

Call for Papers for a Special Issue of *Capital & Class*

‘Political Marxism and Open Marxism: Divergences and Convergences’

Deadline for abstracts: **15 October 2023**

Please send abstracts (maximum 250 words) and any enquiries to: jack.copley@durham.ac.uk

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The purpose of this Special Issue in the journal *Capital and Class* is to foster a conversation between two of the most innovative strands of contemporary Marxist thought: Political Marxism and Open Marxism. We feel that this has been a neglected area of academic study, and that despite important differences in their approaches, there is great scope for productive cross-pollination between these two Marxist traditions.

Political Marxism emerged from debates in the 1970s on the origins of capitalism, and is most closely associated with the work of Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood. Against claims that capitalism resulted from the gradual expansion of long-distance commerce (Sweezy, 1950; Wallerstein, 1974), Brenner (1976; 1977) argued that it was in fact the historically peculiar transformation in social property relations in the late-feudal English countryside that resulted in capitalism’s emergence. Wood (2002; 2016) theorised this insight, conceptualising capitalism as a fundamentally bifurcated social system, whereby an impersonal, bureaucratic state superintends a depoliticised market realm governed by binding market imperatives.

Open Marxism was born out of debates that began in the 1970s within the UK’s Conference of Socialist Economists over the relevance of Marx’s writings for the study of contemporary capitalism. Thinkers such as Simon Clarke (1988; 1991), John Holloway (2002; 2010), Werner Bonefeld (2014), Ana Cecilia Dinerstein (2014), and others have sought to reclaim Marx’s mature work as a critical theory of social forms. Contrary to structuralist Marxist accounts that understood the political, the economic, and the ideational to be relatively autonomous levels of social reality that exist transhistorically (Althusser, 2005), Open Marxists theorised them as the historically unique *forms* assumed by capitalism’s antagonistic social relations of production.

There are significant differences between these two traditions. Political Marxism has chiefly taken its cues from Marx’s historical writings and has thus been primarily concerned with grand historical debates over the timing, geography, and causes of capitalism’s emergence; with less explicit attention paid to the theoretical apparatus laid out in Marx’s *Capital*. Open Marxism, closely associated with the so-called New Reading of Marx (see Bellofiore and Redolfi Rivera, 2015), can to a significant extent be understood as an attempt to offer a novel

reinterpretation of Marx's value theory, and thus tends to be presented in a more abstract theoretical register.

Nevertheless, there are important affinities between these approaches. Both traditions can be understood as radically historicist. Political Marxism insists that capitalism is not simply commerce – an age-old phenomenon – but is rather an historically distinct form of society marked by a relentless pressure to augment labour productivity that results from social agents' enmeshment in a web of impersonal market imperatives. Open Marxism, through its analysis of the value-form, similarly conceives of capitalism as a novel form of social reproduction, whereby people's everyday market interactions assume the form of a quasi-autonomous system of economic compulsions that forces them to produce faster or perish.

Both approaches also display remarkable convergence on the question of the state. As Ellen Meiksins Wood and Simon Clarke insisted, capitalist society is unique in that the political content is drained from the sphere of economic exploitation and is instead concentrated in the hands of a bureaucratic state. In this way, the state is framed neither as an instrument directly wielded by the bourgeoisie nor as an entity that is autonomous from capitalism, but as an impersonal apparatus that polices the rules of the capitalist game – that is, as the political form of capitalist society.

This Special Issue will examine these – and other – divergences and convergences between Political and Open Marxism. We invite papers that explore how these Marxist traditions approach the following themes and more (the list below is **not** exhaustive):

- Value theory
- The capitalist state
- Theories of crisis and stagnation
- Money and finance
- International Relations
- The critique of structuralist Marxism
- Gendered and raced forms of domination
- The concept of socialism/communism

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