PART II

Political implications
Neoliberalism and authoritarianism have often been mentioned in the same breath. There are good reasons for this: one can think of the post-coup developments in Pinochet-era Chile, the attacks on national self-determination embodied in structural adjustment programmes for countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and the co-existence of ‘free market’ policies and strengthened security apparatuses in countries such as the USA and China. However, for the most part this connection between neoliberalism and authoritarianism has been articulated in problematic ways. Principally, neoliberalism’s valorization of the ‘free market’ by way of an ostensibly anti-statist outlook continues to receive respect (implicitly or explicitly) in even critical literatures. In consequence, authoritarianism tends to be portrayed as an outcome of the contradictions between ‘pure’ neoliberal ideology and ‘messy’ neoliberalizing practices which result in a larger role for the state than anticipated.

Unfortunately, this misses the point of the neoliberal agenda, which from the beginning has been less interested in giving free rein to markets than in engineering and managing the markets that it wishes to see. Moreover, state-directed coercion insulated from democratic pressures is central to the creation and maintenance of this politico-economic order, defending it against impulses towards greater equality and democratization. Nevertheless, although neoliberalism, along with more classical strands of ‘free market’ thought, has always contained authoritarian tendencies, this has become significantly more prominent since the outbreak of global capitalist crisis in 2008. This has two consequences for our understanding of neoliberalism: refrain from offering implicit or explicit respect to its anti-statist rhetoric; and expand more traditional conceptualizations of authoritarianism in order to capture more appropriately contemporary processes. As I have argued elsewhere, ‘one should not view ‘authoritarianism’ as merely the exercise of brute coercive force (for instance, policing of demonstrations, racist political rhetoric, etc.). Authoritarianism can also be observed in the reconfiguring of state and institutional power in an attempt to insulate certain policies and institutional practices from social and political dissent’ (Bruff 2014: 115).

In order to illustrate most effectively this approach to neoliberalism, the chapter discusses the post-2008 and, especially, the post-2010 period in the European Union (EU), and particularly for the countries in the Eurozone. This is a useful exercise because, more than anywhere else in the world, Europe’s self-image is that of a socially aware, more generous and more inclusive form of capitalism than in other world regions. The notion of ‘social Europe’ is a powerful trope
which is regularly invoked to justify painful restructuring and austerity, yet a key contemporary aspect of these discourses is the argument that such forms of capitalism can survive only if ‘social’ institutions such as the welfare state prove able to adapt to change (for instance, through the growing emphasis on the responsibility of individuals to work rather than the collective entitlement to protection from socio-economic restructuring). Recent years have seen the dramatic intensification of neoliberalizing processes that were already taking place, bearing witness to the reconceptualization of the European state as increasingly non-democratic through its subordination to (often supranational) constitutional and legal rules that are portrayed as ‘necessary’ for prosperity to be achieved. This even extends to the deliberate violation of EU law by the very institutions charged with upholding it, as a means of removing the accountability of the institutions to the European and national parliaments. In addition, protests and resistance against such rules – rules that have in some cases led to drastic forms of austerity – have provoked growing levels of coercive response. These include the increasingly violent forms of policing against alleged ‘extremists’ in the anti-austerity camp in an attempt to prevent alternatives to neoliberalism from emerging, and most recently (writing in August 2015) the crushing of the Syriza programme and ignorance of the referendum against austerity in Greece.

Despite the highly pessimistic nature of this picture, I view authoritarian neoliberalism as a response both to wider capitalist crisis and more specific legitimation crises of capitalist states. Hence, the apparent strengthening of the state simultaneously entails its growing fragility, for it is becoming an increasingly direct target of a range of popular struggles, demands, and discontent by way of the pressures emanating from this strengthening. It should be kept in mind that, as with neoliberalism’s authoritarian tendencies, examples of state strengthening/weakening are not confined to just the contemporary period. Nevertheless, there have been considerably more visible and significant crises of legitimation across a number of countries since 2008. As a result, the attempted ‘authoritarian fix’ is potentially more of a sticking plaster than anything more epochal. The question, then, is whether the contradictions inherent to authoritarian neoliberalism – especially with regard to the strengthening/weakening of the state – have created conditions in which progressive and radical politics can begin to reverse the tide of the last three decades.

The chapter is structured into three main parts, all elaborating upon the above comments. First, in line with the critiques of classical political economy articulated in Michael Perelman’s *The Invention of Capitalism* (2000), I compare and contrast the underlying respect for neoliberalism’s anti-statist rhetoric with the central focus of neoliberal ideology on the reconceptualization of the capitalist state towards a more coercive, anti-democratic social purpose. Second, I discuss the EU in order to demonstrate that, even in a world region which would theoretically be the most resistant to such a reconceptualization, the steady drum beat of neoliberalization has dramatically intensified since 2008, often via the explicit mobilization of juridical power to both constitutionalize austerity and selectively violate EU law. Third, I explore whether the increasingly coercive levels of response to protest and resistance against these developments – mirroring examples elsewhere in the world, which will also be commented on – have the potential to actually make it *more* and not less possible that new, more equitable modes of living can emerge and flourish. Finally, I conclude with reflections on the broader implications of my argument and suggestions for further research.

**Neoliberalism: marketing the market, reconceptualizing the state**

Neoliberalism’s genesis during a period bearing witness to the growing role of social democracy, organized labour, welfare programmes, and so on, in capitalist political economies, means that its worldview has from the beginning covered all areas of social life. Hence Jamie Peck’s argument...
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that neoliberal ideology has always been ‘preoccupied with the necessary evils of governmental rule’ and ‘framed by the distinctively post-laissez-faire question of appropriate forms and fields of state intervention in the socioeconomic sphere’ (Peck 2008: 7). In consequence, the virtually innumerable aspects of social life that could, in an ideal world, be reformed in the name of the ‘market’ makes it relatively simple for neoliberalism to be rhetorically deployed against all manner of intellectual, political, and social enemies. As Peck (2010: 7–8) further notes, ‘[e]ven after decades of neoliberal reconstruction, it is remarkable how many present-day policy failures are still being tagged to intransigent unions, to invasive regulation, to inept bureaucrats, and to scare-mongering advocacy groups’.

This means that it is commonplace for a critique of neoliberalism to focus on the contradictions between ‘pure’ neoliberal ideology and ‘messy’ neoliberalizing practices, whereby the role for the state is larger than anticipated in neoliberal ideology due to the socio-historical conditions in which neoliberalism emerged and rose to prominence (in addition to Peck, see also Harvey 2005; Mirowski and Plehwe 2009; Cahill 2014). Examples include the enforcement of the neoliberal agenda through vigilance against ‘distortions’ of the market by groups such as trade unions, and the maintenance of ‘law and order’ in times of economic crisis and/or protests against a smaller economic and social role for the state. However, as argued by Martijn Konings (2010), there is an enduring tendency to view neoliberalism as fundamentally about the ‘free market’: the disembedding of the market from state and other forms of institutional regulation in the name of the mythical invisible hand. Hence, the neoliberal/neoliberalizing contradiction should only be the beginning and not the core of our critique.

Such an acknowledgement encourages us to take further steps, and ask whether the relentless focus on ‘marketing the market’ (Desai 1994: 48) has masked underlying philosophical commitments immanent to neoliberalism. To give one example, Friedrich Hayek, one of the key neoliberal intellectuals, argued in the 1970s that ‘the political institutions prevailing in the Western world necessarily produce a drift [towards the destruction of the market] which can be halted or prevented only by changing these institution’ (Hayek 1973: 9). Note here that Hayek is seeking to change rather than do away with the state, a point which he then elaborates on by attacking conceptions of democracy that are, in his view, incompatible with capitalism (ibid.). Yet many forms of democratic participation and governance would fall foul of this categorization, as shown by his subsequent argument that there is a need to restrict strongly the power of elected parliaments in favour of the creation of institutional safeguards. Such safeguards make it possible for the executive part of the state to coercively enforce obedience to general rules that are applicable to all:

The root of the evil is thus the unlimited power of the legislature in modern democracies, a power which the majority will be constantly forced to use in a manner that most of its members may not desire. What we call the will of the majority is thus really an artifact of the existing institutions, and particularly of the omnipotence of the sovereign legislature, which by the mechanics of the political process will be driven to do things that most of its members do not really want, simply because there are no formal limits to its powers.

(Ibid.: 11; see also Hayek 1944, 1960)

In other words, the conditions for neoliberal order are not realized through the unleashing of market forces alone, as per neoliberal rhetoric; nor is the state significant only in periods of transition towards the utopia of a market order, as per ‘pragmatic’ interpretations of this ideology. Instead, we should see the state as a permanent and necessary part of neoliberal ideology, institutionalization and practice. For it is state-directed coercion insulated from democratic
pressures that is central to the creation and maintenance of a politico-economic order which actively defends itself against impulses towards greater equality and democratization (see also Klein 2007; Springer 2015).

None of this should come as a surprise when one considers the fact that this has always been a hallmark of so-called ‘free market’ worldviews. Michael Perelman (2007: 44) argues that although classical political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo ‘generally attempted to show [in their core theoretical writings] how market forces could benefit people… they understood that market society required strong measures in order to coerce large numbers of people to join the market revolution’. This often entailed their (sometimes private) support for widespread legal restrictions on self-provisioning in the countryside, especially regarding food, and for enclosures of the land which drove agricultural workers into factories and mills (Perelman 2000: 5–6). Such a position, which contradicted their more public and principled avowal of laissez-faire economics, was merely a continuation of early democratic theory, which declared a clear preference for the liberty of the owners of private property over the collective democratic rights of the populace as a whole. Hence depriving people of a means of living was justified on the grounds that the land should be owned and used by ‘the industrious and rational… [not] the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious’ (Locke 1947[1689]: 137).

This means that the classic early capitalist state, the British, did not live up to its image of a minimal, liberal set of institutions. Partly inspired by the interventions of classical political economists and political theorists on the need for enclosures and wage dependence to ‘improve’ the economy, the lot of the people and especially the lot of the poor, ‘the taking of game [became] tantamount to challenging [private] property rights’ (Perelman 2007: 52; see also Perelman 2000: 38–58). Indeed, poaching – that is, traditional self-provisioning for sustenance – was seen as such a serious crime ‘that it was, on occasion, even equated with treason… several poachers were actually executed’ (Perelman 2007: 52; see also Thompson 1977). As a result, Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exhibited ‘levels of state violence that would have been unthinkable’ in countries such as Prussia, one of the traditional examples cited of an ‘authoritarian’, non-democratic transition to capitalism (Clark 2007: 465). Clark notes that ‘the number of persons executed… exceed the Prussian figure by a factor of sixteen-to-one’ in the 1816–35 period, taking differences in overall population into account (ibid.: 466). Moreover, ‘the great majority of English and Welsh capital sentences were passed for property crimes (including quite minor ones)’ (ibid.), which would have included offences such as stealing farm animals from enclosed land as well as attacks on property by desperate, starving people (see also Thompson 1977, 1991).

Therefore, if we can find little evidence during the so-called ‘classical’ era of capitalist development and politico-economic thought of a ‘free market’ in theory or in practice, then why should this be the case in more modern times? (See also Bruff 2011a, 2011b.) Furthermore, if there is plenty of evidence during this period of authoritarian state practices in the dedicated pursuit of liberty for the owners of private property at the expense of the collective democratic rights of the populace as a whole, then why should neoliberalism not also be fully supportive of such practices today?

‘Social Europe’ and the post-2008 rise of authoritarian neoliberalism

As noted in the introduction, it is a useful exercise to focus on the EU when discussing neoliberalism and authoritarianism because, more than anywhere else in the world, Europe’s self-image is that of a socially aware, more generous and more inclusive form of capitalism than in other world regions. Principally, three features are generally held to have distinguished Western Europe
after 1945 from other middle- to high-income capitalist countries (see Albert 1993; Hay et al. 1999; Esping-Andersen 1990). These are relatively low levels of socio-economic inequality, generous welfare states and a significant role for organized labour in the workplace and in policy-making – all of which were underpinned by a supportive political consensus that gave a prominent role to ‘non-market’ institutions in the political economy. Of course, this varied across different countries, but Western European political economies appeared after 1945 to combine economic success and social cohesion in a way not observed in other ‘developed’ parts of the world. This unity in diversity increasingly became, with the ongoing broadening and deepening of the European integration project, a point around which a wide range of social and political actors and opinions could rally, not least with the rise of discourses on ‘globalization’ in the 1990s. During this decade, the idea of a pan-European social model (i.e. inclusive of post-socialist states) was so prominent that it became a dominant trope when talking about political economy issues (Jepsen and Pascual 2005; European Commission 1994; Vaughan-Whitehead 2003).

Nevertheless, despite the attachment to ‘social Europe’, Europe has in reality been neoliberalizing through, not against, ‘social’ institutions of governance since the 1980s. One could observe, even before 2008: the growing use of collective bargaining negotiations to explicitly discipline labour rather than treat unions as an equal partner; increased welfare retrenchment and the broader shift from welfare to workfare; and the decline of ‘catch-all’ political parties and the rise of narrower social and political coalitions (sometimes in tandem with a resurgent far-Right) (Bruff 2014; see also Bruff 2015 on Germany, the proclaimed ‘model’ for other countries to emulate). Furthermore, the growing importance of the EU has tended to reinforce these developments, with initiatives such as the Single Market, Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) plus the Lisbon Agenda promoting social cohesion only insofar as it is ‘defined in terms of the adaptation of labour to the exigencies of global competition’ (van Apeldoorn and Hager 2010: 227).

This all laid the foundations for the rise of a distinctly European form of authoritarian neoliberalism after 2008. I have argued elsewhere that the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism is centred on a three-fold reconfiguring of state and institutional power:

1. the more immediate appeal to material circumstances as a reason for the state being unable, despite ‘the best will in the world’, to reverse processes such as greater socio-economic inequality and dislocation;
2. the deeper and longer-term recalibration of the kinds of activity that are feasible and appropriate for nonmarket institutions to engage in, diminishing expectations in the process; and
3. the reconceptualization of the state as increasingly nondemocratic through its subordination to constitutional and legal rules that are deemed necessary for prosperity to be achieved.

(Bruff 2014: 115–16)

While such developments can be observed across the world, the most compelling example of this shift can be found in the EU because of Europe’s aforementioned self-image. For example, in the late 2000s European and especially German elites were vocal in their criticisms of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ capitalism, which, via the implosion of the American sub-prime market and the violent chain reaction culminating in the massive global crisis in late 2008, was portrayed as promoting excesses that would not be permitted by the more socially responsible European capitalisms. However, the large fiscal deficits created across Europe by the massive bailouts and recapitalizations of numerous financial institutions, plus the sharp falls in GDP in 2008–9, were portrayed as a clear sign that European states had been living beyond their means.

This built on the dominant argument, both politically and academically, in the 1990s and especially the 2000s: ‘social Europe’ could continue to exist, but only if ‘social’ institutions
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proved able to adapt to change (cf. Blair and Schröder 1999; Sapir 2006; Kitschelt and Streeck 2004; Ferrera et al. 2001). By and large, labour market flexibilization, welfare retrenchment, and the reduction of trade union power were viewed as central to any successful adaptation. As a result, the curious case of cognitive dissonance from before 2008 – laud the superiority of ‘social’ models of capitalism while simultaneously seeking to dilute precisely these ‘social’ elements – continued in increasingly strident forms after 2008. This means that, even today (August 2015), it is still asserted by those responsible for promoting and imposing drastic neoliberalizing changes that a type of capitalism distinctive from the Anglo-Saxons is the goal. The catch is that the overwhelming focus has been on ensuring that the relevant ‘social’ institutions and policies are reformed ‘appropriately’.

The acceleration and intensification of neoliberalizing processes can be divided into two main components: the content of the proposed reforms; and the means by which the reforms are implemented and enforced. On the content, the thrust is towards: often drastic austerity in the rush towards balanced budgets and possibly even fiscal surpluses, primarily through the reduction in the size of the welfare state and the public sector; the significant loosening of labour market regulations to promote the growth of atypical employment – that is, not of full-time and/or permanent jobs; and reductions in unit labour costs in the name of greater ‘competitiveness’, achieved primarily through austerity, atypical jobs, but also legally mandated wage freezes or reductions. None of this could be said to reflect the values embodied in traditional notions of ‘social Europe’. Moreover, the disastrous economic performance in the Eurozone since 2008 – by 2014, EU GDP was no higher than the pre-recession peak (EuroMemo Group 2015: 8) – means that one cannot argue that the changes have ‘worked’ even when assessed against a narrow set of criteria for ‘success’.

For both of these reasons – the abandonment of traditional notions of ‘social Europe’ and the invisibility of any benefits to wider society accruing from the measures – the task of gaining societal consent for such changes has been and is likely to be, at best, only partially successful. Hence the widespread development of (supra)national constitutional and legal mechanisms since 2008 to impose these changes and also restrict significantly the scope for future generations to overturn them. This emerged initially in Germany, which only months after the collapse of Lehman Brothers passed a constitutional amendment mandating the achievement of a balanced budget from 2016 onwards (in the name of avoiding Anglo-Saxon excess, of course). Following on from this, in the aftermath of the Greek crisis in 2010 a whole raft of measures were proposed and agreed on at the EU level. These new ‘economic governance’ regulations seek to construct a permanent, continent-wide conditionality regime that is aimed at all states, regardless of their economic performance. In contrast to ‘traditional’ structural adjustment programmes in Africa, Latin America and Asia (where some of the connections between neoliberalism and authoritarianism were made prior to 2008), which were reactively imposed on specific crisis-hit countries, in the EU the attempt is to pre-emptively self-impose such measures.

There is not the space here to investigate the specificities of the different agreements, pacts and treaties – such as the Euro Plus Pact, the Six-Pack, the Two-Pack, and the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance – and I direct interested readers to the outstanding work of Lukas Oberndorfer on the various legal provisions (Oberndorfer 2012, 2014, 2015). Nevertheless, five points can be made. First, the aim of EU economic governance is, in the words of the European Commission, to ‘detect, prevent, and correct problematic economic trends’. Second, problematic economic trends are defined primarily in terms of ‘excessive’ budget deficits and ‘high’ unit labour costs that must be reduced in the name of competitiveness. Third, the executive authority of the European Commission has been strengthened to not only monitor closely member states, but also propose/impose sanctions on them such as fines of up to 0.2 per cent of GDP.
Fourth, the ‘Reverse Majority Rule’ states that Commission proposals are accepted as valid if they are not prevented within ten days by the European Council’s veto with a simple majority, and member states are expected to respond to Commission suggestions for budget consolidation (which overwhelmingly focus on austerity measures) before their respective national parliament is consulted. Fifth, as noted by Oberndorfer and other critical legal scholars, many of these changes are in violation of EU law. Examples include the very limited consultative role for the European Parliament in the new regime, despite its oversight function (‘co-decision’) in the EU’s institutional architecture, and the illegality of the ‘Reverse Majority Rule’. I will return to this point below.

Finally for this section, the EU’s economic governance regime is implemented via the Eurosystem, which is organized according to an annual cycle. The European Semester is also the declared institutional mechanism for promoting ‘social Europe’ as part of the ‘Europe 2020’ agenda. In other words, despite all of the above – the drastic changes required and the antidemocratic violation of EU law that their implementation entails – the EU is still claiming to uphold the values embodied in the notion of ‘social Europe’. For instance, even in the highly punitive Euro Summit ‘agreement’ of 2015 (more details below), it is asserted that Greek labour market policies should be ‘in line with the relevant EU directive… along the timetable and the approach agreed with [IB: read ‘imposed by’] the Institutions [the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund]… with the goals of promoting sustainable and inclusive growth’ (Euro Summit 2015: 3; emphasis added). The question, then, is what can be done in response to both increasingly authoritarian modes of governance and the ongoing attempts to cloak such developments with legitimizing tropes such as ‘social Europe’.

The fragility of the ‘authoritarian fix’

Lukas Oberndorfer (2015) argues that whereas before 2008 neoliberalization proceeded primarily via an erosion of substantive democracy, since 2008 we have seen various breaks with formal democracy. Hence, the scope of neoliberalization has widened from the reversal of social and economic gains made during the twentieth century, via the presentation by neoliberals in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries of alternatives to the current mode of governance at elections and through other forms of political participation, to alternations of different neoliberal governments as the only choice seemingly on offer (for a prescient discussion, see Poulantzas 1978: 231–40). But it is this apparent strengthening of capitalist state formations which leaves them as more fragile and delegitimated entities, by way of the more visible role for coercion in both the legal and repressive senses and the relative absence of material benefits for the majority of the population.

This sheds light on the aforementioned Euro Summit ‘agreement’ of 12 July 2015. Here, despite the election of the anti-austerity Syriza government in Greece in January 2015, and the resounding Greek referendum result in June 2015 against further rounds of austerity and neoliberalization, the European institutions imposed perhaps the harshest terms yet on the Greek population since 2010 (see Euro Summit 2015 for details). The measures were preceded by a dramatic development in the role of the Eurogroup of finance ministers for the Eurozone countries, which is responsible for managing EMU affairs outside the monetary policy controlled by the legally independent European Central Bank (ECB). On the one hand, numerous ministers led by Germany’s Wolfgang Schäuble openly supported Greece’s ejection from the Eurozone; on the other, a remarkable legal somersault was performed. As noted earlier, many aspects of the new EU regime are in violation of EU law – meaning that various declarations after January 2015 that European law prevented Greece from revisiting earlier bailout terms
were rather ironic. But this acquired a farcical dimension in late June 2015, when Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis was expelled from the Eurogroup meeting because his presence would make a unanimous agreement on Greece impossible. When he queried this, the justification was that the Eurogroup does not exist in European law as it is an informal group and thus is not bound by any legal statutes or regulations (Lambert 2015). As such, the Eurogroup possesses highly significant legal powers when it suits the European institutions (potentially forcing a ‘Grexit’), and it does not exist when it suits the European institutions (when the basis for a ‘Grexit’ is challenged). Conveniently forgotten in all of this is the formal legal basis for the Eurogroup, as mandated by the 2009 Lisbon Treaty.

This is merely the most recent example of the increasingly flagrant breaches of formal democratic procedures and rights one can observe around the world. Take, for instance, the ‘gag’ laws introduced in Spain in summer 2015, which significantly restrict and to a degree criminalize the freedom of assembly and protest. This includes being disrespectful to police officers and trying to prevent an eviction from taking place, i.e. far removed from more traditional notions of ‘public disorder’ (see also, for a similar set of legal provisions and restrictions, Canada’s C51 Bill passed in 2015). In addition, consider the routine practices of police violence and the illegal mobilizations of juridical power across the globe, be it the repression of the Occupy movement in the US in 2011, the massacre of striking miners in South Africa in 2012, or the violent crackdown on the Gezi Park protests in Turkey in 2013. Consider also how the protests, strikes and resistances have been framed: as an ‘extremist’ attack on ‘democracy’, thus justifying the coercive reaction. Hence my argument that one should not view ‘authoritarianism’ as merely the exercise of brute coercive force: it can also be observed in the reconfiguring of state and institutional power in an attempt to insulate certain policies and institutional practices from social and political dissent.

Nevertheless, despite the highly pessimistic nature of this picture, we must always keep in mind that authoritarian responses to capitalist crises are ‘partially responsible for new forms of popular struggle’ which seek to create and live in a different kind of world to the one being imposed on them (Poulantzas 1978: 246). In other words, the capitalist state is currently evolving into a stronger and more authoritarian but also a more fragile and delegitimated entity. As a result, the attempted ‘authoritarian fix’ is potentially more of a sticking plaster than anything more epochal. The question, then, is whether the contradictions inherent to authoritarian neoliberalism – especially with regard to the strengthening/weakening of the state – have created conditions in which progressive and radical politics can begin to reverse the tide of the last three decades.

As in the past (for example, the 1918–39 period), the current conjuncture has ambiguous implications for radical/progressive politics of the Left, not least because of the success of radical Right movements and parties in narrating the post-2008 period for rather different political ends. In Europe, one can find examples across the continent, be it the FN in France, the PVV in the Netherlands or Golden Dawn in Greece. However, one can find more positive examples, too. These include the widespread growth of self-organization in countries hit hardest by crisis and crisis response – for instance, the formation of citizen health centres and community kitchens in Greece and the creation of the Spanish Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform of Those Affected by Mortgage Debt, PAH) to fight against widespread evictions and promote housing as a human right. Furthermore, there has been the delegitimation of large parts of the political establishment in some countries, opening up space for the growth of parties of the Left (such as Sinn Fein in Ireland and Syriza in Greece) which reject the neoliberalized social democracy of the traditional party (the latter arguably being the case even after the August 2015 formation of the Popular Unity party, created by Syriza opponents of the party leadership’s strategy since
entering office, in advance of the national election on 20 September 2015). And, finally, even if this appears an optimistic spin on the Euro Summit ‘agreement’ of July 2015, the protracted negotiations after the election of the Syriza government opened real splits in the pro-austerity camp in Europe and also between the European institutions and the International Monetary Fund, with the latter admitting belatedly that the shock therapy of the last five years has not worked and that a programme of debt relief for Greece is now needed (the likelihood of which is now growing).

These developments are significant, because all of them – the rise of self-organized communities, the emergence of new parties of the Left, the growing splits in the pro-austerity camp – challenge ingrained assumptions about the state, the law, and ‘social’ values. ‘Left’ politics has frequently been guilty of taking the law and ‘social’ institutions in capitalism to be somehow neutral, ignoring in the process how ‘non-market’ social forms have often been central to, not resistant against, the rise of neoliberalism. The approach I have put forward in this chapter alerts us in a more expansive way to how inequalities of power are produced and reproduced in capitalist societies, which in turn enables us to consider how other, more emancipatory and progressive, worlds are possible through this enhanced awareness. More to the point, it helps bring to the forefront an emancipatory anti-statism that is both at a distance from the state and potentially transformative of it through new forms of democratic struggle.

Certainly, while the current conjuncture can look bleak, it has confirmed three things: talk of the ‘free market’ no longer masks the centrality of the state to the (re)production of massive inequalities; rhetoric about ‘social’ values is hollow when it is accompanied by the erosion of precisely such values; and the defence of authoritarianism with recourse to the language of economic necessity often indicates a violation of formal and substantive rights. We cannot say that we were oblivious, not least because there are plenty of examples of protest and resistance that explicitly recognize what the state of play is.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that, unlike many understandings of neoliberalism, and ‘free market’ thought more generally, the state is central to such understandings and their implementation in practice. Neoliberalism is fundamentally about the creation and management of markets that it wishes to see, meaning that the state has a permanent and necessary role to play in this process. Moreover, present-day Europe is an excellent example of the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism, whereby the response to capitalist crisis has facilitated a substantial investment of state and juridical power in the intensification of the attack on formal and substantive rights. Finally, the belated recognition that the state is imbricated in and not protective of neoliberal practices might, in the longer-term, create more propitious conditions for the emergence of new, more equitable modes of living which are the outcome of the rethinking of traditional assumptions about the role of the ‘non-market’ in capitalism.

Inevitably, there are still under-explored areas surrounding the relationship between neoliberalism and authoritarianism that future research could explore (although see Tansel 2016). They include a serious examination of ‘classical’ neoliberal writings regarding the role of the state, which goes beyond the otherwise laudable efforts of Peck and others to expose the contradictions between neoliberal thought and practice. Moreover, a much more sustained engagement with feminist work on social reproduction, the household and the gendered effects of austerity is needed for a richer picture to be constructed of the pernicious impacts of authoritarian neoliberalism and the transformative possibilities this potentially entails — that is, beyond the ‘public’ sites of capitalist society such as the state (although see Bruff and Wöhl 2016).
of the ‘non-market’ should be developed further to encompass more fully the multi-faceted aspects of life, which form part of neoliberal society today and could also form the basis for an alternative society in the future (see White and Williams this volume). There are surely more areas, too, but, whatever they are, it is essential that they take seriously the need to reject out of hand the notion that neoliberalism has anything to do with the ‘free market’ or with democracy.

Note

1 See European Commission [webpage] (n.d) for more information.

References

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