

Part I

Approaches to Power and Politics

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL



1

Marxist Approaches to Power

BOB JESSOP

Marxist approaches to power focus on its relation to class domination in capitalist societies. Power is linked to class relations in economics, politics and ideology. In capitalist social formations, the state is considered to be particularly important in securing the conditions for economic class domination. Marxists are also interested in why dominated classes seem to accept (or fail to recognize) their oppression; so they address issues of resistance and strategies to bring about radical change. Much recent Marxist analysis also aims to show how class power is dispersed throughout society, in order to avoid economic reductionism. This chapter summarizes the main trends in contemporary Marxism and identifies some significant spatio-temporal aspects of class domination. It also assesses briefly the disadvantages of Marxism as a sociological analysis of power. These include its neglect of forms of social domination that are not directly related to class; a tendency to overemphasize the coherence of class domination; the continuing problem of economic reductionism; and the opposite danger of a voluntaristic account of resistance to capitalism.

Marxists have analyzed power relations in many different ways. But four inter-related themes typify their overall approach. The first of these is a concern with power relations as manifestations of a specific mode or configuration of class domination rather than as a purely interpersonal phenomenon lacking deeper foundations in the social structure. This focus on class domination does not imply that power and resistance are the preserve of social actors with clear class identities and class interests. It means only that Marxists are mainly interested in the causal interconnections between the exercise of social power and the reproduction and/or transformation of class domination. Indeed, Marxists are usually well aware of other types of subject, identity, antagonism and domination. But they consider these phenomena largely in

terms of their relevance for, and their overdetermination by, class domination. Second, Marxists are concerned with the links – including discontinuities as well as continuities – among economic, political and ideological class domination. Despite or, perhaps, because of the obvious centrality of this issue to Marxist analysis, it continues to prompt widespread theoretical and empirical disagreements. Different Marxist approaches locate the bases of class power primarily in the social relations of production, in control over the state, or in intellectual hegemony over hearts and minds. I will deal with these options below. Third, Marxists note the limitations inherent in any exercise of power that is rooted in one or another form of class domination and try to explain this in terms of structural contradictions and antagonisms inscribed therein. Thus Marxists tend to assume that all forms of social power linked to class domination are inherently fragile, unstable, provisional and temporary and that continuing struggles are needed to secure class domination, to overcome resistance and to naturalize or mystify class power. It follows, fourth, that Marxists also address questions of strategy and tactics. They provide empirical analyses of actual strategies intended to reproduce, resist or overthrow class domination in specific periods and conjunctures; and they often engage in political debates about the most appropriate identities, interests, strategies and tactics for dominated classes and other oppressed groups to adopt in particular periods and conjunctures to challenge their subordination. An important aspect of strategic analysis and calculation is sensitivity to the spatio-temporal dimensions of strategy and this is reflected in growing theoretical interest in questions of temporality and socio-spatiality.

Power as a Social Relation

Marxists are interested in the first instance in power as capacities rather than power as the actualization of such capacities. They see these capacities as *socially structured* rather than as *socially amorphous* (or random). Thus Marxists focus on capacities grounded in structured social relations rather than in the properties of individual agents considered in isolation. Moreover, as these structured social relations entail enduring relations, there are reciprocal, if often asymmetrical, capacities and vulnerabilities. A common paradigm here is Hegel's master–slave dialectic – in which the master depends on the slave and the slave on the master. Marx's equivalent paradigm case is the material interdependence of capital and labour. At stake in both cases are enduring relations of reproduced, reciprocal practices rather than one-off, unilateral impositions of will. This has the interesting implication that power is also involved in securing the continuity of social relations rather than producing radical change. Thus, as Isaac notes, '[r]ather than A getting B to do something B would not otherwise do, social relations of power typically involve both A and B doing what they *ordinarily* do' (1987: 96). The capitalist wage relation illustrates this well. For, in voluntarily selling their labour-power for a wage, workers transfer its control to the capitalist along with the right to any surplus. A formally free exchange thereby becomes the basis of workplace despotism and economic exploitation. Conversely, working-class resistance in labour markets and the labour process indicate that the successful exercise of power is a conjunctural phenomenon rather than being guaranteed by unequal social relations of production. Thus Marxists regard the actualization of capacities to

exercise power and its effects, if any, as always and everywhere contingent on specific actions by specific agents in specific circumstances. It follows that there can be no such thing as power in general or general power – only particular powers and the sum of particular exercises of power.

General Remarks on Class Domination

Marxism differs from other analyses of power because of its primary interest in class domination. In contrast, for example, Weberian analyses give equal *analytical* weight to other forms of domination (status, party); or, again, radical feminists prioritize patriarchy, its forms and effects. But its distinctive interest in class domination is not limited to *economic* class domination in the *labour process* (although this is important) nor even to the economic bases of class domination in the wider economy (such as control over the allocation of capital to alternative productive activities). For Marxists see class powers as dispersed throughout society and therefore also investigate political and ideological class domination. However, whereas some Marxists believe political and/or ideological domination derive more or less directly from economic domination, others emphasize the complexity of relations among these three sites or modes of class domination.

Even Marxists who stress the economic bases of class domination also acknowledge that politics is primary in practice. For it is only through political revolution that existing patterns of class domination will be overthrown. Other Marxists prioritize the political over the economic not just (if at all) in terms of revolutionary struggles but also in terms of its role in the routine reproduction of class domination. This makes the state central to Marxist analyses not only in regard to political power in narrow terms but also to class power more generally. For the state is seen as responsible for maintaining the overall structural integration and social cohesion of a ‘society divided into classes’ – a structural integration and social cohesion without which capitalism’s contradictions and antagonisms might cause revolutionary crises or even, in the telling phrase of the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, lead to ‘the mutual ruin of the contending classes’.

Economic Class Domination

Marxism is premised on the existence for much of human history of antagonistic modes of production. Production involves the material appropriation and transformation of nature. A mode of production comprises in turn a specific combination of the forces of production and social relations of production. The productive forces comprise raw materials, means of production, the technical division of labour corresponding to these raw materials and the given means of production, and the relations of interdependence and cooperation among the direct producers in setting the means of production to work. The social relations of production comprise social control over the allocation of resources to different productive activities and over the appropriation of any resulting surplus; the social division of labour (or the allocation of workers to different activities across different units of production); and class

relations grounded in property relations, ownership of the means of production, and the form of economic exploitation. Some Marxists highlight the role of productive forces in producing social change but the majority view (and current wisdom) is that the social relations of production are primary. Indeed, it is these social relations that shape the choice among available productive forces and how they get deployed in production.

Given the primacy of the relations of production in economic class domination, some Marxists emphasize the power relations rooted in organization of the labour process. This is considered the primary site of the antagonism between capitalists and workers and is the crucial site for securing the valorization of capital through direct control over power-power. Various forms of control are identified (e.g., bureaucratic, technical, and despotic), each with its own implications for forms of class struggle and the distribution of power between capital and labour. Other Marxists study the overall organization of the production process and its articulation to other aspects of the circuit of capital. Thus emphasis is placed on the relative importance of industrial or financial capital, monopoly capital or small and medium enterprises, multinational or national firms, firms interested in domestic growth or exports. Different modes of economic growth are associated with different patterns of power. Atlantic Fordism, for example, based on a virtuous circle of mass production and mass consumption in relatively closed economies, was compatible for a time with an institutionalized compromise between industrial capital and organized labour. This supported the Keynesian welfare national state with its distinctive forms of economic, social and political redistribution. But increasing globalization (or world market integration) combined with capital's attempts to increase labour market flexibility have undermined these conditions and encouraged an assault on this compromise. This is clearest in those economies that underwent neoliberal regime shifts, such as the United States and United Kingdom, associated respectively with Reaganism (sustained under Clinton's Third Way and the George W. Bush administration) and Thatcherism (sustained by New Labour's 'modernization' project). This contributed to a decline in labour's share in income and wealth, to the growing divorce of financial from industrial capital, to the hyper-financialization of everyday life and, in 2007–2009, to the global financial crisis, which has had its own impact on patterns of class domination.

Political Class Domination

Marxist accounts of political class domination typically begin with the state and its direct and indirect roles in securing the conditions for economic class domination. The state is emphasized for various reasons: first, since market forces themselves cannot secure all the conditions needed for capital accumulation and are prone to market failure, there is a need for some mechanism standing outside and above the market to underwrite it and compensate for its failures; second, economic and political competition between capitals necessitates a force able to organize their collective interests and limit any damage that might occur from the one-sided pursuit of one set of capitalist interests; third, the state is needed to manage the many and varied repercussions of economic exploitation within the wider society. Marxists argue that only if the

state can secure sufficient institutional integration and social cohesion will the extra-economic conditions for rational economic calculation and, a fortiori, capital accumulation be secured. This requires a sovereign state that is relatively autonomous from particular class interests and can articulate and promote a broader, national-popular interest. Where this project respects the decisive economic nucleus of the society and its capitalist character, then the state helps to secure economic as well as political class domination. This is often held to be more likely in bourgeois democratic political regimes than dictatorial regimes (see Moore 1957; Barrow 1993; Gramsci 1971; Offe 1984; Poulantzas 1978; and Jessop 1990).

There are three main Marxist approaches to the state: instrumentalist, structuralist and 'strategic-relational'. Instrumentalists see the state mainly as a neutral tool for exercising political power: whichever class controls this tool can use it to advance its own interests. Structuralists argue that who controls the state is irrelevant because it embodies a prior bias towards capital and against the subaltern classes. And strategic-relational theorists argue that state power is a form-determined condensation of the balance of class forces in struggle. I now illustrate these three views for the capitalist state. Different examples would be required for states associated with other modes of production.

Instrumentalists regard the contemporary state as a *state in capitalist society*. Ralph Miliband expresses this view in writing that 'the 'ruling class' of capitalist society is that class which owns and controls the means of production and which is able, by virtue of the economic power thus conferred upon it, to use the state as an instrument for the domination of society' (1969: 22). More generally, theorists of the 'state in capitalist society' stress the contingency of state-economy relations. For, despite the dominance of capitalist relations of production in such a society, the state itself has no inherently capitalist form and performs no necessarily capitalist functions. Any functions it does perform for capital occur because pro-capitalist forces *happen* to control the state and/or because securing social order also *happens* to secure key conditions for rational economic calculation. If the same state apparatus were found in another kind of system, however, it might well be controlled by other forces and perform different functions.

Structuralists regard the state as a *capitalist state* because it has an inherently capitalist form and therefore functions on behalf of capital. But what makes a state form capitalist and what guarantees its functionality for capital? Structuralists argue that the very structure of the modern state means that it organizes capital and disorganizes the working class. Claus Offe (1984) developed this view as follows. The state's exclusion from direct control over the means of production (which are held in private hands) makes its revenues depend on a healthy private sector; thus, to secure its own reproduction as a state apparatus, it must ensure the profitability of capital. Subordinate classes can secure material concessions only within this constraint – if profitability is threatened, such concessions must be rolled back. Yet capital cannot press its economic advantages too far without undermining the political legitimacy of the state. For, in contrast to earlier forms of political class domination, the economically dominant class enjoys no formal monopoly of political power. Instead the typical form of bourgeois state is a constitutional state and, later, a national-popular democratic state. This requires respect for the rule of law and the views of its citizens.

The strategic-relational approach was initially proposed by a Greek communist theorist, Nicos Poulantzas, and has subsequently been elaborated by the British state theorist, Bob Jessop. Building on Marx's insight that capital is not a thing but a social relation, Poulantzas argued in his later work that the state is also a social relation. Marx showed how continued reproduction of the material and institutional forms of the capital relation shaped the dynamic of capital accumulation and the economic class struggle – but the dominance of these forms could not in and of itself guarantee capital accumulation. This depended on capital's success in maintaining its domination over the working class in production, politics and the wider society. Likewise, Poulantzas saw the modern form of state as having certain inbuilt biases but argued that these were insufficient in themselves to ensure capitalist rule. Indeed they even served to reproduce class conflict and contradictions within the state itself so that the impact of state power depended heavily on the changing balance of forces and the strategies and tactics pursued by class and non-class forces alike (Poulantzas 1978).

The suggestion that the state is a social relation is important theoretically and politically. Seen as an institutional ensemble or repository of political capacities and resources, the state is by no means class-neutral. It is inevitably class-biased by virtue of the structural selectivity that makes state institutions, capacities and resources more accessible to some political forces and more tractable for some purposes than others. This bias is rooted in the generic form of the capitalist state but varies with its particular institutional matrix. Likewise, since it is not a subject, the capitalist state does not and, indeed, cannot, exercise power. Instead its powers (in the plural) are activated through changing sets of politicians and state officials located in specific parts of the state apparatus in specific conjunctures. If an overall strategic line is ever discernible in the exercise of these powers, it results from strategic coordination enabled by the selectivity of the state system and the organizational role of parallel power networks that cross-cut and unify its formal structures. This is, however, an improbable achievement. For the state system is necessarily shot through with contradictions and class struggles and the political agents operating within it always meet resistances from specific forces beyond the state, which are engaged in struggles to transform it, to determine its policies, or simply to influence it at a distance. It follows that political class struggle never ends. Only through its continual renewal can a capitalist power bloc keep its relative unity in the face of rivalry and fractionalism and maintain its hegemony (or, at least, its dominance) over subaltern groups. And only by disrupting the state's strategic selectivity through mass struggle at a distance from the state, within the state, and to transform the state could a democratic transition to democratic socialism be achieved.

Ideological Class Domination

Ideology (1845–1846) stated that 'the ruling ideas of any age are the ideas of the ruling class' and related this to the latter's control over the means of intellectual production. Their own work developed a number of perspectives on ideological class domination – ranging from the mystifying impact of commodity fetishism, through the individualist attitudes generated by political forms such as citizenship, to the struggles for hearts and minds in civil society. Marxist interest in the forms and modalities of ideological

class domination intensified with the rise of democratic government and mass politics in the late nineteenth century and the increased importance of mass media and popular culture in the twentieth century. Various currents in so-called 'Western Marxism' have addressed the mechanisms and effects of ideological class domination – especially whenever a radical socialist or communist revolution has failed to occur despite severe economic crisis or, indeed, during more general periods of working-class passivity. Successive generations of the Frankfurt School have been important here but many other approaches work on similar lines.

An inspirational figure in this area is Antonio Gramsci, an Italian communist politically active in the interwar period until his incarceration by the fascist regime, when he wrote his celebrated prison notebooks. He developed a very distinctive approach to the analysis of class power. His chief concern was to develop an autonomous Marxist science of politics in capitalist societies, to distinguish different types of state and politics, and thereby to establish the most likely conditions under which revolutionary forces might eventually replace capitalism. He was particularly concerned with the specificities of the political situation and revolutionary prospects in the 'West' (Western Europe, United States) as opposed to the 'East' (i.e. Tsarist Russia) – believing that a Leninist vanguard party and a revolutionary coup d'état were inappropriate to the 'West'.

Gramsci identified the state in its narrow sense with the politico-juridical apparatus, the constitutional and institutional features of government, its formal decision-making procedures and its general policies. In contrast, his studies focused more on the ways and means through which *political, intellectual and moral leadership* was mediated through a complex ensemble of institutions, organizations and forces operating within, oriented towards, or located at a distance from the state in its narrow sense. This approach is reflected in his controversial definition of the state as 'political society + civil society' and his related claims that state power in Western capitalist societies rests on 'hegemony armoured by coercion'. Gramsci also defined the state as: 'the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules' (1971: 244). He argued that states were always based on variable combinations of force and hegemony. For Gramsci, *force* involves the use of a coercive apparatus to bring the mass of the people into conformity and compliance with the requirements of a specific mode of production. In contrast, *hegemony* involves the successful mobilization and reproduction of the 'active consent' of dominated groups by the ruling class through the exercise of political, intellectual and moral leadership. Gramsci did not identify force exclusively with the state (e.g., he referred to private fascist terror squads) nor did he locate hegemony exclusively within civil society (since the state also has important ethico-political functions). Overall, he argued that the capitalist state should not be seen as a basically coercive apparatus but as an institutional ensemble based on a variable mix of coercion, consent, fraud and corruption. Moreover, rather than treating specific institutions and apparatuses as purely technical instruments of government, Gramsci examined their social bases and stressed how state power is shaped by its links to the economic system and civil society.

One of Gramsci's key arguments is the need in advanced capitalist democracies to engage in a long-term war of position in which subordinate class forces would develop

a hegemonic 'collective will' that creatively synthesizes a revolutionary project based on the everyday experiences and 'common sense' of popular forces. Although some commentators interpret this stress on politico-ideological struggle to imply that a parliamentary road to socialism would be possible, Gramsci typically stressed the likelihood of an eventual war of manoeuvre with a military-political resolution. But this would be shorter, sharper, and less bloody if hegemony had first been won.

The Articulation of Economic, Political, and Ideological Domination

The relations among economic, political, and ideological domination can be considered in terms of the structurally inscribed selectivity of particular forms of domination and the strategies that help to consolidate (or undermine) these selectivities. The bias inscribed on the terrain of the state as a site of strategic action can only be understood as a bias relative to specific strategies pursued by specific forces to advance specific interests over a given time horizon in terms of a specific set of other forces each advancing their own interests through specific strategies. Particular forms of state privilege some strategies over others, privilege the access of some forces over others, some interests over others, some time horizons over others, some coalition possibilities over others. A given type of state, a given state form, a given form of regime, will be more accessible to some forces than others according to the strategies they adopt to gain state power. And it will be more suited to the pursuit of some types of economic or political strategy than others because of the modes of intervention and resources that characterize that system. All of this indicates the need to examine the differences among types of state (e.g., feudal vs. capitalist), state forms (e.g., absolutist, liberal, interventionist), modes of political representation (e.g., democratic vs. despotic), specific political regimes (e.g., bureaucratic authoritarian, fascist, military or parliamentary, presidential, mass plebiscitary, etc.), particular policy instruments (e.g., Keynesian demand management vs. neoliberal supply-side policies), and so on (see Jessop 1982, 1990).

Whereas Jessop, building on Poulantzas, tends to emphasize the structural moment of 'strategic selectivity', Gramsci focused on its strategic moment. In particular, against the then prevailing orthodox Marxist view that the economic base unilaterally determined the juridico-political superstructure and prevailing forms of social consciousness, Gramsci argued that there was a reciprocal relationship between the economic 'base' and its politico-ideological 'superstructure'. He studied this in terms of how 'the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructure' is secured through specific intellectual, moral and political practices that translate narrow sectoral, professional or local interests into broader 'ethico-political' ones. Only thus, he wrote, does the economic structure cease to be an external, constraining force and become a source of initiative and subjective freedom (1971: 366–367). This implies that ethico-political practices not only co-constitute economic structures (even where, as he noted, the state assumes a *laissez-faire* role, which is, itself, a form of state intervention) but also give them their overall rationale and legitimacy (e.g., through bourgeois notions of property rights, freedom of exchange and economic justice).

Where such a reciprocal relationship exists between base and superstructure, Gramsci spoke of an '*historical bloc*'. He also introduced the concepts of *power bloc* and *hegemonic bloc* to analyze respectively the alliances among dominant classes and the broader ensemble of national-popular forces that were mobilized behind a specific hegemonic project. The concept of hegemonic bloc refers to the *historical unity* not of structures (as in the case of the historical bloc) but of *social forces* (which Gramsci analyzed in terms of the ruling classes, supporting classes, mass movements and intellectuals). Thus a hegemonic bloc is a durable alliance of class forces organized by a class (or class fraction) that has proved itself capable of exercising political, intellectual and moral leadership over the dominant classes and the popular masses alike. Gramsci notes a key organizational role here for 'organic intellectuals', that is, persons or organizations that can develop hegemonic projects that give a 'national-popular' expression to the long-term interests of the dominant or, alternatively, the subaltern classes. He also noted how relatively durable hegemony depended on a 'decisive economic nucleus' and criticized efforts to build an 'arbitrary, rationalistic, and willed' hegemony that ignored economic realities.

Spatio-Temporal Moments of Domination

Time and space are closely related and have both structural aspects (the differential temporalities and spatialities of particular institutional and organizational orders and their interrelations) and strategic aspects (such as specific temporal and spatial horizons of action, wars of position and manoeuvre, and efforts to compress and/or extend social relations in time and space). Thus a sound account of specific forms and patterns of domination must include their distinctive spatio-temporal features. This was already evident in Marx's analysis of capital accumulation: this rests on a distinctive political economy of time and also has inherent tendencies to spatial expansion. The *inner* determinations of capital accumulation entail specific ways of organizing time – reflected in the aphorism that 'time is money'. Accordingly Marx developed an array of concepts to reveal the dialectical interplay of concrete and abstract aspects of time during capital accumulation. They include labour time, absolute surplus value, socially necessary labour time, relative surplus value, machine time, circulation time, turnover time, turnover cycle, socially necessary turnover time, interest-bearing capital and expanded reproduction (cf. Grossman 2007). He deploys them to show how the concrete temporalities of particular processes are connected to the constant rebasing of abstract labour time as the driving force behind the never-ending treadmill of competition from which neither capital nor workers can escape (Postone 1993). This driving force becomes ever more powerful as the world market becomes more closely integrated in real time through what is often called globalization but, from a Marxist viewpoint, is better described as changing forms of international economic and political domination. More generally, differential accumulation involves competition to reduce the socially necessary labour time embodied in commodities, the socially necessary turnover time of capital and, increasingly, the [naturally] necessary reproduction time of nature. These pressures exist alongside other forms of competition based on developing new products, new markets, new sources of supply, new organizational forms, new forms of dispossession and so on.

Such pressures generate uneven geographical development, affect the spatial and scalar division of labour, and reorder the spatial aspects of economic domination. There is also a spatial dynamic to capital accumulation. This is reflected in its inherent tendencies to expand, culminating potentially in the formation of a world market but also prompting counter-movements against unbridled market forces. In short, the temporalities of accumulation are crucial aspects of the organization of economic domination and fundamentally affect political and socio-cultural relations, penetrating deeply into everyday life.

These spatio-temporal dynamics also influence forms of political domination. While the development of the world market and its associated space of flows challenge the state's territorial sovereignty, its temporal sovereignty is challenged by the acceleration of time. States increasingly face temporal pressures in their policy-making and implementation due to new forms of time-space distantiation, compression and differentiation. For example, as the temporal rhythms of the economy accelerate relative to those of the state, it has less time to determine and coordinate political responses to economic events, shocks and crises. This reinforces conflicts between the time(s) of the market and the time(s) of the state. One solution to the state's loss of time sovereignty is a *laissez-faire* response that frees up the movement of superfast and/or hypermobile capital – increasing, as we have recently seen, the chances of global crises generated by their unregulated activities.

There are two other options: states can try to compress their own decision-making cycles so that they can make more timely and appropriate interventions; and/or they can attempt to decelerate the activities of 'fast capitalism' to match existing political routines.

A strategy of temporal compression increases pressures to make decisions on the basis of unreliable information, insufficient consultation, lack of participation etc., even as state managers continue to believe that policy is taking too long to negotiate, formulate, enact, adjudicate, determine, and implement. Indeed, the rhetoric of crisis can be invoked, whether justified or not, to create a climate for emergency measures and exceptional rule. This resort to 'fast policy' is reflected in the shortening of policy development cycles, fast-tracking decision making, rapid programme rollout, continuing policy experimentation and the relentless revision of guidelines and benchmarks. This privileges those who can operate within compressed time scales, narrows the range of participants in the policy process, and limits the scope for deliberation, consultation and negotiation. A scholar inspired by the Frankfurt School, Bill Scheuerman, has summarized some of these trends in terms of a general shift to 'economic states of emergency' characterized by executive dominance and constant legal change and dynamism (Scheuerman 2004).

Thus fast policy is antagonistic to corporatism, stakeholding, the rule of law, formal bureaucracy and, indeed, to the routines and cycles of democratic politics more generally. It privileges the executive over the legislature and the judiciary, finance over industrial capital, consumption over long-term investment. In general, resort to fast policy undermines the power of decision-makers who have long decision-taking cycles – because they lose the capacity to make decisions in terms of their own routines and procedures, having to adapt to the speed of fast thinkers and fast policy-makers. This can significantly affect the choice of policies, the initial targets of policy, the sites where policy is implemented and the criteria adopted to demonstrate success. This is

especially evident in the recent global financial crisis, where pressure to act forced states to rescue banks that were deemed 'too big to fail' and led to the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of a small financial elite who had played a key role in creating the crisis in the first instance.

An alternative strategy is not to compress absolute political time but to create relative political time by slowing the circuits of capital. A well-known recommendation here is a modest tax on financial transactions (the so-called Tobin tax), which would decelerate the flow of superfast and hypermobile financial capital and limit its distorting impact on the real economy. Another important field of struggle is climate change. Here we see continuing conflicts between national states about the speed and nature of the response along with well-funded and vocal opposition from firms and sectors with vested interests in continued economic expansion that could cost the earth. In this sense, rather than being a purely general problem that affects all equally, there is a strong class aspect to the creation of the environmental crisis and to struggles over appropriate responses and the distribution of costs of adjustment (Burkett 1999).

Another issue raised by changing spatio-temporalities is the increasing complexity of economic, political and ideological relations as they develop in the context of a world market that lacks either a world state or effective global governance. This undermines state capacities to steer the economy, cope with its crisis tendencies and address its effects on inequalities in economic power and resources; but it also generates instability as enterprises exploit global market opportunities without regard to their environmental, political and social consequences. This is reflected in a shift from government to governance, the increased role of networks and partnerships, and resort to multi-level or, better, multi-spatial governance oriented to different spatio-temporal horizons and interactions. These are far from purely technical solutions to new challenges but have their own selectivities on the configuration of class power (Jessop 2002, 2007).

Conclusions

Marxist approaches to power and its exercise address the following themes: (1) power and class domination; (2) the mediations among economic, political and ideological class domination; (3) the limitations and contradictions of power that are grounded in the nature of capitalism as a system of social relations, including their spatio-temporal aspects; and (4) the role of strategy and tactics. These themes indicate the strengths and weaknesses of Marxism. First, in privileging class domination, it marginalizes other forms of social domination – patriarchal, ethnic, 'racial', hegemonic masculinities, interstate, regional or territorial etc. At best these figure as factors that overdetermine the forms of class domination and/or change in response to changes in class relations. Second, Marxist analyses may exaggerate the structural coherence of class domination, neglecting its disjunctures, contradictions, countervailing tendencies etc. Notions of a unified ruling class belie the messiness of actual configurations of class power – the frictions within and across its economic, political and ideological dimensions, the disjunctions between different scales of social organization, the contradictory nature and effects of strategies, tactics and policies, the probability of state as well as market failures and the capacity of subaltern forces to engage in resistance. Many empirical

analyses reveal this messiness and complexity but this often goes unremarked in abstract Marxist theorizing. Third, Marxists risk reducing the limits of economic, political and ideological power to the effect of class contradictions and thereby missing other sources of failure. Finally, while an emphasis on strategy and tactics is important to avoid the structuralist fallacy that capital reproduces itself quasi-automatically and without need of human action, there is a risk of voluntarism if strategy and tactics are examined without reference to specific conjunctures and broader structural contexts.

Further Reading

- Barrow, C.W. 1993: *Critical Theories of the State: Marxist, neo-Marxist, post-Marxist*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Jessop, B. 2002: *The Future of the Capitalist State*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jessop, B. 2007: *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Marx, K. 1871: The Civil War in France. In D. Fernbach (ed.) *Karl Marx: the First International and After*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.
- Miliband, R. 1969: *The State in Capitalist Society*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Poulantzas, N. 1978: *State, Power, Socialism*. London: Verso.