

**POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION IN SOCIALIST FRANCE:
ALTERNATIVE THEORIES--ALTERNATIVE STRUGGLES**

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A unitary, strongly centralized state has characterized French political thought and practice for centuries. The Socialist Party broke from this tradition during its recent tenure in national office when it passed a comprehensive program of political decentralization. We consider these recent changes in the structure of the French state from pluralist, elitist, and ruling class perspectives, and conclude that each of these traditional conceptualizations limits our understanding of state power in various ways. We explore the utility of a refined ruling class perspective known as social capital, and suggest it offers insights into political decentralization and state structure not provided by alternative perspectives. We conclude by suggesting that social capital holds promise for application to problems of analytical and practical significance.

INTRODUCTION

A strong central state capable of initiating political and economic change from above has been a staple feature of French political life for centuries, well ante-dating the absolutism of Louis XIV. The French Revolution of 1789 and the subsequent rule of Napoleon Bonaparte gave additional impetus to this tradition. Even the republican governments of the 19th century continued to consolidate increasing responsibility for local affairs in the assorted Parisian ministries. In the 20th century, political parties of both the left and right maintained the practice of imposing solutions from above to perceived social and economic problems. While the centralization and consolidation of the political authority of the state in Paris has dominated French political development, criticism and reflection on the costs and consequences of this trend has been ubiquitous as well. Much of the turbulence characterizing the development of an enduring democratic state in France has been due to the ongoing debate between the partisans of centralism and pluralism, each trying to mold the state into its idealized form.

Debate over the form and structure of the state reached a crucial turning point when the recent (1981-1986) socialist government introduced a program of political decentralization that represented a sharp break with the tradition of centralized state authority. In part a response to social movements for greater local control and worker self-management as solutions to growing centralization and technocracy, the socialist program also addressed the party's pragmatic needs for policies that would attract and hold its constituency. We find the French experience to be particularly instructive for several reasons. First, the Socialist Party controlled both the executive and legislative branches of government of a major capitalist democracy for a period of five years. This provides a unique opportunity to observe how a socialist government in office approached political change in a capitalist society embedded in a Western capitalist economic system. Second, the strongly centralized unitary French state provides an interesting contrast to the familiar federal state structure characteristic of the United States, thereby encouraging the development of conceptual analyses grounded in a more comparative, international framework.

We examine these recent changes in the structure of the French state from pluralist, elitist, and ruling class perspectives in order to evaluate their utility in explaining political and economic dissent and the government's response to it. An examination of the French case leads us to suggest that each of these familiar theoretical approaches to socio-political processes and outcomes is limited in ways that impede satisfactory analysis. We suggest that a less restrictive and more insightful interpretation of French political decentralization is provided by the alternative Marxist approach known as social capital (Cleaver, 1979). The social capital perspective maintains that acting on their own behalf, autonomous from the influences of capital, party leadership, unions, or revolutionary vanguards, workers struggle against all forms of the capitalist imposition of work. The social capital perspective submits that class struggle is centered in the antagonism between capital's logical interest in imposing work, accumulating surplus, and controlling the masses, and working class interest in increasing the cost of labor and resisting the discipline of work.

Our purpose is to suggest an interpretation grounded in the rationality of class struggle of the development and implementation of the French political decentralization policies. Using the social capital framework, we construe the socialist political reform as an example of a capitalist state responding to

workers' struggles. Further, we interpret the state's decentralization response as a strategic counterattack that attempted to placate some of the demands of the working class, while maintaining the imposition of work as a legitimate form of social control. We shall begin by tracing the development of the French central state and then examine our varied theoretical interpretations.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRENCH CENTRAL STATE

The Socialist Party's decentralization policies represent an historic break with the ancient French tradition of centralized state power, and manifest their significance in that context. From the late middle ages the nation-state in France was more tightly centralized under the monarchy than other European nations. As the monarchs of the *ancien régime* extended their reign geographically they centralized it politically, making Paris the seat of political power in France (Tocqueville, 1969, 1955; Dayries and Dayries, 1982). During the monarchical period, an intendant in each province served as the personal decision-making representative of the king. Local elites exercised little power since the intendant was authorized to make all important local decisions except those requiring the advice of the king or his advisors, and these decisions were routinely sent to Paris. Because the monarchy was occasionally forced to compromise on regional particularisms to secure the cooperation of local notables, some institutions such as courts and customs duties varied from province to province (Dayries and Dayries, 1982). On the eve of the revolution, France was a strongly centralized state, but in a political arrangement which necessarily tolerated some degree of variation in local privileges.

The revolution of 1789 started a cycle of alternating revolutionary and reactionary regimes that successively shaped and reshaped the state into forms suitable for implementing their goals. With few exceptions, these varied regimes continued the centralization of political power in Paris, following the example of the *ancien régime*. For the Jacobin radical, centralization was essential for securing the revolution and extending its benefits to the nation. Suppression of the aristocracy and the creation of a democratic, unified nation free of particularistic privileges required reform from above. Conversely, for reactionaries centralization was necessary to preserve public order. Tocqueville (1969:97) argues that the revolution was, ". . . both republican and centralizing."

As the revolution proceeded by fits and turns, Napoleon Bonaparte was crowned emperor in 1804. Suleiman (1974:13) argues, "The structure of the modern French state owes more to Napoleon than to any of his predecessors or successors." Napoleon's desire to create a new social order continued the centralization of decision making. He abolished the intendants, replacing them with a prefectorial arrangement in which centrally appointed prefects represented the interests of the state in each department, an arrangement that has lasted to the present day.¹ The Napoleonic centralization resulted not only from imperialistic impulses but also from the continuing need to abolish local privileges and secure the revolution. Napoleon's aims were consistent with the widely prevailing Jacobin view that a strong central state was necessary for securing liberty, equality, and fraternity, thereby preventing the abuses of special interests.

The Third Republic of 1875 was the first sustained, constitutional democracy in France. Under the republic, political change took place at the ballot box rather than the barricade. The republican emphasis on equality, order, unity, and glory required a strong state to suppress the church and create a system of secular public institutions, especially public education (Zeldin, 1973). Durkheim's concern with moral authority and public education reflects the social and political concerns prevalent during the Third Republic. From its inception in 1875 until its demise in the face of the Nazi invasion of 1940, the legislative record of the Third Republic reflects a continuing trend toward the centralization of political power in Paris. Though new legislation granted a modicum of local authority to the commune and department (Lalumière, 1982a; Virieux, 1982), republicanism in France continued the strong state tradition.²

Following World War II, the Fourth (1945-1958) and Fifth Republics (1958-present) faced increasingly complex social, economic, and political problems. Pressing issues such as urban growth, population shifts, economic planning, and industrial development invited state intervention. The difficulties of adequately administering detailed economic and social plans from the Parisian ministries became increasingly apparent with the adoption of central economic planning in 1946. Though most political leaders on the left, center, and right believed the state must take responsibility for solving economic and social problems, they likewise increasingly recognized the need for an intermediate administrative level of government (Dayries and Dayries, 1982).

Arguments about the nature and structure of regional government reflected the historic debate between partisans of the

Jacobin central state versus the Girondist pluralist, decentralized state. For many, the very notion of elected regional governments seemed to be in opposition to republican traditions of national unity and the general interest (Rangeon, 1982:66). Thus the political leadership of the Fourth Republic largely believed that any newly-created intermediate levels of government should function as downward transmitters of policies developed by the central state. This view embraced a continuation of the traditional statist view so prevalent in 18th and 19th century French political thought. At the same time, the post World War II decades witnessed the growth of regional identities based on developing definitions of local interests and aspirations, often centering around a commonly shared and strongly identified regional or ethnic background. Two growing conceptions of regionalism began to emerge: the administrative view of regional reform imposed from above and a growing consciousness of regional identities and interests developing from below.

The legislative record of the Fourth Republic largely reflects the gradual growth of regional governments imposed by the central state and structured in ways to serve its administrative needs rather than the aspirations of local communities. In 1956, at the initiative of the Planning Commissariat, a government decree divided France into 22 economic programming regions (Dayries and Dayries, 1982:27). While these early regions were created by the state to administer its economic plans, they were seen by local economic and political notables as potential vehicles for asserting their shared interests. This early articulation of shared interests grew in future years into a greater sense of regional community in many areas of France. The regional initiatives of the Fourth Republic set in motion a developing dialectic of thesis and response between the central state and local communities that planted the first tentative seeds of growing regional identity. While regionalization in France began as an exercise in meeting the administrative needs of the state, it paradoxically awakened long dormant regional identities which gradually gained strength over the decade. Much of the development of regional government in France is a direct result of this continuing dialectic between the administrative needs of the state and the growing aspirations of local communities for more direct control over their economic and social futures.

The Gaullist Era

With the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958 over the Algerian imbroglio, the Fifth Republic under de Gaulle ushered in

a new constitution and a vision for France's future based on a centralized, technocratic state in which social and economic problems would be solved by policies developed by the central state. De Gaulle espoused a corporatist view that assumed reforms would be imposed from above rather than developed from below. This ideology shaped the Gaullist approach to regional decentralization. Local consultation and participation were not to be major components of regional reform (Suleiman, 1974). Regional decentralization did not mean a transfer of authority and decision making to governments elected locally, but rather a deconcentration of state authority in which locally based central authorities would be given greater latitude in making local decisions. Safran (1977:226) indicates that not only did Gaullists fear powerful regional assemblies potentially controlled by anti-Gaullist politicians, the Communists likewise opposed decentralization for ideological reasons. Beer (1980:39) notes that the French Communist Party was hostile to autonomism since it was attached to a policy of democratic centralism, but that the Socialist Party, with its developing stress on local self-management, favored enhanced local control over local matters.

Because both Gaullists and Communists feared a weakening of the unitary central state (Berger, 1974), the Gaullists developed a regional program grounded in central state solutions to local social and economic problems. Once again the structure of the state was reshaped to suit the interests of its leadership. Gaullist decree laws in 1959 and 1969 created 22 regional administrative districts that in 1964 were placed under the direction of regional prefects (Dayries and Dayries, 1982). Decrees issued in 1968 and 1970 further deconcentrated state authority but withheld any regional autonomy; the state-appointed regional prefect soon emerged as the dominant political force in the region. These Gaullist regional reforms were designed largely to accommodate central economic planning and adjust the periphery to the political and economic decisions made at the center (Chevallier, 1982:112-114).

The growing technocratic and bureaucratic character of state administration in the absence of substantive regional devolution and self-determination climaxed in May 1968 when France experienced a student and worker revolt that momentarily paralyzed the nation and brought the government to the verge of collapse. In the absence of active support from the Communist Party, however, the state soon restored order and the government did not fall. Gaullists took this major crisis as a sign that an active program of political decentralization designed to enhance citizen

participation in political and economic decisions was necessary. In 1969 de Gaulle unveiled a reform package emphasizing regional economic and social development (Dayries and Dayries, 1982:33). Under his proposed reform the regions were to receive enhanced decision-making authority over economic and social concerns but would have less autonomy of action than had historically been the case for the commune and the department.

The reform proposal required a constitutional amendment that was submitted to the electorate in a referendum package along with several other political changes. The Gaullist leadership received an unexpected setback when in April 1969 the referendum proposal was defeated for a variety of reasons, many of them unrelated to the proposed regional reform (La Documentation Française, 1982:20-23; Lalumière, 1982a:48-52). The referendum had largely become an evaluation of de Gaulle's policies and its defeat led to de Gaulle's resignation as he had threatened. The successor Pompidou government created 22 administrative regions in 1972 that seemingly offered citizens an opportunity for greater participation in local matters, but still did not provide for elected regional governments. This arrangement suited the Gaullists' desire to maintain a strong central state and yet appear responsive to the unrest of 1968.

In 1974 the Gaullists lost control of the government with the election of a moderate centrist as president, Giscard d'Estaing. Giscard won the presidency by advocating a diminished role for the central state with corresponding increased authority for local and regional governments (Lancel, 1974). Once in office, however, Giscard's public rhetoric of a more pluralist, less centralist state increasingly departed from his actions (Rousseau, 1981). As an economic technocrat Giscard was ultimately committed to his view of rational economic planning directed by the state. He increasingly enunciated the conservative view that economic growth equally benefitted all citizens and helped to neutralize social and economic conflict (Birnbaum, 1982:112-137). In practice, the state-sponsored economic modernization of the Giscard era essentially benefitted large corporations at the expense of the traditional middle class, small entrepreneurs, and workers. Giscard's ruling coalition of state technocrats, bureaucrats, private sector capitalists, and industrialists united the political, economic, and administrative elites in France more effectively than ever before (Birnbaum, 1982; Suleiman, 1978). This economically and ideologically unified order opposed the creation of autonomous regions with their own social and economic powers.

The Socialist Government's Decentralization Of 1981-1986

The recent socialist political decentralization must be understood in light of this three-century context. The centralized nature of the French state derives from a particular set of historical traditions which assume the central state to be the indispensable and impartial arbiter of the general collective interest (Badie and Birnbaum, 1983; Suleiman, 1974). This perspective supposes that only the state can rise above narrow particularistic interests and neutrally arbitrate conflicts between special-interest groups. A peculiarly French view of the state, it has been both a cause and consequence of centralized state power in France and has resulted in state imposed solutions to social and economic problems. Political formations on both the left and right have largely shared this perception of the state, opposing decentralizing reforms that would alter historic patterns of central power. As Debbasch (1982) writes, modern democracies have attempted to strike a balance between the need for national unity expressed in centralized political power and the recognition of local diversity expressed in decentralized political power. While the attempt to resolve this complex balance has historically produced alternating tendencies toward the centralization and decentralization of state power in France, the dominant trend has been increased centralization. Putnam (1976:90) writes that, "...the formulation of society's agenda of unresolved problems is usually a virtual monopoly of the political elite. . . ." In France, political elites of both the left and right have largely espoused the necessity of a dominant central state.

Political parties on the left in France have historically viewed concentrated state power as a necessary prerequisite for working class control of the state and the subsequent imposition of central economic planning. Both the Socialist and Communist Parties opposed regionalism as a diversion from the primary goal of heightened class conflict leading to the seizure of state power by the working class. However, the student-led uprising of 1968, which enjoyed the active support of portions of the working class, led both socialists and communists to moderate their views on the regional question. The 1972 Common Program of the Socialist and Communist Parties proclaimed that the regions should be transformed from administrative districts into territorial units of local government with popularly elected regional assemblies. The Socialist Party saw regional devolution as a constructive response to the Gaullist and centrist drift toward growing centralization and technocracy. The socialists believed regional devolution, coupled

with economic nationalization, offered a positive program for opening up French society to greater citizen participation.

The ideological shift by the socialists on the regional question resulted not only from a change in political philosophy, but was a pragmatic response to the realities of Gaullist dominance as well. Since the Gaullists dominated the central government in the 1960s and 1970s, the left cultivated political power and office holding at the local level. A growing local constituency propelled the Socialist Party to become increasingly receptive to demands from below for the creation of popularly elected regional assemblies. As a staff member of the Socialist Party delegation in the National Assembly indicated to the senior author (Rousseau, July 6, 1982), since the right monopolized power at the national level the left was forced to develop its power base at the local and regional level. The re-emergence of local ethnic and cultural identities following World War II constituted yet another force for greater regional autonomy. The socialists' emphasis on local governance and worker self-management meshed smoothly with the growing demands of ethnic activists for increased regional autonomy (Beer, 1980). Regional devolution in France is thus a complex social and political phenomenon reflecting diverse struggles for political and economic power in an ever-changing milieu. The socialists' embrace of political decentralization was a reaction to the bureaucratic hierarchy that stifled local initiatives as well as a pragmatic response to their own electoral position (Ardagh, 1983; Godt, 1983; Crozier, 1982).

The surprising victory of the Socialist Party in winning the Presidency and an absolute majority in the National Assembly in 1981 brought the growing debate over statism into a new political context.³ Upon taking office the socialists moved speedily on a package of decentralization measures they had promised. Introduced in 1981, the initial package of decentralizing legislation became law March 2, 1982. The historic law of 1982 was but a first step in an ongoing stream of legislation and decrees (Gontcharoff and Milano, 1983, 1984) that continued through the duration of the socialist majority in parliament, which ended in 1986. The new legislation fashioned the prior 22 administrative regions into functional units of territorial government with popularly elected regional councils chosen through direct election. The state-appointed prefect no longer serves as chief executive of the region; regional councils now select a president from among their own members. The degree of self-direction given to the region varies depending upon the subject-matter. Regions will exercise considerably enhanced control over some matters whereas in other

areas responsibilities are shared with the central state, whose authority remains dominant. Enlarged areas of regional responsibility include decisions about housing, town planning, economic development aid to local industry, public health and welfare, and the like. Conversely, matters such as public works, inter-regional economic development, and cultural, health, and social matters of national significance remain largely within the purview of the central state. Administrative courts have been given the responsibility of distinguishing between exclusive and shared regional powers.

As with the region, the president of the departmental council has become the chief executive of the department, replacing the former departmental prefect. Prefects continue to be appointed by the central state but their responsibilities have been considerably changed as reflected in their new title: Representative of the State. In place of the former role as chief executive of the department or region, the Representative of the State now plays an expanded role in carrying out central state responsibilities. The Representative of the State represents each national ministry in the department and region and coordinates the local delivery of ministerial services, protects the national interest, and enforces the law. Representatives of the State may no longer suppress *a priori* the initiatives taken at local levels of government, as occurred prior to decentralization. Now, when Representatives of the State believe departmental or regional legislation conflicts with state policy, they may appeal the legislation to administrative tribunals for adjudication; however, local initiatives remain in effect until the results of the appeal are determined. This change in the tutelary authority of the state representative initiates a considerable departure from past practice and strengthens local governments.

Changes in tax policy will ostensibly provide local governments greater financial support from the state as well as greater discretion in its expenditure (Mény, 1984). However, like much of the rest of the industrialized capitalist world, the economic crisis in France has and likely will continue to limit the amount of funds the central state makes available to local governments (Kesselman, 1983). The crisis-induced tendency to limit state taxation and expenditure for social welfare measures will impair the ability of local governments to generate revenues. Thus regional decentralization seems unlikely to alter the great economic inequalities between wealthier and poorer regions and departments. Because the socialist government wished to avoid conflicts potentially damaging to its interests, it side-stepped the politically difficult question of the exact division of powers among

the three levels of local government, commune, department, and region. Administrative courts will decide this matter as specific issues are resolved.

Although regional decentralization represents a first departure from the Jacobin statist traditions of the past, constitutionally, France remains a unitary state in which central power remains primary and indivisible because this power presently granted by the National Assembly to local government can also be withdrawn. The conception of the national interest defined by those who head the central state has a large impact on the character of regional powers and presently gives the regions decision-making authority within an institutional framework that tends to reproduce the logic of the central state. Mény (1984) properly observes that the socialist reforms are not a revolution in state-local relations, but rather the transfer of a perceptible amount of power from the state to local governments, the longer-term outcomes of which remain uncertain. Some (e.g. Rangeon, 1982) have argued that regional decentralization will likely result in little more than an increased centralization of power at local levels of government principally benefitting regional and local elites. The Jacobin tradition clearly remains quite powerful in France (Vie, 1982), and the election of the conservative parliamentary majority in 1986 might portend a shift toward the more centralist policies of the past. This seems unlikely in the near-term, however, since the conservatives currently hold power in 20 of the 22 regional assemblies and are desirous of maintaining support among local constituencies, most of whom favor regionalism. Though the present conservative government has introduced no major regional initiatives to date, it has begun to denationalize the industries and banks nationalized by the socialists during their term in office.

PLURALIST, ELITIST, RULING CLASS, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL PERSPECTIVES

Reflecting both ideological and analytical interests, scholars typically interpret socio-political processes and outcomes from pluralist, elitist, or ruling class perspectives (e.g. Domhoff, 1983:203-223). The underlying assumptions of each perspective raise different questions that define and limit their analytical scope. Although we recognize the utility of pluralist, elitist, and ruling class perspectives, we maintain that each limits its respective focus in ways that leave analyses of the state incomplete. We wish to argue that a developing Marxian perspective known as social

capital offers an approach to state-class relations that expands our insights beyond the more conventional directions taken by pluralist, elitist, and ruling class theories.

Before detailing the social capital perspective, we will briefly characterize pluralist, elitist, and ruling class views of the state. Our characterization of these perspectives is not exhaustive; rather, we highlight the pluralist, elitist, and ruling class points of view merely to suggest how each perspective centers its attention on certain analytical questions while neglecting other political processes and outcomes.

Pluralism

We will begin by suggesting how pluralist conceptions of the state define key questions and limit their analytical scope. Associated with American social sciences of the 1950s and 1960s (Cox et al, 1985:108), pluralists primarily ask 'who wins?' For pluralists, political power represents one's ability to make others act in ways which they would not normally behave (Dahl, 1957:202-203). Presupposing that many political actors compete for limited social rewards (e.g. prestige, money, jobs, and the like), pluralists focus their investigations of the state on the observable political processes of elections and policy making. The pluralist approach maintains that while those who compete for limited social rewards are not absolute political equals, democratically elected governments essentially balance rival interests (Dahl, 1967). Further, despite imperfect political equality, according to pluralist perspectives, all individuals in democratic societies have the potential to pursue their goals (Dahl, 1967).

Given these assumptions, a pluralist approach to French decentralization would focus on socialists winning office and implementing their regional reform programs. Moreover, a pluralist perspective would argue that subsequent conservative victories were the result of democratic processes balancing rival political interests. The pendulum-like movements from centrist, to socialist, to conservative governments would suggest shifting political constituencies, changing political participation, and a sharing of power through democratic processes. In sum, a pluralist *weltanschauung* would attempt to explain the socialists' victory by examining who participates in institutional political processes.

Limiting their analyses primarily to observable institutionalized political processes (such as elections, law-making, policy formation, and the like), pluralists typically regard economic influences as external factors. Rather than perceiving economic structures as creating substantially fixed class interests that

generate collective action, pluralists contend that group political participation, in the form of temporary coalitions of interests groups, arises from specific and changing issues (O'Connor, 1984:196-197). Conversely, ruling class theorists like Miliband (1969) have argued convincingly that ignoring a state's defense and perpetuation of social and economic structures is a serious flaw in pluralist analyses. In sum, the pluralist focus on who wins limits its scope in ways that ignore the curious relationships between economic structures, class interests, and political power. Besides political participation, a complete analysis of the central state in France must consider political and economic structures (Badie and Birnbaum, 1983; Birnbaum, 1982; Suleiman, 1974, 1978).

Elitism

Emphasizing the central importance of political and economic structures, elitist theorists ask 'who governs?' Following the work of Weber, elitists argue that those who control the means of administration by occupying top positions in dominant business, government, and military institutions, hold political power (Weber, 1946:221-224; Mills, 1956; Suleiman, 1974, 1978; Badie and Birnbaum, 1983; Birnbaum, 1982). Elitists frequently maintain that while political power issues principally from the bureaucratic institutions of government, it is influenced by those who hold key economic positions (Mills, 1956; Dye, 1976; Domhoff, 1983).

From an elitist perspective, the socialist government's political and economic policies from 1981 to 1986 clearly suggest a mixed record. The Socialist Party's embrace of regionalism and the subsequent creation of popularly elected regional governments were enhanced by the party's attempt to cultivate an electoral power base at the local and regional level. While the socialists fulfilled their electoral promise to create regional governments giving citizens greater decision-making authority over local matters, they also continued to impose from above corporatist, pro-capitalist policies that sustained the prevailing distribution of political and economic power.

Several actions reflect clearly the Socialist Party's intent to maintain policies that facilitated the reproduction of institutionalized political and economic power. The socialist government passed no legislative initiatives that might have substantially altered two political institutions constituting a major foundation of concentrated state power and elite rule, the *grandes écoles* and *grands corps*. Suleiman (1978) has shown how these institutions produce and maintain a state-sponsored political and economic ruling elite that is unique to France. The *grandes écoles*

educate the technocrats and bureaucrats who staff the high state administration, thereby according the state a virtual monopoly on the creation and certification of political and economic elites. The *grands corps* comprise the specialized administrative agencies heading the vast organizational apparatus of the central state. These two interrelated institutions have, since Napoleon, served as a bastion of vast personal privilege and political-economic power that benefit those tied to capitalist rule (Ardagh, 1983). Nor did the socialists move actively to limit the *cumul des mandats*, the French practice that allows elected officials to hold multiple political offices, thereby further concentrating power in the hands of a few. In central economic planning as well, little substantial change from past practice occurred. While the regions now have somewhat greater scope for developing intra-regional economic plans and consulting with the state, economic planning still remains largely a prerogative of the central state. As Wahl (Beer, 1980:xxix-xxx) observed even prior to the socialist ascent to office in 1981, "On the basis of past experience the left in power quickly loses much of its decentralizing fervor. . . while the Socialist Party's program offers lip service to regional government, the bulk of its reforms requires rather massive centralized controls rather than a Girondist devolution of power." Wahl's assessment is apt today.

The socialists' policies while in office were essentially reformist. Neither their ideology nor their legislative program challenged the fundamental political and economic structures of state or society. In spite of their regional initiative, the socialist government followed a largely liberal, coporatist, reform program based on policy formation from above. While they were indeed more solicitous of working class and local demands than prior conservative governments, the socialists remained committed to a political-economic program grounded in the basic logic of capitalist rule. As Singer (1986a, 1986b) observes, given the current conjuncture in France and the world-wide capitalist economic crisis, the opportunity for other than reformist policies was nil. Singer argues that insufficient pressure from below due to the decline of militant mass movements in the years following 1968 meant that the socialist government was not and could not be a workers government. He notes, as have others, that after a brief initial attempt the socialists were forced to abandon an expansionist economic policy in the face of France's existence within a stagnant capitalist world economy. Since vital worker movements at the factory and local level were absent, the lack of pressure from what might have been its natural constituency meant that the Socialist Party pursued economic and social reformism

directed from above. The Party essentially argued that it would be better qualified to reform and manage capitalism in favor of worker interests than the parties of the right. Thus the Socialist Party carried out policies that reproduced existing political and economic structures since the necessary groundwork for radical action was absent. As Singer (1986a:16) writes, ". . . it's the apparent resignation of the people, the weakening or temporary destruction of the idea that you can radically change life through political action. . . which is most serious, and which the left must try to reverse." The parallel political and economic policies of the left and right seem to exhibit a broad continuity, and the 1981 socialist government was no exception. To be sure, important elements in the Socialist Party and the government favored a more active decentralization policy and the involvement of extra-governmental constituencies in the policy process (Aujac, 1986). Nonetheless, as Aujac (1986) demonstrates, with the exception of nationalizing additional industrial enterprises, the socialists' industrial policies were remarkably similar to those of their predecessors, policies which primarily benefitted an expansion of the power of the state bureaucracy and large enterprises (private and state owned) over small ones.

Berger (1986:3-8) has likewise noted the drift of portions of the left, particularly the socialists, toward reformist political and economic policies that reflect a diminution of the ideology of class conflict. She argues that the left in France is undergoing a fundamental transformation as electoral support for the Communist Party has virtually collapsed and the Socialist Party is rapidly moving in a direction of greater acceptance of private enterprise and the market. Berger attributes these changes to massive recent shifts in public values and beliefs toward broader support for economic and political policies based on private property and the market. In her view, left and right in France may be converging more closely toward the center as each begins to redefine its ideological positions. She believes France may be coming to more closely resemble the Anglo-American pattern based on the regular alternation of center-left and center-right parties. Whatever the validity of Berger's assessment, it suggests once again that the socialists' five years of parliamentary governance produced policies of a reformist nature leading to the maintenance of existing political and economic institutional power. While political decentralization has expanded the possible scope of regional government, it remains to be seen whether decentralization will actually place greater power in the hands of local citizens or merely replicate the Jacobin pattern of the central state and lead to

was considerably more responsive than prior conservative governments to demands from below for greater regional autonomy. The statist approach to regionalism taken by conservative governments had dialectically shaped an unintended and enhanced sense of local awareness within regions, many of which shared common economic, ethnic, and cultural interests to which the socialists responded. In short, such a ruling class perspective would interpret the French decentralization policies as a move from concentrated power serving the interests of capital to a more equitable, less centralized distribution of power benefiting the working class.

Although recent ruling class perspectives have attempted to make greater allowance for relative state autonomy, these approaches typically equate the actions of workers' political parties, unions, and revolutionary vanguards with working class interests, thereby theoretically ruling out the possibility of workers' autonomy from those very organizations. In *Accumulation Crisis*, O'Connor (1984, especially pp. 7-9, 18-21, 109-118, and 196-199) points out that an adequate Marxist theory of the state must recognize the autonomy of workers to struggle on their own behalf. We submit that more satisfying analyses of the state must allow for the relative autonomy of workers and explore the significance of non-structural forms of political power.

Social Capital

The above discussion of pluralist, elitist, and ruling class theories has suggested that although all three perspectives have some analytical utility, their theoretical blind spots amply illustrate that one's perception of political processes and outcomes depends upon one's initial assumptions about political and economic power. In the present analysis, we have seen how assumptions about power shaped various theoretical interpretations of French political decentralization. While acknowledging the influence of pluralist, elitist, and ruling class perspectives on our analysis, our present objective is to recast their basic assumptions in order to explore the analytical utility of an alternative perspective, social capital. We hold that the following assumptions produce a different, fuller, and more satisfactory interpretation of political-economic processes and outcomes:⁴

- a) economic and political structures are sources of power;
- b) dominant capitalist structures are the primary condition shaping the characteristics of political processes and outcomes in capitalist societies;

- c) both the state and the working class are relatively autonomous from the influences of capital;
- d) consequential non-bureaucratic, non-structural forms of power exist;
- e) and workers can initiate struggles on their own behalf, autonomous from so-called workers organizations.

The reader should note that these assumptions are not simply the result of *ad hoc* theory construction; to the contrary, theorists associated with the Marxian perspective known as social capital have developed similar assumptions.

We will now briefly outline the history and theoretical emphases of the social capital perspective in order to provide a broader view of what some have identified as an important advance in Marxist scholarship (McNall, 1984:488; O'Connor, 1984:7-8). Characterizing their perspective as a significant departure from orthodox mechanical Marxism, the social capital genealogy includes an American Trotskyist group in the 1940s, the French journal *Socialisme Ou Barbarie* from the 1940s to the 1960s, the Italian New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, and recent Marxists writing from a strategic, worker point of view (Cleaver, 1979:45-66; de Rouffignac, 1982:108-125).

Over the years, beginning with its early departure from Marxist orthodoxy in the 1940s, social capital theorists have developed two primary emphases. First, social capital contends that, ". . . all labor is working directly or indirectly, in household or in factory, to maintain or reproduce. . ." capitalism (Bell, 1977:187). Such an emphasis suggests that the working class performs both waged and unwaged work (Cleaver, 1979:40-75). The social capital conception of unwaged work goes well beyond the typical Marxist view of surplus value as a consequence of the unpaid portion of the working day. Social capital theorists argue that the unwaged labor of houseworkers, children, students, the unemployed, and peasants is absolutely necessary for capitalist production of profit since it is their labor that produces and reproduces the ability and capacity of workers to work (Cleaver, 1979:175; Dalla Costa and James, 1972; Tronti, 1972, 1973.) In short, social capital maintains that unwaged work is necessary to accumulate both surplus value and a working class.

Second, the social capital perspective stresses the relative autonomy of workers from the influences of capital and workers organizations. As Cleaver (1979:44) has observed, ". . . the self-activity of the [working] class. . . makes it more than a victimized cog in the machinery of capital and more than a fragmented mass

requiring instruction in its class interests." Social capital emphasizes the autonomous power of workers to initiate action in furtherance of their own interests. For social capital theorists, workers have often struggled without the leadership of unions, parties, or revolutionary vanguards. Indeed, at times, because such institutions have stood in opposition to their interests, workers have struggled against their official representatives.

These emphases of social capital are significant in this article because they help to identify logical class interests. Put simply, the interests of capital are to impose waged and unwaged work upon the vast majority in order to accumulate surplus value (typically accomplished by keeping the costs of labor low) and to accumulate a class of individuals (workers) working to maintain a capitalist social order. The interests of working class members are to increase the price of their labor (including making previously unwaged work waged), thus reducing capital's appropriation of surplus value, and to decrease the time spent working for capital.

Here one should not confuse class interests with class sympathies. For example, organizations that identify themselves with the working class but pursue goals that maintain a socio-economic system based on the imposition of waged and unwaged work and the accumulation (either capitalist or socialist) of surplus wealth do not act in the interests of workers. Viewed from the perspective of social capital, the historic task of the working class is not to manage capital better than capitalists, but to struggle to end capitalist social systems based on the imposition of work and the exploitation of labor. In sum, the historic task of the working class is to cease producing and reproducing a class subjected to work, to bid *Farewell To The Working Class* (Gorz, 1982).

Social capital's theoretical emphases and identification of class interests suggest an alternative interpretation of French political decentralization. From this perspective, May 1968 marked the climax of autonomous worker struggles. Thousands of waged workers and unwaged worker students seized factories and classrooms, erected street barricades, demanded improvements in the quality of their lives, including greater control over their work, and insisted on increased compensation for their labor (Cleaver, 1979:51). This uprising of waged and unwaged workers, with demands for greater autonomy in their lives and work, began to influence the Socialist Party's views on power, bureaucracy, and regionalism. It also demonstrated that workers acting on their own behalf were capable of employing non-institutional forms of power to influence government policies. Indeed, as Tilly (1986) shows, French workers and citizens have long attempted to shape

government policies through mass protest and popular struggle. Thus, a social capital perspective implies that the creation of popularly elected regional governments represented a response to workers' demands for more autonomy and control over the political and economic conditions of their lives.

The revolt of 1968 had additional significance because it surprised and threatened the legitimacy of the government, as well as the Communist and Socialist Parties. The legitimacy of the state was threatened since workers were exercising a form of political power external to bureaucratic authority, regulation, and control; likewise, the legitimacy of the Communist and Socialist Parties was threatened for exactly the same reasons. If the communists or socialists could no longer legitimately claim the loyalty of workers, could no longer legitimately assert that they alone had the authority to decide whether workers would strike or stay at their jobs, then the basis for Communist and Socialist Party power within the state bureaucracy and leadership of the working class became problematic. Hence, the reply of the Socialist Party to pressures from its constituency below included not only a changed ideology toward regionalism but also an adaptation to the pragmatic realities of economic power and electoral politics as well.

Moreover, after the revolt of 1968 the French government, and particularly the Socialist and Communist Parties, had to develop strategies that would reassert the necessity of bureaucratic control and the imposition of work. As Singer (1986b:22) has noted, the French state, as well as the Communist and Socialist Parties, had to channel workers ". . . back into purely parliamentary [bureaucratic] waters. . . ." Using a social capital approach, we can suggest that May, 1968 was the climax of an autonomous workers' offensive. The French state, the onus falling primarily on the Communist and Socialist Parties, had to design a counteroffensive to bring workers back under bureaucratic control and to reassert the legitimacy of the imposition of work. These pro-capitalist policies suggest that while workers and capitalists contend for power in the political arena of the state, the struggle is an unequal one even though workers are not powerless.

The socialists found new electoral prominence in the years after the 1968 revolt because they were not directly associated with the government policies that precipitated the crisis, they did not betray the revolt as had the Communist Party, and their embrace of local determination cultivated a popular constituency. In the 1960s and 1970s the socialists pragmatically adopted the causes of factory workers demanding more control over the workplace as well as those of ethnic, cultural, and regional communities with common

identities who called for greater local determination. The Socialist Party embraced decentralization in order to build local constituencies since the Gaullists, and to a lesser extent the Communist Party (especially through the C.G.T., the general labor confederation), dominated national political institutions. Eventually, the Socialist Party's stress on regional decentralization bore fruit with its electoral victories in 1981.

To the extent that the decentralization reforms, inspired from the bottom and administered from the top, have given workers the possibility for greater control over political institutions, one can interpret them as genuine working class victories. Alternatively, however, the social capital perspective also suggests that the Socialist Party program, beginning with the 1972 Common Program and ending with the Socialist Party's parliamentary defeat in 1986, was a triumph for capital since bureaucratic control based on the imposition of waged and unwaged work was reestablished. The Socialist Party simply followed the model of responsible Euro-socialism based on the discipline of waged and unwaged labor and a commitment to the capitalist world order. Further, the transition from centrist, to socialist, to conservative governments in France from the 1950s to the 1980s resulted in changes in the managers of capital, but not in the position of workers. One can attribute the recent shift in the composition of the government to a widespread perception that the socialists were less adept at managing capital than the conservatives (Singer, 1986a:11-16). Thus, each moment, working class 'victory' and capital 'triumph,' points to the ongoing attack-counterattack movements of class struggle. The social capital perspective helps us see how both sides in this ongoing struggle, workers and capital alike, are likely to initiate autonomous offensives, even though the dominant structures of capitalism tend to condition outcomes often, but not exclusively, in ways that further the interests of capital.

Recent attempted reforms of the French higher education system and subsequent student protests constitute yet another example of class struggle (Dickson, 1986; Ireland, 1987). In 1986, Higher Education Minister Alain Devaquet proposed to make university admission requirements more stringent by increasing fees and developing a two-tiered university system (Ireland, 1987:464). More than 500,000 university and secondary-school students marched through the streets of Paris protesting Devaquet's proposal (Dickson, 1986). This genuine revolt from the base rejected both the reactionary reforms imposed from above by the conservative Chirac government and the bureaucratic leadership of the Socialist and Communist Parties (Ireland, 1987:465). Following

the protests, Prime Minister Chirac withdrew the contested proposals and Minister Devaquet resigned; autonomous student struggles engendered outcomes furthering student interests.

The social capital perspective helps us understand these recent student protests as examples of unwaged workers resisting capital's attempts to create an under-class of students and further divide the working class. Student demonstrations opposing a two-tiered university system parallel waged workers' struggles against two-tiered wage systems. In both cases, capital's strategy has been to divide the working class further, forcing workers to compete against one another for preferred socio-economic rewards. In the case of the student protests, the working class counterattacked, aiming to resist capital's division of its ranks by all means necessary. Following the social capital perspective, the student revolts of 1968 and 1986 exemplify the autonomous struggles of unwaged workers (students) against capital's imposition of work and bureaucratic control by the state, as well as the Socialist and Communist Parties.⁵

CONCLUSIONS

In this article we have traced the development of the centralized French state and the Socialist Party's recent decentralization policies. We offered possible pluralist, elitist, and ruling class interpretations of these developments as well as an alternative interpretation based on a neo-Marxian approach known as social capital. Using this social capital perspective we have suggested that French decentralization can best be viewed within a broader framework of class struggle. In this framework, the Socialist Party's decentralization program represents victories for both the working class and capital. We have attempted to show how the social capital approach offers a more satisfying analysis because it accounts for economic and political structures of power, which pluralist perspectives largely ignore, and because it stresses the autonomous actions of workers, helping us to comprehend popular sources of power and non-institutional forms of struggle, which elitist and other ruling class perspectives tend to neglect.

Having explored several analytical interpretations of the state, we now briefly suggest some practical implications of these competing theories. A pluralist perspective implies that political practice requires a commitment to constitutional democracy in an open political system where a multitude of political interests compete for scarce rewards, and yet maintain a relative balance of power between competing interests (Gamson, 1975). For pluralists,

the key to political practice inheres in the construction and maintenance of an open constitutional democracy (such as ensuring voting rights to minorities) and in the full participation of an informed electorate. Because pluralists ignore entrenched institutional economic and class interests, their political practice derives from an overly romanticized conception of state and society.

From an elitist point of view, those who control the means of administration make decisions and institute policies. Thus, elitist political practice concentrates on capturing institutional forms of power, especially the political institutions of the state. However, since elitists argue that non-elites have little chance of capturing the means of administration, elitist theory implies that the masses have little recourse to effective political action (e.g. Domhoff, 1983:203-223).

Ruling class perspectives maintain that political practice aims at control of the means of production, and often assert that mass political action requires the leadership of a workers' party. However, where this form of praxis has succeeded, the despotism of private ownership typically has been replaced by the tyranny of Party and state posing as the vanguard of the working class but acting as an abstract mega-capitalist. Similar to elitist practice, this variant of ruling class theory implies that individuals acting together have few options for decisive political action apart from a workers' party or similar revolutionary vanguard.

Beyond its alternative analysis of class struggle, social capital provides alternatives for praxis as well (Zerowork, 1975:1-6). Including both waged and unwaged workers in its conception of the working class, social capital theory affirms the working class is not monolithic and exhibits diverse interests (Cleaver, 1979). It emphasizes that the interests of certain sections of the working class must not be sacrificed for the benefit of others. The autonomous struggles of unwaged students, the jobless, and women burdened with domestic labor are as crucial to the struggle against capital as are the battles of waged workers for higher earnings, safer working conditions, and shorter hours. More generally, social capital suggests that waged and unwaged workers alike contest the imposition of work by and for the benefit of capital. This means that individuals endeavor to become more than good citizens, as the pluralists would have it, or good workers, as certain ruling class theorists suppose. Social capital theory challenges the working class to free itself from imposed work and pursue the full potential of its creative faculties.

FOOTNOTES

1. During the revolution, France was divided into 83 departments (districts) for administrative convenience.
2. The commune is the smallest unit of local government, the town or township level of government. France has some 36,000 communes today.
3. See Rousseau and Zariski (1987:Chapter 4) for a detailed analysis of the Socialist Party's decentralization policies and their origins.
4. These assumptions imply that capital must struggle both to influence the state and the working class. Although capital attempts to be omnipresent, completely dominating all aspects of political, economic, and social life, we do not assume that capital always enjoys success. Therefore, political processes and outcomes are characterized by active class conflict, rather than determined by capitalist or elite domination.
5. Similar student protests in Mexico during 1986 (see Castaneda, 1986) suggest the broad international utility of the social capital perspective.

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REVIEW FEATURE ESSAY

BRINGING THE ECONOMY BACK IN (AGAIN):
CONCEPTIONS OF THE CAPITALIST STATE AND THEIR
RELEVANCE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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The economic role of the state has been the central issue in recent debates on public policy. This is particularly manifest in the numerous works on "reindustrialization" that have inundated the media, business press, public policy discussions, and best-seller lists. These seek to explain the recent stagnation of the U.S. economy, and offer corresponding policy recommendations for "economic revitalization." Whether conservative "free market" proponents, "corporatist" advocates of a national "industrial policy," or social-democratic critics of capitalism, all focus on the problematic relationship between the state and the economy in the contemporary U.S.--though they disagree on what that relationship is.¹

At the same time, there has been a great deal of work on the state in recent political and sociological theory. Previous conceptions of the nature of the state in a capitalist system have been challenged, and new ones formulated. Much of the contemporary debate on the theory of the capitalist state is directly relevant to the recent political and economic upheavals in the U.S. As usual, however, the separation of "theorists" and "policy analysts" in social science has precluded much contact between these two bodies of literature.

This paper considers one of the central issues in contemporary political sociology--the question of the "autonomy" of the state--in the context of recent political and economic events in the U.S. A number of political theorists have challenged the dominance of what they see as an overly-deterministic conception of the state. They advocate "bringing the state back in" by emphasizing the *independent* influence of state structures, state manager, political parties, and "political" factors over other social and (especially) economic phenomena. Some of this work stressing the "primacy of the political" addresses the deficiencies of previous mainstream orientations in political science and political sociology--for example, pluralist conceptions, or structural-