

# The Power of the State

**T**HE State is power. Every attempt to define this political concept in other terms falls flat.

It is merely a word. It is not an entity, possessing separate definiteness; it has the qualities neither of being nor of death. It is an idea, legalistic in origin and traditionalized into many meanings by custom and by purpose. Like all abstractions it serves as a dialectical convenience. It is not a fact. Its only reality consists in the power—political, military and, basically, economic power—which it manifests.

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How else can the idea of State be defined? Linguistically? Use of a common language may result from a State-idea being imposed on peoples speaking different languages. Geographically? Only armies delimit State areas. Nature prescribes no ineradicable boundaries. Biologically? Marriage and procreation are matters of propinquity, not of designed continuance of supposedly fixed racial characteristics.

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The American State—which really began when the colonists imported the legal power instrument of taxation and its corollary, the private ownership of the land—originated historically on the Eastern seaboard of part of the North American continent, embraced Dutch, English, Spanish, French and a dozen other blood-strains, soon well mixed, speaking as many different languages, with an infiltration of native Indian.

It was not much of a State, because its power was weak, because the individuals within its purview were strong. The strength of the people was developed by the presence of vast areas to which they could retire when the power of the State became irksome. That is, free land made it possible for men to be free. State power can find expression only within the domain it physically dominates.

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But, as the nascent power of the American State developed, making partnerships with power groups in the newly exploited areas, it extended its geography to the Pacific, to Canada, to Mexico. "Natural borders," these were termed, mainly because an extension of the American State's sphere of power came into conflict with that of resisting powers. It was more convenient to solidify its gains, to exploit its powers internally. Time came when the "natural" borders

could be extended to Alaska, the South Sea Islands, the West Indies. Considerations neither of language nor of consanguinity determined the absorption of these new aliens; the desire for more power was the sole motivation.

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But political power is neither self-existent nor self-assertive. It resides in individuals, and is implemented with political instruments controlled by them. The value of this power for these individuals lies in the advantages it confers on them over others in the gratification of desires. That is, the purpose is economic. Political power for any other purpose is meaningless. At times the individuals in control of State power may seem to be paranoiacs. Careful scrutiny, however, will always reveal an underlying economic motive.

Public power—or the "power of the people"—is a contradiction in terms. If all the people had power, upon whom would they exert it? The exploitation of all by all is impossible. That is the anomaly of the democratic political order: the assumption that power may reside in all the people. In the "democratic" State it is possible for more pressure groups than in an autocracy to gain control of the means of exploitation. But there must be the large protoplasmic population to be exploited by the various groups which have gained control of the political instruments.

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The three chief instruments are regulation of commerce, taxation and the private ownership of land. The latter two are complementary. For, if the power to tax were denied the State, its vitalizing force would disappear. It would disintegrate, vanish. But the gregariousness of people gives rise to necessary social services, the rendering of which is the State's excuse for taxation. With the abolition of taxes these social services would necessitate the socialization of rent. The socialization of rent is the denial of absolute private land ownership.

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Military establishments and the legalistic paraphernalia by which State power is rationalized and made palatable—all that palaver called political science—are but the technique of exploitation. The real power of the State resides in its power to tax—a power which grows in proportion to the impotence of the people.