

Poulantzas, Conjunctural Analysis, and the Krise der Krisenbearbeitung

Bob Jessop

Abstract:

Poulantzas is often interpreted – especially in the Anglophone world – as a structuralist Marxist who worked on abstract issues in state theory with little direct relevance to contemporary economic and political analysis. This misrepresents his theoretical work and its close connection to the current situation in Europe, especially France and Greece, during the 1960s and 1970s. This paper shows the importance of strategic questions in the development of Poulantzas's reflections on contemporary capitalism, the rise of authoritarian statism, the relation between parties and social movements, and democratic socialism. It then focuses on three issues: (1) Poulantzas's contributions to conjunctural analysis, based on his studies of fascism in Italy and Germany and the collapse of military dictatorships in Southern Europe; (2) his discussion of crisis dynamics, especially the significance of crises of the state and organic crises, in shaping the unstable equilibrium of compromise and determining the horizons of action for radical politics; and (3) his account of the changing nature of imperialism, the incompressibility of its contradictions, and its implications for the crisis in handling crises. I will draw on the crisis of crisis management in Europe to illustrate the continuing relevance of these themes.