versions of each theory which the dichotomous view of their relationship requires in order to be sustained.<sup>60</sup> This is not to downplay Miliband's important achievement in challenging pluralist ideas which were widely accepted at the time, and doing so by demonstrating the resources available within Marxism for developing a plausible theory of the state. But he made a mistake in presenting the two as polar opposites rather than points on a spectrum, and in rejecting a

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specific pluralist theory he didn't adequately consider the need to incorporate plurality into his own account. In fact, Miliband's formulations do suggest the operation of other causal factors, although the suggestion is not followed up.

The terms in which the two approaches are counterposed are familiar: political power is dispersed, or it is concentrated. These contrasting assessments are related to underlying characterisations of the competing interests in civil society: these are basically reducible to class interests, or they involve a multitude of interests among diverse groups in society.

In fact, although it is meaningful and useful to describe the distribution of power, or any other thing, within a population as being 'dispersed' or 'concentrated', it is obvious that these are always used as relative terms and as opposite sides of the same coin. A high degree of dispersal of a thing equates to a low degree of concentration. We are dealing with points on a spectrum, and, when it comes to the distribution of power, the ends of the spectrum involve highly abstract or simplistic models.<sup>61</sup>

In terms of Marxism, this would suggest a form of class- or economic reductionism.<sup>62</sup> Elster suggests that 'the central question in the Marxist theory of the state is whether it is autonomous with respect to class interests, or entirely reducible to them'.<sup>63</sup> If it is the latter then you have an end-of-the-spectrum theory.<sup>64</sup> Such a theory is suggested by the famous formulation in the *Communist Manifesto* that the bourgeoisie has achieved 'exclusive political sway' in the modern representative state, with its implication that all other classes and social forces are excluded from political power.<sup>65</sup> This reductionist formulation can be rendered in an even more simplified form if 'the bourgeoisie' and 'the state' are taken to be singular, unified actors or entities.

Miliband's restatement of the Marxist theory of the state can be read as a defence of what he refers to as Marx's 'primary' view of the state, with the proviso that it needs to be elaborated to take account of the reality of actual capitalist societies.<sup>66</sup> In fact, despite the empirical richness of the account, the basic theoretical framework is highly abstract and class-reductionist. Nevertheless it is possible to identify the recognition of plurality at a number of points. As we have seen, Miliband emphasises that the state is made up of a set of institutions, and in the conditions of advanced capitalism it is forced to respond to popular pressure or pressure from below. In addition Miliband recognises divisions within each of the two main classes and the existence of 'other classes and social formations' to which 'it would clearly be misleading to assign a merely figurative role ... They are in fact of considerable importance, not least because they significantly affect the relations between the two 'polar' classes'.<sup>67</sup> However these three elements or dimensions of plurality are not followed through in the analysis to any great effect. Overall, the state is treated in monolithic terms on account of the common social origins of the state elite, the capitalist class is seen as highly cohesive and class conscious, and the state defends the predominance of this class in society which entails defending private property and profit. There is no analysis of the role of other classes and social formations in political struggles.

What is to be said in favour of such an abstract and reductionist theory with its emphasis on the primacy of class? McLennan has outlined the logic or rationale of a monistic discourse, suggesting that, 'lying behind every form of radical politics, sits a distinctive and primary epistemology'. In this view 'the social may well be accepted as being complex and variegated, but essentially its workings ... must be analysable

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according to one singular and primary logic above all others'. McLennan's remarks refer specifically to '1970s Western feminism', but they apply equally to Marxism.<sup>68</sup>

In Marxist theory the primacy of class is defended in terms of an account of interests and power. It is not just that the economic structure is a set of relations of production that define two 'polar' class positions, but that class position is seen as the primary source of interests and also as vesting individuals with control of key power resources. Thus economic class interests necessarily spill over into and dominate political struggles. In this way Marxism is a theory of economic determination since politics and the state are explained primarily in economic terms. More fundamentally, this economic determination can be understood in terms of the relationship between 'economic base' and 'legal and political superstructure' specified in Marx's theory of history. According to Cohen's influential rendition of the theory, 'bases need superstructures'.<sup>69</sup> This means that capitalist relations of production are not capable of self-stabilisation or self-reproduction but require certain extra-economic conditions of existence to be secured. In Cohen's hands this is at the heart of a functional explanation of the base-superstructure relationship.<sup>70</sup>

Miliband does not discuss the theory of history, the base-superstructure metaphor, or characterise the state's role in functional terms. Yet the whole analysis is clearly predicated on the claim that the capitalist class requires the state to defend its predominant position in society (ie that the base needs a superstructure). What does this involve? Fundamentally it is a question of reproducing capitalist relations of production in the face of a latent threat posed by the working class. This is the basic task of the state in capitalist society that runs through Miliband's analysis, drawing on the classic texts. In classical Marxism this is reflected in a conception of the state as essentially a coercive apparatus. Hence Carnoy states that 'it is the notion of the state as the *repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie* that is the distinctly Marxist characteristic of the state'.<sup>71</sup> However this focus on repression, though capturing the continuing essence of the state, is clearly far too narrow and is not a major theme in Miliband's account. This is because Miliband's starting point is the enormous growth of the state in the twentieth century, largely the result of pressure for reform, which means clearly that the state can no longer be adequately characterised just as a repressive apparatus.<sup>72</sup> Second, Miliband emphasises the point that, to echo Weber, force is not the normal means of the state. Rather, in the conditions of advanced capitalism, the predominance of the capitalist class 'depends .. on the support or at least the acquiescence of those who are subjected to it. .. For dominant classes there can be no enterprise of greater importance, and there is none which requires greater exertion on a continuous basis'.<sup>73</sup> Therefore Miliband devotes a large part of the analysis to the 'process of legitimation' and, though this comes last in the order of presentation, it can be seen as the primary mechanism for sustaining capitalist production relations.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to the need for a coercive state apparatus (associated with Marx, Engels and Lenin) and for ideological domination (associated above all with Gramsci), there are specifically economic conditions that must be met in order for capital to be able to follow its circuit and be accumulated. For example labour power has to be reproduced as a 'fictitious commodity' outside of the circuit of capital.<sup>75</sup>

The logic of the Marxist approach is that the state in capitalist society must be a class state whose main purpose is to defend the predominance of the capitalist class

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because, informed by the theory of history, the analysis of the economic structure shows that this is necessary. Put simply, there are functions that must be performed by the state in order that capitalism is able to keep going. The major contribution of Miliband's analysis was to elaborate this essentially functional theory by elucidating plausible causal mechanisms to show *how* the state system comes to perform this role. Furthermore, substantial empirical support for this theory can be derived from the very reproduction of capitalist societies. Put simply, if the analysis of the needs of capital is plausible, then the reproduction of capitalism shows that these needs have been met, and it follows from this that the state has consistently and adequately served the interests of the capitalist class.<sup>76</sup> Thus, returning to McLennan, 'the social may well be accepted as being complex and variegated, but essentially its workings ... must be analysable according to one singular and primary logic above all others'. Therefore the resistance to pluralism, since if state power is influenced by a multitude of competing interests and groups its main purpose to defend the predominance of the capitalist class would be jeopardised.<sup>77</sup> In this way, pluralist theory, and specifically its claim that the state cannot show a marked bias, seems inconsistent with the historical fact of the reproduction of capitalism.

Yet it is obviously the case that the political process in liberal-democratic states is characterised by a plethora of competing interests, and that such groups and interests do have some influence. State power is not reducible to the 'singular and primary logic' of class. Indeed Miliband's various formulations do not commit him to such a reductionist position. Thus the political process is '*primarily* determined' by or '*mainly* about' class interests, and the '*main* purpose' of the state is to sanction the terms of this class relationship.<sup>78</sup> At another point Miliband states that, in considering whether the capitalist class constitutes a 'ruling class',

The question is not whether this class has a *substantial* measure of political power and influence. Non one can seriously doubt that it has ... The question is a different one altogether, namely whether this dominant class also exercises a much greater degree of power and influence than any other class; whether it exercises a *decisive* degree of political power; whether its ownership and control of crucially important area of economic life also insures its control of political decision-making ...<sup>79</sup>

As well as contrasting 'substantial' and 'decisive', it seems clear that a 'decisive degree of political power' is somewhat short of 'exclusive political sway'. All these formulations allow space for other influences on political decision-making which might include, in addition to the noted 'pressure from below', pressure from a range of interests and groups. In other words, a more pluralistic analysis of political power. However, aside from these general formulations, this question is neglected by Miliband.

The answer to this conundrum lies in rectifying a major gap in Miliband's analysis. Miliband defines the interests of the capitalist class in very general terms of the maintenance of private property and profit. This conception of class interests supports the highly plausible claim that the capitalist class is cohesive and class conscious, and that there is a high level of agreement on these 'truly fundamental issues'. However Miliband's analysis is chiefly concerned with elucidating the mechanisms through which these basic class interests come to influence policy-making to a decisive degree. The

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point is to show that there is a 'ruling class' that is able to secure its interests through the ideological dispositions of the state elite, the 'massive advantage' it enjoys in being able to put pressure on policy-makers from outside, its ideological domination in society, and so-on. But saying that capitalists want the circuit of capital and capital accumulation process to continue is not the same as saying what conditions need to be established and what policies can secure these conditions. To put this differently, exercising a decisive degree of political power does not entail controlling 'the state' but controlling just those policies that are required to establish the conditions necessary for the circuit of capital and accumulation. The Marxist theory of the state requires explanation only of those policies that are 'economically relevant' in this specific sense.<sup>80</sup> This might be an extensive list or a more restricted one but, in any case, it will not encompass policy-making in its entirety. This approach is consistent with the standard pluralist argument that no group is able to exercise power across all issues or policy areas. Showing the scope of control over policy-making that is required by the needs of the economic structure also allows a Marxist analysis of the state's main role to secure the predominance of the capitalist class to be reconciled with a pluralistic recognition of the influence of interest groups over 'non-economically relevant' issues.

## *'In all essentials wrong'?: Miliband's critique of pluralism revisited<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to two referees whose comments on a first draft of this paper have helped to make some improvements to the argument

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969)

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) pp.2 and 4

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.4

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.3

<sup>6</sup> This paper is restricted in scope to a discussion of the relationship between Miliband's rendition of the Marxist theory of the state and the democratic-pluralist approach which he criticises. The focus is mainly on the arguments set out in *The State in Capitalist Society*, though other works by Miliband are referred to. The paper alludes to the Miliband-Poulantzas debate, particularly as this touches on the issue of Miliband placing himself on the 'terrain' of the pluralists, but it does not attempt to place Miliband's approach within the Marxist state debate more widely. However it is worth mentioning that the 'pluralist question' has wider relevance within that debate, particularly in relation to steering a course between reductionism or economic determinism on the one hand and state autonomy on the other. For example, Clarke identifies as the backdrop to the state debate in the 1970s the two then-dominant theories of the state – 'the orthodox Marxist theory of State Monopoly Capitalism .. [and] .. the social democratic theory of the state'. The first under-estimated and the second over-estimated the autonomy of the state, as shown on the one hand by the effectiveness of the welfare state and, on the other, by its limitations - Simon Clarke, 'The State Debate', in Clarke, S (ed) *The State Debate* (CSE / Macmillan, 1991) pp3-4.. For other discussions of the state debate within Marxism see John Holloway & Picciotto, S (eds) *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate* (University of Texas Press, 1978), Bob Jessop, *State Theory* (Polity, 1990), Clyde. B. Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1993) , Stanley Aronowitz & Bratsis, P (eds) *Paradigm Lost: State Theory Reconsidered* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), Paul Wetherly, Barrow, C.W., & Burnham, P. (eds.) *Class, Power and the State in Capitalist Society* (Palgrave, 2008), and Mark J. Smith, *Rethinking State Theory* (Routledge, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Clyde. B. Barrow, *Critical Theories of the State* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1993) p.13

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.1

<sup>9</sup> Paul Wetherly, 'Can Capitalists Use the State to Serve Their General Interests?', in Wetherly, P., Barrow, C.W., & Burnham, P. (eds.) *Class, Power and the State in Capitalist Society* (Palgrave, 2008) pp.109-10

<sup>10</sup> 'A theory of the state is also a theory of society and of the distribution of power in that society', Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Bob Jessop, *State Theory* (Polity, 1990) pp.149-50

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Miliband, *Class Power and State Power*. (Verso, 1983) p.32. Subsequently Miliband used the term 'structuralist abstractionism' to characterise Poulantzas's approach (ibid., p.38). The exchange between Miliband and Poulantzas took place in *New Left Review* (Nicos Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', *New Left Review* 58, 1969, pp.67-78; Ralph Miliband, 'The capitalist state: reply to Poulantzas', *New Left Review* 59, 1970, pp.53-60; Ralph Miliband, 'Poulantzas and the capitalist state', *New Left Review* 82, 1973, pp.83-92; Nicos Poulantzas, 'The Capitalist State: a Reply to Miliband and Laclau', *New Left Review* 95, 1976, pp.63-83) and is analysed by Clyde Barrow, 'The Miliband-Poulantzas Debate: An Intellectual History', in Stanley Aronowitz & Bratsis, P (eds) (2002) op.cit. Poulantzas criticized Miliband for placing himself on the 'terrain' of the pluralist writers he opposed. In fact, *The State in Capitalist Society* explicitly sets out an alternative 'problematic' to pluralist theory if this term is understood in terms of substantive theoretical claims. Miliband sets out the fundamental claim of the Marxist theory of the state, in contrast to pluralism, at the start of the book - that the state's 'main purpose is to defend the predominance in society of a particular class' (op.cit., p.3) - and the book lays out the causal mechanisms which support this claim. The argument here is that the 'common ground' that Miliband shared with pluralism did not constitute a shortcoming of his approach, particularly the acknowledgement of agency (in contrast with Poulantzas's 'structural super-determinism') and 'the absolute necessity of empirical enquiry' (1983, p.29, op.cit.) (in contrast with 'structuralist abstractionism'). Miliband also, quoting C. Wright Mills' term, criticises the pluralist approach as 'abstracted empiricism', meaning 'the accumulation and usage of relevant data without proper regard to the total socio-economic context in which it alone has meaning' [ie structure] (1969, p.172, op.cit.), thus rejecting both structuralist and empiricist abstraction.

<sup>13</sup> In similar terms, Barrow distinguishes between ‘egalitarian’ and ‘ruling class’ conceptualisations of the power structure according to whether the institutional control of key resources is ‘widely dispersed’ or ‘concentrated’ (1993, p.14, op.cit.)

<sup>14</sup> Gregor McLennan, *Pluralism* (Open University Press, 1995) p.ix

<sup>15</sup> Gregor McLennan, *Pluralism* (Open University Press, 1995) p.26

<sup>16</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.1

<sup>17</sup> Pluralist writers and Miliband also emphasise that the state is not ‘a thing’ but in fact refers to a set or plurality of institutions. For example Dahl refers to ‘negotiation, bargaining, persuasion and pressure at a considerable number of different sites in the political system’, quoted in Mark J. Smith, *Power and the State* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009, p.55. However the main emphasis within pluralism and Miliband’s Marxist approach remains on the distribution of power in society.

<sup>18</sup> For surveys of the pluralist literature see Gregor McLennan, *Pluralism* (Open University Press, 1995), Grant Jordan, ‘The Pluralism of Pluralism: An Anti-theory?’, *Political Studies* XXXVIII, 1990, pp.286-301; Mark J. Smith, ‘Pluralism, Reformed Pluralism and Neopluralism: the Role of Pressure Groups in Policy-Making’, *Political Studies* XXXVIII, 1990, pp.302-322; John Dryzek & Dunleavy, P, *Theories of the Democratic State* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009)

<sup>19</sup> Charles Lindblom, *The Policy-Making Process* (Prentice Hall, 1980) p.74

<sup>20</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.79

<sup>21</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.2

<sup>22</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.2

<sup>23</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) pp.5-7, also Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics*. (Oxford University Press, 1977)

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.6. Miliband notes that the ‘ideological and political climate of the Cold War’ (ibid., p.4) provided a favourable context for the dominance of pluralist theory in Western societies by turning subscription into a question of ‘political morality’. In the same way the Cold War also provided the context for the Stalinist domination of Marxism in the West. Hence the recovery of Marxism required the overturning of both of these orthodoxies.

<sup>25</sup> Miliband cites two main works by Dahl, at the start of the book (ibid., pp.2-3), and later in relation to sub-central power (ibid., pp.171-8). See Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (Yale University Press, 1961) and *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (University of Chicago Press, 2006 [1956]).

<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that the substantive pluralist claim that power is dispersed is underpinned by the argument that capitalism has been transformed by the growth of the state and its growing involvement in economic life (Miliband, 1969, pp.8-10, op.cit.)

<sup>27</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.2

<sup>28</sup> The contrast is also made in the characterisation of the political system as ‘bourgeois democratic’ as opposed to (‘pluralist-)democratic’. In the first characterisation ‘an economically dominant class rules through democratic institutions’ whereas in the second, ‘precisely because of .. [the political system’s] democratic institutions, no class or group is able to assure its permanent political predominance’ (Miliband, 1969, pp21-2, op.cit.).

<sup>29</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.49

<sup>30</sup> In a number of these cases the term institution is clearly problematic. Thus it could be said in relation to ‘the administration’ that it is not ‘a thing’ but actually is made up of a complex set of administrative arrangements involving relatively autonomous offices, departments, agencies, etc. that ‘interact’ as parts of a system, as Miliband recognises (1969, pp.50-1, op.cit.)

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.50

<sup>32</sup> This is, of course, also at the heart of the critique of Labourism as an ideology and political strategy focused on securing a parliamentary majority. See Ralph Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism* (Allen & Unwin, 1961).

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted here that Miliband’s analysis includes a key further dimension which is ensuring ‘the support or at least .. the acquiescence’ of the subordinate classes. Indeed ‘for dominant classes there can be no enterprise of greater importance’ (1969, p.178, op.cit.). The ‘process of legitimation’ is examined in two chapters of the book



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<sup>34</sup> Charles Lindblom, *The Policy-Making Process* (Prentice Hall, 1980) and Charles Lindblom & Woodhouse, E.J., *The Policy-Making Process* (Prentice Hall, 1993). ‘The policy-making process in capitalist society’ would have been an adequate alternative title for Miliband’s book.

<sup>35</sup> For example see David Marsh, ‘Pluralism and the Study of British Politics’ in Hay, C (ed.) *British Politics Today* (Polity, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> Miliband refers explicitly to the second face of power, identified by Bachrach & Baratz as ‘nondecision-making’ (or ‘agenda setting’), in his discussion of ‘imperfect competition’ in relation to sub-central government: ‘business at local and state level is not only at an enormous competitive advantage in getting those things it wants; it is also uniquely well placed to prevent those things from being done, or even seriously discussed and considered, which it does *not* want’ (1969, p.175, op.cit.). Something like Lukes’ third ‘dimension’ of power is discussed by Miliband in the extended analysis of the ‘process of legitimation’, drawing on Gramsci’s notion of ‘the ‘hegemony’ of the dominant classes in civil society, ..[that is] their ideological predominance over the subordinate classes’ (1969, p.180, op.cit.). For further discussion see Peter Bachrach & Baratz, M.S., ‘The two faces of power’, in Scott, J (ed.) *Power* (Routledge, (1994); Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (Macmillan, 1974); John Scott, *Power* (Polity, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> This term is typically used as a way of characterising pluralist thought but also seem applicable to Miliband’s account (albeit that the extent of the imperfections is rated rather differently). See Ralph Miliband, *Capitalist Democracy in Britain*. (Oxford University Press, 1983) for a more systematic discussion of ‘capitalist democracy’.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick Dunleavy & O’Leary, B, *Theories of the State* (Macmillan, 1987) p.43

<sup>39</sup> Patrick Dunleavy & O’Leary, B, *Theories of the State* (Macmillan, 1987) p.43

<sup>40</sup> Gregor McLennan, ‘Capitalist state or democratic polity?’ in McLennan, G., Held, D., and Hall, S (eds.) *The Idea of the Modern State* (Open University Press, 1984) p.83

<sup>41</sup> Miliband employs a similar metaphor: in accommodating and reconciling the multitude of conflicting pressures upon it ‘the state is only the mirror which society holds up to itself’ (1969, p4, op.cit.), and he also quotes Woolf as a critic of the pluralist approach who uses the ‘weathervane’ metaphor.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Lindblom, *The Policy-Making Process* (Prentice Hall, 1980)

<sup>43</sup> Charles Lindblom, *The Policy-Making Process* (Prentice Hall, 1980) p.44

<sup>44</sup> However Lindblom does not make any direct reference to Miliband’s book, merely citing it under a guide to further reading as ‘a carefully reasoned and highly persuasive Marxist analysis’ (1980, p125, op.cit.)

<sup>45</sup> Charles Lindblom, *The Policy-Making Process* (Prentice Hall, 1980) p.91

<sup>46</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.16

<sup>47</sup> In other words economic class interests spill over into political struggles and dominate political life as the two classes rationally seek to influence or control state power in their own interests. For a similar, though non-Marxist, analysis see Gianfranco Poggi, *The State: Its Nature, Development and Prospects* (Polity, 1990).

<sup>48</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) pp.54-5

<sup>49</sup> It is notable that the concept of state autonomy or ‘relative autonomy’ is not discussed by Miliband in this work. It is introduced and plays a central role in his later work, though even here it is not entirely satisfactory – see Ralph Miliband, *Marxism and Politics*. (Oxford University Press, 1977)

<sup>50</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.78

<sup>51</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.77

<sup>52</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.93 & p.94

<sup>53</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.78

<sup>54</sup> This conception of relative autonomy is set out explicitly by Miliband in *Marxism and Politics* (op.cit.)

<sup>55</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.94

<sup>56</sup> According to Smith (2009, p.61, op.cit.) the claim that ‘the state has power in its own right and is not solely representing classes or groups in society’ is what fundamentally distinguishes elitist (specifically Weberian) theories from Marxism (and pluralism).

<sup>57</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.59

<sup>58</sup> In this discussion there is no mention of the category ‘upper class’ unless it is inferred that ‘upper’ and ‘ruling’ are synonymous terms

<sup>59</sup> See especially Bob Jessop, *State Theory* (Polity, 1990)

<sup>60</sup> The view of Marxism and pluralism/neo-pluralism as non-overlapping theories is exemplified by Patrick Dunleavy & O'Leary, B, *Theories of the State* (Macmillan, 1987) p.323. For a thorough exploration of the Marxism-pluralism debate and its convergences see Gregor McLennan, *Marxism, Pluralism and Beyond* (Polity, 1989).

<sup>61</sup> Barrow's discussion of 'ruling class' and 'egalitarian' power structures suggests this kind of spectrum rather than a dichotomy (1993, op.cit.)

<sup>62</sup> In recent years reductionism has been seen as one of the flaws of Marxist theory that needs to be corrected as a basis for its renewal or 'resurrection'. See David Marsh, 'Resurrecting Marxism' in Gamble, A., Marsh, D., and Tant, T (eds.) *Marxism and Social Science* (Macmillan, 1999). For a response see Paul Wetherly, 'Review of Gamble et. Al. (eds.) *Marxism and Social Science*, in *Contemporary Politics* vol.6, no.1, 2000. For a considered defence of this and other 'sins' of modernist theorizing see Gregor McLennan, 'Post-Marxism and the 'Four Sins' of Modernist Theorizing', *New Left Review* 18, 1996.

<sup>63</sup> Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge University Press, 1985) p.402

<sup>64</sup> It cannot be the former since then you would have a non-Marxist theory by definition.

<sup>65</sup> Karl Marx & Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Collected Works*, vol.6. (Lawrence & Wishart, 1976, pp.477-519)

<sup>66</sup> Miliband identifies this as Marx's primary view in 'Marx and the State' (1965), reproduced in Ralph Miliband, *Class Power and State Power*. (Verso, 1983) pp.3-25

<sup>67</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) pp.16-7

<sup>68</sup> Gregor McLennan, 'Post-Marxism and the 'Four Sins' of Modernist Theorizing', *New Left Review* 18, 1996, pp.10-11

<sup>69</sup> Gerry Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), and *History, Labour and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)

<sup>70</sup> Although Marxism and pluralism have been compared as forms of power structure research the explanatory ambition of the two theories is clearly very different. This means that they approach policy-making and state power from different starting points. Whereas pluralism involves an inquiry into the influences on decision-making, Marxism starts from a characterization of the economic structure of society and its reproduction conditions.

<sup>71</sup> Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton University Press, 1984) p.50

<sup>72</sup> Miliband argues that repression remains one of two principal options for the state faced with pressure from below. 'These are not alternative options but complementary ones' (1969, p.269, op.cit.). Furthermore Miliband makes the prescient claim that the evolution of capitalist societies 'towards more or less pronounced forms of conservative authoritarianism [is] more rather than less likely' (1969, p.268, op.cit.).

<sup>73</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.178

<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, although Miliband refers to the state's increasing involvement in this process, it is largely undertaken by organisations within civil society, ie outside of the state system.

<sup>75</sup> See for example Claus Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (Hutchinson, 1984), Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Polity, 2002), Paul Wetherly, 'Can Capitalists Use the State to Serve Their General Interests?', in Wetherly, P., Barrow, C.W., & Burnham, P. (eds.) *Class, Power and the State in Capitalist Society* (Palgrave, 2008). However Miliband pays little attention to the economic functions of the state in *The State in Capitalist Society*. The functions of the state are analysed more fully in *Marxism and Politics* where four distinct functions are identified: '(a) the maintenance of law and order .. – the repressive function; (b) the fostering of consensus .. – the ideological-cultural function; (c) the economic function in the broad sense of the term; and (d) the advancement .. of .. the 'national interest' in relation to external affairs – the international function' (1977, p.90, op.cit.).

<sup>76</sup> In other words the reproduction of capitalism is a notable, even 'unlikely' (Jessop), historical fact that requires explanation. As Lindblom also notes, that Western states have sustained capitalist economies is a 'remarkable historical fact' (1980, p.6, op.cit.), also noting that 'we have no evidence that business fails to get what it needs' (ibid, p.77). It is a fact for which the Marxist theory of the state provides an explanation

<sup>77</sup> In the same way, the Marxist analysis of the prospects for the emergence of a class conscious movement of the working class would be challenged. Miliband confronts this challenge in a discussion of 'new social movements' in *Divided Societies* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>78</sup> Compared to Miliband, the emphasis has been switched in the second phrase and added in the third.

<sup>79</sup> Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969) p.48

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<sup>80</sup> The term comes from Cohen (1988, op.cit.). It is related to the distinction between 'the state' and 'the superstructure'. See also Wetherly (2008, op.cit.).