

David Glass Memorial lecture - Ralph Miliband Programme: the future of the left

Envisioning Real Utopias: alternatives within and beyond capitalism

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LSE events

Suggested hashtag for Twitter users:
#lseutopias



ENVISIONING REAL UTOPIAS

Erik Olin Wright
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FOUNDATIONAL EMPIRICAL CLAIM:

Many forms of human suffering and many deficits in human flourishing are the result of existing institutions and social structures.

FOUNDATIONAL EMANCIPATORY THESIS:

Transforming those institutions and structures has the potential to substantially reduce human suffering and expand the possibilities for human flourishing.

Four tasks of an emancipatory social science

1. *Moral Foundations*
2. *Diagnosis & Critique*
3. *Alternatives*
4. *Transformation*

Moral Foundations: three principles

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Democracy: *In a fully democratic society, all people would have broadly equal access to the necessary means to participate meaningfully in decisions about things which affect their lives.*

Sustainability: *Future generations should have access to the social and material means to live flourishing lives at least at the same level as the present generation.*

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Sustainability: *Capitalism inherently threatens the quality of the environment for future generations because of imperatives for consumerism and endless growth.*

What is a “*Real* Utopia”?

Utopia: Alternatives to dominant institutions that embody our deepest aspirations for a just and humane world.

Real: Alternatives to dominant institutions that are attentive to problems of unintended consequences, self-destructive dynamics, and difficult dilemmas of normative trade-offs.

Two ways of trying to make the world a better place:

- (1) Ameliorative reforms: Look at existing institutions, identify their flaws and propose improvements.
- (2) Real utopias: Envision the contours of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals and then look for social innovations we can create in the world as it is that move us towards that destination.

Some Examples of Real Utopias

1. Participatory budgeting
2. Wikipedia
3. Solidarity finance
4. Public libraries
5. The Quebec social economy council
6. Urban agriculture and community land trusts
7. The Mondragon worker cooperative
8. Internet-based gift-economy in music
9. Policy juries and “randomocracy”
10. Unconditional basic income

**A framework for exploring
real utopias in & beyond capitalism:**

Taking the “social” in socialism seriously

Three kinds of power deployed in economic systems

1. Economic power: power based on the control of economic resources.
2. State power: power based on the control of rule making and rule enforcing over territory.
3. Social power: power based on capacity to mobilize voluntary cooperation and collective action.

POWER WITHIN ECONOMIC STRUCTURES: CAPITALISM, STATISM AND SOCIALISM

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Capitalism: an economic structure within which economic activity is controlled through the exercise of economic power.

Statism: an economic structure within which economic activity is controlled through the exercise of state power.

Socialism: an economic structure within which economic activity is controlled through the exercise of “social power” -- power based on capacity to mobilize voluntary cooperation and collective action.

The idea of *HYBRIDS*:

All real economic systems are complex combinations of capitalism, statism, and socialism. We call an economy “capitalist” when capitalism is dominant. The possibility of socialism, therefore, revolves around the problem of enlarging and deepening the socialist component of the hybrid and weakening the capitalist component. I refer to this as the problem of building configurations of social empowerment.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF POWER CONFIGURATIONS

Three types of power:

**Social
Power**

**State
Power**

**Economic
Power**

Interaction of forms of power:



= direction of power constraints

Strength and autonomy of power:



= primary



= secondary

Illustration of Power Configurations

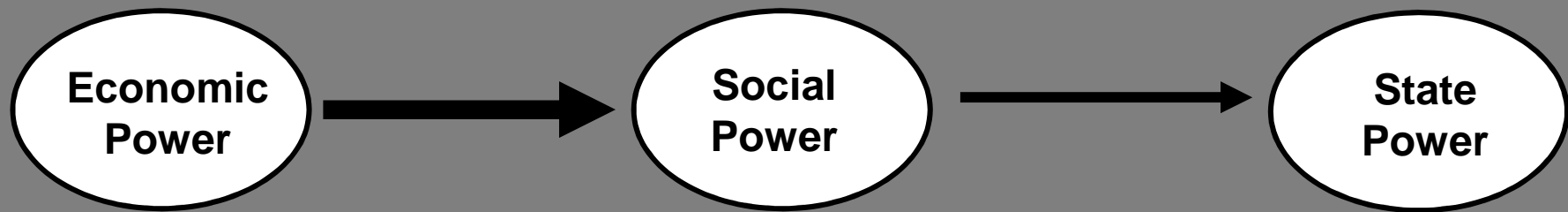


**Conventional democracy:
Social power dominates state power**

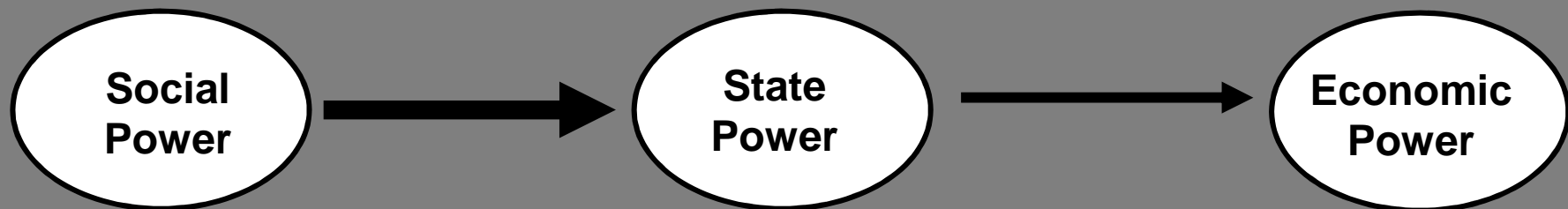


**Corporate control of political parties:
Economic power dominates social power**

Illustration of Power Configurations



Corporate control of state power via funding of political parties



Social control of economic power via state regulation of capital

A diagram on a gray background. In the center is a white rectangle containing the text 'Economic activity: investment, and production and distribution of goods & services'. Surrounding this central rectangle are three white ovals. One oval is on the left, labeled 'Social Power'. Another oval is at the top right, labeled 'Economic Power'. The third oval is at the bottom right, labeled 'State Power'.

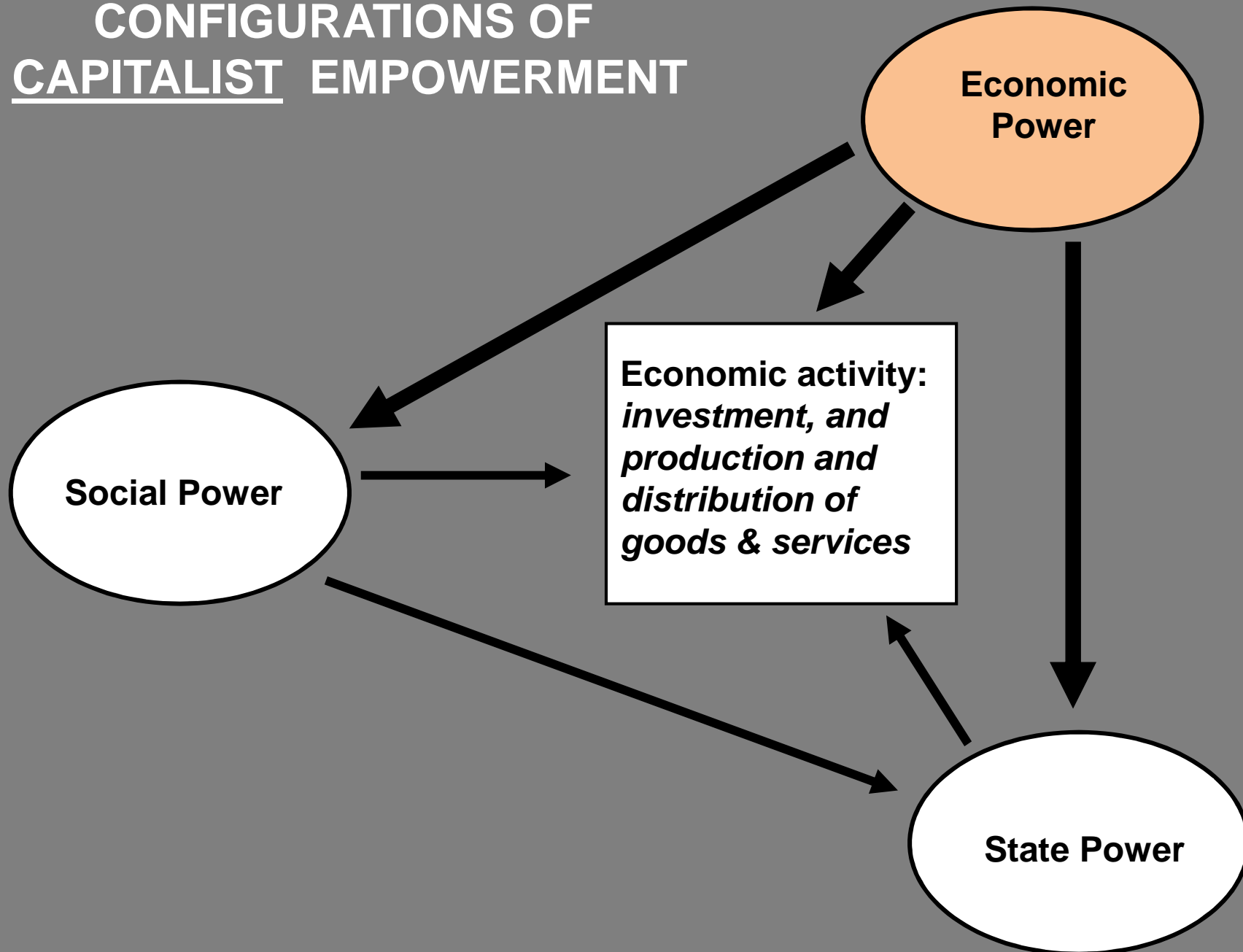
Social Power

**Economic
Power**

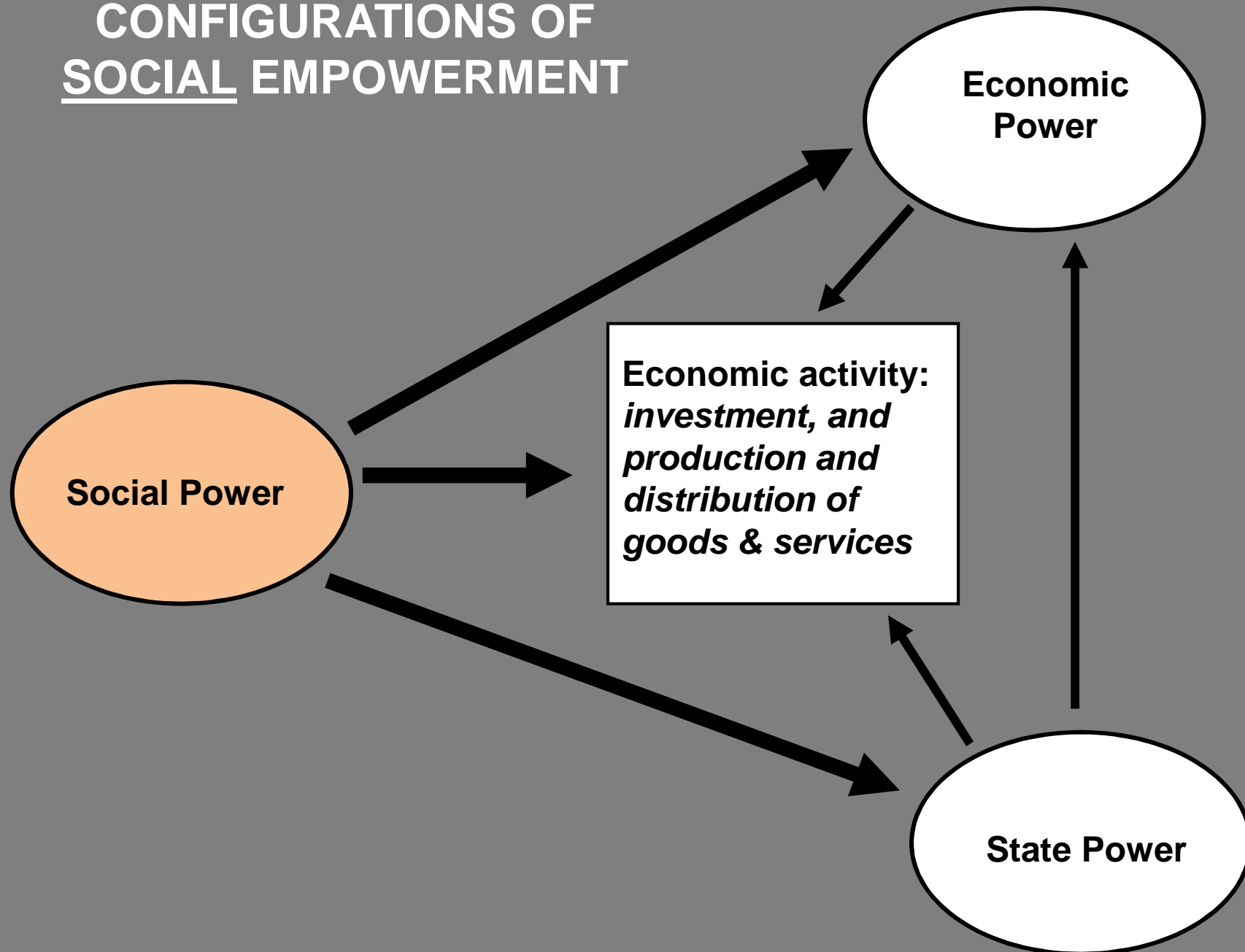
**Economic activity:
*investment, and
production and
distribution of
goods & services***

State Power

CONFIGURATIONS OF CAPITALIST EMPOWERMENT



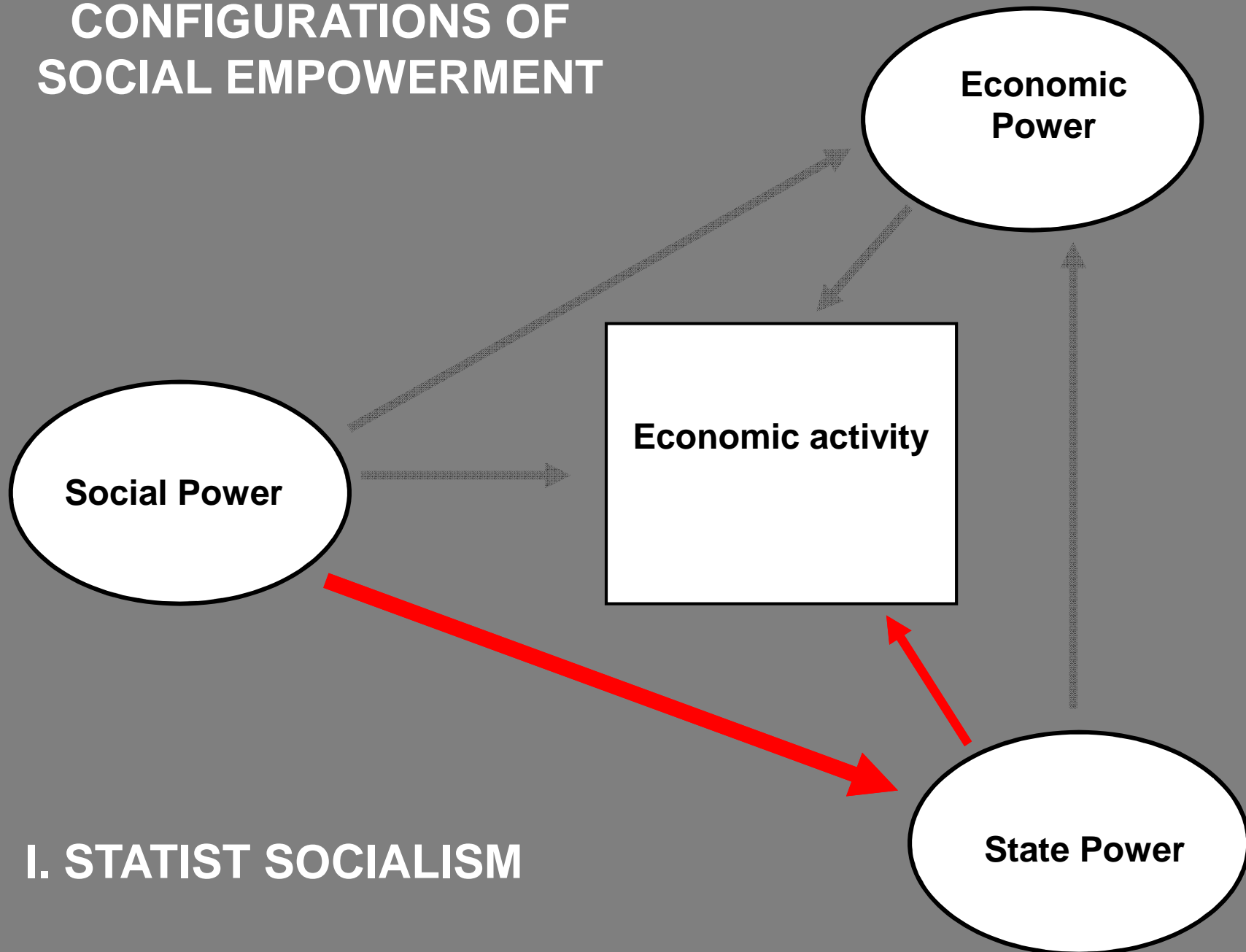
CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



Two central problems of emancipatory social transformation

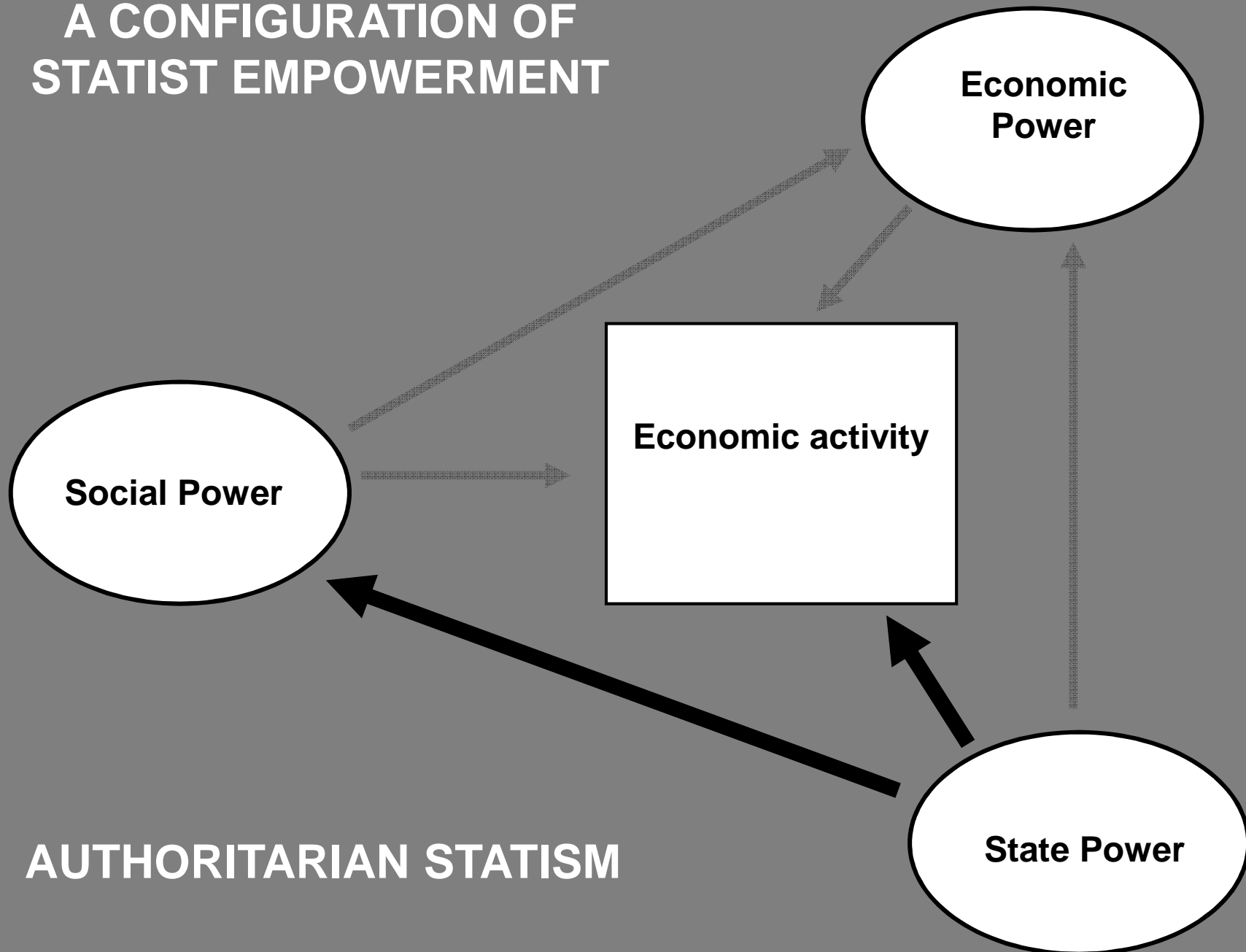
- 1. Institutional designs that reduce
capitalist empowerment and
increase social empowerment**
- 2. Strategies of transformation**

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



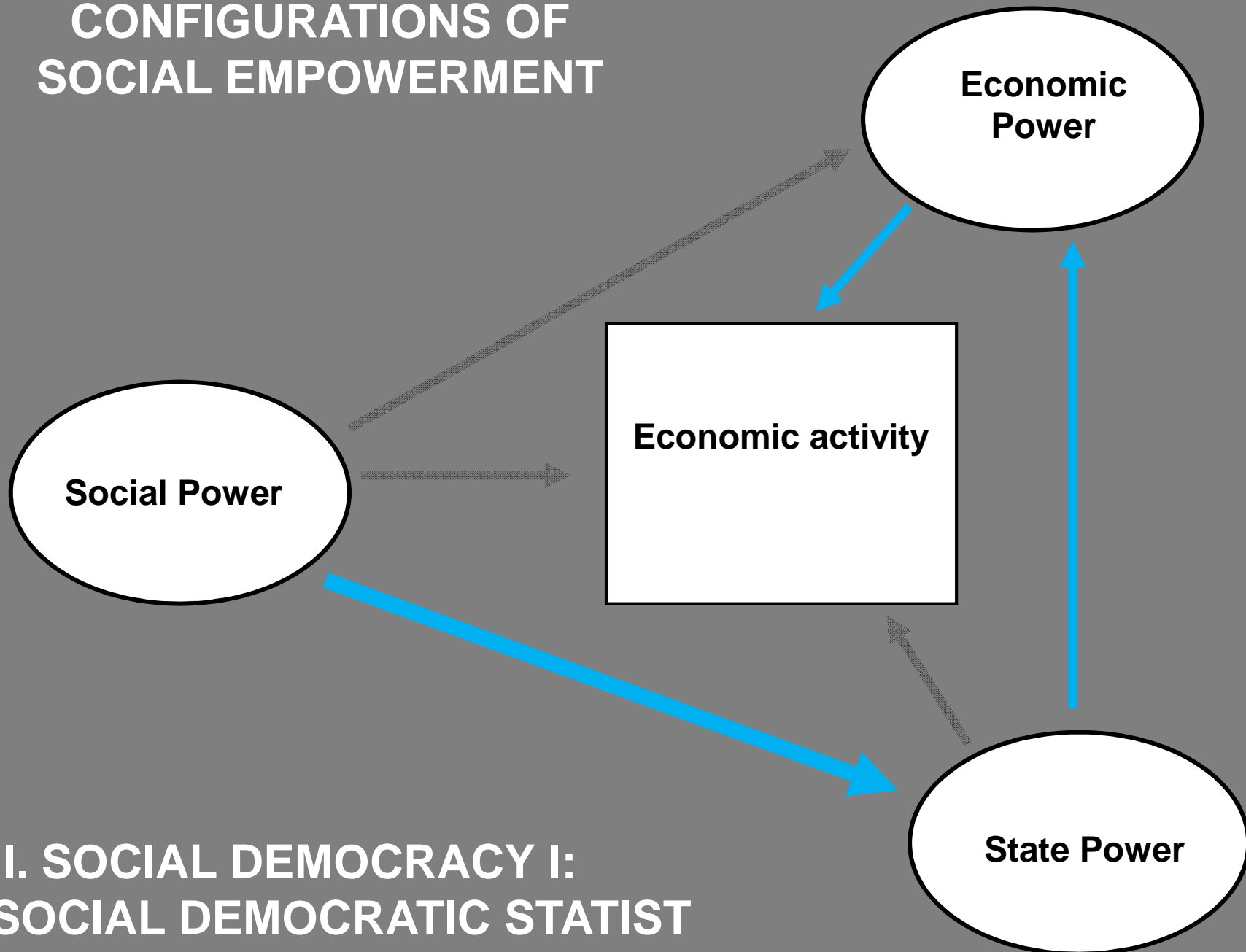
I. STATIST SOCIALISM

A CONFIGURATION OF STATIST EMPOWERMENT



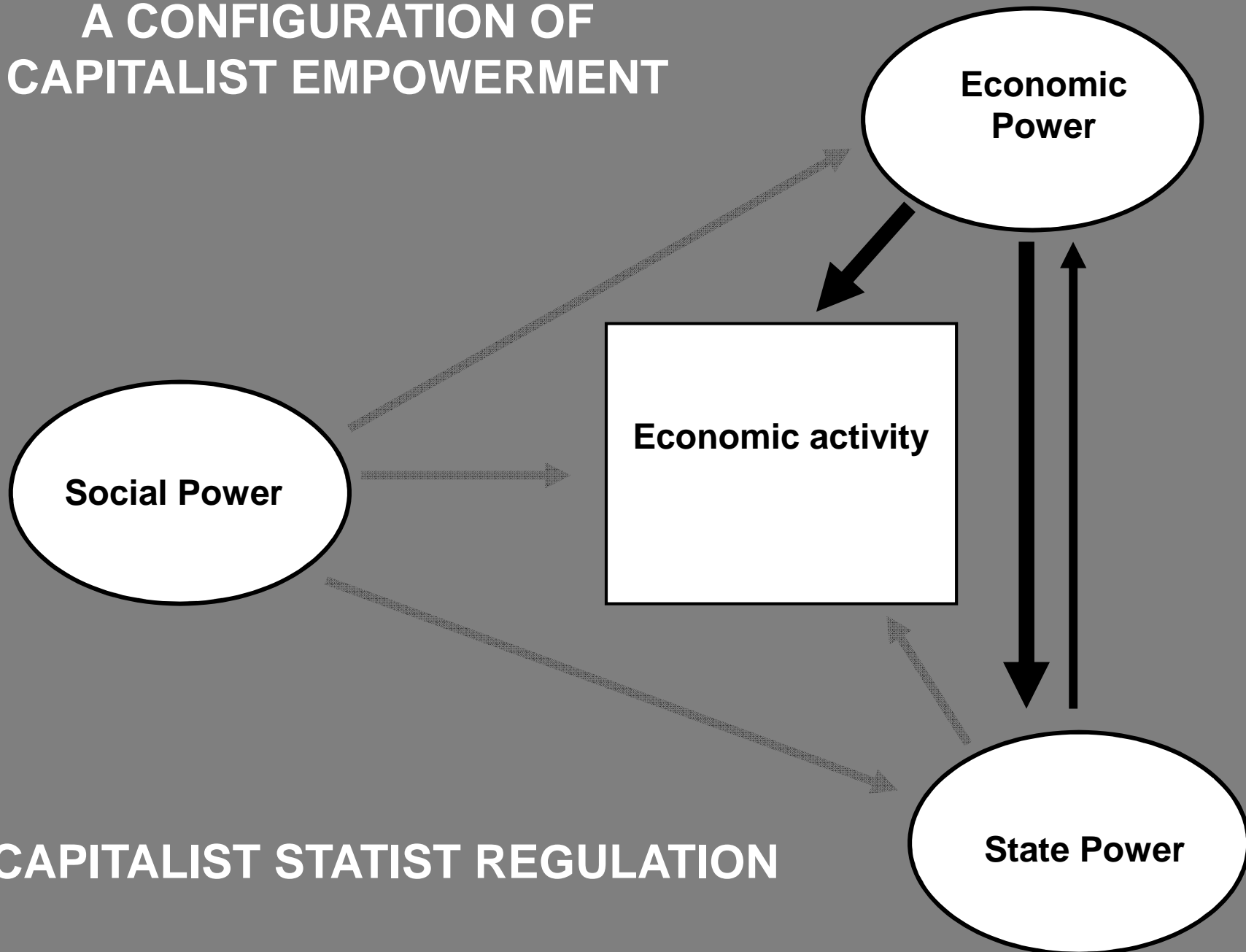
AUTHORITARIAN STATISM

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



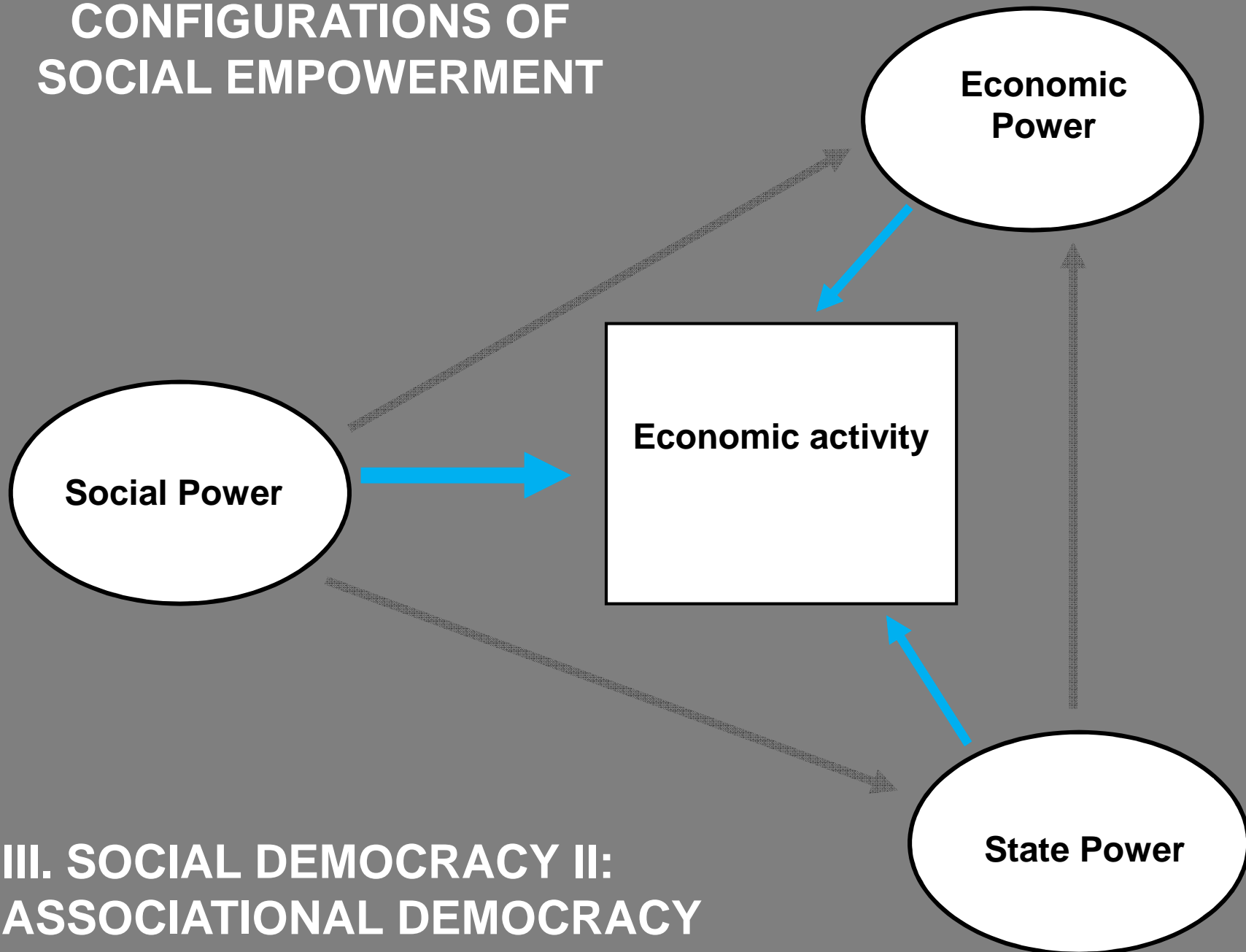
**II. SOCIAL DEMOCRACY I:
SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC STATIST
REGULATION**

A CONFIGURATION OF CAPITALIST EMPOWERMENT



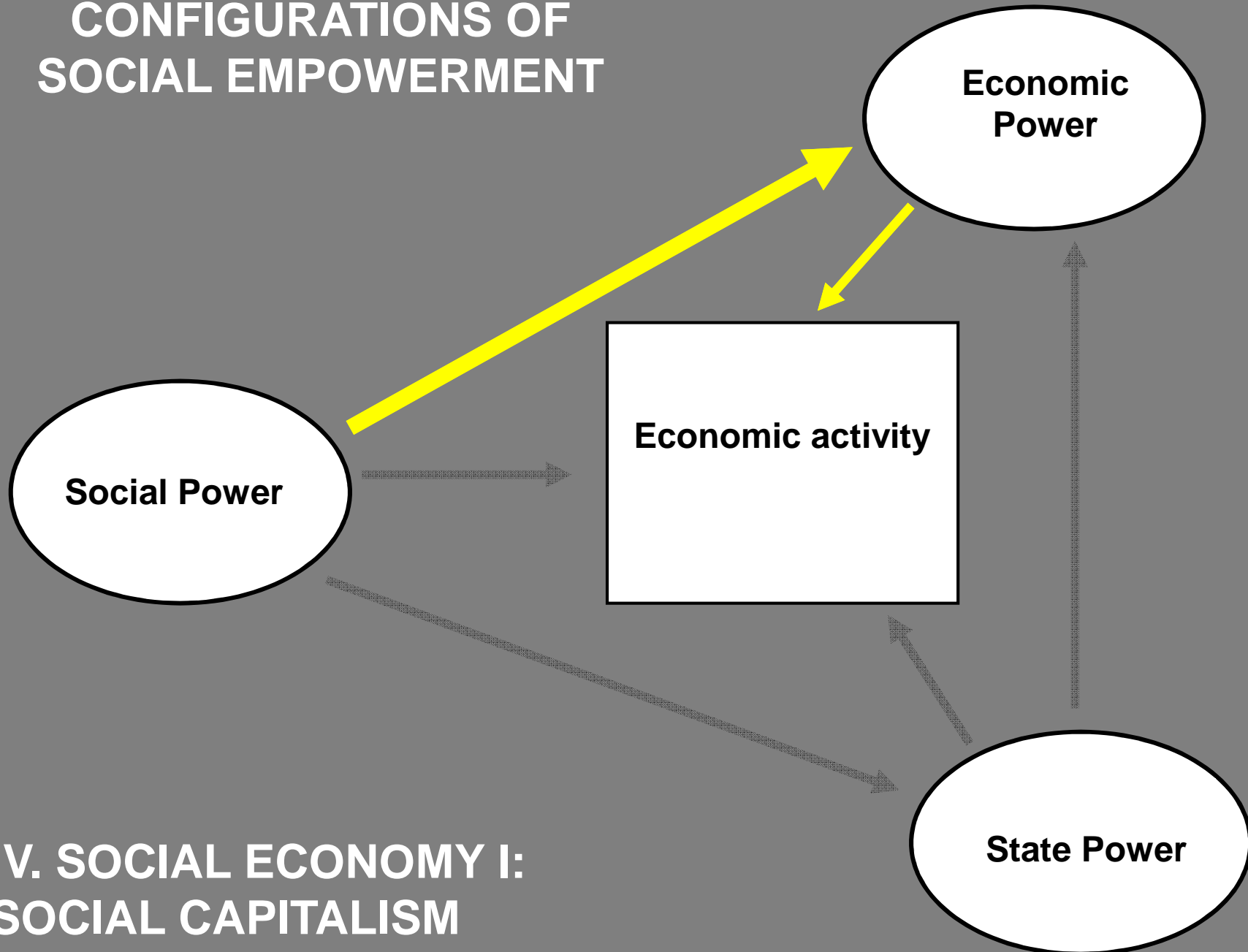
CAPITALIST STATIST REGULATION

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



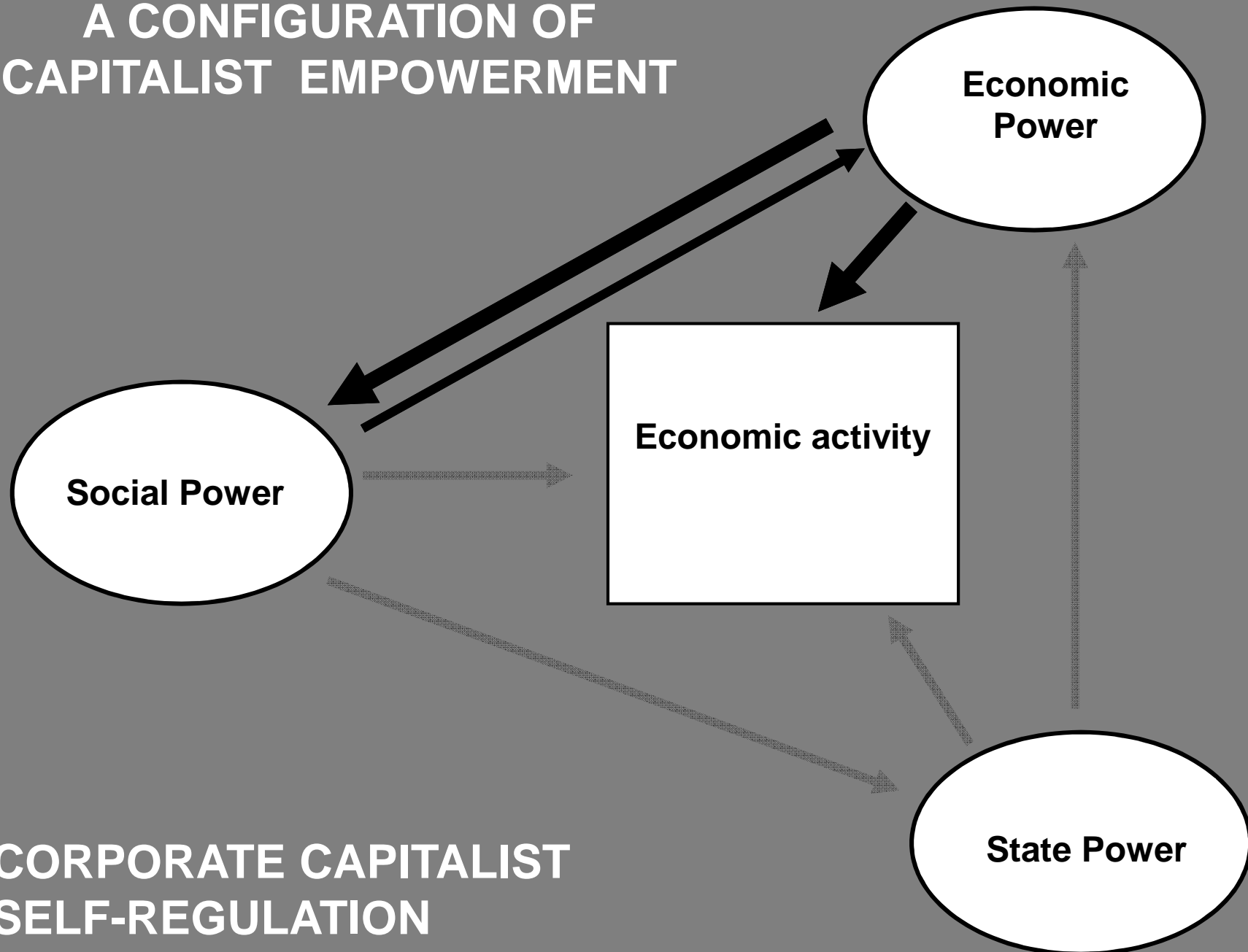
III. SOCIAL DEMOCRACY II: ASSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



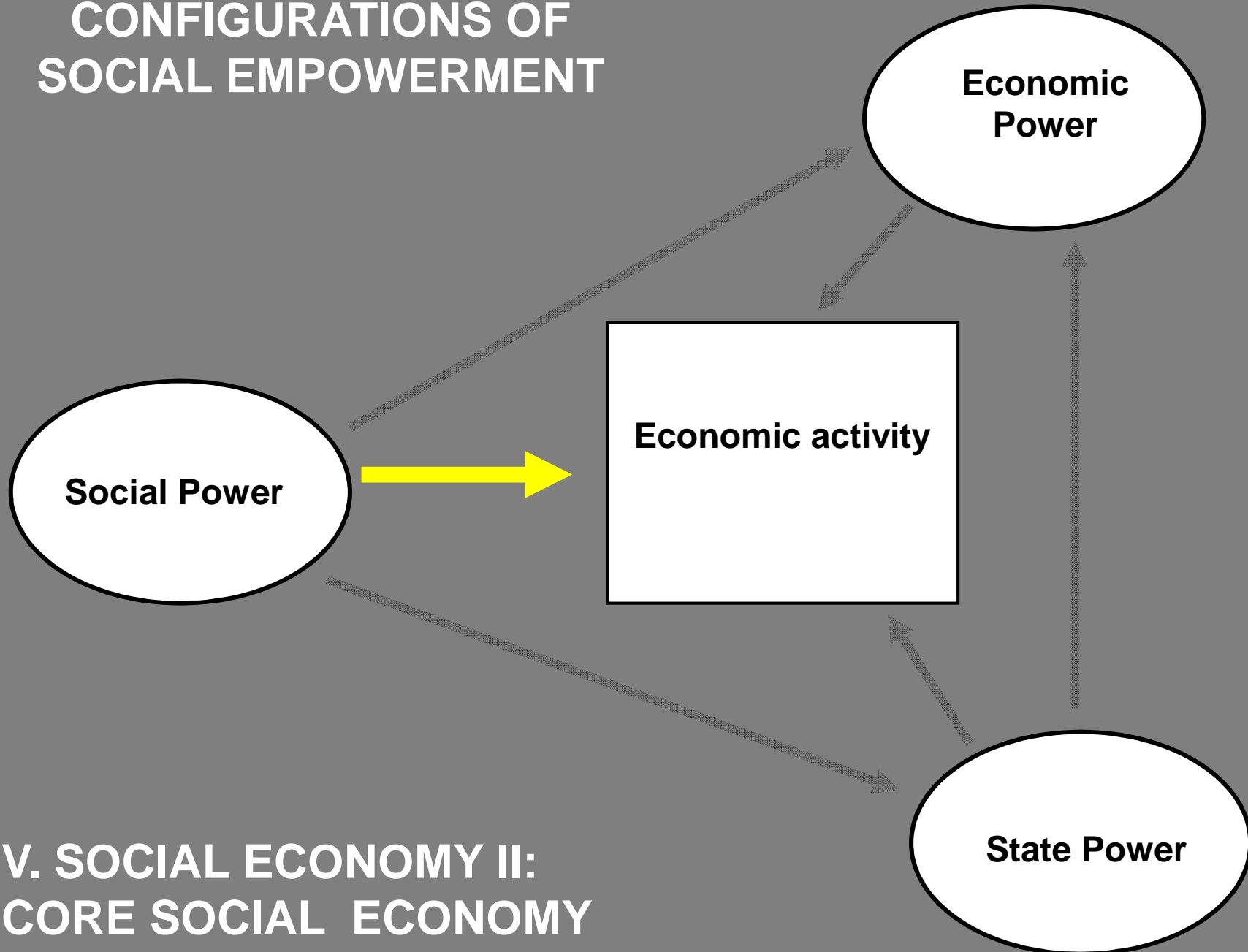
IV. SOCIAL ECONOMY I: SOCIAL CAPITALISM

A CONFIGURATION OF CAPITALIST EMPOWERMENT



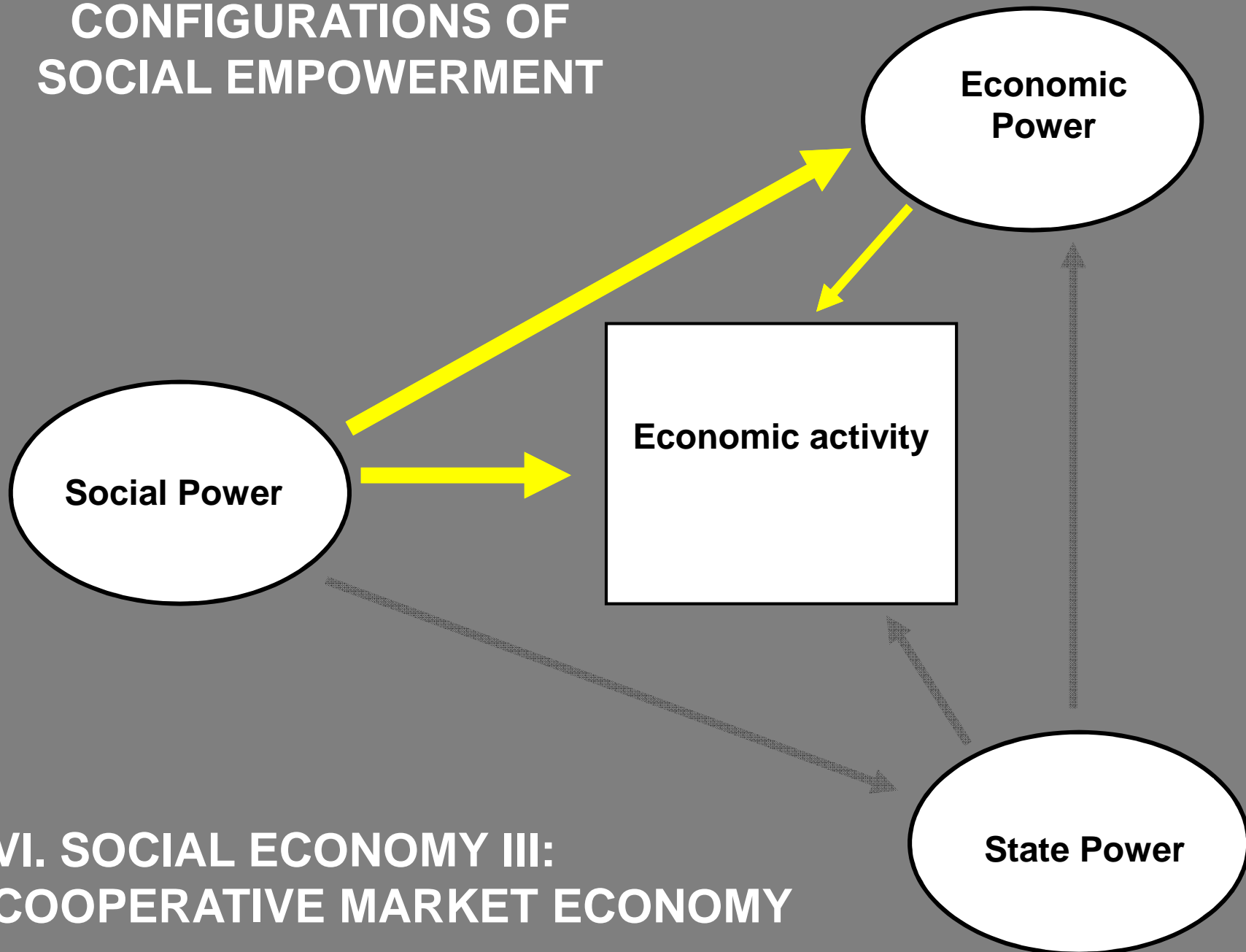
**CORPORATE CAPITALIST
SELF-REGULATION**

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



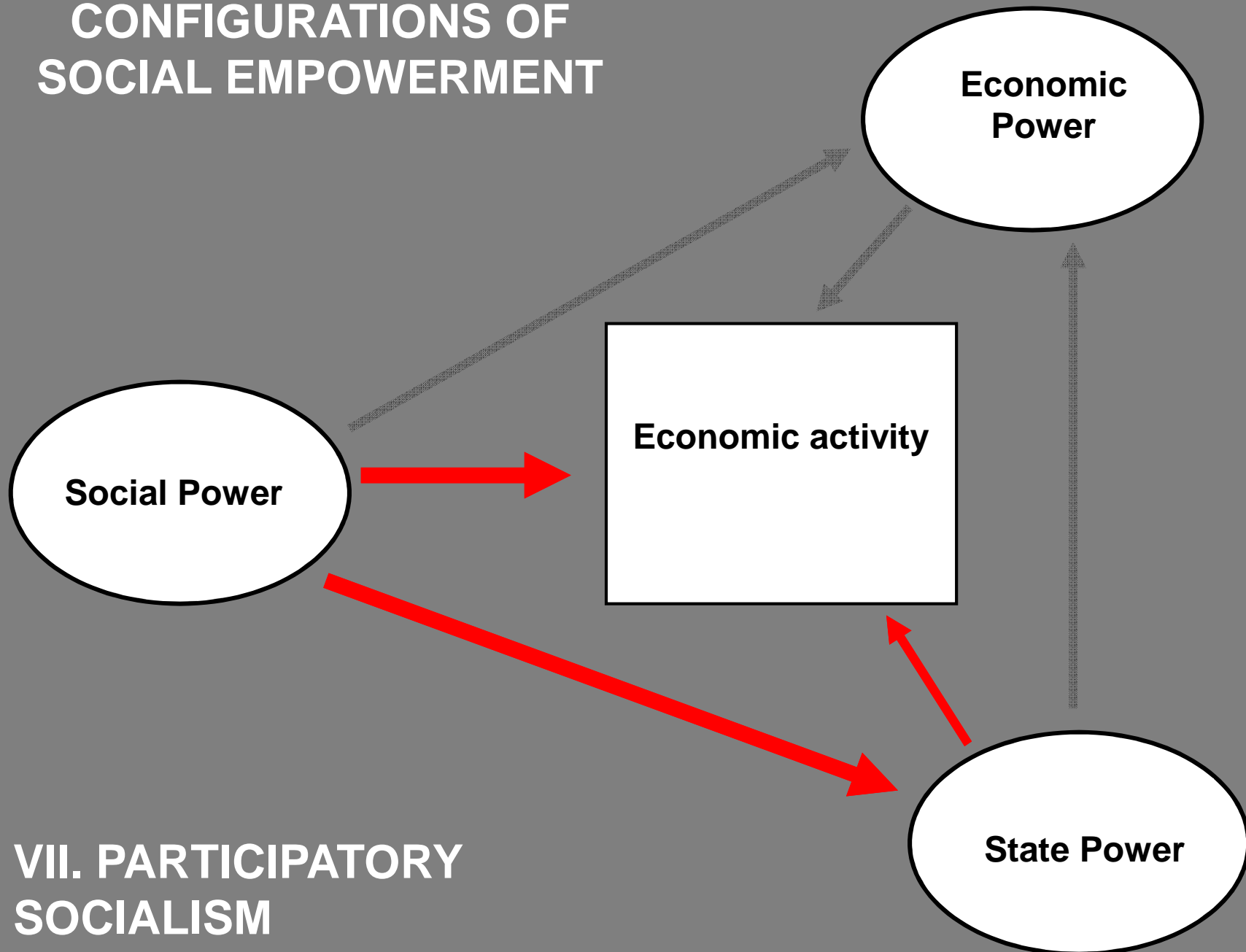
V. SOCIAL ECONOMY II:
CORE SOCIAL ECONOMY

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



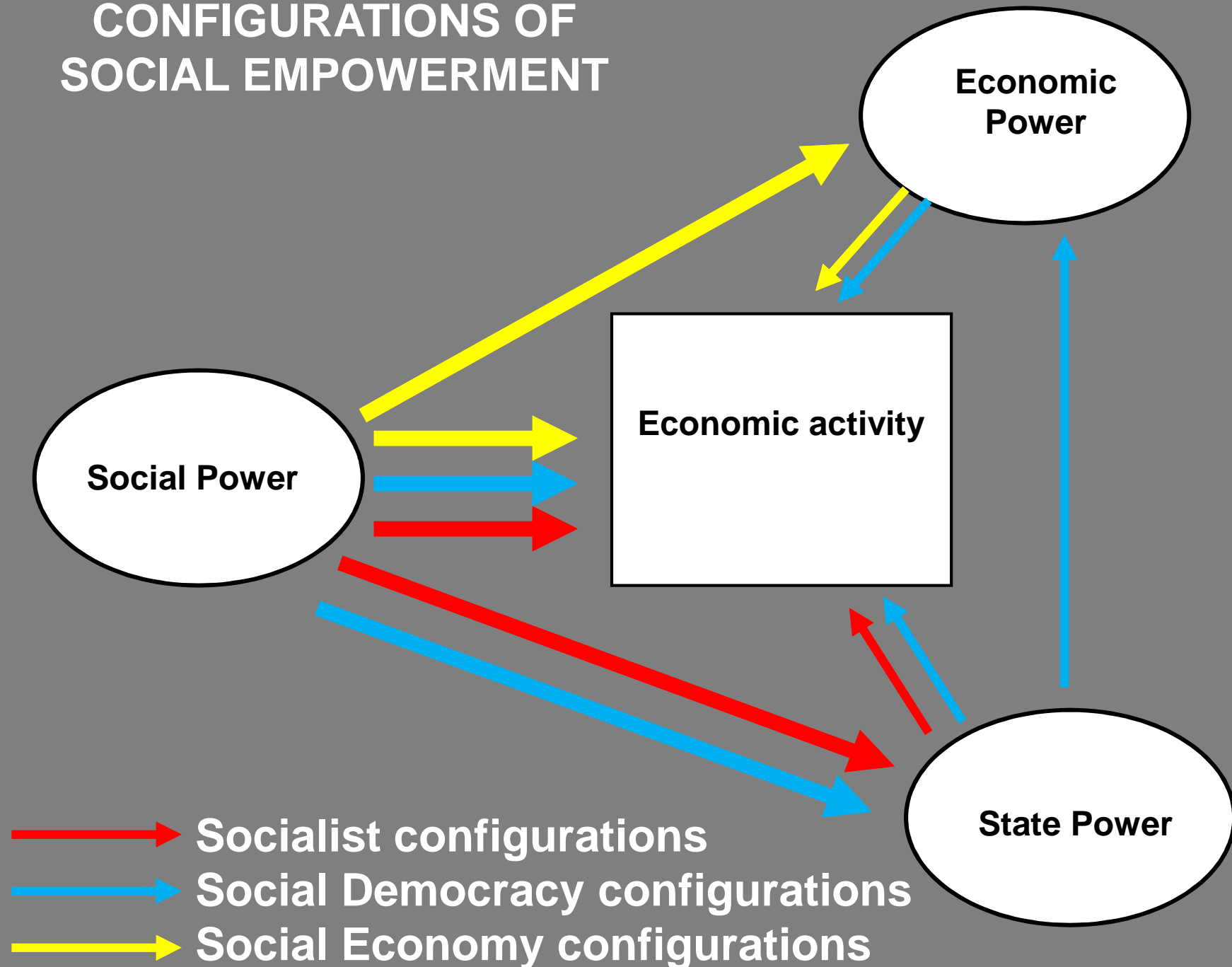
VI. SOCIAL ECONOMY III: COOPERATIVE MARKET ECONOMY

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



VII. PARTICIPATORY SOCIALISM

CONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



Strategic logics of Transformation

1. Ruptural (radical break in institutions):
Revolutionary socialist tradition
2. Interstitial (build new institutions in the
cracks of the system): Anarchist tradition
3. Symbiotic (use existing institutions to solve
problems in ways that transform
institutions): Social democratic tradition

A Strategic Vision for the 21st Century

1. Ruptural strategies directed at capitalism as a system are implausible, but ruptures in specific institutions may be needed to open up possibilities for symbiotic transformations.
2. Symbiotic strategies are needed to expand the space for interstitial transformations.
3. Interstitial strategies create building blocks of emancipatory alternatives.

CONCLUSIONS

1. *Transcending capitalism: centrality of democratization*
2. *Institutional pluralism and heterogeneity: multiple configurations of social empowerment*
3. *There are no guarantees: socialism is a terrain for working for equality, democracy and sustainability, not a guarantee for realizing those ideals.*
4. *Strategic indeterminacy: there is no one way*
5. *Opacity of the future limits of possibility: We cannot know in advance how far we can go in this trajectory of social empowerment.*



Emancipatory Projects, Institutional Designs, Possible Futures

107th ASA Annual Meeting
August 17-20
Denver, CO



REAL UTOPIA PROPOSAL SESSIONS AT THE 2012 ASA MEEETINGS

1. **Unconditional Basic Income.** Philippe Van Parijs
2. **A Democratic Media System** Bob McChesny
3. **The Public University as a Real Utopia.** Michael Burawoy
4. **Contours of Racial Utopia.** Eduardo Bonilla-Silva
5. **Philanthropy and Real Utopia.** Rob Reich
6. **Parecon (Participatory Economics).** Michael Albert
7. **Democratizing Finance.** Fred Block
8. **Reviving Democratic Citizenship.** Bruce Ackerman
9. **Making Democracy Deliberative through Random Assemblies.** John Gastil
10. **Reimagining the Corporation.** Jerry Davis
11. **Designs and Dilemmas of Participatory Budgeting.** Gianpaolo Baiocchi
12. **Work-Family Reconciliation Policies and Gender Equality.** Janet Gornick
13. **A World beyond Gender.** Judith Lorber and Barbara Risman
14. **Real Utopian Foodshed Governance.** Harriet Friedman
15. **From a Transparent State to a Transparent Society.** Archon Fung
16. **Productive Democracy.** Joel Rogers
17. **Democratic-Egalitarian Education.** (1) M. Fielding & Peter Moss. (2) Harry Brighouse
18. **Postfossil Conversion and Free Public Transport.** Mario Candeias
19. **Mutual Aid in Networked Societies.** Yochai Benkler
20. **Corporations with Worker Ownership and Profit-Sharing.** Joseph Blasi
21. **Lesson from the Kibbutz.** Uriel Leviatan

PLUS

50 Real Utopia Thematic panels on:

Anti-Consumerism; Carework; Mondragon; Art; Global Warming; the Family; Sexuality; Religion; Childhood; Sustainable Cities; Fair Trade; Prisons; Intentional Communities; Democratizing Global Governance; A Borderless World; the Welfare State; Communities for the Elderly; Alternative Currencies; the Social/Solidarity Economy; Islamic Utopias; Creating Real Utopias for Persons with Disabilities; Architecture; and more.....

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