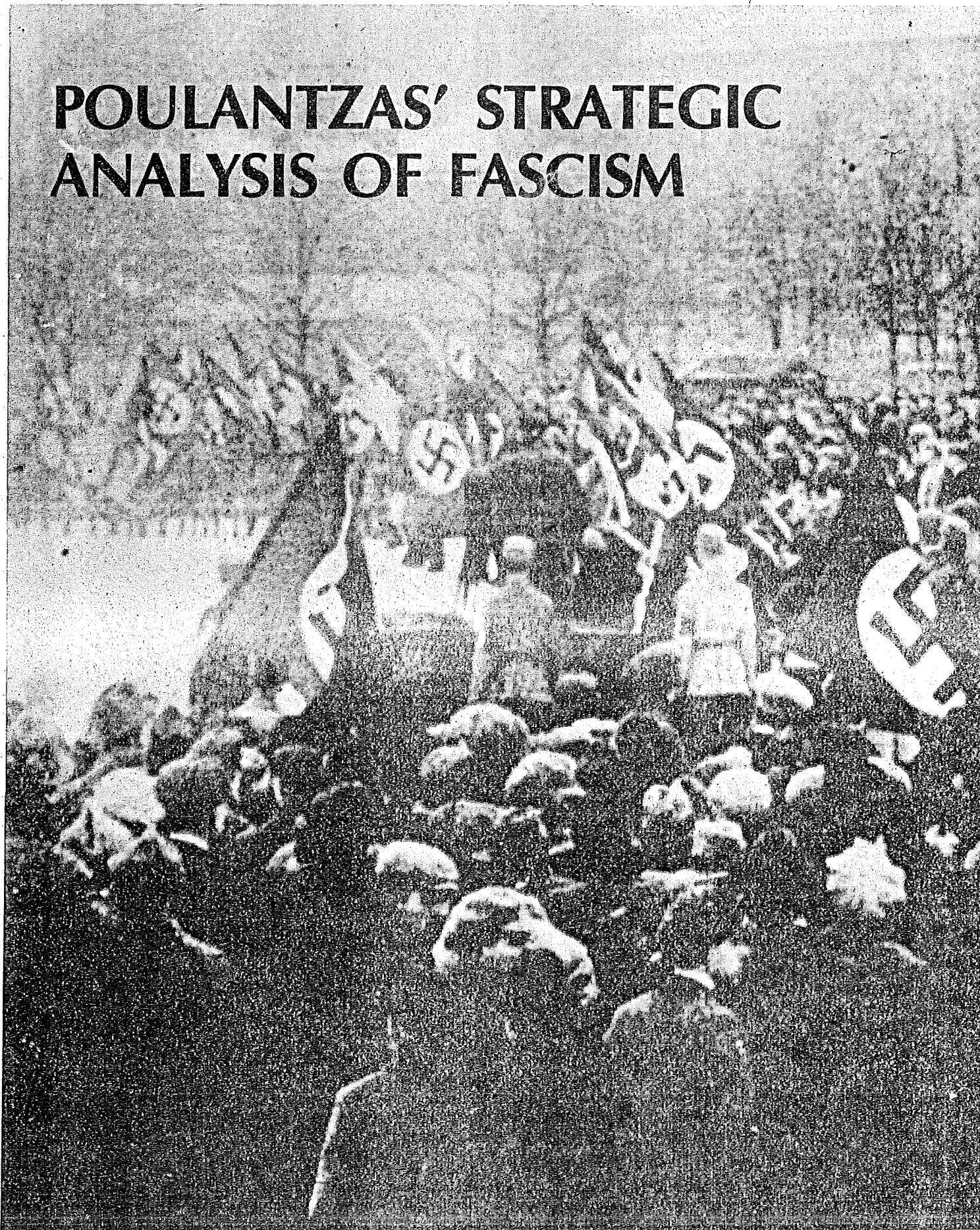


POULANTZAS' STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF FASCISM



by Phillip Ablett
and George Evangelista

The term "fascism" continues to be very much in currency in Philippine society. To the Filipino people, its meaning is often drawn from a pained memory, of the wholesale deprivation of democratic rights and large-scale human rights abuses. Yet, to many, the fear of fascism has still to give way to a deeper understanding of this menace. This may hold true even among those belonging to the progressive movement.

Fascism as a political system and state form is not without its literature. Its emergence worldwide has provided objective impetus for Marxist-Leninist circles to develop the theory on fascism and the practice of the anti-fascist struggle.

Context and causes

One Marxist who did extensive work on fascism was Nicos Poulantzas. His analysis on fascism began by examining the historical conditions from which this movement arose. According to him, a precondition to fascism was the ascent of monopoly capitalism or imperialism to dominance on the global scene and the accompanying but contradictory rise of the interventionist state to manage the economic crisis to which capitalism is prone. Several major economic crises occurred prior to the rise of fascism (i.e., in 1919-1921 and in 1929-31).

Still and all, while an economic crisis was a factor to the rise of fascism, it did not account for its success. Instead, it was the specific characteristics of the class

struggle in societies where fascism had succeeded which proved to be the decisive factor.

Poulantzas noted that fascism occurred in countries which were the weakest links in the imperialist chain following the break associated with the Russian revolution. Germany and Italy at that time were weaker than other European capitalist states because of their economic backwardness and the internal political and ideological contradictions which plagued their societies.

Poulantzas pointed out the characteristics both countries shared. They lagged behind in industrialization and had incurred major foreign debts. Burdened with contracting internal markets, they also lacked foreign markets. Their economies were marked with the uneven development between industry and agriculture, with a highly developed finance capital sector on one hand and the absence of agrarian reform on the other.

Furthermore, there was no strong bourgeoisie capable of singlehandedly presiding over the process of nation-building and state formation. The interventionist role of the state, meanwhile, inhibited this class from fully serving monopoly capital. The sum effect of all these factors placed monopoly capital in Germany and Italy in a decisively disadvantageous position in the inter-imperialist struggle for world leadership and economic domination.

Poulantzas viewed the class struggle which led to fascism's rise as a very specific process of overt and co-

vert class-warfare where the bourgeoisie at all times maintained the upperhand. He rejected the view that fascism had come from a catastrophic class-compromise or equilibrium. While an unsuccessful working class offensive did precede the rise of fascism, this move was however followed by a phase of relative stabilization before an offensive leading to fascism was launched by the bourgeoisie.

two-fold crisis peculiar to these societies. This crisis entailed both political and ideological dimensions.

The political crisis was what Poulantzas called the crisis of hegemony. Poulantzas' use of hegemony took off from Gramsci: In society, the dominant class or class fraction would engineer consent — as distinct from coercion — to its leadership both within the ruling bloc of oppressive classes and over so-

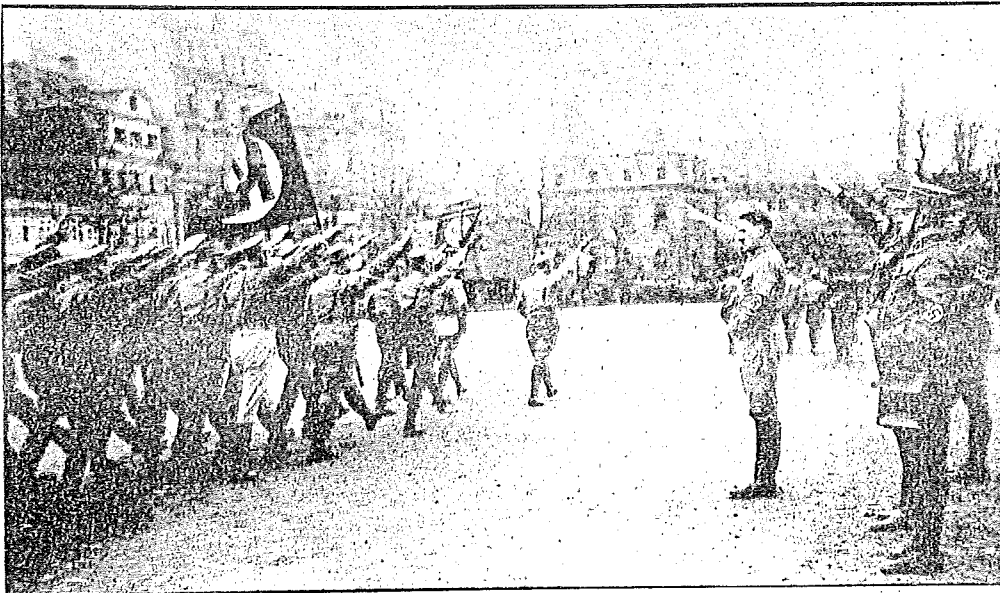
For monopoly capital to realize its interests more fully, it therefore had to establish a new and "extraordinary" state form, cemented by a new ideology. Thereafter, it likewise modified its economic practices and pursued a new economic strategy which would enhance its position and permit increased exploitation of the working class. The emergent project under these concrete conditions was fascism.

consisted of illegal armed bands which were financed by big capital, large landowners and rich peasants to wage a counter-attack on the working-class offensive. In the second phase of "relative stability," the fascist bands, to a large extent, had been abandoned by this power bloc.

Fascism then began to take shape as a mass party based on the petty bourgeoisie with a more organized para-military wing. At the outset, the party genuinely represented the short-term political interests of the petty bourgeoisie. It also established strong organizational and ideological links with this class at all levels, from the voters to ranking cadres.

The third stage began with the fascist party openly courting the support of monopoly capital. Poulantzas marked off the forging of a class alliance between the petty bourgeoisie and monopoly capital, not to mention other fractions of the bourgeoisie, as the point of no return. The growth of fascism at this point had become irreversible. This alliance remained intact, if somewhat uneasily, until the fascist party was installed into office.

At this juncture, the power bloc increasingly turned to fascism as it assumed the character of a mass movement. The bourgeois state lost its monopoly over the legitimate use of violence in society. Police on duty flanked by para-military fascist cadres was a common sight in Nazi Germany, for instance. Parallel fascist networks openly operated alongside state institutions. Simultaneously, the fascist party sought to moderate its



Life

Classical fascism thus was a class strategy to smash the organization and to roll back the economic and political gains of the labor movement when it had already suffered major defeats in an open class war of maneuver. Poulantzas argued that fascism corresponded to a defensive stage in the working class movement when the latter had already been rendered vulnerable.

Meantime, the bourgeoisie resorted to fascism as offensive step to resolve a

society as a whole. Under capitalism, monopoly capital performed this function.

In the cases of Germany and Italy, however, monopoly capital did not have undisputed leadership in the power bloc and was also involved in a struggle with medium capital and its allies. This indecisive hegemony or political disorientation in turn led to a representational crisis in the parliamentary sphere so that say, parliament lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the divided power bloc.

Periodization: The successive stages of fascism

Poulantzas identified five stages in the rise of fascism; namely: the working class offensive; the period of relative stabilization and the formation of a mass party; the forging of an alliance between the petty bourgeoisie and monopoly capital; the installation into office of the fascist party and initial instability; and the period of fascist stabilization.

In the first stage, the fascist movement primarily

anti-big capitalist and one-eyed petty bourgeois aspects in order to secure support from the power bloc and parts of the state apparatus like the military.

The accession of the party into office, the fourth stage, was characterized by the initial instability of fascism in power. While the fascist party-state could now freely pursue policies favorable to monopoly capital, it still had to consolidate support from the popular masses and other classes or class fractions in the power bloc.

On one hand, the purge of the armed, petty bourgeois leftwing of the fascist party and the liquidation of many of its populist figures were carried out. On the other hand, fascism also gave material concessions to the popular masses and other classes to sweeten fascism's basically exploitative and repressive character. During the initial phase, it was still the petty bourgeoisie who took the initiatives as part of the ruling party (i.e. it took charge of staffing the government).

As the regime stabilized within a capitalist economic framework, fascism entered its final stage of consolidation. The fascist party was subordinated to the state apparatus. The petty bourgeois members of the state would break their ties with their class and in combination with monopoly capital became the dominant class fraction resolving the crisis of hegemony.

While this period was not free of contradictions, the interests of monopoly capital were nevertheless advanced in the name of a new unified social order and with the expansion of a war economy. The new social order was not

unified in name alone though. New state mechanisms were developed in an effort to engineer a class-compromising social accord between big business, the fascist party-state and large fascist trade unions.

Poulantzas also examined the relationship between the fascist party-state and the various social classes. For one, he drew attention to the crucial mediating role of the petty bourgeoisie between fascism and monopoly capital at the initial stage. He also studied this class' relationship to fascism.

Poulantzas noted that, unlike the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie had no long-term political interests of its own and was therefore difficult to organize into a specifically petty bourgeois party. Normally, this class would act as a peaceful pillar of the liberal democratic republican bourgeois state. The petty bourgeoisie possessed a politically unstable or ambivalent nature. Under specific circumstances, it therefore could play an independent role in the class struggle, which was the case during the fascist period.

What caused the petty bourgeoisie to turn en masse towards fascism? Poulantzas put this down to the earlier discussed economic, political and ideological factors. At the economic level, the petty bourgeoisie was experiencing the brunt of the general economic crisis besetting the bourgeoisie. At the same time, it found itself at the losing end of the competition with monopoly capital or imperialism. On the political terrain, their short-term interests could not be answered by the existing bour-

geois parties, these being plagued with a representational crisis and intense factionalism.

Classical fascism in Europe in the '20s and '30s therefore came about essentially as a class coalition between the national bourgeoisie (monopoly capital in particular) and the petty-bourgeoisie. In fascism, both classes found a common protector and efficient manager of economic and political life. This would distinguish classical fascist regimes and make them stronger and broad-based than their authoritarian counterparts in neo-colonies or less developed countries.

As for the working class, Poulantzas asserted that fascism received very little support from industrial workers, most of whom had remained loyal to their unions and political parties. Fascist attempts to recruit workers were basically confined to the salaried staff, workers of rich peasant background in newly established "model" factories, the unemployed and declassed lumpen elements like veteran soldiers. Still, some workers were co-opted through the use of petty bourgeois ideology such as anarcho-syndicalism, spontaneism and the putschist cult of violence — all of which stand in opposition to Marxism-Leninism.

The real problem of the working class in relation to fascism, however, was not so much the danger of co-optation but its political neutralization and passivity in the face of the bourgeois offensive. Poulantzas said fascism was able to achieve this through a combination of ideological appeals to nationalism and social accord (i.e. corporatism) which the

bourgeoisie engineered by setting up its own trade unions, on one hand, and using physical repression through the secret police on the other.

Fascism conceded to the existence of unions but used them as safety valves and mechanism for co-optation and surveillance. In short, we witness the extension of the fascist state apparatus into working-class life.

To sum up, classical fascism was an open war against the oppressed classes to massively extend their exploitation. The classical fascist party-state came into power through a petty bourgeois revolt. It then reorganized the power bloc of exploiting classes, the state and the dominant ideology to the advantage of monopoly capital or imperialism by adopting an unusual degree of autonomy from short-term, traditional bourgeois interests.

The relative autonomy of fascism was reflected in the specific institutions of the state and in its repressive and ideological apparatuses. These apparatuses were centralized to an unprecedented degree relative to the bourgeois democratic state. Initially, centralization is carried out under the auspices of the fascist party. Later, after having achieved power and having demoted the petty bourgeoisie, the fascist state was centralized under the secret police who answered directly to nobody but the fascist leadership.

Critique of the Comintern line on fascism

Poulantzas' analysis of fascism also touched on the principles and policies of the Communist International

circa World War II. In particular, he vigorously attacked survivals of Comintern errors in the current line of orthodox communist parties and argued for a mass line, united front and popular front in the struggle against contemporary dictatorships. He dealt at length with the historical and political causes of the working class movement's failure to prevent the rise of fascism in his major work, *Fascism and Dictatorship; The Third International and the Problem of Fascism*.

Poulantzas' critique was structured around three themes, namely, *economism*, *lack of a genuine mass line*, and what he judged to be the Comintern's *progressive turning away from revolutionary proletarian internationalism in favor of narrow Soviet nationalism*.

Poulantzas noted that the German and Italian communist parties had cut themselves off from the masses and suffered deep internal divisions throughout the rise of fascism. In particular, the Italian Communist Party took Amadeo Bordiga's ultra-left line and ignored the originally sound mass line laid down by Lenin in 1919-21. This confined them to establishing a purely economic united front (with non-communist trade unions, whom they feared might contaminate the movement with reformism), rejecting electoral struggles, waging misguided sectarian attacks on the social democrats, and adopting a *minoritarian, insurrectionary view of the party and the revolution*.

In contrast, the German communists consistently pursued the Comintern's line through all of its zigzags

except for their belief in a period of working class offensive. The Germans, equating the increasing repression prior to the rise of fascism with an imagined period of working class offensive, lumped the social democrats, the liberals and the fascists together as a homogeneous counter-revolutionary bloc. They treated social democracy as a manifestation of fascism (hence, the term "social fascism") and disastrously attacked it as the main enemy to the complete detriment of the anti-fascist struggle. For lack of a mass line, even the struggle against social democracy was treated

as a struggle between organizations rather than as a political contest for rank-and-file support. The German communists also systematically ignored the poor and middle peasantry and elements of the petty-bourgeoisie as allies. Finally, despite the danger of fascist victory, they held back their paramilitary organizations from fighting after 1931 and neglected the essential task of building an underground apparatus for combat.

But what stands out in spite of these contrasts is the

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Poulantzas noted several important contrasts and similarities between the German and Italian positions. The Italians, under Bordiga's leadership, were consistent ultra-leftists and internation-

alists who resisted any compromises with imperialism and made seizure of state power their immediate objective. The Germans, while indulging in ultra-left rhetoric, pursued in practice a parliamentarist line which postponed armed revolutionary activity until economic conditions were "ripe" for general insurrection. The Germans so hated the social democrats as rivals in both electoral and trade union fronts that they fought tooth-and-nail to outdo them in their own terrain at the expense of the anti-fascist struggle.

Germany and the Italians' fatalistic acceptance of fascism as an inexorable systemic reaction to a supposedly progressing revolution both had a common basis in economism.

Their different political positions may be traced to their different historical legacies, conditions of class struggle and relations to the Comintern. The Italians had a great tradition of working class militancy and broad, highly organized trade unions and workers' councils. The Italian party, thence, enjoyed great initiative in the formation of its policies and often clashed with the Comintern over major issues. However, the communists were merely a minority in the broad working class movement shared by anarcho-sindicalists, reformist-socialists and Marxists. Worse, the communist mainstream's sectarianism and proclivity towards calling for and engaging in actions beyond the objective capacity of the masses, prevented them from winning the support of the broad masses.

In contrast, the German revolutionary movement suffered a great setback in its failure to forge an alternative to the discredited party of the Second International, lost most of its able leaders in the suppression of mass uprisings at the close of the war, and, under pain of survival, became ideologically and materially dependent upon the besieged Soviet state which increasingly shaped the political line of the Comintern and its affiliate parties according to its perceived needs. The "left" and "right" turns of the Comintern and its affiliate parties could therefore be understood in the light of the Soviet state's

efforts to overcome both its internal crisis (the split within the CPSU and the problem of socialist construction) and imperialist encirclement.

In his own preferred general strategy against fascism and similar dictatorships, Poulantzas constantly advocated united front politics and a mass line. In general terms, Poulantzas agreed with the position outlined by Lenin at the Third Congress of the Comintern and reaffirmed by Dimitrov at the Seventh Congress in 1933 for a truly rank-and-file united front. Such a front would maintain the independence and autonomy of communist parties vis-a-vis other parties of the working class. At the same time, it also called for the creation of non-party rank-and-file organizations through which other parties participate, thus cementing the union of the oppressed classes at the base. These fronts would go beyond merely electoral Eurocommunism and social democracy.

Poulantzas asserted that the principal vehicle for this strategy (following Gramsci) should be the revolutionary workers' councils which have their own self-managing committees and armed units. These, in turn, would present not only working class fighting organizations but also "the models of the proletarian state."

Poulantzas also noted the Seventh Congress not only returned to the correct line of 1921-22 but also introduced the strategy of the anti-fascist popular front. This, Poulantzas deemed to be the appropriate defensive step in the working class struggle as it forges a broad popular alliance embracing the prole-

tariat, peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie.

For Poulantzas, the "ripening of the crisis" and extreme poverty do not suffice to make a revolution; rather the praxis of the vanguard and of the masses forms part of the essential determinants in the making of the revolution. Likewise, it is absolutely necessary to base one's political strategy and tactics upon historical conditions, i.e. the nature of the social formation and the state, the level of organization and consciousness of the revolutionary classes, and the balance and alignment of class forces.

Elaboration of Poulantzas' works

Forms of Bourgeoisie State

Poulantzas' analysis of the fascist state proceeds from a distinction he makes between "normal" and "exceptional" forms of bourgeois state. "Normal" forms encompass the various forms of bourgeois-democratic regime. "Exceptional" forms, on the other hand, pertain to the various forms of authoritarian regime, namely, the *fascist*, *bonapartist*, and *military* regimes which correspond to the political police, the civil administration and the armed forces, respectively, as the dominant branch of the state apparatus.

"Normal" and "exceptional" in Poulantzas' phraseology do not imply any idealist ascription of teleology to the capitalist state such that liberal democracy constitutes what is natural to bourgeois society while fascism constitutes a travesty, but simply indicate which types of state are most probable and appropriate under

the given historical conditions and balance of contending class forces.

Far from regarding these alternative state-forms as absolute opposites, Poulantzas regards bourgeois democracy and fascist dictatorship as akin to each other in regard to their common socio-economic base. "Normal" forms do not differ from "exceptional" forms in their alleged primary reliance on consensus over violence. Civil institutions or ideological apparatuses (media, schools, churches, social organizations, etc.) in bourgeois democracy, do not differ from fascist ones in that the former are outside the state whereas the latter are part of the state. (see Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, London: New Left Books, 1978, pp. 300-309)

The formal separation between economic, cultural and political realms in bourgeois society stems not from the intrinsic qualities of the so-called "institutional bases" of bourgeois democracy which allegedly lie outside the state, but rather derives from the specific nature of capitalist relations of production. A system based on generalized commodity production for profit needs such kind of state to regulate intercapitalist competition and exploitation of labor which make society anarchic. This formal separation between state and civil society makes it possible to extend democracy to a broader extent than previous class societies had done before (e.g. Athenian city-state), but at the same time lays down the basis for a despotic state in which subjection of individuals and society to political authority is more complete than it had

ever been in pre-capitalist milieu. (see Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, London: Verso, 1978, Part I, ch. 1-3)

Violence, says Poulantzas, "always occupies a determining place" in the bourgeois state not because it is resorted to in critical moments, but rather because it permanently underlies all state organs, being a necessary condition for the operation of those institutions which need not employ force. (ibid., p. 81) Parliament indeed represents some form of consensus, but it is itself powerless without a coercive arm to enforce its will. Even in the most democratic of capitalist states, consensus in the form of elections, plebiscites and legislation represents a subtle way of obtaining the masses' acquiescence to ruling class hegemony.

Though emphatic about the affinity between the alternative state-forms, Poulantzas strongly warns against treating the transition to fascism as a mere "blossoming of buds." To do so would be to indulge in a dangerous truism of the same order as the dogma that revolution is present in the womb of capitalist society. The transition from one state-form to the other is never a smooth one, but rather a conflict-ridden process involving multitudes from various classes, which the vanguard can ignore only at the cost of grave political setbacks or even the revolution itself.

Having established the affinity between the diverse forms of bourgeois state, Poulantzas proceeds to ask in what sense they concretely differ from each other and what each form entails for the revolutionary and democratic classes.

Poulantzas dissects the following essential points in which the alternative forms of bourgeois rule significantly differ:

1. The forms and patterns of state intervention in the economy and other spheres of social life, and the forms and patterns of the relative autonomy of the state from the ruling class.

2. The role, forms and inter-relationship of the repressive state apparatus and the ideological apparatuses, corresponding to modifications in the law which govern their operations.

3. The general relationship of the branches of the state apparatus proper itself, corresponding to the general relationship between the executive and the legislative.

4. The general relationship between the ideological apparatuses. (*Fascism and Dictatorship*, p. 310)

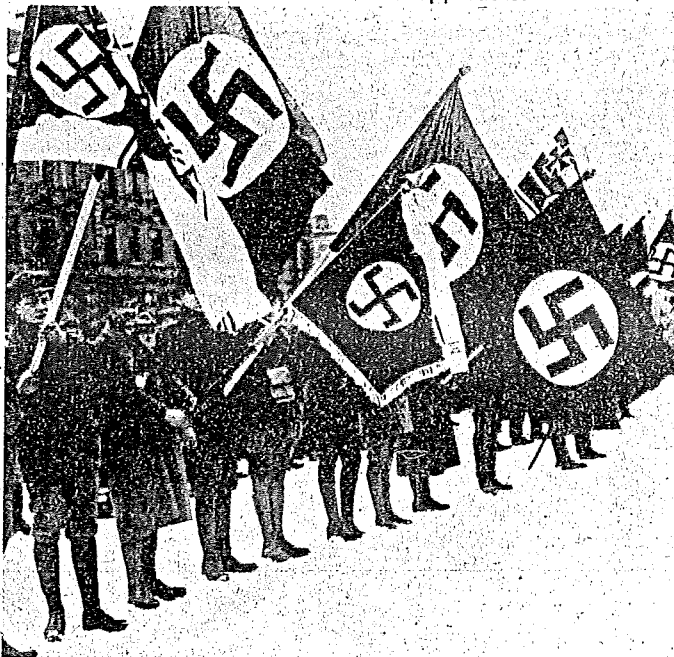
Applying the above organizational and political criteria, Poulantzas makes a comparative analysis of the alternative state forms and draws out several important political lessons.

First: The normal bourgeois state has representative democratic institutions with universal suffrage and competing political parties. In contrast, the exceptional state eliminates the plural party system and suspends elections with the possible exception of plebiscites which are tightly controlled from above.

Second: In the normal bourgeois state, transfer of power between ruling class fractions occurs within constitutional boundaries and the rule of law; such transfer is therefore stable and predictable. In the exceptional

state, strict legal regulation is, at the least, suspended and sweeping arbitrary powers are vested on certain repressive state apparatuses to give the power-holders maximum latitude in reorganizing the ruling power bloc and in carrying out the social, economic and political changes needed by the crisis-ridden system.

Third: The ideological apparatuses like the schools, media, churches and other cultural centers usually possess a "private" legal status, display a great variety among



LIFE

themselves, and enjoy a degree of autonomy from government control in the normal bourgeois state. In the exceptional state, ideological apparatuses are largely subordinated to repressive apparatuses and are thus deprived of any independence.

Fourth: In the normal state, strict separation of powers exists between different branches of the State apparatus; the legislative, the executive, the administrative, the police, the military, and the judicial branches respect each other's terrain and exercise their respective functions

in and for civil society. In the exceptional state, a centralizing executive branch brings under its control other state organs such as the armed forces, the police and the civilian bureaucracy, through parallel power networks as in Nazi Germany which cut across hitherto separate branches. These parallel power networks pertain to a system of ensuring loyalty and obedience to authority through police spies and/or political officers assigned to every level and branch of the state apparatus.

The Modern Capitalist State, Political Strategy and Socialist Transformation

In the latter half of the '70s, new developments in both the capitalist and socialist countries prompted Poulantzas to modify his views on political strategy and the state. The sudden collapse of the Greek military junta in 1974 and the overthrow of a similar regime in Portugal in the same period deeply affected Poulantzas. Both dictatorships had been toppled and swiftly displaced through a relatively peaceful uprising

by a broad democratic opposition with the aid of defectors from the state itself after the state's prolonged period of internal crisis and alienation from the citizenry.

These developments (especially the fate of the military regime in his native Greece) contradicted the expectations of Poulantzas who, then under the influence of Mao, believed that these regimes could be overthrown most effectively by a protracted war waged by a communist-led revolutionary mass movement. Poulantzas also examined the prospects for popular-democratic transition to socialism in Portugal, significant branches of whose post-dictatorship government and armed forces were socialist-controlled, attributing the death of these prospects to the adventurist means by which the left-wing military attempted to seize power that alienated it from the broad masses and its allies.

The sorry fates of China, Vietnam and Kampuchea which underwent bureaucratic deformations and became enmeshed in armed conflict among themselves also apparently reinforced Poulantzas' growing distrust of statist approaches to revolution which naively imagine the building of the alternative state exclusively outside of and against the existing state as the best if not the only revolutionary strategy. The movements or regimes which pursued this type of strategy tended to become isolated from the masses through their built-in sectarianism or to become parodies of the regimes they had overthrown after their accession to power.

Likewise, the rise of what he termed as "authoritarian statism" in the advanced

Western capitalist countries caused Poulantzas to recast his ideas on the current bourgeois democratic state, analyze anew the structures and conditions that engender the rise of the fascist state, and envisage a new strategy capable of combatting a repressive technocratic regime.

It was in the context of these developments that Poulantzas came to recognize more fully than ever before the falsity of the view of the state as a monolithic entity to be displaced by a similarly structured revolutionary movement which aims at the creation of "dual power." Poulantzas continued to affirm the need for a vanguard party, revolutionary mass organizations and a military arm to enable the proletariat to muster its own power, but henceforth, rejected as simplistic and fraught with dangers, the problematic of building these organizations to the mutual exclusion of existing representative democratic forms and committing them to an immediate, concerted frontal assault on the state as if the latter were a fortress to be captured by besieging "outsiders." What Poulantzas proposes for communists, then, is the need to engage in a combination of forms of struggle both at a distance from ("outside of"), within, and against the state.

Nature of the State

In his last book, *State Power Socialism*, Poulantzas argues that attempts to find in the Marxist classics a "general theory" of the state and revolution are doomed to failure, not because Marx and Engels never completed the theory but rather because no such theory exists nor could ever exist. Social science can-

not furnish revolutionaries with a general formulae revealing the nature of all hitherto existing, current and possible states, but can only provide them with specific theories and categories explanative of specific types of social formation and the states appropriate to them.

While affirming the basic truth established by classical Marxism about the state as an organ of class domination whose nature is contingent upon the dominant mode of production, Poulantzas asserts that the concrete nature of the modern capitalist state has never been adequately theorized. Most Marxists after Marx have been all too complacent or simply mired in daily political tasks, that they have not advanced beyond truisms toward a deeper scientific understanding of the capitalist state and an appropriate strategy for its revolutionary overthrow and supersession.

Poulantzas cites two widespread misconceptions of the state which lay claim to the Marxist label. One view regards the state as a "Thing — instrument" which is so completely manipulated by one class or fraction that it is divested of any autonomy whatsoever. The other conceives of the state as a "Subject" which enjoys an almost limitless autonomy which enables it to do what it deems rational at its chosen instance.

Both misconceptions have their own distinct left- and right-wing variants which lead to different but perhaps equally disastrous political results. The right-wing instrumentalist view in seeing the state as an object of conquest abandons revolution in favor of reformism and class collaborationism. The left

variant in its treatment of the state as a mere target of coordinated subversion and frontal assault fails by alienating the masses or "succeeds" by setting up a travesty of its original goal. The same tendency holds true for the left and right variants of the teleological view of the state, because the two opposed misconceptions of the state in fact share a common distrust of the masses and a common fetish for the state.

In opposition to these two views, Poulantzas holds that the bourgeois state is, like capital, "a relationship of forces or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions." This means that the state, far from being a fortress separated from society by Chinese walls, consists of coercive as well as cooptive apparatuses through which it is kept in constant contact with people from all classes and sectors. The state impresses its class character upon all of its organs including even those with socially necessary functions (e.g., welfare, education, health, etc.), but does not render itself free from internal contradictions.

On the contrary, it is the state's class character and need to constantly respond to the pressures exerted by all classes that makes it a field of struggles as well as compromises between classes and between fractions of individual classes. The state's flexibility (being circumscribed by what Poulantzas terms as the state's institutional materiality which endows it with an enduring form or structure) does not at all diminish its class orientation, but enables it to adapt to a variety of circumstances and hence, manage daily problems as

well as crises.

The internal contradictions of the bourgeois state are neither a handicap nor a "trick" conjured by the capitalist class, but are the natural outcome of the peculiar structure of capitalism which thrives on competition and accumulation. The various fractions of capital (monopoly or non-monopoly capital, industrial, commercial or banking capital) do not always stand in a uniformly contradictory relationship to the exploited classes; nor are their political attitudes to these classes always identical. Moreover, in a particular conjuncture or over a longer period, differences of tactics or even of political strategy may count among the prime factors of division within the ruling power bloc itself. (*State Power Socialism*, Part II, ch. 2, pp. 140-45)

Shifts in the state's policy are settled neither by mere decree of the dominant ruling class fraction nor by historical periodization, as if the entire ruling class lines up behind a given political solution under the single direction of some unseen hand. Contradictions permanently underlie the state and involve minor as well as major political differences. Among the latter is the choice of the state—forms to be established against the exploited classes: the choice between authoritarian forms and bourgeois-democratic forms, or the choice between types of the latter (e.g., conservative democratic regimes or social democratic ones). (*Ibid.*)

From this conception of the state follows Poulantzas' ascription of primacy to class struggle as a determinant in the shaping of states (reactionary ones included)

and insistence on the sharpest analysis of the actually existing state as an element of political strategy. It is absurd to directly deduce political strategy from an abstract analysis of the mode of production which by itself reveals only the skeleton but not the flesh and blood of living society. The historical fact that class struggles have never been quite unilinear and have often been obliged to transform old structures before they overthrow and replace them should compel revolutionaries to develop their strategy on the basis of the sharpest analysis of the social formation in all its complexity and movement.

Poulantzas' proposed political strategy is one which involves the exploitation of the state's internal contradictions and the calibrated dismantling of the existing apparatus by a revolutionary mass movement which correspondingly develops its own sectorally and territorially based political structures parallel to the state wherein its agents and/or friendly democratic forces had previously established beachheads. Poulantzas contends that this strategy, however difficult to pursue, would best ensure the complete supersession of the bourgeois state by proletarian socialist democracy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we recapitulate the following lessons we have drawn from our study of Poulantzas. These may serve as guideposts in our own analysis of fascism and struggle against it or any other authoritarian state form akin to it.

First, there is no "one-to-one proportion relationship" between worsening economic

crisis and spontaneous mass revolt and between the rise of the revolutionary mass movement and the rise of authoritarian regimes. On the contrary, as in the case of classical fascism in Europe, the rise of fascist regimes may even be partly due to the weakness of the revolutionary classes and their organizations. A crisis of hegemony, if left unharnessed for appropriate socio-political ends by a politically weak proletariat, can be exploited by the fascists or any similar reactionary tendency for the strategic advantage of the ruling class.

Second, political strategy

classes, fractions and strata. This must be taken into account to determine the forms of struggle, the nature of the united front, and the political agenda, appropriate to the given stage and phase of development of the social formation to be transformed.

Third, the fascist state is akin to but not identical with the bourgeois democratic state. It is a different form of bourgeois state bound up with the stage of development of the socio-economic system, a crisis of ruling class hegemony and the balance/alignment of classes and class forces. The transition from bourgeois democracy to

Fourth, (and in connection with the second point) the specific national characteristics of class struggles and revolutionary movements are essential determinants of political strategy and in no circumstances should they be ignored in the guise of adhering to internationalism. Internationalism does not dissolve national differences in a global movement directed from a single center; rather, it consists in various self-reliant national revolutionary movements cooperating with one another in the advancement of the common struggle for socialism and democracy.

Lastly, fascism is not a system devoid of any significant mass base, but is a most resilient authoritarian state form which has the capacity to mobilize people from various sectors in suppressing dissent and revolutionary opposition. It dispenses with autonomous representation of ruling class fractions through abolition of the plural party system, but does not thereby lose the support of non-hegemonic fractions whom it aids through the bureaucracy and technocracy. For this reason, the revolutionaries must reach out to workers of other political affiliations as well as all other democratic sectors through nonparty rank-and-file organizations which cement their unity at the base. This will safeguard the mass movement against attempts at cooptation by the bourgeoisie, while consolidating a broad union against fascism which, though not subordinate to the Party, creates favorable conditions for the Left's conquest of political hegemony in the mass movement. ●

The forging of a broad popular front against fascism creates the favorable conditions for the Left's conquest of political hegemony in the mass movement.

cannot be elaborated at the same level in which a society's mode of production is theorized. Nothing substantial about political realities is captured by simply characterizing the conflict between the productive forces and the social relations of production as inexorably intensifying towards catastrophe and then backing this claim with empiricist data "confirming" either the "ebb" or the "flow" of the mass movement. A society, even while it retains the self-same mode of production upon which it is based, undergoes structural and historical transformations which alter fundamentally the balance and alignment of

fascism is neither the simple "budding of totalitarian seeds" nor the fiat of the hegemonic fraction of the ruling class: The destruction of bourgeois democracy which a fascist takeover involves is necessarily replete with intense struggles between opposed classes and among fractions of the ruling class itself. Since bourgeois freedoms are of value not only in alleviating their livelihood but also in advancing their struggle for class emancipation, the working classes have an objective stake in forging a broad popular front against fascism with all democratic forces including the liberal bourgeoisie.