When, theoretically, can Marxists talk about the capitalist state? In the original conception of his ‘Economics’, Marx placed the ‘State’ as the fourth of his six intended books.1 ‘The concentration of bourgeois society in the form of the state’, ‘the concentration of the whole’, was to follow the book on wage-labour which itself would complete ‘the inner totality’.2 Thus, as revealed by its placement, the concept of the capitalist state would be developed out of the consideration (in a dialectical manner) of capital, landed property and wage-labour – the subjects of the first three books. Only when that ‘inner totality’ is completed can we examine the state as ‘the concentration of the whole’.3

The problem, of course, is that Marx never went beyond Capital in his original plan. Some of the implications of this (and, in particular, of the missing book on wage-labour) have been explored in Beyond

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1 Lebowitz 2003, Chapter 3.
3 By the same logic, the concept of the state itself as initially developed in Book IV must be incomplete. The full and adequate development of the concept of the capitalist state occurs only when the state is considered in the context of the world-market (the subject matter of the concluding book) ‘in which production is posited as a totality together with all its moments’ (Marx 1973, pp. 264, 273). I.e., the aspect that the state takes on in the context of competing national capitals and nation-states is essential to understanding the capitalist state. See the strong argument to this effect in von Braunmühl 1978. This side of the capitalist state, however, is not explored here.
‘Capital’. Not only was Capital one-sided with respect to its examination of capitalism (presenting the side of capital but not ‘the completed bourgeois system’) but, in particular, the treatment of workers as subjects – as they struggle for their own goals and as they produce themselves through their own activities – is revealed to be both essential to the understanding of capitalism and missing from Capital.

None of this, however, has stopped Marxists from theorising about the capitalist state based upon Capital alone. Central to the extensive state-debates of the 1970s was the contribution of the ‘state-derivationist’ or ‘capital-logic’ school, which attempted to avoid the eclecticism characteristic of so many Marxian treatments by logically deriving the category of the state directly from the concept of capital. Yet, as Simon Clarke has indicated in his fine survey, these efforts were simply a variant of a structural-functionalist orthodoxy which considers the state in terms of its functional necessity for capital; the determining role of class struggle was necessarily displaced.

And, this judgement cannot come as a surprise – when we understand that Capital has only capital as its subject and considers only capital’s needs and tendencies but not those of workers.

It does not mean, however, that the project of state-derivation is inherently flawed. By explicitly considering the ‘intermediate link’ omitted by the capital-logic school (i.e., the side of wage-labour), it is possible to reconstruct Marx’s concept of the capitalist state as the object and result of class struggle. Further, the resulting understanding of the capitalist state as the ‘concentration of bourgeois society in the form of the state’ is the link to Marx’s view of the form of state necessary to go beyond capital.

**Wage-labour’s latent state**

There is a concept of the state implicit in the concept of capital. Since this is, however, ground well-covered in the earlier state-derivation discussions (cf. Holloway and Picciotto), it is sufficient here to note that inherent in capital’s need for valorisation are state activities to ensure the availability of appropriate

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4 Lebowitz 2003.  
7 Lebowitz 2003.