

## MORROW'S CRITIQUES?

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Professor Morrow appears to be distressed at finding a poor, misled soul still casting her reflections in the structuralist perspective which he would have wished laid to rest once and for all with the passing from the scene of the leading structuralist theorists, Althusser and Poulantzas. For Morrow, the substance of structuralist Marxism deserves the same fate as that of its greatest exponents and indeed its total lack of any virtue has doomed its inevitable demise. The last remaining handful of sympathizers, including myself, should come to realize it and abandon the perspective altogether. But if structuralist Marxism is dead or dying, why not just ignore it and allow it to suffer the last pangs of death in peace? Why kick a dog when it is down, unless, of course, one intuitively senses that the dog has a lot more life in it than one would wish.

Morrow characterizes structuralist Marxism in general in the strongest, most categorical of terms: an "epistemological and political straightjacket", "fatalistic", "cul-de-sac". Nowhere in his critical exposé, however, has he discussed the sense in which structuralist Marxism is fatalistic, nor how it constitutes an epistemological and political straightjacket nor has he identified the "cul-de-sac" of structuralist Marxism, the very title of his text. I confess to some difficulty in knowing how to respond substantively to a critique which is so confident of its grounds that it does not consider it necessary to specify them. Nevertheless, to Morrow's thinking, it is incumbent upon structuralists or upon anyone with the remotest sympathy for structuralism to justify his/her position and at the same time respond to its critics while reviewing previous debates on the relative merits of structuralist Marxism versus other

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more subjectivist, voluntarist forms of Marxism. This is the first task which Morrow sets for me.

I would have thought it inappropriate and even presumptuous, in the framework of an article-length essay on one specific aspect of advanced capitalism, namely the group effect, to proceed with a defence of Althusser and Poulantzas, even though they are responsible for the development and refinement of some important concepts essential to a critical understanding of this effect. And even in the context of this debate, I think I would be very ill-advised to take up Morrow's first challenge when he, himself, does not take the trouble to specify what it is about this perspective which makes it theoretically weak, politically unsound or otherwise objectionable. An adequate expository *and* critical treatment of the diversity of structuralist Marxist positions, of the debates between their adherents *and* of the various Hegelian Marxist and non-Marxist critiques of structuralist Marxism could not be done in a cursory manner. Distortion and oversimplification of these perspectives and of their relative merits would be the inevitable result. In his reticence to provide specific grounds for debate on his first point, Morrow is perhaps betraying an awareness of the hazards of such an undertaking in the space of a few paragraphs, since specific grounds, to make sense would have to be situated in the general, overall perspective. I shall follow his example in declining his invitation to fall into such a trap.

There is one name, that of Poulantzas, which comes up here and which recurs in most of the subsequent remarks of Morrow's critique. The specific reference to Poulantzas provides the key to that which inspires Morrow's entire critique of my paper. It is with praise that Morrow points to Poulantzas's reformist political stance in his last work, *State, Power, Socialism* as opposed to the disdain he expresses for the radical political action to which my analysis leads. Indeed, it is Poulantzas's politics of reform which wins Morrow's favour and it is the politics of radical action, the logical conclusion of my analysis, which Morrow so fervently opposes. That which divides us is the form of politics which we deem essential and necessary in the struggle against exploitation and domination. The form he espouses is reformist, and this accounts for his interest in late Poulantzas.

But Morrow situates the differences between us on a political level. He does not merely note in passing a difference in our positions but, in a combative spirit, raises this difference in the form of a challenge. He is quite right to do so for the defence of a given form of politics is not a purely academic question, it is a question of political struggle and it is in this spirit in which I accept his challenge.

An adequate defence of politics can never, of course, be dogmatic. It must go beyond a simple declaration of superiority of a given set of values. It must also avoid making efficiency the grounds of validity in an instrumental link

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between posited and achieved goals. A proper defence must go beyond politics. I also think that it must go beyond ideology as well, in order to dispel much of the dogmatism with which ideology is necessarily constituted. This is what I try to do in my analysis of advanced capitalist processes and ultimately the merits of the political theory of radical action must be judged on the merits of such an analysis. This, Morrow does not do.

If my account of social relations in advanced capitalism which attempts to penetrate the ideological veil of compromise, the very principle of reform, is correct, we cannot reject it simply because it points to radical action as the necessary form of politics in the struggle against exploitation and domination. We cannot reject a valid theory because we do not like its political implications. But this is precisely what Morrow's critique consists of. In this he commits two serious methodological errors: he abstracts the theory of radical politics from the general theory and makes it the grounds of assessing merits of validity of the general theory. In other words, he takes the conclusions of the analysis ignoring the process by which they are arrived at and makes them the grounds for accepting or rejecting the analysis. Secondly, the conclusion, itself (i.e. radical action), is judged not on the basis of a proven validity of external criteria, theoretically permissible in itself, but on the basis simply of a disparity between it and his preferred politics (i.e. reform). It is a dogmatic assessment because his real grounds for rejecting my entire analysis as invalid in a simple disparity between my conclusions and his closely held values.

I would have preferred that he demonstrate errors or falsehoods in elements of my analysis on some rationally sustainable grounds. To make the judgement of conclusions dependent on the judgement of preceding theory is not, of course, a matter of my personal preference but a matter of theoretical necessity. He does indirectly, however, make a judgement of the general theory by appealing to Poulantzas but in doing so I do not think that he departs from his own grounds. Indeed, his attraction to Poulantzas owes to the similarity in the form of political action they both favour. This is the criterion on which Poulantzas's last work, *State, Power, Socialism*, proposing politics of reform, is judged as being superior to other structuralist Marxist analyses and indeed to his earlier work. Morrow reproaches me, therefore, for having ignored it. I should have commented on the evolution of Poulantzas's work, he says, taking an explicit position on it insofar as the development in its treatment of the state is one showing a departure from early emphasis on structure to later preoccupation with various forms of struggle beyond simply that of the class struggle. Perhaps my not having assessed Poulantzas's later work in relation to mine makes for an ambiguity which might be translated as a theoretical weakness in my arguments as opposed to a relative strength in his. For how can our account of advanced capitalist processes be equally valid when we arrive at irreconcilable positions?

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I do not, however, think that the theoretical approach of Poulantzas in *State, Power, Socialism*, is at odds with my own; nor do I think there is disagreement between his analysis of forms of advanced capitalist relations and their effects, and my analysis. I think, rather, that the theory he expounds is more consistent with my argument concerning group effect and radical action than with his own conclusion regarding the form of transition from capitalism to socialism and if Morrow will bear with me for a moment I should like to look at some of Poulantzas's arguments in this work to judge the consistency between his analysis of capitalist state, relations of power and his conclusive remarks for a politics of reform.

It seems to me that what Poulantzas is saying is that capitalist relations (economic, political and ideological), are power relations in which the bourgeois class is dominant and that the actual struggles (economic, political and ideological), between classes do not directly or indirectly escape this bourgeois dominance. They are marked in determinate ways by this relation of capitalist power. Now this is, of course, a gross oversimplification of his argument but most Marxists would have little difficulty recognizing that the statement, even in its simplicity, is true however unacceptable they find the social conditions to which it refers. The question that Poulantzas raises is how, in the light of this power structure, can socialism emerge. In other words, what form must the struggle against capitalist dominance and for the creation of socialism take if it is to avoid the statist forms of social domination associated with Stalinism? Democratic, is the answer he gives, of which there are already some promising signs: a form of anti-statist popular struggle in which ordinary citizens are organizing to manage various facets of their lives. This is a democratic form of political action as direct participation in decisions affecting their lives. It is self-management, a form of action which seems to mediate the development of women's movement and the ecology movement as well as the more traditional struggles. Morrow captures all this in his first Poulantzas citation.

According to Poulantzas, that this form of popular struggle is wide-spread and that it is located "at a distance" from the state with major dislocatory effects within the state, bears repeating, for it is here on the second point, that I differ from Poulantzas. The question of how "wide-spread" is this form of action presumably both in the sense of numbers and variety or diversity of action, is, of course, an important one. It is not, in this case, simply an empirical matter but one of considerable theoretical significance for we are concerned with, after all, a "democratic" form of struggle and the numerical or quantitative component is not totally irrelevant. But this is not the point on which I should like to dwell, for I do not challenge Poulantzas's estimates, impressionistic as they are, of the extensiveness of this form of struggle in various western social formations. This is not the issue that divides us. The second

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point, namely, the relation to and effect on the state is the critical one. Poulantzas claims that this form of struggle is located “at a distance” from the state and that it “sets up major dislocatory effects within the state itself”. The implication here is that the practice of self-management has not only the positive effect of creating an anti-statist material infrastructure essential for socialism but strikes a blow at the state through a negative weakening effect on the state — both effects being critical for the transition from capitalism to socialism.

When Poulantzas says that these struggles are “at a distance from the state” he is not implying that there is no articulation between these struggles and the state, for he does claim that the struggles have a “major dislocatory effect” on the state. The critical question to raise, then, is how does this articulation operate? He provides the answer.

Poulantzas first tells us that class struggles (economic, political, ideological), make up the primary field of power relations which have primacy over the state. He also tells us that all struggles that are relations of power are not class struggles but they have a “class pertinency”.

Of course, they will still have class pertinency, continuing to be located, and to have a stake, in the terrain of political domination. But they do not rest on the same foundation as the social class division of labour, and are neither a mere consequence nor homologues or isomorphs of that division; this is so most notably in the case of relations between men and women.<sup>1</sup>

“Class pertinency” refers to the articulation of class and non-class relations and struggles so that what Poulantzas is really saying is that class struggles overlie all other forms of struggle (women’s, ecology, etc.), such that these struggles are overdetermined by the class struggles without their being themselves, strictly speaking, class struggles. Poulantzas adds that the state is, itself, organically present in bourgeois class power and hence in the class struggle — political, economic and ideological, as well. The following makes the point well.

Although(...) power relations (and struggles K.M.) stretch beyond class relations, the State cannot keep aloof from them any more than they can be materialized and reproduced without specific apparatuses and institutions(...) Through its activity and effects, the State intervenes in all the relations of power in order to assign them a class pertinency and enmesh them in the web of class power. The State thereby takes over heterogeneous powers which relay and recharge the economic, political and ideological powers of the dominant class.

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The power exhibited in sexual relations between men and women, which is certainly dissimilar to that of class relations, is nevertheless invested in the latter and is mediated and reproduced as a class relation by the State(...) class power therefore traverses, utilizes, and gears down that other power, assigning to it a given political significance. The State is a class State not only insofar as it concentrates power based on class relations, but also in the sense in which it tends to spread through every power by appropriating its mechanisms (even though that power is never co-extensive with the State).<sup>2</sup>

Simply following Poulantzas' reasoning, these struggles in their "distance from the state" are overdetermined by the class struggle and class power relations. Now if the state is organically present in bourgeois class power, how far can it be from these struggles? I think that there is some inconsistency between Poulantzas's analysis and his conclusions regarding reformist politics, for politics of reform including the action of these popular struggles are contained within relations of class domination. My arguments of group effect are consistent with his theory but not with his conclusions.

This theoretically derived presence of class relations in popular struggles is confirmed when we witness, in this conjuncture, actual state technical and financial assistance, however small, not to mention the ideological encouragement offered by the state to these movements. As I say in my paper, in the conjuncture of pressure for balanced budgets, do-it-yourself citizens committees, clean-up-the-environment neighbourhood groups receiving a minimum of financial help from the state are not entirely incompatible or in contradiction with bourgeois dominant economic, political and ideological structures.

These arguments already touch on Poulantzas's second point regarding popular struggles, namely that they have a dislocatory effect on the state, but I should like to comment specifically on it nevertheless. Assuming for a moment that these struggles are independent of the state and of class relations and struggles, it would be very undialectical (and naive) to argue that their articulation to the state would be simply one of dislocatory effects — internal disruption and weakening of the state — without some reaction from the state to absorb the dislocation in ways that have effects on the struggles themselves. These effects may well be ones of containment within a reformist mold.

It may appear that in my paper I commit the same error of undialectical reasoning in reverse. As this seems to underly Morrow's fourth point, I should like to take it up now, returning to the third point later. I would never wish to say that whatever popular struggles emerge in capitalist relations they are doomed to failure or at least fall far short of their objective because the dominant bourgeois power militates against their becoming a threat to it and that

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this determines their fate of failure, so it is useless to differentiate between different forms of popular struggle since they have the same lamentable destiny. I hope it is not this that one reads into my paper. The questions I raise fall within the problematic of the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. It seems to me that an objective understanding of the processes of reproduction promotes the struggle against this very reproduction; and in this sense the problematic is neither innocent nor an apology for bourgeois power. If Marxism is anything it is the perspective which allows an objective understanding of inequality and promotes the struggle against it and part of this is seeing compromise in capitalist relations for what it is — a form of articulation of popular struggle to dominant structures.

Negotiations in relations of unequal power cannot lead to an equalization of power nor is the equalization of power even a negotiable issue. Liberal ideology, makes the assumption of equality and this assumption becomes the means of excluding the issue from discourse. It was Marx who discovered this in his analysis of the level of circulation of capital in which the circulation of labour-power is mediated by the free market operating on the basis of take-it-or-leave-it. Capital and labour are assumed equal, an assumption generated by the structural separation of the level of circulation from the level of production. To read an equality in this exchange between capital and labour is to remain within the confines of liberal ideology. In my analysis of class relations and class struggle in advanced capitalism I do not depart from Marx but rather apply the relations between economic, ideological and political structures that are implicit in *Capital*. The take-it-or-leave-it of competitive capitalism which, strictly speaking, is not negotiation for there is no obligation to participate on either side, is assumed to be a mode of interaction between equals. The compromise which replaces the take-it-or-leave-it is also assumed to be a mode of interaction between equals as well — also as an ideological effect of the relations of production. There is no need to repeat my whole argument again. I have taken it this far to emphasize one thing: that there is nothing to suggest that compromise in relations of unequal power leads, in itself, to a normalization of power or equality. It is rather a mode of interaction mediating the reproduction of these unequal power relations precisely because it either appears as a relation of equality (neo-liberalism) or that it appears to hold the promise of leading to equality (social democracy). Now this is not to say that negotiation of salary settlements that succeeds in allocating a favourable proportion of value to labour is not progressive, but that its very structure excludes the issue of exploitation, i.e. wage labour and privatized surplus product as such. Just as does any relation, this particular relation has determinate effects — effects that go beyond it as simply an economic relation. The ideological and political effects are what I tried to examine in my paper. I do not think that my analysis proceeds by definition but rather examines concrete

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relations and their effects which were there long before I set out to define them.

I wonder if Morrow does not commit the error of logic of which he is accusing me, namely definitional formalism, in defining compromise as democratic without distinguishing between forms of democracy, i.e. liberal democracy, socialist democracy, etc. I think it is necessary to relate compromise to specific democracies in order to determine the extent or limits of compromise, itself, for compromise is not simply form. It has determinate content as well. Many critical thinkers, Macpherson amongst them, have indicated the affinity between liberal democracy and capitalist market relations. Compromise in these relations must be examined as form and substance. First of all compromise draws attention to a give-and-take, to a mode of interaction in which differences are settled by mutual acceptance of concessions. It is a mediator of issues and in being this it also draws attention to the quality of issues themselves — issues considered to be negotiable and on which compromise can be achieved. The assumption here is that both partners in the compromise retain their identity including, and especially, capitalist and labourer. There are matters that are not raised as issues for the compromise cannot accommodate the negation of the identity of either or both. Such issues are eliminated from dialogue (and even perception). It is not a coincidence that the neo-liberal theories of democracy which emerged and flourished in the '50s and '60s from Dahl to Lipset to Dahrendorf emphasizing conflict and compromise as being the stuff of democracy did so after declaring that class interests were no longer contradictory making the class conflict simply another form of conflict resolvable by compromise. A bit of this seems to echo even in Habermas's revisionist reflections on Marx's labour theory of value implying a resolution to the objective contradiction between labour and capital. I am aware of the theoretical dangers of overstretching the point of there being a similarity between crude neo-liberal pluralism and Habermas but in emphasizing dialogue and compromise both found it necessary before anything else to settle the question of relations of production and class struggle. They are right about one thing: that the basic resolution of the objective contradictory class interests cannot be reconciled through compromise and it becomes essential to eliminate such a question in one way or another from becoming an issue. The whole point of my paper is to show how the economic relations between the capitalist class and the working class, a relation of contradiction, is ideologically translated as a relation of non-contradiction and of healthy differences between opponents — differences resolvable by compromise. My first concern is to examine how conflicts emerge, are received by, and handled in these relations so as to know how to resist the logic of these relations. It is the ideological structure of compromise between groups of equal power as the effect of the economic relations of production which



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assigns equal value, importance and fate (resolvability by compromise) to all forms of conflict. Morrow seems to imply that it is I who define them as equal.

When Morrow raises the welfare state as a promising example of a process of political change in which the state is emerging as something other than "an agency of reproducing class domination" he has hardly chosen a strong supporting case for his position. I think he is rather proving my point. Reform and class domination are not incompatible or contradictory. Surely the welfare state for all its progressiveness in the reproduction of a healthier, more educated and more materially secure working class particularly in the '50s and '60s was not antithetical to capitalist interests. In the present conjuncture of deregulation, privatization, cutbacks, I wonder whose welfare the welfare state is promoting and I wonder how progressive it can sensibly be considered to be? One thing is certain, the welfare state is a capitalist state and the interests of the capitalist class prevail over the interests of other classes.

But what are the alternatives to compromise, concessions and reform? Morrow fears there is only one, namely Stalinism, which, of course, he rejects and I join him in this rejection. As a first step to working out a better alternative for the struggle for social equality let us at least go beyond the ideological image of compromise in which it is abstracted from concrete relations of inequality and linked to democracy as a fair, just mode of settling differences always of equal value. Let us at least shed our naïveté and innocence about its implications and consequences.

In his third and fifth critique, Morrow raises a methodological/epistemological question. If I read him correctly he is essentially saying that there is no substitute for empirical analysis and that since structuralism ignores the "nitty gritty empiricism" or since it theoretically cannot be reconciled to empiricism, it should be rejected quite apart from the political consideration crying out for its rejection. There is some theoretical confusion here. It is certainly true that structuralist epistemology rejects empiricist epistemology as a theory of knowledge, but it is not true that structuralism ignores the real, concrete world for it is this with which the object of knowledge tries to come to grips and without real objects, there cannot objects of knowledge be. The difference thus between structuralism and empiricism is *not* one of ignoring vs. highlighting the concrete world which we often refer to loosely as "empirical" (though this is what Morrow's critique of theory and his applause of "nitty gritty empiricism" seems to imply) but rather in the way in which this concrete world is known, or, in other words, in the way in which knowledge of the real world is produced. As to the relative merits of my paper versus other critiques of pluralism, I shall leave it to the reader to judge, but I cannot but interpret the implication that, unlike that of other critiques, my analysis either ignores concrete social phenomena or in its theoretical direction is a hindrance to future research on specific forms of political or other action, as a confusion

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about this elementary distinction. Do I cut myself off from concrete phenomena when I talk about collective bargaining, brokerage political parties, etc. or do I say that their specific operations should not be documented? What I do not do is allow the dominant pluralist ideology to mediate my interpretation of these concrete social objects for if a knowledge of the concrete world is produced by a means which simply reproduces ideological categories, that is, if the reconstitution in theory of social relations is governed by an ideological structure, be a mere extension of the prevailing ideological discourse, the knowledge product could only be qualified as ideological (and indeed, is it not the dominant ideology of pluralism which underlies Morrow's entire critique?).

If the differences between Morrow and myself on this epistemological point were not based on a confusion, I would, in spite of lack of space, pursue the question, complex and inexhaustible as it is, of the relative merits of structuralist epistemology versus empiricism.<sup>3</sup> How confusion breeds irony, for is it not indeed ironical that in Morrow's insistence on the importance of "the empirical" he should totally miss the point that it is not in Mediterranean Europe where one observes a high concentration of capital, a strong institution of collective bargaining, thriving brokerage political parties and so on, but right here in North America, right in front of his eyes?

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### Notes

1. Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, translated P. Camiller, Verso, London, 1978. p. 43.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.
3. See Barry Hindess, *Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences*, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1977, for a structuralist critique of empiricism which is not uncritical of Althusser.