

Jessop, Bob. 2001. *The Regulation School and the Crisis of Capitalism: Volumes 1 – 3*. Cheltenham. Edward Elger.

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The persistence of endemic crises in Western capitalism, despite the hegemony of over two decades of neo-liberalism, has led to renewed interest in institutional and evolutionary approaches to socio-economic theory. Yet, institutionalism is an extremely broad theoretical tradition,

encompassing critical development theories and paradigms primarily focused on the advanced societies. Amongst the latter, there is little doubt that one of the leading schools of thought is regulation theory, whose dominance is only now being challenged by an offshoot, business systems theory. However, regulation theory is considerably more explicit in its aims of developing a ‘critical political economy of contemporary capitalism’, albeit at the price of giving less heed to national particularities than the latter. Nonetheless, regulation theory is an extremely broad school of thought, with its basic analytical tools being deployed to explain issues ranging from work organisation to regional development issues. This has made for a somewhat diverse literature; there are few general works that fully encompass the breadth of this tradition. In an attempt to fill this gap, Bob Jessop has compiled many of the most important articles on regulation theory into a five volume collection; a monumental task, but, there is little doubt, also a labour of love. The first three volumes form the subject of this review.

Entitled *The Parisian Regulation School*, the first volume encompasses classic essays by, inter alia, Aglietta, Lipietz and Boyer. After a general series introduction, Jessop provides a brief but solid overview of the Parisian school. The latter was founded as a result of debates over Michel Aglietta’s (1974) doctoral thesis. In it, Aglietta posed an obvious question: it may be easy to explain why capitalism has periodic crisis, but how does it avoid them? (p. xxv). Aglietta argued that analyses of economic reproduction through market forces needed to be complemented by an understanding of the mechanisms of social regulation. Inspired by this, subsequent contributions focused first on explaining the periodic crises in post-war France, and, by the mid-1980s, on developing an understanding of the nature of the ‘Atlantic Fordist’ accumulation, and its associated, institutional ‘mode of regulation’. Whilst more explicitly radical than many overseas manifestations of regulation theory, the Parisian school is politically diverse. Aglietta’s work partially constituted a dialogue with Althusserianism; later Aglietta distanced himself from the regulationist mainstream (p. xxvii). Meanwhile, Lipietz has progressively flirted with Trotskyism, Maoism, and, more recently, green politics. Boyer represents one of the more pragmatic figures in the Parisian school, and, whilst affirming the Parisian school’s Marxist roots, has also drawn extensively on non-Marxist writers such as Keynes, Schumpeter, and Polanyi (p. xxvii). Boyer has also been the most open to a multi-disciplinary approach, and this may partially explain his current status as the doyen of the Parisian school (p. xxvii).

As Jessop notes, the Parisian approach centres on four key concepts. Firstly, an *industrial paradigm* is about the institutional and social regulation of labour. Secondly, an *accumulation regime* is ‘the complementary pattern of consumption and production’ that is reproduced over time. Thirdly, a *mode of regulation* is the configuration of institutions that stabilises an accumulation regime. Finally, when the above three complement each other for a enough time to create the conditions for a long-wave of growth, this can be described as a *model of development*. (pp. xxvi-xxvii).

Part One of the volume, entitled *Background and General Presentation*, provides a solid overview of the foundation and central principles of the Parisian school. The opening chapter is an interview with Alain Lipietz, by Jane Jenson. Lipietz stresses that regulationism, rather than a holistic paradigm, is about models of development in terms of accumulation and regulation. The complexity of social relationships (e.g. surrounding wage labour) makes crisis inevitable. A mode of regulations is simply a set of *habitus* (Bourdieu’s term for a particular mindset, associated with a particular culture and willingness to play by the rules of the game) and a set of evolving institutions. Intriguingly, Lipietz refers to regulation writers as the ‘rebel sons of Marxism’,

differing from the tradition in that they reject the neutrality and non-social character of the forces of production, in other words, the notion that particular forces of production will pull behind them relations of production, politics, ideology, etc. To Lipietz there are so many possible forms of compromise under capitalism that the issue of socialism 'is not on the agenda'; contemporary capitalism is no longer working, but the outcome is open-ended. Lipietz argues that the way ahead is a 'new form of compromise', that may – given the persistence of patriarchal relations, the nature of citizen-state relations, etc. – take decades to work out. Classical Fordism is in crisis, but this may ultimately result in hyper-Taylorism rather than a benign flexible specialisation; progressives need to push for a new compromise that places a premium on increasing leisure time. The Lipietz interview is of particular interest in that regulationists have often been criticised for having little to offer in the way of progressive alternatives. Lipietz's solution is the broad 'rainbow view' echoed, inter alia, by members of the anti-globalisation movement.

Chapter 2 consists of Boyer's introduction to the English translation of his work, *The Regulation School*. What Boyer has to say is most welcome in terms of his efforts to link together trends in scholarship in history, economics and labour studies. Unfortunately, the reader's path is occasionally obscured by the cobblestones of his characteristically opaque prose, in this and other essays by him in this collection. In Chapter 3, Lipietz provides further detail on regulationism's debt to classic Althusserianism, and its critique thereof. In the current rush to discard Althusserianism as wholly mistaken, it is indeed useful to highlight some of the issues this perspective raises, at least as a starting point for debate.

Part two, entitled *Some Early Works*, contains a number of classic papers, most notably Aglietta's 'Phases of US Capitalist Expansion'. With seminal brushstrokes, Aglietta links major developments in the emergence of modern America: the drive westwards, the civil war, and mass immigration to the development of a set of institutions supportive of capitalist growth, and subsequent crises. In what was originally a 1978 article in *Review*, Mike Davis laments the dead hand of rational choice neo-classicism over the disciplines of economics and economic history, and the possibilities of the regulationist alternative. Unfortunately, whilst rigor mortis has palpably set in, rational choice economics remains dominant some twenty years later, and for at least a decade has been shamelessly haunting the disciplines of sociology and politics. Davis's article is thus still of great relevance, even if his understanding of regulationism now seems somewhat mechanistic. Whilst by no manner light bedtime reading, Boyer's paper on historical patterns of wage formation in twentieth century France is empirically rich, and concludes with some valuable insights on unemployment and wages during the 1970s recession. Boyer's chapter is followed by one by Robert Delorme on theories of the state, and two consecutive chapters by Lipietz. The first is entitled 'Towards Global Fordism'. Particular insightful is Lipietz's critique of the war Keynesianism of the Reagan years and its inherent contradictions; again, this chapter makes most timely reading given the gradual drift of the current Bush administration towards similar remedies. Many of the themes raised are picked up again in the subsequent chapter, entitled 'Accumulation, Crises, and Ways Out'. Here Lipietz is prophetically dismissive of high-tech solutions to the crisis of capitalism of the 1980s.

Part three, *Commentaries and Critiques*, contains a number of useful debates, including the regulationist/post-Fordist contestation, the latter the subject of a paper by Michael Barbrook. Associated with the magazine, *Marxism Today*, post-Fordist thinkers highlight the obsolescence of the old class struggle, and the need for new coalitions working for a better life for all, in a reformist manner. In contrast, Lipietz argues for a more radical – but rather vaguely delineated –

red-green alternative that conscientiously distances itself from reformist neo-liberalism. Some of the issues raised are echoed in Brenner and Glick's overview of regulationism; again, they stress the need to move beyond the politics of amelioration. The closing chapter of this volume by Tickell and Peck, argues that regulationism focuses too much on accumulation and too little on regulatory mechanisms and processes. Indeed, they suggest that the latter can be studied independently of regulationism; regulation theory provides some interesting insights, but represents an incomplete start to a new critical path of social enquiry.

Volume 2, entitled *European and American Perspectives on Regulation*, introduces five further schools of regulationism that are offshoots of the original Parisian school. The first, the Grenoble school, actually predates classic regulationism in its focus on the relationship between two tendencies suggested by Marx: the tendency for profits to fall, and the tendency towards the equalisation of profit rates. More squarely within orthodox Marxism, Grenoble theorists eschew the terms Fordism and Post Fordism (p. xxv). The opening chapter of this first section of this volume, by Gerard de Bernis, highlights the central concerns of Grenoble thinkers, namely the structural conditions that sustainably inherently unstable processes of accumulation. They see regulation not as simply a set of institutions but rather what can be loosely referred to as the social and structural aspects of capitalist accumulation. Again, in the following chapter, De Bernis further elucidates some of these points. Here, De Bernis closely examines the nature of the concept of crisis, concluding with a brief – but now very timeous look – at the problems posed by the re-emergence of deflation; there is little doubt that, to date, no satisfactory way of regulating out of the crisis has been found.

Part 2, entitled *Social Structures of Accumulation*, looks at the radical American regulationist school, associated with the analysis of social structures of accumulation (SSAs). The opening chapter is David Gordon's seminal piece on 'Stages of Accumulation and Economic Long Cycles'. Gordon seeks to provide some theoretical tools for understanding the widely noted - although still contested - pattern of economic long waves (Kondratieff waves). Economic crises are likely to trigger crises in SSAs and vice versa. Gordon provides some exciting insights into the nature of this relationship, but, regrettably, pulls his punches: his conclusion is in his own words, 'modest and tentative', leaving the reader somewhat dissatisfied. This paper is followed by one by Michael Reich, looking at the origins and growth of SSA analysis. Reich concludes by an assessment of recent trend in US capitalism: it is suggested that it may either remain locked in a period of unsustainable short term profit seeking, or entering a new era, where expansion is fuelled by profit led, rather than wage led growth.

Part three contains papers on the Amsterdam school, a loose-knit body of thinkers that explore the centrifugal tendencies in contemporary capitalism. Kees van Pijl looks at the implications of hegemonic neo-liberalism: above all, severe economic shocks may shake political structures, in turn producing outcomes hostile to the existing order. Henk Overbeek looks at the decline of British capitalism. He concludes that the remedies it imposed shattered the fractional compromises that made Thatcherism possible. However, this has yet to result in a new unity around really meaningful alternatives.

In some ways more sociological than economic, the German regulation school - the subject of part four - focuses on social institutions and the state from a regulationist perspective. To German regulationists, the state 'helps exemplify the complex connection between relation of production, accumulation regime, mode of regulation and social action' (p. 108). Progressive politics should operate within and against specific 'modes of socialization', a distillation of much of what

regulation theory is about, a questioning of the order of things, and attempts to define better ways forward with the imperfect material at hand. The following two chapters in this section, by Joachim Hirsch, with Josef Esser and Juergen Haeusler respectively, provide a critique trends and alternatives in contemporary German politics.

Part five looks at Nordic models. Close to the Parisian school, the Nordic tradition seeks to accord more attention to national modes of growth, focusing specifically on the Scandinavian countries. Consisting of two chapters by Lars Mjoset, this section accords specific attention to theories of corporatism. Mjoset argues that the performance of corporatism is partially about shifts in the domestic balance of power, and the relative position of export led versus protected sections of the economy. Again, the closing section of this volume deals with commentaries and critiques. The opening chapter by Bob Jessop looks at the methodological foundations of regulationism, and its specific approach to theory building. Particularly useful is Jessop's detailed dissection of the distinction between the primarily economically focused Parisian school, and the more societally focused SSA and German traditions. Regulation is founded on a realist methodology and ontology, is rooted in the political economy tradition and is concerned with shifting forms and mechanisms for securing the reproduction of capital as a social relation (p. 356). In his chapter, David Kotz argues that Parisian regulationism is in the scientific Marxist tradition, and SSA theories in the critical Marxist one. He concludes by suggesting that the one is too structuralist and the other too voluntarist; there is a need to find a middle ground between these two traditions. In critiquing Bob Jessop's interpretation of regulationism, Werner Bonefield argues that he has veered too strongly into the scientific Marxist camp, and has left little room for critical theories of action. In the following chapter, Colin Hay enters the lists on behalf of Bob Jessop. Hay argues that Jessop leaves room for both the 'optimism of the soul' and 'the pessimism of intellect'; the struggle for social transformation is partially about recognising the limited parameters in which it is possible to operate. The final chapter, by Michael Webber and David Rigby, provides an overview of competing theories of economic change in the post-war period. This is a very general overview, but helps locate regulationism within broader debates in the humanities.

Entitled *Regulationist Perspectives on Fordism and Post-Fordism*, Volume 3 explores the dynamics of the crisis of Fordism, and the search for alternative forms of work organization. There are, of course, many edited collections dealing with this subject. However, this volume is unique in its explicitly regulationist orientation. Nonetheless, a few of the included essays do not seem regulationist at all, most notably some of the those included in the forth part of the volume; it seems that coherence may have been sacrificed on the alter of comprehensivity. Part one, *Introduction and Key Issues*, is opened with an essay by Mark Elam on 'The Post-Fordist Debate'. This provides a very nice overview of the subject area, and helps locate regulationism with broader debates. This is followed by a masterful overview by Bob Jessop, who provides a very capable dissection of the concepts 'Fordism' and 'Post-Fordism', so widely deployed and so little understood. Part two looks at *The Origins of the Fordist Labour Process*. Karl Dasbach looks at the origins of Fordism at Ford itself. This empirically rich account is marred only by a rather cursory treatment of Taylorism. Whilst Dasbach does acknowledge Ford's debt to the latter, he tends to give Taylor less credit than he deserves in mapping out a comprehensive - yet so repressive - structure of work organisation. Rather different is Bruce Pietrykowski's account of 'Fordism at Ford', which focuses exclusively on two plants, Highland Park and the Rouge, and accords more attention to processes of employee resistance and unionisation.

Part three, *The Crisis of Fordism*, is opened by a general overview of the literature on flexibility, supplemented by some empirical evidence, by Boyer. Boyer concludes that 'flexibility' remains a contested concept, and open to a number of different interpretations; however, the debate is open-ended, and there remains a vital need to identify new organisational forms that are both viable and humane. These themes are taken up again in a subsequent essay by Boyer, who argues that current trends are contradictory. Moreover, organisational forms currently being experimented with will not always prove the most viable in the long term. He concludes that a composite model is most likely, with particularly high degrees of concentration in high-tech industries. An essay follows this by Andrew Glyn, in which he evaluates the regulationist notion that the crisis of Fordism reflected concerns over productivity. He concludes that slowdowns in technical productivity were often the most severe in industries not normally associated with Fordism; rather they seemed to reflect the social problems encountered when increasing work intensity. This is followed by a review article of Piore and Sabel's 'The Second Industrial Divide' by a team of scholars led by Karel Williams. They conclude that the book is largely an exercise in futurology and meta-history than a sustainable account, a critique that provides a useful starting point for regulationist perspectives on work organisation.

Entitled *Beyond Fordism to...?*, Part four is opened by an account by Horst Kern and Michael Schuman on trends in work organisation in Germany. In practice, this article tells more about the dynamics of German politics than a detailed review of trends in work organisation. This shortfall is somewhat redressed by a subsequent account by Schuman (writing alone this time) on the German car industry. In a paper entitled 'The Japanization of Fordism', Stephen Wood provides an interesting critical account of the concepts of neo- and post-Fordism from an alternative perspective. Rather different is the Leborgne and Lipietz essay on post-Fordism. They conclude that there is a stark choice between unsustainable development, ecologically destructive and short-term growth, or an ecologically and macroeconomically stable alternative.

The final section of this volume, *General Reviews*, is opened by an essay by Andrew Sayer, in which he explores the institutional prerequisites for growth; in the end, this is more than through techniques of work organisation, encompassing education, the social and institutional form of capital and state-capital relations. There is a provocative account by Jamie Gough, on the importance of assessing value relations when evaluating post-Fordism. Gough's conclusions are very much more in the critical Marxist than orthodox regulationist traditions. The final essay in this volume, Paul Hirst and Jonathon Zeitlin, explore the barriers to flexible specialisation, which, they conclude is only possible through an active industrial policy.

There is little doubt that this series provides a valuable resource not only to those interested in regulation theory, but to all concerned about contemporary trends in work organisation, macro-economic policy and politics. In the interests of 'facilitating' cross-referencing, the various contributions are reproduced in the format and layout in which they were originally published. Indeed, an unprincipled scholar could quickly amass an impressive reference list of sources, without venturing beyond a single volume of this series! Unfortunately, this also means that most pages have double pagination (that of the original journal and the current edited volume), which can be rather confusing at times. Also, some of the typefaces employed by the various journals have reproduced more clearly than others. Finally, whilst there is a name index at the back of each volume, there is no subject index. This is a serious omission, and marginally impairs the worth of this collection. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that it constitutes an invaluable contribution to the literature.