

The 'Overdeveloped' Post Colonial State: A Re-evaluation

Colin Leys

In this article Leys questions some of the formulations on the post-colonial state and its bureaucracy developed by Hamza Alavi, Roger Murray and John Saul. The articles referred to are Alavi's 'The State in Post-Colonial Societies' (*New Left Review*, 74, July/August 1972) and Murray's 'Second Thoughts on Ghana' (*New Left Review*, 42, March/April 1967). But Leys is particularly concerned to open a debate on John Saul's 'The State in Post-Colonial Societies—Tanzania', published in *The Socialist Register* (London, 1974).

At the end of his review of recent theorising about the state in post-colonial societies and its application to Tanzania John Saul raises a critical question: is state power in Tanzania a force which defends and promotes the interests of workers and peasants, or should 'the independent political organisation of progressive elements, already a (difficult) priority in most other one-party and military administrative regimes in Africa, become a priority for Tanzania as well?' (p. 367). John Saul does not presume to answer this question; his concern is to see whether current theory furnishes a valid framework within which Tanzanians themselves can try to answer it.

He starts out from Hamza Alavi's influential article on the state in post colonial society, focussed on Pakistan and Bangladesh. Alavi argued that (1) the original base of the state apparatus inherited by a 'post-colonial society' lay in the metropole (ie it represented class forces existing there); its task was to subordinate *all* the indigenous classes in the colony (ie it did not rest on the support of any of them); and hence it was 'over-developed' in relation to the ex-colonial society (ie once it rested on the support of at least one indigenous class after the colonialists withdrew). Specifically, it inherits a strong military-administrative apparatus. (2) The state directly appropriates a large part of the economic surplus and deploys it in bureaucratically directed 'development' activity. The 'centrality' of the post-colonial state, which

evidently follows from these propositions, implies the 'centrality' of the state bureaucracy. Alavi suggested that this bureaucracy, which he called an 'oligarchy', was relatively independent of control by any social class, but Saul points out that Alavi's reasons for saying this are not very clear; in any case, Saul notes, in East Africa there were no strong indigenous classes to be subordinated, so that the 'overdeveloped' nature of the state is not due to the need to subordinate such classes, but to the need to 'subordinate pre-capitalist social formations to the imperatives of colonial capitalism'. The absence of strong indigenous classes must, however, affect the degree of independence of the state bureaucracy; but just how, depends on why it was supposed to be relatively autonomous in the post-colonial situation. If its relative independence was due to a 'balance of power' between indigenous and external class forces, then the absence of strong internal classes would seem likely to make the state bureaucracy subservient to strong external classes—ie the metropolitan bourgeoisie. On the other hand, if the state bureaucracy is strong for other reasons, the absence of strong indigenous classes, as in Tanzania, might make it even more powerful. Either way, Saul concludes, the state bureaucracy remains very 'central'. How should we seek to understand its significance?

He suggests that we have only two serious alternatives: (a) the state bureaucracy is a class of a new type, or a class-in-the-making, appropriating and controlling productive resources, whether by using state power to acquire private capital or directly, in its capacity as the collective 'managers' of the so-called 'public sector' (various versions of this approach are associated with Fanon, Debray, and Meillassoux); or (b) the state bureaucracy should be seen as a fluid, still 'plastic' category, largely 'petty-bourgeois' in origin but, by virtue of its role at the junction between the local economy and foreign capital, exposed to contradictory influences—national, working class and peasant class interests confronting those of foreign and domestic capital in the *mode of operation* of the state. On this view they are a potential new class, but not a class whose character can be known in advance, but only from the emerging results of the way they grapple with the contradictions in their conduct of affairs. (This conception was first formulated by Roger Murray with regard to Ghana).

Turning, finally, to Tanzania, Saul argues that only the second of these approaches can really accommodate the progressive initiatives of President Nyerere and his supporters from 1967 onwards. The former approach, which Issa Shivji adopts in his analysis of the class struggle in Tanzania, involves treating all these initiatives (from the Arusha Declaration onwards) as essentially deceptions, exercises in ideological manipulation in the narrow class interest of what Shivji calls the 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie', or at most as reluctant concessions to popular forces. Saul does not underrate the pressures which operate to curtail and neutralise the influence of the progressive forces inside the state bureaucracy but he contends that their initiatives have been genuine, and that it is essential to understand the 'plasticity' of the state bureaucracy in terms of a real class struggle taking place between different elements inside it. The question confronting Tanzania is then, in these terms, whether or not the bourgeois forces have effectively won in that arena, necessitating the 'independent organisation of

The Overdeveloped State?

It is not difficult to agree that the Arusha Declaration, ujamaa vijijini, Mwongozo, etc., have resulted from some kind of struggles within the state apparatus. But Saul himself is now pessimistic about the prospects of further such initiatives from that quarter, and there is mounting prima facie evidence of the weakness and/or neutralisation in practice of several of those which were taken earlier; in a recent sketch Aidan Foster-Carter recently went so far as to argue, with uncomfortable plausibility, that the portrayal of Tanzania as a country making the 'transition to socialism' is and always has been a myth, and that the reality is one of the last of an old line of 'populist' regimes, stretching from Sukarno through Nkrumah, and one whose days are also numbered. But what, then, is the practical difference between John Saul's position and Shivji's? Saul's seems to consist in leaving it to 'those engaged in significant praxis within Tanzania' to determine whether the struggle within the state bureaucracy is really over, whereas Shivji holds that it hardly, if ever, really occurred. In fact it is not clear that Saul's theoretical discussion of the state really illuminates the key question he is posing; to my mind it is more illuminated by his various references to other issues, such as the nature of TANU, the character of the industrialization policy, the mobilisation/demobilisation of peasant political action, etc., many of which he has discussed quite fully in previous articles. The reason for this, I suspect, is that the theoretical formulations about the state which he has surveyed in this article are defective.

Let us begin with Alavi's concept of the 'overdeveloped' state inherited from colonialism. What does 'overdeveloped' really mean here? The word suggests that the inherited state apparatus is larger, its coercive or administrative powers weightier or more ramified, than they would be if the colonial state had not had to subordinate all the domestic classes including those which were themselves dominant classes in the pre-colonial social formation. By dubbing the colonial state a 'powerful bureaucratic-military apparatus' Alavi reinforced the superficial plausibility of this; the 'overdevelopment' of such states then became, for him, an accepted fact which his class analysis of its historical origins could then explain. But a brief reflection suggests that this is misleading. Even if it were true that the colonial state apparatus was more powerful militarily and administratively than it would have needed to be, if it had not had the task of subduing native kings and princes and their ruling classes, this does not mean the force at its disposal would necessarily be excessive for the tasks of domination in the situation which existed by the time formal independence was achieved. For by that time the capitalist mode of production had been introduced, and made effectively dominant, in the colonial social formation, giving rise to a new and developing structure of class antagonisms. In fact it seems more plausible to argue that the colonial state, after the initial resistance to conquest had been overcome, disposed of less military force than it would have required if it had not been able to rely on reinforcements from the metropole or other parts of the colonial empire whenever the need arose. At any rate, in the Indian sub-continent, which Alavi had primarily in mind, the

civil service and armed forces were expanded more rapidly than either national income or population in the years *following* 1947, and in fact, everywhere the *expansion* of the post-colonial state seems to have been dramatic. Of course this does not prove that it was not 'overdeveloped' already at independence, but it certainly is true that the states of the ex-colonies actually tend to be *small*, relative to both population and the size of the economy, compared with the states of the advanced capitalist countries. The relatively low share of national income taken by government revenue and expenditure in underdeveloped countries was noted ten years ago by analysts of the bourgeois 'developmental' school, such as Russett. For our purposes, a few cases will illustrate the point:

	1. National income	2. % GDP from agriculture	3. Central govt. budget	4. (3) as % of (1)
Tanzania	£431m.	37	£107m.	25
Kenya	£563m.	31	£115m.	20
Uganda	£475m.	49	£80m.	16
U.K.	£46,000m.	3	£17,525m.	37
W. Germany	DM611,000m.	3	DM148,000m.*	24*
U.S.A.	\$879,000m.	3	\$370,000m.*	42*

(Budget figures marked * are for Federal and State/Länder governments combined. All data from UN Statistical Yearbook, relating to the year 1970. Because of differences in the way public expenditure figures are defined they are only roughly comparable between countries. Total 'public sector' expenditure in Britain in 1970 was 48% of G.D.P.)

Of course the reason why the share of national income appropriated by the state is smaller in underdeveloped, or periphery-capitalist countries, is that the volume of surplus value produced there is small; so it may well be that in such societies, the state directly appropriates a larger share of the surplus than it does in countries where much more is produced, although we cannot assume this without further investigation. Certainly, the more of the total volume of surplus value which the state directly appropriates, the more it is likely to be immediately involved in the class struggle (by contrast with situations where the state merely guarantees the conditions for the appropriation of surplus value by the bourgeoisie through the apparently 'natural' operation of the labour market). All this, however, is not described or illuminated by calling such a state 'overdeveloped'.

In the case of Tanzania, Saul himself notes that the colonial state did not encounter any strong indigenous classes to be subdued (this was true throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa), but he still maintains that the Tanzanian state was 'overdeveloped', saying that this was due to the need to 'subordinate pre-capitalist social formations to the imperatives of colonial capitalism'. But why should this call for a particularly strong state if there were no strong classes to defend their interests in the old social formations? In any case, it seems to me simply implausible to regard the colonial Tanganyikan state as very strong in relation to its tasks, let alone as 'overdeveloped'. John Saul continues to subscribe to this idea, I suspect, because it suggests a reason for the 'centrality' of the state in post-colonial societies. But

surely 'centrality' is another empty word in this context? The state is equally *important* in all class societies; it is no more 'central' in Tanzania than in Britain or the USA (or the USSR). It may be more 'embracing' (ie may own more productive forces or intervene more directly in various areas of social life) in some societies than others, but in this respect it is typically less 'central' ('extensive' would be a better word here) in most post-colonial societies than in most advanced capitalist societies.

But the important point is not so much that the idea of the 'overdeveloped' state is empty; it is really that this whole way of approaching the question of the significance of any state, ie of starting out from its structure or scope, whether inherited from an earlier situation or not, is a mistake. In order to understand the significance of any state for the class struggle we must start out from the class struggle, not the state. The idea of the 'overdeveloped state' functions, in both Alavi's and Saul's accounts, as an apparent reason for reversing the proper order of procedure: the inherited state is said to be 'overdeveloped', therefore it has exceptional significance in post-colonial societies, therefore the class character of the bureaucracy of this overdeveloped state is the key issue. This leads to formulations about the state bureaucracy which seem as questionable as the idea of the 'overdeveloped' state.

First, the discussion blurs important distinctions which need to be made between different elements in, and branches of, the 'state bureaucracy'. Second, the 'class character' of the state, ie the class interests which state power reflects and promotes, is confused with the class membership, or class position, of the functionaries of the state apparatus. Third, both sides in the debate about the state bureaucracy use a rather loose concept of the 'petty-bourgeoisie' which they regard as the class from which the state bureaucracy originates, and whose interests it reflects; this is true whether they think this means that it tries to use its position in the state to turn itself into a bourgeoisie proper (as Shivji holds) or whether (like Murray and Saul) they think this means that the use they will make of state power is initially indeterminate. Let us briefly consider each of these points in turn.

(a) The 'state bureaucracy'

Within the state apparatus we need to distinguish between two elements, even in 'party states' of the Tanzanian type. First, the career bureaucrats, and second, the personnel inserted into, or added onto, the apparatus through the 'statification' of the nationalist party. Career bureaucrats initially include, especially in senior posts, a high proportion who were recruited under colonialism, but they are joined by younger officials whose formal training, entry route and career aspirations do not differ very much from theirs. In spite of some interchange between state and 'party' posts, especially near the top of the hierarchy, the two elements remain different in one important respect, at least for some time: the party-recruited element brings with it into the state apparatus political links with workers and peasants. Murray's argument primarily concerns the party (CPP) leadership, rather than the civil service; Shivji, on the other hand, is particularly concerned

with the expanding numbers of managers of state-owned enterprises, the 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' *par excellence*. Saul notes this difference but does not stress it, and it is true that in Tanzania the policy of 'cross-appointing' party leaders and career civil servants makes the formal distinction seem less important, yet I think it may be significant for understanding the origins and course of the struggles that do occur inside the state apparatus. It may also be important to distinguish between both levels and branches of the apparatus. Saul's view involves identifying progressive elements at policy-making levels whose initiatives are severely emasculated by the 'dead hand' of 'the bureaucracy' (often lower level officials charged with implementation). This is a different process from that of the party leaders 'crystallising as a privileged class around the apparatus of the state' (Saul in RAPE No. 1) which may of course also be true for other leaders. The distinction between *branches* of the state may be important as the state takes over more and more of the economy. The officials entering the 'state enterprise' branch are especially exposed to the bourgeois values embodied in the technology, management practices, 'efficiency' ideology, etc. of the firms they take over, especially as they are dependent on the former management for advice and are thrust into a ready-made class position vis a vis the workers.

(b) **The 'class character' of the state bureaucracy**

One of the valuable points made by Nicos Poulantzas in his book *Political Power and Social Classes* is that it is a mistake to think that the class origins, class ties or class ambitions of the individuals who compose the apparatus of the state need be the same as those of the dominant class, or that of state power reflects their own class interests, except in a secondary way. The first question must always be which class is dominant in a given social formation, since this dominance must be enforced by the state; the class character of the state is given by this relationship. Of course the relationship is not static. But the class interests of the state bureaucracy, whether they are congruent with those of the dominant class, or in conflict with them, are unlikely to be the determining factor in establishing or upsetting that dominance. Or to put it another way, even if the state bureaucracy enjoy great 'relative autonomy', and have a distinct class interest of their own, it doesn't follow that the class character of the state, or of state power, reflects this interest. This seems to me true even in the USSR, from which this whole problematic probably derives. Trotsky, who first posed the question whether the state and party bureaucracy had developed into a new class, clung for a long time to the Leninist idea that it was acting as the agent of the new dominant class, the proletariat; when he finally came to abandon this belief, he was forced to postulate that some other class ruled; and since this was clearly not the former aristocracy, or the former bourgeoisie, he concluded that it would have to be the state bureaucracy itself. But the originality of the Russian situation permits other formulations. If it was not a classless society, it did not necessarily have a new dominant class; those who have described it as 'bureaucratic collectivism' have in part been making this point. At all events, in post-colonial societies in Africa there can be little doubt that the *dominant* class is still the foreign bourgeoisie; and the question then is whether or not the Tanzanian state serves its interests, not whether the Tanzanian state bureaucracy

has 'become a bureaucratic bourgeoisie' by virtue of its control over state-owned capital. To repeat; we cannot discover the class character of the state by inspecting the class interests of the state bureaucracy, even if these are clear; Murray's suggestion that the 'political class' is subject to 'multiple determinations', and that its class significance must be discovered in its 'modus operandi' of state power confuses the issue, not only because these phrases say so little, but because it points our attention in the wrong direction.

(c) The 'petty-bourgeoisie'

In the debate about whether the state bureaucracy are a new class, or a class-in-the-making, etc., it is generally taken for granted that the members of the state bureaucracy are drawn from the 'petty bourgeoisie'. If this debate is misconceived anyway, it may seem unimportant whether or not their class origins are being correctly described. However, the rather casual way in which the term 'petty bourgeois' is used corresponds to the lack of interest which some of these theorists have displayed (at least in their discussion of the state) in what I would call the historical tendencies of the capitalist mode of production in these 'post-colonial' societies, a question which seems to me fundamental for anyone attempting to answer the political question posed by Saul—ie how we should assess the significance of a regime such as Tanzania's in 1975.

Briefly, Marx's use of the term 'petty-bourgeoisie' was historically fairly specific. It referred to small manufacturers, shopkeepers, peasants and artisans:

In countries where modern civilisation has become fully developed, a new class of petty bourgeois have been formed, fluctuating between proletariat and bourgeoisie and ever renewing itself as a supplementary part of bourgeois society. (Communist Manifesto).

It was a 'petit' bourgeois class in the sense of being in possession of small amounts of capital, and hence having an interest in the preservation of private property, and hence having an interest in the preservation of the power of the bourgeoisie proper. On the other hand, its interests were also opposed to those of the bourgeoisie; individual members of this class, however, are being constantly

hurled down into the proletariat by the action of competition, and, as modern industry develops, they even see the moment approaching when they will completely disappear as an independent section of modern society, to be replaced, in manufacturers, agriculture and commerce, by overlookers, bailiffs and shopmen. (*Ibid.*)

The political consciousness of the petty bourgeois reflected this ambivalence:

... he is dazed by the magnificence of the big bourgeoisie and has sympathy for the sufferings of the people. He is at once both bourgeois and a man of the people... He is himself nothing but social contradiction in action. (Marx to Annenkov, 1846.)

It is a 'transition class, in which the interests of two classes (the bourgeoisie and proletariat) are simultaneously mutually blunted...'
(*Eighteenth Brumaire*)

By contrast the word 'petty bourgeois' as used by the parties to the debate on the state bureaucracy in post-colonial Africa refers mainly to (i) owners of small amounts of non-agricultural capital, such as small manufacturers, contractors, traders, etc. (ii) the richer peasants (iii) white collar workers generally (mainly, of course, in state employment). This clearly means something different from Marx's concept. For one thing, the last category are not owners of capital at all, but the sort of people who Marx thought would replace the petty-bourgeoisie as he used the term, even though they may well have 'bourgeois' tastes, ideas and aspirations. The richer peasants are generally included, and other peasants excluded, because the former have distinct economic interests to defend against the latter and against the rural labourers. Further, all these categories are typically *expanding* in present-day Africa, and have gained both influence and wealth at the expense of the rest of the peasantry and the majority of wage workers.

The 'petty-bourgeoisie' so defined is thus a different concept from that of Marx. This does not necessarily mean it is inept, but it does mean that its political implications cannot be taken for granted. Whereas Marx's petty bourgeoisie played an ambivalent political role corresponding to its contradictory class interests vis a vis the developing bourgeoisie and proletariat, this seems less likely to be true of the 'petty bourgeoisie' as the term is used by both Murray and Shivji. In order to know the real significance of any statement about the 'petty bourgeoisie' as they use it, we need a general analysis of the development of the capitalist mode of production and its relations with petty commodity production, and thus of the development of the relations of production and the class struggle. And this is also the essential starting point for an assessment of the role of the state—and of the significance of the fact—if it is significant—that its personnel are recruited from one class rather than another.

Conclusion

The point of these comments has not been to disagree with Saul's interpretation of the situation in Tanzania, but to question whether the theory he has used in this instance really helps to illuminate that interpretation, or points the political way forward.

As far as the analysis of events in Tanzania is concerned, the distinctions I have tried to draw at most put a gloss on Saul's views, especially with regard to the *origins* and the *course* of the struggles inside the state apparatus. The origins of any such struggle evidently lie in the links—personal, organisational and ideological—with the workers and peasants which some of the party-recruited elements bring into the state apparatus with them. Individual career officials identify themselves with their outlook, but the impetus comes from the party elements, and it was in the party executive, by then largely composed of holders of state posts but still organisationally and ideologically distinct from the state, that the initiatives of 1967 and 1971 were taken. These initiatives reflected an appreciation of some of the class *implications* of the existing social and economic system, as revealed in a succession of policy contradictions (neutralism versus dependence on bilateral aid, egalitarianism versus the elitist educational system,

etc.). This appreciation was very partial, however. In particular it was assumed that the dominance of a local bourgeois class, and of foreign bourgeoisies, could be prevented by legislative and administrative action taken by the existing state. This ignored both the bourgeois character of the existing state (its adaptation to the task of defending bourgeois interests) and the fact that the penetration of Tanzanian society in all its dimensions by capitalism was far too advanced to be checked, let alone prevented, by juridical measures. Rosa Luxemburg's words apply as much to periphery capitalism as to capitalism in the metropolises: '... the fundamental relations of the domination of the capitalist class cannot be transformed by means of legislative reforms, on the basis of capitalist *society*, because these relations have not been introduced by bourgeois *laws*' (italics added). To check, let alone eliminate, the dominance of the capitalist class could only mean mobilising the working class and the poorer peasants to struggle against it at all levels. This was excluded, partly by Nyerere's resistance to the idea that class struggle was involved in the 'building of socialism', and partly, one suspects, from a reasonable fear that mass struggle would involve the leadership in being outflanked on the 'left' by new leaders emerging in such struggles, while simultaneously running the risk of a reaction from the right within the state apparatus. Distortion and 'neutralisation' of the initiatives taken by 'Nyerere and his supporters' within the state apparatus clearly played a part in reducing their impact—the clearest example being the open opposition to the urban workers' response to the TANU Guidelines by the economic bureaucracy—ie state-company managers and directors, supported by the union bureaucracy and the police—in 1973-74. But it needs to be emphasised that this process itself reflects the limitations of the original initiatives taken. It was Nyerere who insisted in February 1967 that the nationalisation measures were 'primarily nationalist' in purpose, and that the fact that ownership and control had to be transferred to the state, which made the measures 'socialist', was welcome (because 'we are socialists as well as nationalists') but incidental; in the interests of 'Tanzania' the firms affected 'should be efficiently run. Their management must be good, and their workers must play a full part in securing high production. Industrial discipline is an essential part of this process. . . .' (Economic Nationalism). These ideas mark the limits, not of one man's ideology, but of the broadly 'populist' form of consciousness of the wing of the original nationalist leadership most sensitive to its mass base. The 1973 decision to enforce 'villagisation' need not necessarily be seen as completely inconsistent with Nyerere's earlier political position, either. His 1968 statement was that no-one could be forced into an ujamaa village; it could not be a *socialist* village if force was used. The villages into which people have since been forced are actually termed 'development villages'. While the President was obviously very reluctant to use force, for any purpose, he seems to have concluded that it was justified in order to improve the ability of the government to direct an increase in agricultural production. This is consistent with the conception of 'socialism' as something that can (if necessity requires) to 'introduced' later, when the material basis for it has been built.

Looking ahead, the theoretical considerations given earlier simply suggest that the concept of the 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' as an

entrenched ruling class is an unreliable starting point for further analysis. Most writers on Tanzania are impressed by the state bureaucracy's expansion and growing powers, and by the bureaucratisation of the party and the trend towards authoritarianism in general. But the contradictions of the situation are obscured by this lumping together of different elements in the state apparatus with the idea of the dominant class and specifically also with the undifferentiated 'petty bourgeoisie'. One illustration must suffice to indicate the sort of issue involved. The initiatives of the Arusha Declaration, etc., cannot be known to be 'progressive' *per se*, but only from an analysis of the class forces and contradictions of the situation as a whole. So the 'progressiveness' of the nationalisation measures can be questioned: perhaps, as Aidan Foster-Carter suggests, they were really just 'the most up-to-date form of denationalisation'. Conversely, can the enforced villagisation be known automatically to be *retrogressive*? As Raikes points out, it does not obviously advance any class interest of the state bureaucracy and it could both raise peasant consciousness, and even stimulate organisation among them. Or again, how well does the present power of the state bureaucracy cater to the material needs of the non-state petty bourgeoisie—rich peasant (included in forced villagisation?), traders, entrepreneurs of various kinds? These questions seem prejudged by the proposition that the state bureaucracy has now constituted itself a ruling class.

In general, I am not entirely convinced that the 'state bureaucracy' does now constitute a class, rather than having simply consolidated itself in its bureaucratic function, in however officious a manner, and with however bourgeois a mentality; or that the bourgeoisie proper (abroad) has been really, rather than juridically, expropriated, under the nationalisation arrangements as these have been described by Shivji and others; in short, I am not sure that there has been a fundamental evolution in the relations between the different elements of the ruling class alliance, as the 'ruling bureaucratic bourgeoisie' thesis implies. Unless these issues are first clarified, the next phase of the class struggle cannot be clearly understood either; specifically, it is not a question of deciding whether the struggle between the 'progressive' 'nizers' and their opponents inside the state bureaucracy is over, but of reconsidering all the changes that have been made in terms of their impact on the development of the class struggle as a whole, and what that impact now implies for future strategy.