

UNDERSTANDING THE CAPITALIST STATE IN AUSTRALIA: INSIGHTS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN NEW LEFT

Llewellyn Williams-Brooks

This article utilises insights developed by the Australian New Left during the 1970s to conceptualise the Australian capitalist state. The argument is composed of three parts. First, the debates between Ralph Miliband and Nicolas Poulantzas are reviewed in relation to the light they shed on instrumentalist and structuralist theories of the state. Second, instrumentalist state theory is analysed in the Australian context prior to the rise of New Left scholarship. Third, it is suggested that the Australian New Left challenged instrumentalist interpretations of the state by offering a structuralist critique. While Australian historian Humphrey McQueen claimed that the Australian state served as an extension of the British Empire¹, a quite different view developed locally by R W Connell and Terry Irving focused on how the structure of the state organised the existing social relations of Australian capitalism. Building on this basis, Connell and Irving subsequently developed a novel synthesis of instrumentalist and structuralist models which is of ongoing relevance to social theorists today. By clarifying the historical debates and what was at stake, we can thereby get a better understanding of the capitalist state in Australia.

¹ The first edition of *A New Britannia* studied Australian history from 1788-1901, or from British colonisation to the federation of the Australian colonies. Subsequent publications (McQueen, 1986, 2004) have extended the insights offered to more contemporary debates post-federation, especially in relation to monopoly capitalism and the development of the world market.

Williams-Brooks, L. (2019)
'Understanding the Capitalist State in Australia: Insights from the
Australian New Left'
Journal of Australian Political Economy
No. 82, pp. 140-55.

Defining theories of the (capitalist) state

Broadly speaking, Marxist political economic theories of the state have tended to adopt either instrumentalist or structuralist perspectives. At a basic level, this can be understood as an issue of agency or structure: is the state ‘controlled’ by agents (social groups or groups of corporations or families) or structured by semi-autonomous logics of accumulation? Within instrumentalist accounts, the state is defined as a sovereign political territory, with an organisational apparatus, and a claim to legitimacy through the generation of consent from a citizen population (Barrow, 1993: 24-25). A critical element of this approach is that the state may be captured by social agents, that it may be ‘acted upon’. More specifically, particular groups of social agents may influence organisations of the state for their own advantage. Thus, instrumentalist conceptions of the state consider class domination of core agencies to be the hallmark of state power. This sort of analysis was typified by Ralph Miliband when he argued that ‘[w]hat ‘the state’ stands for is a number of particular *organisations* which, together, constitute its reality, and which interact as parts of what may be called the state system’ (my italics, Miliband, 1969: 49).

This instrumentalist method focuses on identifying organs of control within the state, the agencies which administer the state and the power resources these agencies possess. Power is understood as economic, political and ideological. The state is understood to serve the interests of an elite class because members of this class design or select and subsequently administer its agencies, and are the possessors of power resources. As a hallmark of the instrumentalist method, power structure research reveals the organised centralisation and control by capitalists of power resources within state agencies. The *degree* of the concentration of power resources in this analysis typically reveals the *degree* of capitalist class control over the state. Conversely, the dispersion of power resources represents processes working towards democratic egalitarianism – a normative goal of this approach (Barrow, 1993: 15-23). Therefore, for instrumentalist state theorists, state agencies are a source of power, typically captured by a capitalist class – although such capture may be contested.

Instrumentalist theorists utilise the lens of management and ownership relationships in order to identify membership of the elite class. For example, in analysing the management of corporations, positional analysis and social analysis are generally used. The former considers interlocking

interests of individuals across state agencies to identify the concentration and centralisation of corporate interests. The latter explores the practice of elite social rituals to identify the specificity of the ruling class and its cultural practice as an exclusive form of class identification (Barrow, 1993: 15-24). A distinguishing aspect of the instrumentalist approach is the conceptualisation of the state as a captured apparatus, held by a class-fraction of social agents. This implies that state power is capable of being contested, and that a non-elite class, typically a highly organised working class, could attain state power through the possession of powerful organisations (Barrow, 1993: 44). As will be discussed, structuralist accounts of the state take issue with this claim because it presents the design and selection of state agencies as being neutral in respect of class, not inherently capitalist. This point is essential in understanding the weakness of elite approaches to state analysis in the Australian context.

There are other significant criticisms of this approach emerging from its acceptance of a separation of the state and class interests. The instrumentalist method tends to be elite-centric and limited in its analysis of capitalist social relations more generally and, in particular, aspects of resistance and class struggle. The Milibandian framework, in contrast, does recognise the essentiality of the ownership of the means of production, such that state agencies are constructed and used for the purpose of advancing the interests of the capitalist class. Marxian instrumentalists for their part must provide evidence of domination by a class of social agents in the political processes of organisation building. This may necessitate recourse to the notion of conspiracies between elites of social agents to secure their shared and conscious interests within organisational contexts. Instrumentalist approaches do not perceive class relations (that is, structuralist relations) within the workings of the state. There are limitations within instrumentalism as a research program in so far as it relies on conspiracy, a focus on elites and their motives, and the acceptance of state neutrality. As an advantage, instrumentalist theory can be used to explain the relationship between class-factions and individuals within the capitalist class, as well as processes determining the concentration of power resources.

What of the alternative offered by the structuralist approach to analysis of the state? This focuses on the state as an arena of class struggles and crisis management. In this respect, the state is understood as relatively autonomous of sections of the ruling class and serves to mediate forms of conflict within capitalism. This approach was typified in the work of

Poulantzas, as when he argued that: '[t]he state fulfils a general *maintenance function* by constituting the factor of cohesion between the levels of a social formation [...] and as the regulating factor of [capitalism's] global equilibrium as a system' (my italics, Poulantzas, 1968: 44-45). In this account, structure takes on a meaning entailing systemic functional aspects that underpin state agencies. Structuralist approaches are concerned with how economic, political and ideological structures function to reproduce the capitalist mode of production (Barrow, 1993: 51). Because the theory assumes that social and economic reproduction is a central purpose of the capitalist state, structuralism is able to explore how contradictions between these goals can lead to crises such as economic depressions and the intensification of class struggle (Barrow, 1993: 52). In research terms, form and policy analysis are included in examinations of specific states. The former refers to the different forms of state intervention and representation strategies within a nation-state, while the latter refers to the underlying pressures informing political action in the development of a government's policy formation (Barrow, 1993: 67-70).

An important departure from instrumentalist theory is structuralist theory's conceptualisation of state power as inherently capitalistic. State organisations are re-envisioned as arenas in which capitalist power is exercised; and, therefore, non-capitalist objectives cannot be pursued through the capitalist state's agencies. For Poulantzas, state power and state apparatus have a functional unity, emphasising the non-neutrality of the state and its agencies. That having been said, a major criticism is the potential functional-reductionism of structuralist theory. Given that the state is inherently prone to instability, it is ambiguous whether states have an internal logic favouring a specific fraction of the capitalist class, or whether they may undermine attempts at capitalist class leadership by particular groups. This distinction matters to the extent that we can interpret historical events occurring within capitalist states, and the relationship between capitalist crisis and class-factions.²

² While the focus of this article is the Australian New Left, the debates between Miliband and Poulantzas in *New Left Review* remain definitive for understanding instrumentalist and structuralist accounts of the state (See Miliband, 1970, 1973; Poulantzas, 1969, 1973, 1976).

Instrumentalist approaches to the (capitalist) state in Australia

Several different types of instrumentalist approaches can be identified. What connects them all is their focus on state power as being held by groups, rather than being a structure with a logic of its own. These features can be seen in that instrumentalist approaches to state theory have been extensively employed in the Australian context (Connell, 1977). They have been connected to two broad discussions, one relating to class structure and the other to economic dependency. The former tends to be associated as a field of inquiry within sociology, the latter with economic history. Connell observed that elite theory was a close counterpart to theories of social stratification and therefore suffered from a weak conception of class. As Connell (Connell, 1977: 39-59) argued in 1977, the then-existing scholarship on the 'ruling class' in Australia had been primarily concerned with three areas, namely the international relations of the business elite, analysis concerned with capital and personal relationships, and relations between business and state. That is to say – in terms of Barrow's (1993) typology – with social (network) and positional (interlocking directorate) analysis.

Before the New Left, nationalism and dependency were closely associated within radical literature. Dependancy, in this context, is simply the idea that the Australian economy and/or its class relations were dependent on foreign ownership.³ This literature would seem to suggest that Australian companies and the Australian state have been relatively autonomous of the British state in growing the national stock of labour and capital. One such example is *The Australian People* (Fitzpatrick, 1946), which appealed to a populist, nationalist opposition to British ownership. It argues that there are fundamental differences 'between what is British and traditional, and what is Australian and original' (Fitzpatrick, 1946: 10). It identified the role of industrial struggle in challenging 'overseas control' (Fitzpatrick, 1946: 11) of Australia's economy through 'an economic separation of Australians, as producers, and British or Anglo-Australians, as shareholders' (Fitzpatrick, 1946: 11).

³ It is worth also noting that Australia's British dependency has been contested (See Tsokhas, 1986, 1990a, 1990b).

The Highest Bidder (Fitzpatrick & Wheelwright, 1965) continued this theme with a more explicit focus on appeals to populist and nationalist strategies, combined with aspects of positional analysis (Wheelwright, 1957; Wheelwright & Miskelly, 1967). It suggested that foreign investment has a negative impact on ‘the health and growth of the economy, and the social and political community as an Australian economy’ (Fitzpatrick & Wheelwright, 1965: ix). Specifically, the work explored the relationship of foreign capital with political leadership and governance (Fitzpatrick & Wheelwright, 1965: 153-16). The book’s conclusion points firmly towards the mobilisation of a political praxis: ‘...[i]f we do not act without delay, our future will be fabricated for us — by others... soon Australia will not merely be up for sale to the highest bidder: it will have been sold’ (Fitzpatrick & Wheelwright, 1965: 197). This analysis stressed the role of elites in corporate monopolies, and demonstrated a concern for egalitarian parliamentarian democracy through arguing that it is the power over state agencies, exercised by elites, that undermines an otherwise benign social democracy in Australia. As Connell (1977) has noted, elite theory, grounded in the same theoretical foundations as categorical conceptions of class, cannot present capitalism in Australia as a totality of social relations. Rather, a structuralist ontology is required.

In Barrow’s (1993) terms, the Wheelwright and Miskelly studies employed positional analysis. *Ownership and Control of Australian Companies* (Wheelwright, 1957) was a quantitative economic analysis of the concentration of corporate ownership and control of Australia’s major companies. It attempted to establish the ‘degree of separation of ownership and control’ (Wheelwright, 1957: vii) of Australian companies, defining control as ‘the power to select or change the management of a company’ (Wheelwright, 1957: 3). Wheelwright argued that, despite the democratic aspects of widespread company shareholdings (which had arisen by the mid-1950s), the control of companies is vastly centralised within ‘oligarchies’ (Wheelwright, 1957: 4). Moreover, there is a clear tendency for this centralisation to undermine the democratisation of public companies. This analysis was extended to embrace private companies in *Anatomy of Australian Manufacturing Industry* (Wheelwright & Miskelly, 1967), which identified a very high concentration ‘in a few hands’ (Wheelwright & Miskelly, 1967: 2), and an especially high concentration of overseas ownership in the Australian economy. The work’s analysis served to highlight the relationship between the growth and centralisation

of corporate holdings with increased economic and political instability (Wheelwright & Miskelly, 1967: 14).

Another instrumentalist approach is that of the sociology of class. An example of the sociology of class approach is *Equality and Authority* (Encel, 1970), which examined the 'family nexus' (Encel, 1970: 303) of ruling families in Australia, especially in their collusion in developing 'pastoral empires' (Encel, 1970: 307) through the monopolisation and control of land, animals and crops. This control was shown to extend outside of the ownership of property, into political agencies and employer associations (Encel, 1970: 315). A similar pattern of analysis was applied to the business elite in Australia during the 1940s-50s. The connection between ruling families and business is identified by the role that the possession of inherited private wealth played in investment and production of the Australian industrial sector (Encel, 1970: 378). Encel traced how marriage and social connections provided the grounds for inherited fortune, arguing that this explains the centralised character of control in the Australian context (Encel, 1970: 376-389). This develops an analysis of the business elite as a history of ruling families. Within Barrow's (1993) typology this is comparable to social analysis, as it identifies how social connections at a familial and social level generate elite membership.

Neo-Capitalism in Australia (Playford, 1969) identified the rise of the modern corporation and the concentration ('monopolisation') of economic surplus. It argued that the 'social process of production and a private form of appropriation' (Playford, 1969: 5) have intensified since the 1950s. It also explained that neo-capitalism is distinguishable from monopoly capitalism, to the extent that state and economic power have become entwined by virtue of being jointly administered by elite corporate management. The Playford approach therefore used a blend of positional analysis, identifying corporate 'monopolisation', and social analysis, in order to demonstrate how elite cultural practices were used to deepen the collaboration between the state, corporations and labour. An instrumentalist approach to state analysis is also employed in contemporary work, for example in the edited book *Ruling Australia* (Hollier, 2004) where the methods of instrumentalist analysis are applied to new research in power analysis (Hollier, 2004: xiii-xli).

Instrumental approaches to the state have an important legacy in considering Australia's distinct political economy. There is much merit in tracing the way in which groups of persons agglomerate power for their

own interests. Without such an approach, we would be forced to blame the ‘cosmic ballet’ of capitalism and its processes for the outcomes experienced within Australian society. We should instead acknowledge that we live in a political system where people enact and organise society under socially defined power relations. In tracing the distinct groups of persons who organise and shape private ownership, we can begin to see society as a constellation of human interests, rather than merely gravitational forces; although structural understandings of Australia’s political economy have distinct advantages, as is detailed below.

Structuralist approaches to the (capitalist) state in Australia

As was discussed, instrumental approaches to the state before the 1970s had concerned themselves with questions relating to elite groups and property rights in Australia. However by the 1970s, notions of a ‘national interest’ were beginning to break down, creating the space for a new forms of political consciousness. Within federal politics, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s program of ‘New Nationalism’ forged a divergent path from the established political consensus, coupled with the rise of new social movements, especially the Anti-Vietnam war movement (Pender, 2005). This raised a new and startling question: what did it mean to practise radical politics within the Australian political economy?

At the heart of this debate were three influential figures and two main works. Humphrey McQueen wrote *A New Britannia* as an assault on the Old Left, especially figures in the radical nationalist tradition, who championed the egalitarian nature of Australian unionism and the Labor Party. McQueen exposed the hidden imperialism underpinning the Australian labour movement, which included a deeply held racism. Connell and Irving, University of Sydney academics in the Department of Government, had collaborated at the Sydney Free University and decided upon producing a generative history of Australian capitalism: *Class Structure in Australian History* (1980). The work interrogated the historical development of Australian class relations as a site of class formation and struggle.

Both works identified the state as an arena of struggle, and a mediator of crisis within the structuralist framework. However, McQueen’s focus (1970/2004) on global processes emphasised the state as mediator of crisis.

McQueen's (1970/2004) analysis also suggested that instrumentalist approaches to state power could be used to advance a pro-capitalist, nationalist politics. A nationalist and populist conception of the state as a neutral assemblage of agencies, he suggested, has historically served to support a reformist advocacy of the use of state power. McQueen was primarily concerned with explaining how instrumentalist approaches to the state are a form of ideology, serving the mediating role of the state. McQueen also took a global perspective on the role of the Australian state in extending the interests of British imperialism. Connell and Irving (1980), from the nationalist perspective of social resistance, tended to focus on the structuralist aspects of the state as an arena of struggle between social classes. They accepted a structuralist conception of the state as inherently capitalist. They also argued that, nonetheless, the capture of state organisations had been used to implement social reform in Australia – that is that the state could be captured – in part, for a time, and for a specific purpose in which capitalists could see advantage for themselves – by classes other than capitalists. Theirs was a domestic focus on the role of the Australian state as an arena of class conflict, within the conditions of economic crisis and uneven development. While McQueen's conception of the state lends itself to ideological critiques of state action and an international perspective, Irving and Connell accept the capitalist state as a reality of radical strategy and take a nation-state vantage of analysis.

McQueen (1970/2004) identified the Australian state from a global perspective as serving to extend the process of capitalist expansion internationally. For this reason, he argued that the formation of the Australian state and the development of British imperialism must be understood as interconnected developments. This understanding is unlike that of Fitzpatrick, who saw Australian democracy as a victim of foreign interests. McQueen saw the Australian state as 'an over-anxious partner' (McQueen, 1970/2004: 21) in imperialist processes:

Australia's prosperity, based on wool and gold, was the prosperity of expanding capitalism. Geographically, Australia was a frontier of European capitalism in Asia. The first of these circumstances gave rise to the optimism that illuminated our radicalism; the second produced the fear that tarnishes our nationalism (McQueen, 1970/2004: 3).

In substantiating this claim, he analysed Australia's role in the annexation of New Guinea, and the support for the British in the Sudanese War, Boer War, the Boxer Rebellion and the Great War. For McQueen, these

examples revealed Australia's efforts to assert itself as a sub-imperial 'new Britannia' in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the afterword to *A New Britannia*, McQueen (1970/2004) argued that acknowledging different bases of accumulation in succeeding periods is the best way to understand the historical development of the Australian capitalist state. He identified four periods: Merchant Capital (around 1606); Mercantilism (1788-1830s); Free Trade (1830s-1870s); and Monopolising Capital (1870s onwards). He then noted how the various epochs relate to the developments of the labour market and the Australian Labor Party or ALP (Australian Labour Party until 1912). Implicit in this analysis is the instability of accumulation regimes within global capitalism, and the need to establish economic and class strategies within a state (or in this case the relationships between six colonies, until federation in 1901) to resolve crisis. This is typical of the structuralist approach to the state as a mediator of crisis identified by Barrow (1993).

In an interesting turn, McQueen argued that the instrumentalist approaches to the state serve an ideological purpose favouring the capitalist state. Two examples of this are his analysis of national identity and his analysis of the emergence of class struggle in Australian history. For McQueen, notions of national identity are an ideological mediation of the Australian state. For example, racism is understood as an ideological extension of Australian nationalism. Having noted that nationalism serves the interests of imperialism in an Asian context, and that racism serves to promote exclusivity, he notes the continuity between nationalism, militarism and racism in 'the destruction of the [Aboriginal people], the dominance of the Pacific, and the fear of Asiatic invasion' (McQueen, 1970/2004: 31). Therefore, nationalism and racism are shown to be ideological expressions of both the Australian capitalist state and its interests. This serves to demonstrate that racism is a form of ideological power that permeates conceptions of nationalism, frontier settlement, militarism and nationalist art (McQueen, 1970/2004: 1-110). This was critical for McQueen's advance of an alternative 'progressive nationalist' tradition founded on anti-racism and collective organising (Marks, 2011).

In the discussion of the history of the labour movement, McQueen argued that reformism is a consistent feature manifested throughout the development of the Australian state. In the context of the development of state support for capitalism, he identified the 'petit-bourgeois' consciousness driving mythologies surrounding Australia's immigrants,

convicts, diggers, selectors and democrats (McQueen, 1970/2004: 117-187). This was defined as 'state socialism' but, as McQueen argues, was a utopian ideology (McQueen 1970/2004: 191-4) used to advance a model of state interventionism particular to capitalism in Australia (McQueen, 1970/2004: 188-210). He also explored how the rise of unionism and the ALP, from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, served as conflict mediation strategies of the Australian capitalist state, ultimately producing a working class that was incapable of revolutionary aims and restricted to reformist parliamentarian strategies. In popular consciousness, state intervention was conceptualised as a form of socialism. This was used to elaborate McQueen's thesis that an ideological commitment to socialism was deployed as a popular platform to advance the interests of the Australian state (McQueen, 1970/2004: 188-209). This argument conforms with Barrow's (1993) discussion of ideology as an explanatory tool for structuralist theories of the state. These examples showcase how McQueen applied structuralist approaches to the state to identify Australia's place in the expansion of global capitalism. It also exposes the ideological role that nationalist and popular identifications of the state as a 'captured' assemblage of agencies served in promoting crisis mediation within the state.

Class Structure in Australian History (Connell & Irving, 1980) proposed that instrumentalist and structuralist approaches to the state are both important in understanding the nation-state vantage of the capitalist state in Australia. They identified the state as 'an instrument of oppression [...] and the] product of class antagonisms' (Connell & Irving, 1980: 22). This was reflected in their consideration of the differences between state organisations and the social relations of the state. They argued that the sphere of the state underlies and has a constitutive role in the formation of capitalist class relations. However, they suggested that the agencies of the state, by which these relationships are produced, can be captured, transforming the state form.

This led to the theoretical conclusion in *Class Structure in Australian History* (Connell & Irving, 1980: 1980) that instrumentalist and structuralist conceptions of the state are interrelated, and that the history of class structure is necessarily a history of the struggle for state power. The mobilisation of populism and nationalism is seen to be a material strategy, from the historical perspective of structuralist analysis. While McQueen (1970/2004) treated populism and nationalism as an 'ideological' project, Connell and Irving materialised the problem as

concerning the structure of Australian class society in relation to the necessity of state power. As they argue:

Throughout Australian history, capitalists have attempted to *use* the state to control the price of land, control immigration, etc., to ensure a supply of wage labourers; and conversely workers have petitioned, pressured, and eventually attempted to *capture* state power in order to 'civilise capitalism' – or abolish it (my italics, Connell & Irving, 1980: 22).

A hallmark of this thesis is Connell and Irving's (1980) analysis of class formation emergent from combined aspects of the convict and settler labour market. The Australian state, they argued, produced a contradictory labour market (during the 1788-1840 period) emerging from the dual production of the convict-assignment smallholder production economy in the pastoral industry, alongside the production of an emergent mercantile wage-labour relationship emanating from urbanising townships and cities (Connell & Irving, 1980: 51). While both are identified as components of the capitalist mode of production, they emphasised the specificity of capitalism in Australia emerging from a coerced smallholder economy in conflict with the small-scale production in the urban economy. The contesting accumulation strategies between these sectors led the capitalist class (squatters and mercantile capitalists) to move towards state power to secure their economic interests. In the context of labour, they noted that convict rebellion was limited by the growing replaceability of convict labour with wage-labour, generating class formation that favoured the dominance of wage labour over convict labour. This account stands as a counter-response to McQueen's (1970/2004: 125) argument that the convicts were lumpen-proletariat. It demonstrated that convicts' class position, rather than their consciousness, determined the formation of the Australian class structure. This successfully contributed to Connell and Irving's (1980) situational accounts of agency by showing the limits applying to class actors within a given structural social relationship.

The specificity of the Australian state formation in *Class Structure in Australian History* was used to describe the development of the class-structure in the colonial convict/wage worker labour market. This marked another departure from McQueen (1970/2004). While McQueen argued that Australia was a sub-imperialist state, Connell and Irving (1980) stressed the specificity of the internal-development of the Australian state. As they go on to say:

For all its influence and the undoubted continuities, the British State was not completely transplanted into Australia. The state as a set of social relations simply cannot be lifted from one spot and set down in another—it has to be constructed, or reconstructed in new conditions. In Australia this construction was undertaken deliberately, using the resources of the British State, and modelled on many of its features, but departing from the model in a number of ways (Connell & Irving, 1980: 32).

This demonstrates how, while the Australian state was pressed to protect continuing British imperialist interests in the Asia-Pacific (as claimed by McQueen, 1970/2004), it is possible, using a model of periodisation, to engage with the Australian state in a historically specific manner. Crucially, this reveals the reconcilability of McQueen's (1970/2004) focus on the periodisation of the world system, with a nationalist perspective on class formation, which is the principal concern of Connell and Irving (1980). There was a tension between the continuing British imperial interests and the local processes of state formation.

Finally, an analysis of the emergence of organised labour, especially the origins of the ALP, reveals in Connell and Irving (1980) a stress on historical contingency that is necessary to complement McQueen's (1970/2004) structuralist analysis. The entirety of *A New Britannia* can be seen to demonstrate McQueen's structuralism through the exploration of parliamentary reformism. Thus, McQueen describes the ALP as 'the highest expression of a peculiarly Australian petit-bourgeoisie' (McQueen, 1970/2004: 249). In contrast, Connell and Irving identified the ALP as a 'product of class-mobilisation under hegemony' (Connell and Irving, 1980: 30). Specifically, they argued that: 'a mobilising working class creates a form of power that is collectively based and experienced in the capitalist mode of production' (Connell and Irving, 1980: 195). In the form of parliamentary representation, this power creates a contradictory experience of 'extra-capitalist power', but also integrative power within the confines of the capitalist state. In the Australian context, class mobilisation was restricted within the confines of the capitalist state because of the state's control over the organisation and reproduction of the labour market. This is clearly both a rejection of the historic narratives of the Old Left and the expression of a more nuanced structuralist conceptualisation, than characterises McQueen's perspective, of the non-neutrality of state agencies as an arena of struggle. The structural approach to the Australian state has been useful in identifying the deeply embedded

nature of social actors in the economy. By seeing property rights and elite groups in their specific historic form, the Australian political economy could be uniquely grasped as extensions of world historic and local processes.

Conclusion

McQueen (1970/2004) and Connell and Irving (1980) utilised a structuralist conception of the Australian state to explain the development of class relations. McQueen located how instrumentalist mythologies of Australian nationalism strengthened the advancement of state power (in the form of parliamentary politics). Connell and Irving (1980) identified the instrumentalist aspects of the state as a material engagement of class struggle within the state as it is understood by the structuralists. Both books utilised a periodisation of the structuralist state to explain the development of Australia. This led McQueen to focus on a global perspective of class formation. Connell and Irving focused on specifying the Australian state as an arena of struggle. They produced a periodisation of how conflict between social classes translated into periods of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic mobilisation within the state. The authors' respective assessments of structuralist state theory are complementary, offering global and nation-state perspectives on capitalism in Australia. They also serve to advance contesting accounts of the role of nationalism in relation to the state, and the interests it is capable of representing.

Instrumentalist and structuralist theories of the capitalist state have largely been defined in terms of an oppositional dichotomy. The state, it is posited, is either an instrument of class power, or a structuralist assemblage of the interests of capital. However, neither approach seems independently adequate to analyse the existing relationship between structure and agency. For example, in a capitalist economy, it is conceivable that economic logics compel social beings to act in materially-defined ways. And yet, as autonomous social actors, individuals have the capacity to challenge and contest their respective political situation(s). The complexity of the state as both a material and theoretical problem creates greater difficulties. State processes are necessarily social and uneven, while inherently predicated on the ownership of things, waged labour and the production process (Wells, 1989). Seen as a more complex whole, a combination of

instrumentalist and structuralist approaches to the state helps us to imagine both material and abstract articulations of the state, and thus, radical ways of reimagining the existing political economy. The long shadow of the 1970s stands as a high watermark for intellectual thought and political action; In this regard, the New Left represented a defining cultural renaissance in critiquing Australian capitalism.

Llewellyn Williams-Brooks is a PhD student in the Department of Political Economy at the University of Sydney; and a winner of the 2016 JAPE Young Scholars Award.

lwil5730@uni.sydney.edu.au

References

- Barrow, C. W. (1993), *Critical Theories of the State: Marxist, Neomarxist, Postmarxist*, University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin.
- Connell, R. W. (1977), *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Connell, R. W. & Irving T. (1980), *Class Structure in Australian History*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.
- Encel, S. (1970), *Equality and Authority: a Study of Class, Status and Power in Australia*, Tavistock Publications, Melbourne.
- Fitzpatrick, B. (1939), *British Imperialism and Australia: 1783–1833*, Sydney University Press, Sydney.
- Fitzpatrick, B. (1941), *The British Empire in Australia: An Economic History 1834–1939*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Fitzpatrick, B. (1946), *The Australian People: 1788–1945*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Fitzpatrick, B. & Wheelwright E. L. (1965), *The Highest Bidder: A Citizen's Guide to Problems of Foreign Investment in Australia*, Lansdowne, Melbourne.
- Hollier, N. (2004), *Ruling Australia: The Power, Privilege & Politics of the New Ruling Class*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne.
- Marks, R. L. (2011), Rejection, Redemption, Ambivalence: the New Left and Australian Nationalism (Doctoral Dissertation), La Trobe University.
- McQueen, H. (1970/2004), *A New Britannia*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane.
- McQueen, H. (1986), *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Racism and Nationalism*, Penguin, Victoria.
- Miliband, R. (1969), *The State in Capitalist Society*, Basic Books, London.

- Miliband, R. (1970), "The Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulantzas", *New Left Review*, Vol. 59, pp. 53–60.
- Miliband, R. (1973), "Poulantzas and the Capitalist State", *New Left Review*, Vol. 82, pp. 83–92.
- Pender, A. (2005), "The Mythical Australian: Barry Humphries, Gough Whitlam and 'New Nationalism'", *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 67–68.
- Playford, J. (1969), *Neo-Capitalism in Australia*, Arena Publications, Melbourne.
- Poulantzas, N. (1968), *Political Power and Social Classes*, NLB, London.
- Poulantzas, N. (1969), "The Problem of the Capitalist State", *New Left Review*, Vol. 58, pp. 67–78.
- Poulantzas, N. (1973), "On Social Classes", *New Left Review*, Vol. 78, pp. 27–54.
- Poulantzas, N. (1976), "The Capitalist State", *New Left Review*, Vol. 95, pp. 63–83.
- Tsokhas, K. (1986), *Beyond Dependence: Companies, Labour Processes and Australian Mining*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Tsokhas, K. (1990a), *Markets, Money, and Empire*. Melbourne University Press.
- Tsokhas, K. (1990b), "People or Money? Empire Settlement and British Emigration to Australia, 1919–34", *Immigrants & Minorities*, 9(1), pp. 1–20.
- Wells, A. (1989), *Constructing Capitalism: An Economic History of Eastern Australia, 1788–1901*. Allen & Unwin.
- Wheelwright, E. L. (1957), *Ownership and Control of Australian Companies: a Study of 102 of the Largest Public Companies Incorporated in Australia*, Law Book Company of Australasia, Sydney.
- Wheelwright, E. L. & Miskelly, J. (1967), *Anatomy of Australian Manufacturing Industry*, Law Book Company, Sydney.

PROGRESS IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

Progress in Political Economy is the blogsite of the Department of Political Economy at the University of Sydney.

It features regular posts by leading Australian and international scholars on a range of themes in critical political economy and global governance.

Recent contributions include posts on topics such as theorizing the contemporary nature of strike action; accumulation in a post-industrial ecology; transcending neoliberal policies to address climate change; and the political economy of HECS.

<http://ppesydne.net>