

# The State in Times of Coronavirus: The pendulum of the "Illusory Community"

Álvaro García Linera

**Abstract:** In 2020 and for months, about 3.9 billion people around the world have stopped most of their economic, educational and recreational activities to slow the spread of a virus. Neither the call for a general strike nor the presence of gigantic repressive armies were needed to instantly freeze the processes of capitalist accumulation in half the world and leave the main cities deserted. Everyone answered the call of their states, an institution apparently in extinction, but which was the only one that came in the midst of a global panic, giving rise to what the IMF called the "great reclusion," which in reality is a euphemism for a suspended capitalism. This protagonism of the State, and also of society, above the markets and the value chains has revealed the limitations and failures of a good part of the current conceptualizations of this elusive and omnipresent social relationship called the State. Likewise, the link between the state form and globalization, imagined as antithetical, or the belief in the overcoming of capitalism without collective and physical action to replace it, are shown to be unhelpful in understanding the present and the horizon of possible courses of action. This transitional quality of the historical moment, due to its compressed intensity, challenges the consistency of theoretical frameworks whose fragility goes unnoticed in quiet times. This article criticizes some of the predominant conceptions of the State, the relationship with society and globalization, in counterpoint with the heavy reality of the events that took place.

**Keywords:** State - Globalization - Pandemic - Community

For the first time in human history, vast numbers of people across the world have agreed to abandon their paid activities, to stop attending public gatherings, and confine themselves in their homes for weeks and months. We are living in a kind of general planetary strike which has paralyzed most of the transport, commerce, production, and services.

People have accepted confinement when asked to do so by their state institutions which justify the measure as a way to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Two relevant questions, in the face of this planetary social fact, are, 1) how has it been possible for people to abruptly agree to suspend most of their paid work and their recreational and social activities in light of this call of the State? And, even more intriguing, 2) how is it possible that the State, which is supposed to be subordinate to reproducing the capitalist economic order,<sup>1</sup> decides to suspend the expanded reproduction of capital, placing health "above economic accumulation"? The answer which says that this is a decision aimed at "maintaining the reproduction of capitalism in the long term" assumes

.....  
<sup>1</sup> Bonnet 2017.

that governments are in command of the historical consciousness of capitalism. How is it that the US and British governments initially acted as the opposite of that historical consciousness? These are inconsistent responses that presuppose an intention prior to the factual reality of the events and, whose logic leads, in the end, to suppose that breathing is also a way of ““guaranteeing the reproduction of capital.””

In fact, most of our definitions of what the State is do not help us understand this extraordinary reality that entirely involves the state relations. It is as if the crisis unleashed by COVID-19 had caused many of the categories with which we analyze reality to burst.

Certainly, information about the existence of a lethal disease first appeared in the media through medical specialists who explained about the dangerousness and speed of the spread of the virus detected in other countries. Since mid-January 2020, journalists, international health institutions, and academics<sup>2</sup> have been talking about different ways to contain the virus. They even mentioned the technique of confinement as an emergency response. However, these were comments without any binding force.

Even when the contagions began to appear in many countries, not even the alarm of specialists and opinion leaders resulted in voluntary confinement. People were waiting for the authorized voice of the government to agree to the extreme measure. In some countries such as the United States,<sup>3</sup> Brazil,<sup>4</sup> and England<sup>5</sup> it happened that while all the recognized medical references raised immediate quarantine, their leaders opted for ambiguity or the refusal to implement isolation; it was recommended weeks later because of social pressure against government officials and workers against employers. Finally, the quarantine became effective, but only when the official authorities of the State decided to do so.

### **The state as a community**

What power did the State use to achieve something apparently impossible, such as putting the brake on the maddened vertigo of modern societies? There is no doubt that the panic of the risk of death has catalyzed state efficiency. But compliance with the social isolation decreed by governments does not have to do only with the centralized information that they have, since the arguments they used to justify the

2 <https://www.who.int/es/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline---COVID-19>.

3 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/04/05/worst-president-ever/>

4 <https://www.semana.com/mundo/articulo/coronavirus-jair-bolsonaro-critica-cuarentena-y-hace-lla-mado-a-los-brasilenos/664521>

5 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/30/five-already-dead-by-time-uk-reported-first-coronavirus-death>

quarantine had already been used previously by medical specialists and by other governments affected early by the virus, without this affecting the self-isolation of societies with still small numbers of infected people. So the idea that the power of the State is born from centralization or information advantage does not work.

It is clearly noted that the resources and personnel dedicated to centralizing society's information (on property, income, debts, crimes, on economic functioning, on social mobility or political activities, among others), make the state gear work, but they don't define it.

The Weberian monopoly regarding the monopoly of coercion<sup>6</sup> does not help much either because closing factories or shops paralyzes the generation of family economic income for an entire society. It is a measure that interrupts the only source that people must guarantee their material means of life and blocks his personal career developed over decades. And for more than 3,000 million people<sup>7</sup> to accept the temporary paralysis of their social destiny without any argument other than coercion and jail, it would require 3,000 million police and military to be behind each citizen, forcing them to comply with the quarantine, which is impossible. The social magnitude of global atrophy was so massive that no monopoly of coercion has the means or the personnel to impose it on its own. The addition of "legitimate" coercion is not enough either, because although a social tolerance to the centralized use of violence is required to force compliance decided by the government, it can only be exercised if it is applied to a part of society, for reasons of "public order" (subversion, delinquency, and others); it is unsustainable if it is applied to the whole of society since there is no longer a subject of legitimation that supports the use of coercion.

The Germanic legal tradition that focuses the power of the State on the existence of a legal order<sup>8</sup> or on the associativity of political wills endowed with the power of domination,<sup>9</sup> is not enough to explain the events either, since most of the current suspension of the social world has been done without the support of laws, and even in some cases, by suspending the constitutionally guaranteed right to travel. As it seldom happens, the law and the norms have been liquefied by the speed of political events without, for this reason, the legality of the State's decisions escaping the moral evaluation of the citizens. Today the law is starkly displayed, in the face of the health emergency, as a second-term consecrator of a relation of legality beliefs produced by the tolerances and licenses shared by most people.

6 Weber 1998.

7 Read: <https://www.infobae.com/america/agencias/2020/03/25/mas-de-3000-millones-de-personas-instadas-a-confinarse-por-pandemia-balance-afp/>

8 Kelsen 1992

9 Jellinek 2017

Certainly, there is no State without a legal order, but it is not the legal order that gives rise to the State.

Jessop's proposal that the State is the set of institutions whose socially accepted function is to make binding decisions<sup>10</sup> does not precisely explain the singularity of the current situation in which these State institutions are socially "allowed" to apply binding decisions. Where did that attribution come from? Who gave them that power and why? Bourdieu analyzes the same decisive element of the concentration of the basic consents of a society by proposing that, in addition to coercion, the "monopoly of symbolic violence"<sup>11</sup> is characteristic of the State form. Beyond the fact that the State is not the only source of symbolic violence (it is present in other social nodes such as business corporations, the family, and so on, the central issue is how the State managed and still manages to administer and permanently renovate its ability to define the dominant patterns with which society understands reality which, in turn, determines the way in which society relates to the State. Why does society allow this to happen? The reference to a harsh violence that is seen as the founder of an imposition that was later settled, forgotten, and updated as soft violence, reduces the power of the State to an old abuse, later forgotten, which would require falsehoods and updated impostures to maintain itself over time. And if, in addition, these types of violence are the only ones that the subordinate classes have to locate themselves in the world, we are facing a collective deception that is self-perpetuated by the action of the subordinates themselves. If the State was only a permanent deception, it would be enough to disillusion ourselves to make the State disappear, which is a naive reading of the reality of political power. And if the mental structures of the dominated are only an effect of domination, then the rebellions that break into history would be only an illusion.

There is no doubt that the State subjects society to logical and moral ways of ordering the world hierarchically with which the same society is linked to the State, instantly recognizing its authority; but this does not explain how societies have forced some States to decree quarantine when they did not wish to do so. If the monopoly of symbolic power were so constitutive, the mismatch between social beliefs and state emissions would not have occurred. The replacement of the instrumentalist reading of the State, which conceives it as a mere tool of the dominant classes, by an instrumentalism of mental structures, is powerless to explain the active presence of subordinates in the State and the grammatical quality of the logical, moral, and procedural precepts with which the dominated, in exceptional moments, locate themselves

.....  
10 Jessop 2017

11 Bourdieu 2014, p.14, 174

and produce a social reality beyond the domination of the State and the dominated mental structures.

It is not enough, therefore, to find the nucleus of state functioning, neither in its monopolies of coercion, nor in dominated mental schemes nor in its territorially binding decisionism. It has to be found in the social authorization to be able to monopolize binding decisions.

The organization of the fear of death, produced by a microorganism of genetic material has, in this case, more elements of explanatory reason than the authority of the State.

Elías looks at the containment of externally induced fear of death as the articulating fact of the acceptance of the formation of the coercive and tributary monopolies of the modern State.<sup>12</sup> But this explanation is just applicable to the generation marked by permanent wars of territorial plunder; but it does not help to explain why state formation is reproduced by the actions and expectations of new generations distant from the din of extermination battles.

In the case of the current pandemic, the containment of the fear that it generates could have been channeled, for example, by the temporary purchase or rental of hospital spaces for those who have money, and the seclusion and repression of those who try to interfere with this allocation of care. In fact, this is the proper market response to a pandemic. But the most certain thing is that this response would have unleashed popular uprisings which would have posed a higher threat to wealthy families than that of contracting the virus.

The solution to this shared risk was then to demand and wait for a state solution. But why?

The State is a common belief in the protection of everybody through public resource. Before, it meant the expectation of collective protection against wars, invasions, violent death, and also the hope of a safeguard against collective misfortunes, economic catastrophes, losing positions. At this moment, the State represents the promise of protection against the risk of death from the virus.

It is in collective responses to constitutive fears (Dubu<sup>13</sup>) where we can find decisive clues about the origins and functioning of States. But the State is not the same as fear. The fear of invasions, misery, the loss of possessions, the plague, allows a community of affected people to become a political community when everyone decides to accept a common way of organizing resources that allows to stop, mitigate, defeat imminent or perceived primary fears. It is not the fear or the defense against it what makes a political community. It is precisely the belief and the practical action of consolidating, or tolerating, an organization of

.....  
12 Elías 1989, pp. 626-27

13 Dubu 1995

common means to overcome this or other adversity that gives rise to a society's political moment.

Therefore it is not only a belief of collective goods for the common protection; it is also a material reality of organizing a form of management of the common (government, parliament, ministries, legal apparatus, permanent coercive apparatuses); it is a material reality of having resources and common goods for protection (initially taxes, then public goods, services, savings, among others), consequently, it is a way of directing the common; and it is also discursive ways of territorially delimiting the community of beliefs (school system, national identity, recognition systems, state legitimacies).

We are not facing any belief without verifiable materiality. They are performative beliefs that create the institutional and material order that they enunciate, but they are also beliefs derived from developing material realities. Therefore, they are beliefs of a type of political community validated by the territorial material realities. Hence, we can speak of the State, *at first*, as a political community of beliefs, tolerances, and actions on common life objectified by rights and common material resources arranged for that purpose. Those beliefs have a univocal binding effect on all the people of a specific territory.

For this reason, faced with the risk of death or catastrophe, the formative bond of associativity develops. This bond has been channeled and appropriated by the State form. Hence, when the members of society panic, they interpellate the State first: firm and effective measures of medical protection, a guarantee of access to basic services, food, support for economic activities, credits, donations, were some of the demands. The State arose from a demand for collective protection; each month society financially contributes to sustain it. The State guards the assets considered as common to all members of society and, accordingly, the State is the institution to which society turns to when there is a danger that threatens everyone.

No one can escape this principle of primary social protection, not even those who, days ago, demanded a reduction of the State to its minimum components and the final triumph of the markets over statist populism. Despite their arrogance and private wealth, they can't escape the fear of a democratic wave of contagion which may sweep everyone with relative equality.

However, beyond the constitutive fears that starkly reveal the core of the state relations, the State regularly functions as a material reality and normative belief because it manages socially shared and collectively owned resources, such as basic services like public health systems, official education, environment, natural resources, currency, citizen security, property protection, taxes, social savings, public companies and others. That is why the moments of greatest social cohesion or degree of adherence of society to state structures have occurred at the time of

the expansion of rights or at the moment of democratization of goods and public recognition obtained by the increase in the participation of the State in the generation of the Gross Domestic Product. In the case of the so-called welfare state of the last century, the world's States managed between 35% and 40% of national income.<sup>14</sup>

The budget cuts, the privatizations of public companies (in the areas of health or education), or the loss of monetary sovereignty that much of the world has experienced in the last 40 years, do not contradict this hypothesis of the source of state order; they show it in motion, as a process of expansion and reversibility. The fact is that the privatizations and cuts in social spending were never done in the name of making a few rich people richer (as in reality it happened); but under the slogan of saving society from supposedly "loss-making" public companies that only benefited some leaders; or in the case of health and education, because citizens deserve a more efficient educational and medical system, the result of competition between medical offers and the "free" choice of spending by citizens. In fact, this meant the medical abandonment of millions of people and the devaluation of public education in the labor market. But until these results were seen dramatically, there is no doubt that the ideology of "personal merit" or of enthusiasm for "free choice" or the illusion that everyone could enrich themselves by competing individually by being entrepreneurs, not only took hold as a popular prejudice, but as a certainty that it was the best way to "democratize wealth."

In this cultural environment, when the State itself dismantled its own wealth, it did so in the name of the State's protective social nature. It was said that it was the best way to guarantee the well-being of all. When the neoliberal rhetoric argued that a public company is inefficient because its revenues are always postponed and that it is better to be the private owner of a piece of that company or, better, to have tomorrow's profits in advance today, that same rhetoric was sustained by appealing to the benefit of all (which is the key to accessing state legitimacy); but now in an individual code or language that was no longer collective.

Thus, the privatization's time did not mean a displacement of the State, but a new form of State characterized by the decline of social rights, the expansion of its coercive actions, the reinforcement of its discursive functions and the class redistribution of its assets.

The State organized, defended, and legitimized the private expropriation of public property; it was the State that transferred funds from public debt into private hands; the State dismantled the worker's protective system; the State triggered inflation to punish wages and confiscated the contributions of pensioners; the that spent millions and millions of dollars to transform the logical, procedural, and moral schemes of society in line with competitive individualism and, of course,

.....  
<sup>14</sup> For the European and the North American case see, Piketty 2019, pp. 548-549

the containment of disgruntled social classes. Markets and private investors do not have the territorially binding force of official decisions and political legitimacies. That is what the State has and that is why the States were the essential organizational support of the global neoliberal hegemony.

This attempt of private expropriation of the public has been taken to the limit. It has been a reckless way of tempting the abyss because over time the substantive belief of the State as administrator of common goods empties of verifiable material content. That is something that is going to explode at the beginning of the 21st century in Latin America and now in the whole world.

The heralds of free market and “the global village”, today, in the face of the pandemic and the global economic recession, appear as fervent upstart Keynesians.<sup>15</sup> It is clear that it is not an act of delayed repentance, but of strategic lucidity, since the social class in which they are grouped will also be affected in the volumes of their accumulative wealth, so it will require the State to relaunch it in the medium term. But also, the inevitable catastrophic mismatch between expectations of economic aid to popular sectors demanding collective welfare and the limited resources available can trigger protests that put a substantial part of their earnings, and even their own assets, at risk.

Thus, during catastrophes and the concentration of social expectations in government actions, the State initially appears as a political community of protection and collective direction sustained by rights, material resources, institutions, and beliefs around that protection. It is also constituted by a character binding and sovereign in a territory of the planet. It is a community of performative beliefs, community of collective material goods, community of institutions that organize the management of these ideas and common goods, thus give the State an ideal and material body. Therein lays the impulse of irresistibility or mode of social adherence of the State.

### **The community as a material illusion**

But it is not an absolute community, it is a community that is organized by monopolies and in this paradox resides its determination as an artifact of domination and irresistible.

The state form exists because there are shared assets, but administered monopolistically by a specific segment, permanent or changeable, of society.

The shared ideas (moral, logical, procedural, and instrumental

.....  
<sup>15</sup> FinancialTimes (<https://www.ft.com/content/927d28e0-6847-11ea-a6ac-9122541af204>); European Comision's vicepresident (<https://www.expansion.com/economia/2020/04/09/5e8ee878468aebbb708b45ef.html>), France's president (Le monde, París, 13 de abril de 2020), England's prime minister (<https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20200701/482040665312/boris-johnson-medidas-reino-unido-crisis-coronavirus.html>), etc.

principles with which people develop their daily lives in an implicitly coordinated way with other people) are enunciated and administered in a monopolistic way by a reduced piece of society, in exclusive formats, called official enunciation of the State. The public force protects property (large, small, material or incorporated as a labor force) but it is a specialized force, permanent and dependent on the government executive, that assigns itself the exclusivity of handling violence. The parliament gives normative body to the legal structure of the society, but it monopolizes the exclusivity of the deliberation with obligatory effect in all the territory of sovereignty. All taxes are paid as a basis for shared funds, but it is managed monopolically by a centralized bureaucracy that assigns by its own decision, and according to specific interests, the ways and use of these public funds. The public investment and the indebtedness that involves the destiny of at least two generations establishes expenses for all, but who of “all” will benefit the most and who will be hired to execute that disbursement, is decided monopolically by the State.

Public health and education are available to all members of society, but the available resources, the quality of the services, the educational contents are decided by a group of officials who have glances committed to certain factions of the society. The ideas about the official identity, the official language, the rituals of representation of the collective and the imagination of the nationality itself are monopolized in their construction by small intellectual blocks articulated around government resources, which will use that same molecular irradiation of the State to universally consecrate that particular way of seeing or signifying history and the world. The public wealth available to society in a collective, social and natural way, are there to be usufruct by all in the form of rights; but the way of distributing the usufruct is monopolically organized, regulated and justified by a governmental apparatus that will prioritize access to some sectors to the detriment of others, or will improve the opportunities to access some resources over others. As Marx well pointed out in relation to the state centralization of the requirements of life in common in the nineteenth century, “Every common interest was immediately severed from the society, countered by a higher, general interest, snatched from the activities of society's members themselves and made an object of government activity – from a bridge, a schoolhouse, and the communal property of a village community, to the railroads, the national wealth, and the national University of France.”<sup>16</sup> The point is how the state form is the historical process of a double monopolization: on the one hand, centralization or appropriation of the needs of life in common, of common resources, of the common efforts of a society; and on the other, monopolization of the monopolies that can be had in a delimited territorial environment.

.....  
<sup>16</sup> Marx 1980a, p. 253

The State always involves all members of society and their common ties, hence it's territorially binding quality. But by doing it in a way that is monopolized by the State administrators, it will do so by prioritizing, favoring, guaranteeing, protecting, and expanding certain interests of one part of society over others, of the economically dominant classes over the rest of the social classes.

Special rules, complex procedures, deadlines, guarantees, temporalities, seals, administrative labyrinths, all that universe of bureaucratic micro-powers used to simulate impartiality actually create a dark tunnel at the end of which the privileges are distributed as a result of an "administrative neutrality." Bureaucratic procedures are quite sophisticated technologies that transmute specific wills into universal ones. This labyrinth becomes even more complex if we also take into account that state monopolies are not fully pyramidal, but also present horizontal divisions between the legislative power and the executive power; between the executive power and the judicial power; within the executive power there are sub-monopolies with their relative autonomies and specialized liturgies, such as the armed forces, the intelligence services (that function as a quasi-sovereign State within the state); and vertically, between the different ways of territorial decentralization of power, which enable among all, another space of internal struggles of the State to expand their respective monopolies. In a certain way, the State is also a fragmented political world in multiple nuclei of power that demand agreements and concessions to act in coordination at certain times and on specific issues.

Saving the differences of geographical dimension and issues involved, the State is a power relation (such as the family, the church, or the market) where interests, views, criteria, and particular actions are transmuted into interests, looks, criteria, and universal actions to everybody. But there is a difference, the State has a territorialized power with the ability to demarcate or, if it is necessary, interfere in the management of the other powers.

This magical and mysterious faculty of making every particular become a universal with just a touch comes from the way of instrumentalizing this paradoxical reality of being a monopoly of common goods and resources. Then, the community dimension of the State is inverted as decisionism of the few over the goods of the many. Hence the State is a failed communitarianism. That is the reason why Marx defined the State as an "illusory community."<sup>17</sup>

.....  
17 Further, the division of labour implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another. And indeed, this communal interest does not exist merely in the imagination, as the "general interest," but first of all in reality, as the mutual interdependence of the individuals among whom the labour is divided (...) And out of this very contradiction between the interest of the individual and that of the community the latter takes an independent form as the State, divorced

And it is by this constitutive political mediation of the State that the common rights in order to be instituted, exercised, or applied have to be regulated by a structure of class social influences.

Of course, a state right is an individual power applicable to all members of a society without any discrimination, but class influence is present from the moment of selection of powers. It is not the same to convert free health into a right (that will require a gigantic investment and will mainly benefit the most humble) than to institute the right to remit the profits abroad (which, although it is a power exercisable by anyone, in fact it will only favor a handful of foreign companies). Or, in the legal drafting of the same right, it is very different if (in its specifications, characteristics, requirements, deadlines, and procedures) it has integrated reparations to those affected, has put conditions for its application, has taken into account favorable conditions for some to the detriment of others. In other words, it is very different if in the legal drafting of a law are compressed the intense hierarchical conflagration of interest of diverse social classes and class segments..

Each law and state decree has inscribed in the wording of each paragraph a compressed summary of the hierarchies of interests and political, economic and cultural influences that the different sectors of society have in the state bureaucracy in particular and in the State in general. Legality is thus a compilation of the interests and capacity for pressure possessed by social classes in the State, and which, therefore, exercise state power, state domination. The fact that in capitalist societies, the holders of great fortunes have much more power of influence than the rest of the social classes, is deduced from three relational components: firstly, from their ownership of larger volumes of the modern "general representative of wealth" (money) that allows them to reach more effectively influence in the different segments of the State: the presidency, the judiciary branch, the Armed Forces and the intermediate administration of the bureaucracy. This effectiveness can be seen in the financing of certain party's campaign, the shared business with elected officials, the proximity to inside information in exchange for money and the bribery for administrative or legal decision-making.

The second influence comes strictly from the administrative materiality of the State itself. Insofar as it is just a few people who make executive decisions, who consider the democratization of dispositions a waste of time or efficiency and, in general, these are individuals whose

.....  
from the real interests of individual and community, and at the same time as an illusory communal life, always based, however, on the real ties existing in every family and tribal conglomeration – such as flesh and blood, language, division of labour on a larger scale, and other interests – and especially, as we shall enlarge upon later, on the classes, already determined by the division of labour, which in every such mass of men separate out, and of which one dominates all the others. It follows from this that all struggles within the State, the struggle between democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy, the struggle for the franchise, etc., etc., are merely the illusory forms in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another. Marx 1980b, p. 14, 30,

sediment of experiences and world of obvious options is similar to those of the experiences and habits of those who also monopolize decisions about the fate of private companies and fortunes, then immediately generate a logical and procedural affinity of monopolies and State actions with the monopolies of business leaders.

And thirdly, if the entire life trajectory of society, of the disadvantaged subordinate classes, is framed by a set of logical ways of organizing production and material exchanges based on the logic of market value, if their daily actions take private property to be an innate evidence of reality and if, in addition, the horizon of future expectations is guided by the continuity of the fundamental structures of the prevailing order, then the elected rulers (the administrative bureaucracy of the State, regardless of their political affiliation) would have no cause to depart from the ways of thinking and acting which are guided by the dominant reason that already dictates the order of things, ideas, and the common sense of society.

If the state is a political form of society and society, in its real and imagined life, is embedded in the predominant order of capitalist relations, there is a structural complicity between a part of the possible courses of action adopted by the rulers (problems they see, the solutions they pose) and the prevailing courses of action and the possibilities that the capitalist economy drives. It is a collusion of class interests that does not require any coercion because it coincides with the dominant beliefs shared by all members of society about how the world should be generally organized. However, this collusion is not an equality of interest between actions of the State and capitalist relations because the nature of the State is founded on the production, centralization, and management of common resources and the capitalist relations of production are not. The common goods of society are the last limit that prevents the State from being an epiphenomenon or a mere derivation of the capitalist logic of mercantile value. Therefore, what happens is that there are the social coalitions that are formed to govern a state to cut these common goods (neoliberal regimes) and there are those which try to expand them (different forms of social, social democratic, “populist” leftist coalitions).

A variant of this structural collusion is F. Block’s proposal of “business confidence,”<sup>18</sup> considered as the mechanism by which capitalists influence government decisions, since their private investments affect employment rates, in the generation of wealth and, with it, the electoral popularity of the ruling coalition itself. This is a materialistic and practical reading of how the business classes intervene in state policies without the need to be directly present.

However, it is insufficient to explain the influence in the exceptional moments in which left or progressive forces take over the administration

.....  
18 Bock 2020.

of the State. In fact, the exceptionality of revolutionary leftist governments comes from the exceptionality of the moment, which is generally characterized by a crisis of the old party system, by a crisis of the prevailing system of ideas and, above all, by a crisis of the model economic dominant until then, which leads voters to demand new directions beyond the broken normality. Otherwise they would not have voted for the left. In these circumstances of social availability, governments depend much less on private investment to maintain their electoral support, and have at their disposal a vast menu of governmental tools, and social support, to regulate inflation through economic planning processes, increase the public investment, improve employment, selectively collect more taxes, nationalize large, highly profitable companies, promote other forms of social ownership of companies, etc. The one who does not dare to do so is not so much a structural limit as a mental and political limit of a left that in reality renounces being one. What there will be in that case will be a collusion of cultural horizons that leads these types of rulers to the same questions, and the same answers, as those of the economically dominant classes.

Rulers cannot pose problems whose solution is not emerging in the course of society itself. A left-wing government cannot be required to implement socialism in circumstances in which the course of collective reflection by society and the concrete actions of the subaltern classes have not actually raised these possibilities. In these circumstances, a left coalition should expand the commons goods, shore up new rights, distribute wealth, reduce inequalities, etc., but it will not be able to decree socialism. It is not enough to invoke socialism or communism many times or to nationalize all private services to overcome the logic of capitalism. That is the frustrating lesson of all the revolutions of the 20th century. Given this, the best bet to crack the coexistence of collective expectations with the capitalist horizon will be to promote the growing democratization of binding decisions (of the executive measures of the State) while waiting for this to awaken, in the debates and expectations of the classes popular, new courses of action possible beyond the framework of capitalist relations of production. In the end, the possibility that a revolutionary government can go beyond the social management of capitalist relations of exploitation will also depend on the impulse of the popular classes to consider different modes of organization of the economy, property and the use of wealth.

It is therefore no coincidence that every time Marx referred to communism as a new society capable of overcoming capitalism, he did so in terms of a “real movement which abolishes the present state of things” whose conditions of possibility are “of this movement result from the premises now in existence.”<sup>19</sup>

Returning to the relation between state organization and dominant classes, it is clear then that it is always a fluctuating relation of mediations

.....  
19 Marx 1980b, p.16; Marx 1981, pp. 564-569 Marx & Engels, 1988.

that require permanent framing processes. It is not a direct relation since it must permanently preserve its quality as administrator of common goods and rights to continue exercising its attraction and recognition by the rest of society.

The state monopoly is, therefore, the scene where a political economy of the construction of rights unfurls that prioritizes, hierarchizes, promotes, makes viable or segments some of them, and contains, slows down, hinders or repeals others. This is what can be called the “material condensation” of the state’s correlation of social forces,<sup>20</sup> which is the social substance of which state acts are composed. It is not that the State exists and then the different forces are involved in it hierarchically. The State itself is a living and moving hierarchy of the network of correlation of social forces that varies historically in its composition, depending on which group or social class is able to postulate its particular interests by integrating the interests of the rest of society; that is, to understand the social alchemy of the particular in the universal. For this reason, there is no class State in the sense that it belongs to it as property; because it only exists as a social reality if it integrates the care, wealth, and expectations of all; therein lies the source of its practical necessity and moral legitimacy. Likewise, there is no condensed social “correlation of forces” as a State-form having an only force, because in that case, the State would be the property of a class and the logic of its authority over the other classes could only be perpetual violence. That which belongs to a class is the leadership, the administration, the dominant beliefs, that is, the organizational and imagined materiality of the leadership of the state.

The historical processes of monopoly construction that continuously crystallize the social power correlations do not fracture the State precisely because it is done in the name of the primary statehood principle, which is the protection of common goods and rights. And it is through this inversion of the common that state power is established and, therefore, the struggle for state power.

Monopolies are a form and processes of appropriation of what belongs to everyone, but it is done in the name of protecting those assets of everyone. It is an illusion, but it is a well-founded illusion objectively sustained by the persistence of these common goods. For this reason, we speak of an “illusory community” because what it is common remains concentrated in a few hands as the capacity to command and direct those goods or sometimes as the private property of a part of them. For all these reasons, the State can be defined as a form of procedural organization of collective resources, collective needs, common beliefs, and the rights of a society through decision monopolies with binding effect on a territory.

.....  
20 Poulantzas 1979.

Rather, it is the way to organize the common life of a society, through territorially binding monopolies.

The fascination that the State provokes comes from its paradoxical condition of being for everybody, but administered by a few; of having control over the common resources of society, but bestowing the monopoly of their management on a few; of producing universal effects, but from particular decisions; to articulate all its citizens, but consolidating the domination of a class. Every state involves all the people of a society; It involves them from the payment of taxes, compliance with the rules, from the simplest things such as traffic rules or the most complex ones such as the use of an official paper as a general representative of wealth. In this sense, no one escapes the state relation, not even the most remote agrarian community or the most persistent anarchist. When we use money, when property is registered, when we send our children to school, when taxes are paid, when a right is exercised or when the struggle develops to extend rights, a part of the actions are always framed in a state logic of life in common. We are all in the State, we all participate in it because there is a part of everyone that is in the State. But this does not mean that we are on an equal footing. Some, the few, are in the position of decision-makers; they are the ones who exercise the monopoly. While others, the majority, feed the state fabric and have a capacity to influence (directly proportional to their resources such as monetary, cultural, political, family and inversely proportional to their class population density) the State. We are all traversed by the state fabric, by its correlation of forces, feeding it deliberately or unconsciously. But only those who run state monopolies can claim state representation.

In this blindness that can’t see the constitutive presence of the subaltern classes in the state relations lays the theoretical error and the practical impotence of all the instrumentalist readings of the State. They not only construct a magical image of the State as a thing, as a hammer in the hands of the bourgeoisie for the domination of an inert people, as a mere object of history. In addition, this reading awards to the monopoly and property of the ruling classes all that enormous set of struggles, resources, and means produced by work and nature which are a patrimony of all; which is a great relief to them. This perspectives can’t understand that the State is in the first place a way of relating between all people, it is a social relation, therefore, domination is a social fabric subject to correlation of forces capable of being modified, or dismantled, depending on the variation of that correlation of forces.

In summary, the State will never be an absolute socialized socio-political reality, a real community, because always, even in moments of maximum protagonist and leader presence of the popular classes in the State, there will be a sector that monopolizes the command. But at the same time, it will never be an absolute private monopoly, because the

state reality only works if there are common goods, rights and wealth that incorporate the subaltern classes.

What can happen depending on the historical contexts is that each of these two trends (real socialization or class privatization) approach their maximum expression, but without being absolute, like the asymptotes of a parabola or the ends of the arms of a horseshoe. Thus, it is possible to say that the more community of decisions, the less state monopoly; and the more monopoly of decisions, the less social presence in them. In a certain way, revolutions can be seen as a breakdown of social adherence that produces the imagination and the reality of commonality among all members of society. When those “above” abandon the pretense of having common things with those “below”; and those “below” see in their lives that they have nothing in “common” with those “above”, a revolutionary epoch arises which, in principle, is a new moral experience of the logic and procedures of the immediate world.

### **Cohesive State Monopoly**

Among all the state monopolies that are being built over time, there is one that, without having a heavy institutionalized material burden, in a certain way unifies all of them. We are talking about words and ideas with political power, that is: they influence all members of society in an irresistible and binding way. It is not only about the symbolic violence to which Bourdieu refers and which makes people think and act in relation to the State and society with the parameters that the State itself has arbitrarily instituted as schemes of practical understanding of reality; but also about the performative capacity of institutions<sup>21</sup> that possess those ideas and words.

We are referring to the capacity of official statements made by official state representatives to become objectively state actions that are territorially binding. This is the case of a law, decree, or presidential instruction that, once issued, immediately becomes a mountain of reports, studies, procedures, financial disbursements, labour activities, institutional events, all of which have practical effects on society as a whole.

Whether it is a new investment, the contracting of a public debt, the approval of a new law, a whole machinery of actions, beliefs, and material consequences is put into operation to implement it. The state is one of those few places where the idea and the official word become social materiality; where the world of ideas precedes the material world with lasting effects on the whole of society. These are relations of domination by acts of government decision.

Beliefs with power therefore produce two forms of domination: by induction, when by state authority they reveal and inhibit certain possible

.....  
<sup>21</sup> Searle 1997, p.113

courses of action that society might choose; and by decision, when the words of the state create a reality that is obligatory for everyone, including sometimes next generations, as in the case of public debts, wars, trade agreements, among others.

It is clear that this truth-effect and social matter contained in the state enunciations, have no force by themselves, as enunciations. They are only a wish if they are said by any normal citizen, and just declarations of an intention without power, if they are expressed by a public official as a comment. In order to have an effect of power they need to be enunciated from a specific place, the State, and within the framework of the official ritual and liturgy of the State. It is a power delegated through the formal system of hierarchies and influences of State's spaces. It is for this effectiveness, versatility and impact that it is one of the most precious assets for which political blocs with State ambitions compete.

But this monopoly also closes the circle of beliefs as a substantive political force. As we already mentioned, beliefs firstly came from society towards the political community as expectations of protection and rights. But now, beliefs are imposed from the State to society to impose themselves, no longer as ideas of society over itself, but rather as ideas of something that appears different from society because it monopolizes social things. This is the political fetishism of the state as a social reality.

It is, however, an incomplete or failed fetishism, as all fetishisms finally are, including that of the commodity. There is always a space for social beliefs about the State that do not come from the State, but from the society that has objectively opted for the protection and the rights to common goods. There are common material things that are in the State and, although they are managed to favor primarily a few, they also favor, partially, everybody. It is the principle of material reality of beliefs about the State – about its legitimacy and the tolerance of its arbitrariness, without which the power of the State would be an artifice, a ruse that would have no objective communitary foundation. Fetishisms always have fragilities, gaps, through which the verifiable materiality of the fetishized power itself filters.

Moreover, the force of belief-induction of the State power is not entirely its own force, emerging only from the State relations. In fact, it is a force of beliefs that is sustained on the utilisation or colonization by the State of other nodes of production of loyalties, other social institutions and non-state power relations, but which at specific moments and on specific issues are coupled by the discursive emissions of the State to replicate, amplify or validate them. These include the family, the churches, “public opinion”, the media, private research centres, civic associations, and companies, which are private centres that generate collective beliefs, to which the state establishes thematic interfaces of mutual benefit based on the established order; in such a way that these institutions make use of the state to territorially irradiate their precepts, while the

state makes use of the clientele of these private institutions to expand its own discourse. This is a coupling of legitimacies that allows the State to add to its public legitimacy the legitimacy of these private institutions, giving rise to a type of “externalisation” of the production of government political legitimacy.

The state does not encompass the whole of society, but temporarily and thematically makes use of the whole of society to impose its aims and objectives.

It is in this way that we have to understand the Gramscian definition of the State as “political society + civil Society” or “private “ organisms of hegemony.<sup>22</sup> State is therefore sometimes civil society to the extent that it supports, drives, or uses power relations and civil society institutions differentiated from the State to produce a dense network of cognitive assemblages that function as a structure.

These are the discourses and logics of patriarchal power, or the despotic relations of the factories, or the racist prejudices of a part of society, or, if necessary, the solidarity impulses of the trade unions and communities, or the proposals for social equality from centers of knowledge production, or in general, the pieces of “common sense” with which, for certain governmental purposes, the State links up to create a dominant common sense. This turns state issuing into social prejudice, giving the government greater legitimacy to act monopolistically in the direction of that collective prejudice.

This interdependence between the state and “common sense” should not lead us to confuse one with the other. State does not have a monopoly on common sense, because if it did, there would no longer be a civil society, instead it would be a self-referral of the State itself. The State is one of the producers of common sense to the extent that it sediments in society logical, moral and instrumental modes of long term life in common governed by the State; but there are more or less expanded areas of social life, such as the trade union, neighborhoods, companies, churches, the media, political groups, cultural institutions that create their own logic of action, their own socially and classically segmented moral judgments, which, over time, also create common sense. When the two constructions overlap, we have the dominant common sense.

Thus, the strength of the State has a source of renewed feedback in the very strength of civil society, which shows it as an ideal-material reality in movement, in a permanent process of construction. And precisely for this reason, because of these continuous renewals of the discourses of civil society, which are the result of molecular modifications of the correlations of forces within it, there are or can be logics of action, moral evaluations of things that exceptionally go beyond the State’s logic

.....  
22 Gramsci 1981-2000.

and that, on their own, create different ways of imagining what is common in society; new forms of sectorial organization of the handling of common problems and that, over time, could dispute the structure of order, the social hierarchies and beliefs existing in the State. In this exceptionality lie the shaping of mobilized social forces, which bring with them new common meanings, and other possible horizons of action that could have a transformative effect on the State.

In the end, the moral, logical, procedural, and instrumental schemes with which people adapt the whole of their world of practical actions to the dominant world have a functional duality: on the one hand, they function as a structure of regularities that enables an infinite but delimited space of possible options of action and imagination, in correspondence with the position in which the pre-existing and dominant social order has placed each person according to his or her origin and social trajectory. But on the other hand, and this is decisive for breaking out of domination, they function as a grammatical order of senses capable of producing, in exceptional circumstances such as those provoked by the pandemic and the world economic crisis, modes of combination and signification that go beyond, or further, up or down, the dominant order, making visible different possible courses of action than those of the mere reproduction of the dominant order.

That is also why hegemony is a way of articulating intellectual and moral leadership in society with the political direction of the State. Although the hegemony that is capable of developing a power block in the State goes from the “top” to the “bottom” in civil society, and the hegemony that builds an alternative social block is initially built interstitially from civil society; this fragmented course of hegemony can only be unified and fully realized from the State, because, at the end of the day, the State is the political commons that societies have. Thus, hegemony is much more than a mere discursive challenge, or a linguistic ability of a political project. From the government, it is a way of organizing the common material and imagined resources of a country. The political opposition proposes a different way of organizing the handling and use of these common resources, with the immediate effect of creating a practical and active new associativity of society itself, which assumes this result as a new common resource.

This allows us to understand the limits and restrictions that the progressive and revolutionary processes face when they reach the government. They usually do it in times of State crisis, which enables them to carry out a set of collective activities and availabilities that transform the correlation of political force, allowing them a series of initiatives of structural change, which are moderate in the case of emerging from electoral victories or radical when they are the result of insurrectional processes. But in both cases, the other spaces of social, economic, industrial, financial, and commercial power, and the very

burden of multiple components of the former common sense, which have not yet been affected by the cognitive crisis that accompanies every State crisis, impose an enclosure on the actions of the new governments. This is a material and ideological conservative power that, emerging from outside the State, seeks first to constrain, then to reverse, the governmental decisions of the newly emerging social bloc and, finally, to recover the direction of State power by any means. The restraint or defeat of these conservative forces is not only a matter of administrative decisionism, but above all, of articulating state actions with social force mobilized also outside the State, carrying the class struggle itself into each of these spaces of non-State power, starting with the factories, the enterprises, and also many of the very collective habits of the subordinate classes, inherited and sedimented by decades or centuries of domination. These are the moments that no longer reveal the State as the culmination or synthesis of political struggles, but as a result of society's own political qualification.

### **New scenes of State and society**

The pandemic has revealed the basic composition of the state relations by presenting it as the only and last social space of protection against the risk of death and economic catastrophe. International organizations and global markets have abdicated their prerogatives in relation to the State; globalised production is collapsing and companies are lining up to take refuge in public debt. The institutions that once drew on the creation of globalization over the State are now extending their hands in search of government benefits.

This is not a triumphant return, and certainly not a rebirth of the State, which as we saw, was part of the driving force behind the implementation of neoliberalism.

What is happening now is a moment of historical inflection that opens a new phase in the processes of stateisation of social life.

And it has been so since the moment in which the State has had the power to paralyse capitalist accumulation of profits in most of the world.

Stopping is not the same as replacing capitalism, but even so, the fact that the State has been able to temporarily suspend capitalist production, in some cases under social pressure as in England and the United States, speaks not only of a kind of State power rarely seen, but also of its limits because there are moments when society can impose itself on the State. In fact, today in some countries, the very relaxation of the care measures facing the pandemic or, in some cases, the lack of awareness, are emerging from sectors of civil society above State decisions.

### **The dispute over the fundamental State monopoly**

However, the quality of the era that has opened up is that of a State which is required in its role as protector of people and financier of economic resources to mitigate the economic recession.

Immediately between 5% and 30% of the countries' GDP has been mobilized in the form of new public debt and guarantees.<sup>23</sup> This is the beginning of a series of recurrent debts that will increase in the following months. In reality, the monopoly of fiscal expenses and public debt is the fundamental monopoly of the State that drives the movement of the other monopolies; and this will be the most visible at least during the time of repayment of the loan. A real planetary dispute for the economic surplus of an uncertain destiny is under way, exposed to intense social struggles.

As the State's income will decrease substantially due to the fall of taxes, caused by the paralysis of production, three will be the social subjects that will dramatically tense the correlation of forces to determine the uses of the new resources and to distribute the historical costs of this debt: the wealthy classes, popular sectors and the State's bureaucracy that absorbs between 10% and 30% of the labour force in most countries of the world.<sup>24</sup>

Given this, States will oscillate between one of the asymptotes of the State parable or the arms of the horseshoe consisting of more social democratization or more monopoly. Whether the State's performance is inclined towards one or the other pole must depend on the class struggles that strengthen its presence and its power of influence on the administrators of the State monopolies. And it is not only a question of which social bloc is or will be exercising State power, because of electoral victories or coups d'état. It will also depend on the strategic ability to influence other blocks and social segments with the capacity to mobilize and to produce discourse, which, as we have seen, can direct the actions of the State without necessarily being a block of power.

The subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 or the commodity crash of 2015-2016 show that extraordinary public resources can be transferred to the business elites to buy back stocks, raise private profits and nationalize deficits, all in the name of the common good, but cutting rights and stability for the majority. This happened where governments were neoliberal, society was demobilized and the cultural environment of Darwinian competitiveness prevailed. Today, facing greater losses in corporate profitability and higher volumes of debt, it will not be different if the three conditions mentioned above are maintained. For example, most of the two trillion dollars provided by the US State are destined to serve as liquidity for the repurchase of stocks and grants to private companies.

.....  
<sup>23</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Fiscal Policies for a Transformed World*, July 10, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> OCDE, *Government at a Glance 2019*; BID, *Panorama de las administraciones públicas América Latina y el Caribe 2020*

Whereas social aid is not meant to be an amplification of rights, but rather to temporarily avoid indigence increasing. Meanwhile, the central banks of each state, are tending to play the role of a risk insurance for large private investments, instead of democratizing current and future resources, which belong to everyone, by means of a universal income, universal health or the cancellation of family debts.

For the capitalists, this is a new form of class patrimonialization of public goods, which inevitably, in order to be sustained, has to be accompanied by new forms of social discipline, and strategies to contain popular discontent regarding these unjust distributions of public resources. The racialization of social dangers, together with the control of the pandemic through the monopolization of all the digitalized acts of people, will begin to be used in algorithmic political control and induction from the State. An example of this, and without much sophistication, is what has been happening in the midst of the quarantine in Bolivia, where the use of public goods as a class patrimony or a prolongation of property, together with the imprisonment of people who protest through social networks, has been more successful than the containment of the virus.

But where the correlation of political forces is inclined towards the popular sectors, where there are progressive governments and public opinion tending towards policies of equality, public resources are probably reasserting old social rights and extending them to new ones. In any case, an age of widespread social discontent has opened up where the deprivations of the subordinate classes will intensify with the loss of the aesthetic effect of the crisis mitigation actions. And the way in which this discontent is articulated with collective action and a horizon of possibilities will give the progressive or regressive quality of history.

In fact, the second relevant aspect of the new historical moment is that given the global cognitive stupor of conservative thinking vis-à-vis the speed of the pandemic and the paralysis of production, the ideas and proposals developed marginally within left-wing groups appear to be the only platforms of action that are feeding public debates and the decisions of States regarding the COVID-19 and the economic crisis, including right-wing governments.

Economic protagonism of the State, increased public investment, cancellation of the payment of the foreign debt, elimination of bank interest payments for small savers, universal basic income, social ecology, short-value chains and reindustrialization in essential areas, selective protectionism, nationalization of strategic economic activities, wealth distribution to reduce inequalities, extension of social rights, demercantilization of health, repatriation of fortunes from tax havens, planetary tax on transnational corporations for a universal health network, etc., proposals made years ago by the left and practiced in a partial way by progressive Latin American governments, which were accused of being irresponsible populists, now turn out to be the minimum

platform for public debate, for actions by the states and for a new planetary common sense.

This is the third relevant aspect of the moment: the porosity of society's ways of thinking, representing and acting which are generally highly resilient to change. The dominant schemes of locating oneself in the world, of judging the actions of people who accompanied the 40 years of neoliberalism, are now paralyzed by fear and catastrophic risks; people are stunned to ensure lasting certainties in this social order which is becoming increasingly unstable and chaotic. Governments and the dominant centers of discursive broadcasting are shocked by the sum of crises that are increasing over the months. The contingency of history, which always existed but was hidden behind a triumphalist mantle of free market, privatization, and globalization as the naturalized destiny of humanity, is today shown in all its unpredictability. And as the inevitable collective suffering caused by the pandemic and economic hecatomb increases in the coming months, an exceptional moment of collective willingness to revoke old beliefs, to replace aged certainties, to listen, to process new understandings, and new procedural and moral reasons for the organization of personal life and the world is becoming possible. It is a moment of propensity to some kind of cognitive epiphany capable of giving the imagined world a stable sense of destiny to engage the meaning of personal decisions; a period of collective desire towards new signifiers to stabilize each individual's world order.

But this willingness to revoke beliefs enables a range of options for all sides: from more authoritarian and unjust horizons to more communitarian horizons or, at the other extreme, to escape into magical and providential havens of "just punishment" to set humanity straight. It will not be long before this cognitive opening of society, this reconfiguration of common sense, is closed, giving way to a new long period of predominant logical, moral, and instrumental representations.

Facing this, critical thinking and the left-wing have a political obligation to help building a new common sense for a different way of organizing life in common both now and in the future, strongly based on justice, equality, permanent democratization, and community. For the moment, it has an ephemeral advantage which, in time, can be a burden, since its ideas mark the axis of generalized discussion on how to confront the crisis. But the demand for possible horizons of action is much greater than what has been proposed so far; and what is worse, there is a growing expropriation of their ideas by conservative and reactionary forces which, while inevitably distorting them, may take away the historical initiative from the left. The aperture to State spending, the extraordinary public indebtedness of governments previously proud of their strict fiscal discipline, is not a matter of conviction but of convenience for their own particular interests. The most certain thing is that a reduction in the costs of the wage bill will be achieved through state subsidies to the workers,

as long as the cash flows assigned by the State to capital are translated entirely into profits and not into investments.

The fact that late neo-liberalism wraps itself up in fragments of progressive thinking and appeals to certain protectionist measures, is suspicious to say the least. It is a rushed ideological transformism that, beyond being justified in an attempt to mobilize State resources for the revitalization of private accumulation, speaks of a disorder of the old cognitive order that sustained the neoliberal regime for 40 years.

### Globalization and the Nation State, free markets and protectionism, exchange value and use value.

One of the functions of crises is to reveal the pathetic reality of things. Since March 2020, when the COVID-19 was expanded to the entire planet, we have seen not only the world markets being silenced, but also States clearly demarcating their frontiers to declare quarantines, closing their airports to foreigners and assuming differentiated health policies against the virus. Global media and opinion leaders, who not so long ago were pontificating about the successes of globalisation, could not hide the humiliation caused by seeing European governments confiscate medical supplies at their national borders in order to attend to their populations. The World Health Organization (WHO) condemns an immoral “vaccine nationalism” and claims for socialize data and results. Like a castle of dry leaves, the imagined globalization was collapsing in the face of the priorities of individual States that regarded their neighbors as a risk. It took a global panic to break down in a couple of months the triumphalist and sophisticated ideology of market globalization as the final destination of humanity. The states were there; they had always been there despite their invisibility in the discourse of the globalist narrative.

The fact is that the national state and globalization are not antagonistic, nor are protectionism and free trade. They are components of an economic-political reality that will weigh more heavily on one another, depending on the moment in the historical cycle, and yet one will not be able to impose itself definitively on the other. And in the transitional moments of the historical cycle, such as the present one, an amphibious reality occurs that makes elements of free trade coexist with growing elements of protectionism, forces of globalization with an ascending presence of the Nation-State protagonism.

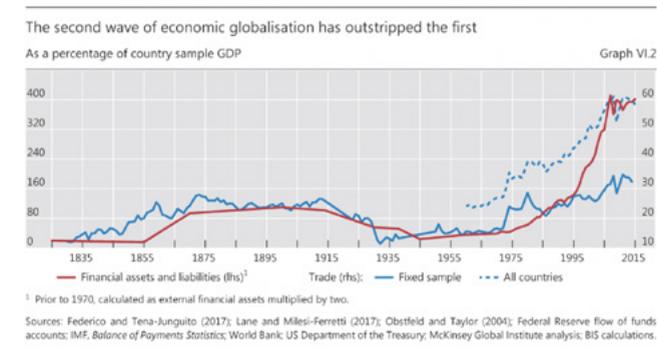
Signs of this epochal change are already visible in the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008, when cross-border capital flows, which were one of the jewels of globalization and which grew from 5% of world GDP in 1989 to 20% in 2007, have since fallen by around 5%.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, global trade, which had been growing at two to three times the rate of world GDP since 1980, began to slow down to match

25 McKinsey Global Institute, “The New Dynamics of Financial Globalization”, Agosto de 2017.

the rate of GDP growth.<sup>26</sup> The Brexit period followed, putting an end to the unity of the European continent. In turn, the election of Trump in the USA has sparked off a battery of protectionist measures for the United States, contrary to the neoliberal decalogue that had characterized his predecessors since Ronald Reagan. He has withdrawn the United States from the Trans-Pacific Economic Cooperation Agreement which was intended to unite all the economies that border the Pacific Ocean in the logic of free trade; he has established a set of sanctions on US companies that wish to relocate their industries to other countries with lower wages; he is building a long and threatening wall on his southern border to prevent Latin-Americans from “taking” jobs from Americans, and is embarking on a trade war with China which, despite the recent January agreement, applies to \$360 billion in Chinese imports.<sup>27</sup> In addition, German companies are increasingly confronted with China over market protection on “security”<sup>28</sup> grounds. As a result, the drive to use state borders to get rid of competitors is tending to spread throughout the world.

For all these reasons, it is most likely that in the next decade we will witness a recovery of the protagonism of state forms, not only due to the economic effects of the pandemic, but also because of the cyclical dynamics of some components of historical capitalism, verified by multiple studies,<sup>29</sup> including those of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) and summarized in this graph (1).<sup>30</sup>

Graph 1



26 Organización Mundial del Comercio (OMC), “La fortaleza del crecimiento económico dependerá de las decisiones políticas”, 12 de abril de 2018, “Examen estadístico del comercio mundial 2020”, julio de 2020.

27 <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-51129740>

28 Ver los justificativos de la empresa Telefónica para dejar de lado a Huawei en la instalación del sistema 5G: [https://www.eldiario.es/tecnologia/ericsson-desplegara-nucleo-telefonica-alemania\\_1\\_6040192.html](https://www.eldiario.es/tecnologia/ericsson-desplegara-nucleo-telefonica-alemania_1_6040192.html)

29 Kondratieff 1956; Schumpeter 2002.

30 Bank for International Settlements (BIS), “Understanding Globalisation”, julio de 2017.

This unsurpassable tension between globalism and territorialism is rooted in the same double nature of what Marx called the “elemental form” of wealth in modern society: the commodity. This form of modern wealth has two social components: its quality of use, its utility, which Marx calls use value; and the second component, its quality of interchangeability, the way to access it, the exchange value. The modern world is, then, a showcase of millions of goods that carry some kind of social utility or “material content of wealth”, but they are only accessible, available for use, if one pays their exchange value.

Now, this quality of consumption of goods, their use value, refers us to the system of needs of a society. Today we have in shops objects that hundreds or thousands of years ago would surely not have any sense or use. The utility of things depends, then, on a social environment, on practical logical modes of organising social life, on a kind of appetites, expectations, and consumption patterns that a determined society has created in history. Things that are useful today will cease to be so tomorrow, and things that are useless today may become very useful in the future, depending on how society has been culturally structuring its consumption and its horizon of expectations.

This social determination of the world of needs is called the system of needs, and it is clear that it is a mainly territorial-based cultural and moral construction<sup>31</sup>, which takes into account a society’s labour capacities, the specific logical and instrumental ways of organising life in common, the accumulation of collective appetites generated, external influences, and the capacity to adapt its consumption expectations to its real capacity to satisfy them.

This adaptation of consumption expectations, which could be infinite, to the capacities to satisfy them (which are limited), is what delimits the system of needs in a given society and what furthermore structures the territorial social order, that is, the daily correspondence between the norm, the law, the property regime and the moral, logical and instrumental behaviour of individuals. And this is a task of cultural adherence and territorialized social cohesion that has fallen, falls and, necessarily, will continue to fall to the States.

The fact that people do not assault shops to get access to the merchandise of their desire, and they are punished if they do so; the fact that they learn skills to use and acquire knowledge to value certain things; the fact that they cultivate dispositions of intimate adherence to form in which the world is organised and how to develop successfully in it; the fact that they appreciate certain material characteristics of things over others; the fact that they prioritise certain uses over others, certain goods over others, the naturalised use of money itself as a means of exchange, etc., all of these things that set the wheels of the

.....  
31 Marx 1981, p.208.

world of commodities in motion every day, depend on school and family education; they depend on the system of rules and ideas prevailing in communication systems; they depend on the threatening punishments and acknowledgements of legitimacy that are largely monopolised by the state, or at least organised and delimited by it.

In this way, the realization of the use value of the commodity in modern capitalist society is regulated, produced and validated in the national-state territorial space. It is as if the material content of wealth, in its objective quality of usefulness, compresses accumulated history and culture which makes it a useful object for those who observe it and want it.<sup>32</sup> Hence Marx points out that the various aspects of the usefulness of things and, “consequently, of the multiple ways of using things, constitute a historical fact.”<sup>33</sup>

Thus, when the person is confronted with the commodity, in order for the utility to emerge in it and to enable the act of interchangeability, of purchase and use, it has to be, previously, a structural tuning between the world of social perceptions of the person and the world of objective, socially produced qualities of things. Or, in Marx’s words, it must “be accredited as values of use before it can be realised as values”.<sup>34</sup> And this can only be achieved by the territorial cultural system of the state, or states, by means of the construction of the system of needs that depends on culture, social cohesion and the constant adaptation of personal needs to social possibilities. To the extent that this cognitive subsoil illuminates the social utility of the object that is in front of the person, the whole history of the thing: of the product of work as a commodity with an exchange value for its interchangeability, has just begun. The fact that the exchange value then dominates social history, including the permanent construction of the structural harmony between human perceptions of what is considered socially useful and the material quality of the merchandise, does not prevent this process of the social construction of the utility of things from having to be renewed every day in a territorialized way in people’s cognitive and sensitive schemes.

Then it is in the use value of the commodity that the first geographical dimension of capitalism is nested: the state-national space. Because this territorialized space is where social cohesion is built, where culture is built, where a correspondence is produced between people’s practical knowledge and the material utilities of things and, therefore, where the set of collective needs of society is shaped.

Capitalism in its beginnings has emerged in the context of cities, lordships, empires, colonies, ancient national forms, and agrarian

.....  
32 About the implications of the concept of use-values in Marx’s theory, see: Echeverría 1998.

33 Marx 1981, p. 44.

34 Ibid., p. 105. m

communities, all of which were territorialized, with differentiated processes of state political cohesion, specific modes of managing common goods and particular regulations on the interchangeability of products. Of these multiple pre-existing state forms, due to its own internal dynamics, historical contingencies, and the growing influence of capitalist logic, the modern state form has been consolidated until today, and because of these three sources of origin, it is always in transformation. State form and capitalist economic form are two different but increasingly intertwined and interdependent historical processes. In the facts there is a formal, and then real, subsumption of aspects of the pre-existing state modes of territorial organization by the capitalist rationality. The forms of value studied by Marx in chapter one of *Capital* can also be applied to the understanding of the forms of colonization of capitalist logic, to the ways of structuring the contemporary modes of conformation and legitimization of state monopolies as a capitalist state. In this case we are dealing with an example of real subsumption. But this does not mean that the state is a direct and full product of capitalist rationality. There are decisive areas of modern state functioning, such as the need for common resources that unite society, that is to say the “community” dimension of the state, which have their own roots and rationalities; just as there are areas of modern society that have their own roots and logics which are not a mere unfolding of the capitalist logic of production. In this case we are only dealing with a merely formal subsumption without the possibility of going further.

The other component of this simple and fundamental object of modern society, the commodity, is the exchange value that refers us to the forms of interchangeability of things. What differentiates capitalism from other societies, where objects are also produced, is that the direct producer produces for someone “who is not the possessor”. For someone who is neither the direct producer of that commodity nor the owner of that commodity. And the “non-possessor”<sup>35</sup> who has to realise the utility of the produced object can be someone from the region, the country, the continent or the world itself.

This means that the whole planet is the space for the realisation of the interchangeability of goods or, if you prefer, the limit of interchangeability of the product of someone’s work, is the whole world. The commodity establishes a type of social universalism that articulates people above kinships, countries, states and continents. My product, Marx notes, is a product for me only in so far as it is a product for someone else; it is therefore an individual that has been surpassed, a universal.<sup>36</sup> However, this is an abstract universalism because the link with the rest of

.....  
35 Ibid.

36 Marx p.208.

the inhabitants of the world who are capable of realising the “use value” of the object can only be realised through the “undifferentiated human labour” contained in the merchandise, the “exchange value”, which is an abstraction of the concrete works that produce concrete goods.

Since the amount of abstract labour, the exchange value, is the key to access to the commodity, interchangeability does not depend on kinship, nationality, language or cultural proximity; it depends only on possessing the equivalent of that amount of labour deposited in some other necessary material body (barter), or on general equivalence (money), which immediately enables the purchase and sale of goods. And since this is a bond based on a quantity of human labour in general, a universal and abstract quality of human activity regardless of the place of people, then the space of potential territorial realization of the commodity is again rounded off globally. In this sense, to the extent that the world is the space of realization of this kind of interchangeability based on a universal abstraction (human labour in general), then the territoriality of the exchange value is the planet itself or, if you prefer, globalization. Without forgetting, of course, that even in this dimension of the universal realization of the interchangeability of goods as bearers of a universal quality of “undifferentiated human labour,” as Marx points out in some extraordinary pages, it is a common quality that is an “abstract objectivity, a thing of the intellect”<sup>37</sup> and for whose “naturalized” use by all producers and buyers a long process of socialization has been required “by education, habit and custom”.<sup>38</sup> Socialization which, until nowadays, has been promoted, organized and regulated precisely by state forms.

Graph 2



.....  
37 Marx 1981, pp. 987, 988.

38 Ibid., p. 922.)

Summarizing, in the cell of modern society, the merchandise as a social process, the two territorial spaces of the constitution of modern society are contained. The commodity, as a value of use, preferably enables the national-state space as the space of constitution of needs, of culture, of cohesion and of the legitimization or specifically capitalist way of construction of the moral schemes, of the logical schemes, of the procedural and instrumental schemes of people. And, on the other hand, the commodity, as an exchange value, enables the space of interchangeability of the labour-value that it contains the space-world, the space-planet as the place of the final realization of the commodity.

The different ways of producing wealth have had a way of defining the geographical space of its realization. The commodity form, that is, the organizational nucleus of capitalism, is born, simultaneously, with the constitution of two spaces: the space of necessity – which is a cultural fact, is a logical and practical fact - and the space of interchangeability – which is, by definition, universal, planetary.

Capitalism is born by simultaneously crossing two spaces, two social geographies, two territorialities: the national-state geography and the planetary geography; the national geopolitical dimension of the commodity and the universal planetary geopolitical dimension of the commodity.

This explains why, throughout the history of capitalism, for more than 500 years, in its different cyclical and historical variants, whether under Dutch hegemony, then English hegemony, then American,<sup>39</sup> the development of the capitalist world has exchanged, in each systemic cycle, moments of predominance of protectionist policies centered on the internal market, tariff barriers, local labour regulations, etc., and moments of supremacy of economic liberalism, planetary opening of markets, labour deregulations, financialization of the economy, etc.

Protectionism prioritizes the protection of national industry, the regulation of financial flows, selective links with other national markets, import substitution and, in short, the capitalist densification of the national space. It is not a question of the formation of autarkic spaces, since world trade flows objectively articulate the various national activities; but this world market and this economy, which has been globalized for more than 200 years, tends to organize itself with the national-state space as its cell. In this first moment, the capitalist world presents itself as a flexible articulation of capitalist state-national spaces.

But, at the same time, the other constitutive space of modern capitalism is exchange value, and we have associated exchange value with universality. And this universality of exchange is free exchange.

.....  
<sup>39</sup> Arrigi 1999.

Rooted in the immanent logic of the commodity and of capitalism, this theoretical, economic, ideological, and philosophical tendency towards free exchange, or liberalism or neoliberalism, emerges; from its point of view, the concern is no longer the inner space, it is not the inner geography, it is not the inner horizon of society. Liberal or neo-liberal free trade logic will have to focus its concern, its policies and its reflections on a consideration of the world market, of global money flows, of planetary financial markets, of deregulations of all kinds. Therefore, in this view, state borders are a nuisance, national cultures are a barrier, and the aim is to create a single homogeneous space of universality of the commodity of capital.

It is not that the national-state dimension disappears under this logic. To date, there is still no space or institutionality capable of replacing that of the Nation-State in the construction of logical and moral adherence to the mercantile form of production and society. But, in addition, economic liberalism in fact functions as the global imposition of economic logic, of the need for new markets for the production and finances of the hegemonic nation-state worldwide. And the continuity and success of this hegemonic capitalist state is at stake in this collapse of borders. But what differentiates it from the planetary territoriality under economic liberalism is that this planetary space of irradiation of the hegemonic power pre-exists and regulates the presence and density of national spaces.

In protectionism the world capitalist space is presented as the articulated sum of state-national spaces. In liberalism, the planetary space is presented as previous and independent of the national-state spaces, whose opaque existence is supported as necessary to discipline, culturally and coercively, the popular classes.

Both historical moments require the national state space and the planetary space to unfold within them the development of capitalist modernity. But what differentiates them is the predominance of one of the spaces in the constitution of the other. The two will always be interacting, the national and the global. But under protectionism, it is not only the national-state space that stands out, but the planetary space is constituted from the national-state spaces. At the moment of free trade, the planetary space is the one that predominates and is also the one that shapes the national-state space as a contingent place of social cohesion and adherence.

Capitalism, therefore, is born with an insuperable tension from its very foundation. As long as there is capitalism, there will be this tension between the dimension of the national-state space and the dimension of the planetary space. In some moments, one of those spaces, the national space will be the predominant one; in other moments, the planetary space will be the predominant one. But in neither case

does one make the other disappear. Although they are presented as antagonistic, in reality they need each other. That is why in all historical moments different modes of coexistence and articulation of national and planetary social struggles have always existed and will continue to exist. With the characteristic that are the struggles of national-state character where at the end the possibility of transformation of the social nature of the state is settled, because the main activities of socialization of the people are deposited in it.

It can therefore be said that, in general terms, the historical narrative of the capitalist economy has two main aspects; protectionism (with multiple variants) and liberalism (with multiple variants). The moments in which protectionism predominates (1930, after the 1929 stock market crisis), until the 1970s, are times of expansion of national markets, expansion of social rights which in the case of the United States and Europe gave rise to the “Welfare State” that lasted until the 1980s; and in the case of Latin America to the policies of import substitution. But even in the most intense moments of protectionism, a global dimension of other economic flows will also be present, such as technological and financial circuits and an international division of labour (countries that produce the primary), countries that process the primary), countries that make intermediate products and countries that generate high technology.

The same applies to the logic of free trade in the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, and from 1980 until now. Although in the liberal logic there is a predominance of the planetary space as a scenario for the circulation of financial capital, and as a space for the circulation of transnational industries, there is a necessary and essential function of the state-national space to generate consensus, moral tolerance or, if necessary, discipline in the face of these decisions.

However, each of these two internal forces of the form of capitalist social wealth, in their moment of cyclical predominance, institute self-centered ideological narratives that in the end turn out to be failed. The protectionist reading of space conceives the world as a sum of sovereign state-national spaces, one alongside the other, and therefore the capitalist world, will be the negotiated articulation of the relations of these subjects called nation-states. This is a failed utopia, because in reality not even in the twentieth century was there a full state sovereignty (it is enough to see the reduced sovereignty of Germany, Japan, Latin America, or Africa); but furthermore, because of the very nature of the commodity whose space of interchangeability is planetary, there is a set of economic relations that have been built independently from the states, above the states, as the pattern of worldwide interchangeability; silver in the 17th and 18th centuries; the pound in the 19th century, gold and the dollar in the 20th century; or the financial market system, or the division of labour and the interlinking of production chains, etc.

The neo-liberal utopia, for its part, imagined the world as a homogeneous global space where there were no longer any barriers or cultural strongholds that differentiated countries and where everyone would be a consumer or a producer, or a businessman or an entrepreneur, without any difference. But this utopia also failed because, as the general response to the pandemic showed, modern society has no other way of constructing a symbolic world with the capacity for lasting cultural and political direction than through territorial adherence to states.

This is what can be called the end of the neoliberal political utopia. It is not that economic globalization will disappear. Trade flows and financial markets will have to be maintained, slowed down, perhaps cut back, and combined with modes of territorial protectionism in a type of hybrid economy typical of the transition stages; but the planetary space as a stage for the realization of money will have to continue. However, what already appears as a decrepit, exhausted ideology is the ideology of neo-liberal globalization as the final destiny of humanity.

What remains is a general uncertainty, a misdirection, a healthy and liberating loss of the unique sense of history. Liberating because the ideology of globalization imposed social impotence, resignation in the face of “ineluctable destiny”. Today the absence of destiny has assumed the status of a popular prejudice: therefore, what will happen will depend on what society itself can do, on what its desperation or reborn hopes can allow.

In this scenario of the porosity of old certainties and of the hybridization of the organizational proposals for the state, the economy and society, a sociological displacement of the spatial axis of political positions is taking place, which is causing the right wing to take the place of the left on some issues. In response to all this, the left has to expand and radicalize the spatial axis of the position of the discourses by creating a new “center” and a new “left” more on the left, capable of displacing society and the state towards forms of greater democratization of social wealth. As always, democracy and property are the two pillars on which every equality program is based.

Democratization of decisions on all areas of life in common, starting with decisions concerning rights, public wealth that belongs to everyone, and new goods that are to be considered the property of everybody, culminating in the democratization of the gigantic wealth that is owned by only a few and that has to serve to cover the enormous expenses that the state will have to make for decades to guarantee the well-being of the population. And the left that wishes to go beyond the state cannot but take this path of greater social democratization. Even in a long-term perspective, the struggle to overcome the state form can only be a democratization of the handling of the common bonds that a society has, and desires to have; but certainly now without monopolies of that management.

It is clear that this depends on two practical processes: horizons for the future capable of unifying the practical hopes of people, and collective strength mobilized, territorially and thematically, with the effect of reorganizing life in common around some new moral, instrumental, logical, and procedural principles. It is not a question of inventing realities, but of reinforcing, making visible and intensifying forms of collective action, mobilizing beliefs and expectations already present in the plebeian interstices of today's society. Encouraging the imagination and the creation of new futures to go beyond the individual, family or corporate, in order to assume the ethical dimension of embracing life in common with the rest of society, firstly national-territorial and then global, is the great task of the present.

In short, the logical and practical order of societies and state forms are in tactical suspension; therefore, in dispute. Not assuming these struggles with passion is a historical disregard that can lead, by force of inertia, to a degrading and vengeful revival of the old neo-liberal social-state order.

Translated by Ramiro Parodi and Natalia Romé

C  
R  
I  
S  
I  
S  
&  
C  
R  
I  
T  
I  
Q  
U  
E

/  
Volume 7  
Issue 3

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Arrigi, Giovanni., *El largo Siglo XX*, Ediciones Akal, España, 1999.
- Bock, F., "La clase dominante no domina: notas sobre la teoría marxista del Estado", en Santamarino, J., (comp.), *La teoría del Estado después de Poulantzas*, Editorial Prometeo, Argentina, 2020.
- Bonnet, A., Piva, A., (comp.), *Estado y capital. El debate alemán sobre las derivaciones del Estado*, Editorial Herramienta, Argentina, 2017.
- Bourdieu, P., *Sobre el Estado*, págs. 14, 174, Editorial Anagrama, 2014.
- Duby, G., *Año 1000, año 2000. La huella de nuestros miedos*, Editorial Andrés Bello, Santiago de Chile, 1995.
- Echeverría, B. *Valor de uso y utopía*, Editorial Siglo XXI, México, 1998.
- Elías, N., *El proceso de la civilización*, págs. 626-27, Editorial Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1989.
- Gramsci, A., *Cuadernos de la cárcel*, 6 tomos, Cuaderno 6, párrafo 137 y cuaderno 12, párrafo 1, Ediciones ERA, México, 1981-2000.
- Jellinek, G., *Teoría general del Estado*, pág. 190, Editorial Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 2017.
- Jessop, B., *El Estado*, Editorial Catarata, Madrid, 2017.
- Kelsen, H., *Compendio de teoría general del Estado*, págs. 123, 130, Editorial Colofón, México, 1992. (Eng. Ed. Kelsen, H. *General Theory of Law and State*. Russell & Russell, 1961).
- Kondratieff, N., "Los grandes ciclos de la vida económica" en Gottfried, H. (comp.), *Ensayos sobre el Ciclo Económico*, Editorial Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1956.
- Marx, K., "El Dieciocho Brumario de Luis Bonaparte", en Marx, C., Engels, F., *Obras Escogidas en Tres Tomos*, pág.253, Editorial Progreso, Moscú, 1980a.
- Marx, K., *La ideología alemana*, en *Obras escogidas en tres tomos*, Tomo I, págs. 14, 30, Editorial Progreso, Moscú, 1980b.
- Marx, K., *El Capital*, Tomo I. Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires, 1984.
- Marx, K., *Elementos fundamentales para la Crítica de la Economía Política (Grundrisse)*, Obras de Marx y Engels (OME) tomo XXI, pág. 208, Editorial Crítica, T. 1, Barcelona.
- Marx, *El capital*, tomo III, vol. 7, págs. 564-569, Editorial Siglo XXI, México, 1981.
- Marx, Engels, *La Internacional. Documentos, artículos y cartas* en Marx-Engels, *Obras fundamentales*, tomo 17, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988.
- Poulantzas, N., *Estado, poder y socialismo*, Editorial Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires/México, 1979.
- Piketty: T., *Capital e ideología*, pp. 548-549, Editorial Paidós, Argentina, 2019.
- Schumpeter, J.A., *Ciclos económicos. Análisis teórico, histórico y estadístico del proceso capitalista*, Editorial Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, España, 2002.
- Searle, J., *The Construction of Social Reality*. Free Press. 1997, pp.113.
- Weber, M., *Economía y sociedad*, pág., 1.056, Editorial Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1998.

C  
R  
I  
S  
I  
S  
&  
C  
R  
I  
T  
I  
Q  
U  
E

/  
Volume 7  
Issue 3