Review Articles

Marx, L’État et la politique
ANTOINE ARTOUS
Paris: Syllepse, 1999

Reviewed by BOB JESSOP

Artous’s detailed and meticulous book seeks to test the common arguments that Marx either failed to develop a coherent account of the state and politics and/or laid the theoretical foundations for the rise of totalitarianism. Some claim that his work was incomplete, inconsistent, and lacked explanatory power; others, that he could not explain the autonomy of the political and political class struggle but dissolved them into the economic or, at least, the social; yet others, that his ideas about the end of (class) politics, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the eventual withering away of the state created the space for a totalitarian political régime. In contrast, Artous sides with those that regard the early Marx as a convincing thinker of the autonomy of the political and as a passionate advocate of the democratic self-institution of the social against the bureaucratic formalism of the modern state; with those that regard the later Marx as a rigorous investigator of bourgeois law, the capitalist state, and their respective roles in the expanded reproduction of capitalism; with those that praise Marx’s analyses of the specificity and effectivity of different political régimes and political class struggles; and with those that regard Marx as a consistent supporter of democratic self-government and the self-constitution of the people. In exploring these issues and debates, Artous has three main objectives: first, to provide a critical exegesis of Marx’s work on the forms of the modern state, law, and political representation, their impact on the nature and dynamics of political struggle, and the prospects for a democratic order that transcends bourgeois liberal democracy; second, to comment on and refute various other interpretations of Marx’s work, primarily those of other Francophone Marxists and social scientists but also of other leading scholars, such as Max Weber, György Lukács, Ernest Mandel, and Jürgen Habermas, whose work has been translated into French; and, third, to outline his own suggestions on the form and functions of the modern state as derived logically from capitalist relations of production. While Artous achieves the first and second aims relatively successfully, he falls seriously short on the third aim, when his arguments are compared...
to alternative attempts to complete Marx’s theory of the capitalist state, for reasons to be explored below.

Artous’s book is divided into four parts. Part I explores Marx’s early work on the specificity of the modern state based on the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, the *Introduction* to this critique, *On the Jewish Question*, and various comments in the *Paris Manuscripts*, *The German Ideology*, and *The Communist Manifesto*. Part II explores Marx’s and Engels’s discussion of the legal form as an expression of the capitalist mode of production and also offers a critique of Pashukanis’s overall method of analysis and his account of private and public law. Part III focuses on the analyses offered by Marx and Engels on political conjunctures, political régimes and régime change, the diversity of national trajectories in state formation and the resulting constraints on alternative political strategies, and the problems involved in securing bourgeois political hegemony. And Part IV deals with the dictatorship of the proletariat and the withering away of the state, focusing on the Paris Commune and issues of political strategy in parliamentary-democratic states. It discusses more general problems of the social economy and human emancipation. Artous concludes with comments on the democratic self-organisation of society as the appropriate route to transcending the capitalist form of state and politics.

Part I provides a painstaking and sometimes repetitive dissection of the nuances of language and argument in Marx’s critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* and his own reflections on the modern bureaucratic state. Artous argues that the separation of state and ‘civil-bourgeois’ society is at the centre of this and other texts of the early Marx and that Marx’s starting point is not classical liberalism, with its limited role for the state as guarantor of individual property and personal liberty, but, rather, Hegel’s view of the state as a universal concrete able to resolve the contradictions of an egoistic civil society. Marx sees Hegel as an advocate of a representative monarchy rather than a theorist of Prussian reaction, but he also criticises Hegel’s mystifying treatment of the state on the grounds that it is an abstract term and that only the people is concrete. Yet Marx also finds heuristic value in Hegel’s analysis. In particular, his critique of Hegel leads him to conclude that: (a) the modern form of political representation is based on the re-organisation of the ‘social body’, such that individuals are no longer differentiated in terms of a particular *status hierarchy* but in terms of their enjoyment of *formally free and equal individual citizenship*; and (b) the state apparatus is structured through a modern bureaucracy (having its own distinctive hierarchy of knowledge), with the positions in this hierarchy filled on the basis of competence and its legitimation based on constitutional accountability. Artous draws a double parallel here between the formal freedom of *échangistes* (subjects of exchange relations) in the capitalist labour market and the factory despotism (with its hierarchical division of labour) found within the capitalist enterprise; and he insists on the importance of both moments of the political as well as the economic. He then suggests, not entirely