BOOK REVIEWS

edited by Adam D. Morton

EXTENDED BOOK REVIEW

'O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark': The many deaths of Antonio Gramsci

Richard Day

Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements

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reviewed by Ian McKay

The two purposes of Richard Day's *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* are declared in its title: on the one hand, to evaluate anarchist tactics and strategies within a variety of contemporary social movements; and on the other, to perform a critical autopsy on Gramsci and his supposedly omnipresent concept of hegemony. Day canvases a long list of anarchist and autonomist theorists, from William Godwin to Hakim Bey, in search of a radical theory of the 'logic of affinity', guided by 'groundless solidarity' and 'infinite responsibility' (p. 18). This affinity is contrasted with the 'hegemony of hegemony', here defined as the 'paradoxical belief that state domination is necessary to achieve "freedom"' (p. 14). Day's book is both a survey of anticapitalist movements and a polemic against Gramsci. In its first guise, it contains useful information and suggestive analyses. In its second, on which I will focus in this review, it is theoretically and politically deficient.

Leftists are, almost by definition, people who internalise historical narratives and situate themselves and their opponents in terms of overarching periodisations and categories. These abstractions often become more and more reified. In a standard polemical historical account, we are invited to see left history as one extended war. If we are disposed, as is Day, to identify with 'anarchism' today, we scan the past looking for yesterday's 'anarchists' – those who identify

'with the traditions of anarchism', and think 'through his or her own position primarily with reference to markers drawn from this milieu rather than from some other milieu' (p. 150). Then, just like leftists of the 1930s and 1970s, we restage battles pitting 'anarchists' against 'Marxists', constructed as two mutually exclusive left species, locked in epochal struggles of the fittest to survive. Ancestor-hunting produces a form of 'vertical' or 'tunnel' history, and often culminates in a potent blend of sectarianism and sentimentality.

If this polemical, 'vertical' approach invites us to reify our particular species of leftist – a Marxist is a Marxist is a Marxist, whether in 1871, 1917 or 1945 – a newer, more challenging 'horizontal' or paradigmatic approach (for one anticipation, see Claeys, 1989) encourages us to agree with Darwin (and Marx) that species of leftists work within historically specific environments, both material and discursive, that condition their conceptual and political frameworks. Such 'species' function, that is, within formations that are broader and more causally efficacious than the narrow identities retrospectively ascribed to past tendencies. In this more rigorously historicist approach, which can be called 'reconnaissance', Marxists and anarcho-syndicalists of, say, 1910 – Bernstein, Kautsky, Kropotkin, and De Leon – might, for all their evident disagreements, also be usefully analysed in light of their shared social evolutionary problematic. Once this emphasis on left formations is taken on board, a historiography often narrowly focused on reified 'parties' – in both the narrow and broad sense – is sharpened (and in some cases supplanted) by one that looks at broader and more durable 'formations'. The implications of this strategy of 'horizontal' reconnaissance are profound for rethinking the history of the left, but they might be even more far-reaching for the remaking of contemporary leftism.

From this standpoint of 'horizontal' reconnaissance, *Gramsci is Dead* seems like a throwback to old styles of polemics. The title itself is highly revealing. Since the 1890s, rituals celebrating the many 'deaths' of Dr Marx helped disabused writers and older-but-wiser activists to mourn and to bury what they imagined to be an easily personified constellation of movement and ideas (McKay, 1995–6). One of the most renowned revivals of this invented tradition took place in the 1950s – exemplified by *The God That Failed* (Crossman, 1949, 1963) – and relied on a bevy of illustrious writers, not to mention substantial overt and covert investments from the US security state (Saunders, 2000). The restaging of this performance decade after decade suggests both the nerve-jangling discordances of 'Marx' within the harmonies of liberal order, and the extent to which his 'corpse' has never been quite as cold as his enemies might wish (see Mandel, 1995). *Gramsci is Dead* perpetuates this age-old invented tradition. Much of it conveys a very conventional intellectual narrative, as one disembodied (male) anarchist 'talking head' succeeds another, with scant attention paid to economic, political or cultural context. In this deeply liberal historiosophy, each individual theorist is a freestanding captain, if not of industry, then of introspection. Conceding the 'deep and rich well' (p. 9) of Marx's critique of capitalism, Day then follows convention in arguing that Marx approached reality in terms of 'general theorems and axioms' (p. 108) and arrived at 'authoritarian-statist' conclusions (p. 116) – interpretations that are hard to square with *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in the first instance, and *The Civil War in France* in the second. (Martin Buber, whose *Paths in Utopia* (1966 [1949]) quietly structures many of Day's interpretations and recommendations, is not in full agreement with his disciple's interpretation of Marx).

Yet Day does break new ground – or at least digs some fresh graves – with his extension of the 'Death of ...' metaphor to Antonio Gramsci, seen here essentially as a cunningly disguised Stalin, whose theoretical arabesques all reduce to a state-centric vanguardism. Other fashionable dismissals of

Gramsci focus intently on confining him to the Italian peninsula (see Bellamy & Schecter, 1993), but here he is in essence too *Communist*, the heir of the lifeless and dogmatic socioeconomic determinism of traditional Marxism (for a parallel discussion, see Ghosh, 2001: 42). Why must Gramsci be declared dead? In order that a poststructuralist 'anarchism' may flourish. So urgent is the need to bury Gramsci that the poor man is not allowed a word in his own defence. In a book called *Gramsci is Dead*, Gramsci himself is given virtually *no space*. Everything we learn about this particular corpse comes via glosses, commentaries and brief characterisations.

This brief for the prosecution takes particular aim at 'hegemony', which for Day incorporates five disabling elements. As the theoretical elaboration of Leninist vanguardism, it inherently involves domination by a political party; an equally elitist focus on state institutions; a delusory preoccupation with 'integrating' leftists into these institutions; a narrowing programme of 'national' rather than global politics; and yet, simultaneously, a rationalistic and totalising revolutionary drive for a 'transparent society' (p. 95). Hence, associated with (and at times, seemingly required by) the logic of hegemony is a narrow and authoritarian 'politics of representation, recognition, and integration' (p. 18). In Day's view, hegemony is simply about the struggle for *dominance* and, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Marxisms, one generally limited to the confines of a particular nation state (pp. 6–7). This 'national' reading of Gramsci has been shown to be partial and inadequate (see Brennan, 2006; Morton, 2007); but one should also underline Day's evident interpretation of 'hegemony' itself as a perennial strategy of 'those Marxists', instead of registering Gramsci's complete transformation of the concept (see especially Lester, 2000).

Gramsci is Dead is in some respects an interesting polemic. It combines Buber's humanistic reconstruction of utopian socialism with Todd May's self-refuting argument that a poststructuralist analysis of the non-referentiality of language can sustain an anarchist critique of political representation (May, 1994). It draws, as is apparently still now obligatory, on Foucault's anti-humanistic turn towards 'micro-politics' (see Sanbonmatsu, 2004 for a powerful critique). Historians can even find here suggestive echoes of Herbert Spencer's proto-anarchist argument that 'Man' has the right to 'Ignore the State' (Spencer, 1875) – raising, not for the first time, the suspicion of a convergence of a supposedly radical anarchism with the traditional themes of classical nineteenth-century liberalism.

Yet for all this ingenuity, the polemic fails in one of its declared central purposes – that of convincingly showing that Gramsci is Dead. In its simplest form, Gramsci's actual insight into 'hegemony' is 'that the success of a social group in acquiring and maintaining stable governmental control in a modern state depends as much upon the work it carries out in civil society prior to acceding to power as on its subsequent ability to extend its influence over (and/or absorb within it) increasingly larger segments of civil society' (Buttigieg, 1995: 20). This emphasis is evident in the very first development of the concept in the *Prison Notebooks*:

> The politico-historical criterion on which our own inquiries must be grounded is this: that a class is dominant in two ways, namely it is 'leading' and 'dominant.' It leads the allied classes, it dominates the opposing classes. Therefore, a class can (and must) 'lead' even before assuming power; when it is in power it becomes dominant, but it also continues to 'lead.' ... There can and there must be 'political hegemony' even before assuming government power, and in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony one must not count solely on the power and material force that is given by government. (Gramsci, 1992: 136-7; Q1§44)

Hegemony here denotes not a 'thing' nor even a 'relationship' (whether of coercion or consent), but a historical process. It condenses as a hypothesis about Italian political history a powerful narrative about the origins, rise, consolidation (and later in the *Prison Notebooks*, potentially the fall) of a ruling group.

Of the many Gramsci scholars who have written on hegemony over the past three decades or so, very few would find much they could recognise in Day's highly polemical and abstract treatment of the concept. Simply put, this is a weird reading of Gramsci, unaffected by almost all the recent scholarship about him (see, e.g., Buttigieg, 1990, 1994; Crehan, 2002; Germino, 1990; Ives, 2004; Gunn 2006; Morera, 1990). Without attempting to make the case that these Gramsci scholars are all interpreting hegemony in identical ways, they are generally unified in seeing hegemony not as a philosophy or a general theory, but rather as a *historical method* – one that loses much of its interest and meaning when it is abbreviated and condensed into an ahistorical *sociological abstraction*. In Gramsci's work, the point of hegemony is not to underline the rather banal and abstract point that those who govern combine coercion, consent and corruption in varying ratios, but rather to excavate the preconditions and consequences of such real-world historical developments as the Italian *Risorgimento*, the Russian Revolution, and the interwar crisis and global reconstruction of twentieth-century capitalism. Gramsci is developing an 'eventful' concept of causality, one (to cite a historical sociologist writing in a very different context) quite at odds with attempts to 'discover and apply *general* causal laws, laws implicitly or explicitly assumed to be independent of time and place' (Sewell, 2005: 10). Hegemony as method investigates not a thing-like 'relationship' of domination, but rather a historical *process* of class and regime formation. It condenses a powerful account, combining the precise empirical description of events with the logical reconstruction of their conditions of possibility, focusing in particular on the origins, rise, consolidation, and potentially the fall of specific ruling groups. It necessarily entails an 'eventful conception' of temporality, which assumes (to cite William Sewell again) that 'what has happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time' (Sewell, 2005: 100–1).

In his polemical ardour to finish Gramsci off once and for all, Day has resorted to a dated structural-functionalist reading of him, popular in the 1970s, which assimilates hegemony to social control theory. The so-called 'logic of hegemony' is not, pace Day, inherently vanguardist, state-centric, institutionalist, nationally parochial or totalising. Day's hostile reading reifies and dehistoricises only one possible moment of a specific hegemonic process. It converts the real-world *eventfulness* of hegemony into the abstract *functionality* of bourgeois social-control theory. What *is* and *is not* required for a given hegemonic project, whether those of rulers or subalterns, is a question resolvable only through determinate analysis of a given economy and society, and cannot be decided abstractly and in advance.

Gramsci's analysis of the *Risorgimento*, for example, illuminates three moments in the rise of liberal hegemony: a) the economic-corporate (the direct expression of class interests); b) the political moment of the struggle for hegemony (to impose a new 'conception of the world' with its appropriate 'norms of conduct'); and c) the moment of state power, 'when the existing economic, political and ideological structures are transformed by the victorious class and its allies' (Gitling, 1987: n.p.). If we focus exclusively on a given moment – that of the domination characteristic of 'achieved ruling-class rule' – we will be tempted to minimise both its precariousness and contingency. Moreover, the exploration of the process of hegemony in any of its overlapping moments requires (to an extent often overlooked in many Anglo-American appropriations of the

concept in the 1970s and 1980s) a realist emphasis on the *materiality* of human relations economic, political, and cultural (Joseph, 2002).

One notices throughout *Gramsci is Dead* a sleight of hand. The Gramscian *theory* of hegemony is repeatedly conflated with the state *practice* of hegemony. Day's phrase 'the logic of hegemony' conflates state practices with the analytical concepts devised to explore, critique and undermine them. Does the *logic of hegemony* refer to the *practice of hegemony* or to its *logico-ethical* excavation and critique? 'I want to show how the theory and practice of hegemony are unravelling, being taken apart from within their own traditions by the very forces that had to be excluded to establish these traditions in the first place' (p. 47). Are the 'theory' and 'practice' of hegemony so easily harmonised? Does not the Gramscian *theory* of hegemony aim to destabilise and open up the bourgeois *practice* of hegemony? Arguing that those who operate across 'one or a few axes of oppression' are engaged in a very different politics than those who seek 'wholesale reconstruction of an existing order through revolutionary means', Day announces: 'I take this shift as a marker of a partial undermining of the logic of hegemony' (p. 69-70). Yet once again: does this mean an undermining of the logic underlying the oppressive relations, or an undermining of the theories within radical politics that have been brought to bear upon them? This slippage is polemically useful – 'the hegemony of hegemony' makes a suitably villainous counterpart to the 'affinity for affinity' – yet it is, at bottom, intellectually vacuous.

Rather like gladiators, the 'hegemony of hegemony' and the 'affinity for affinity' do battle through the pages of this book. It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that the first of these is Evil, and the second Good, in Day's dualistic political vision. Yet once we enter the actual push-and-shove of left history, almost all movements will answer to both 'logics'. For example, if we take the Communist Parties of the 1930s as perhaps a 'limit-case' of Day's 'evil left', we would nonetheless find them suffused at many levels with a communitarian ethic of mutuality. (This is why their crisis of the 1950s was so deeply painful for so many participants: they were losing a genuine community). Conversely, if we take the newest social movements of our own time as 'limit-cases' of the 'good left' – perhaps the 'black bloc' so esteemed by Day – we might find more than a few troubling instances of elitism, machismo and unaccountability. Pried loose from polemic and put to actual historical work, the hegemony/affinity dichotomy seems distinctly unpromising.

One of the most paradoxical aspects of *Gramsci Is Dead* is that, at the same time as it announces the total eclipse of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, it leans heavily itself on a highly determinist and mechanical version of it. For Day, neoliberalism personified has been 'seeking hegemony' and 'is achieving it on a scale that makes the Chinese, Roman and Aztec Empires look parochial indeed' (p. 8). Here and elsewhere, when Day himself uses a concept of hegemony, he denotes not so much an *eventful historical process* but a *static condition.* Hegemony lapses into social control on the one hand, and fatalism on the other – in short, the (determinist and idealist) Foucauldian antithesis of Gramsci's politics. Following Foucault, Day argues that we are not governed by institutions apart from ourselves: 'Rather *we all govern each other* via a complex web of capillary relations of power' (p. 125, emphasis in original). Having radically oversimplified hegemony and, tentatively, even tendentiously linked it to notions of 'social control' and 'false consciousness', Day then puts it to work in a form Gramsci would have found profoundly troubling: that is, as a reason to withdraw from hegemonic struggles altogether. Within 'our' camp, the affinity for affinity may blossom; outside it, there is evidently no genuinely transformative work to be done. Fatalism is combined with radical

voluntarism: withdrawal into communities of the faithful with reverence for isolated, heroic deeds. This is a very old left script, c. 1890, that Gramsci was desperate to rewrite.

The paradoxical upshot of the Foucauldian voluntarism and anarchist ardour of *Gramsci is Dead* is to deliver us to a kind of nihilistic fatalism. Jean Baudrillard is right, says Day: 'the revolution has in fact occurred, the masses of the First World have chosen quiescence, and nothing we can do will change their behaviour for the better' (p. 126). Or, in his own version of an even more arresting Baudrillardian image: 'no amount of irradiation can rid the social body of its cancerous tumours – the energy will simply be absorbed by the mass' (p. 214).

Having leaned so far towards a very limited interpretation of hegemony as a state-centric strategy of domination, Day himself is thus left, ironically, with a stance vis-à-vis his 'diseased' fellow citizens that is more highly vanguardist and dismissive than anything to be found in Gramsci. From this Baudrillardian perspective, there can be no meaningful hegemonic (or alternative-hegemonic) projects on the left, period. To contest hegemony is to become contaminated. So, although there is a hegemonic neoliberal formation operating 'across all axes of domination and exploitation', one that seemingly calls out for a 'multidimensional analysis of oppression … to oppose, subvert or offer alternatives to the neoliberal world order' (p. 184), any such multidimensional connecting of subaltern alternatives is ruled out of order. A Gramscian 'war of position' – that extended struggle in which subalterns struggle to construct a new hegemony – is *ethically* disallowed.

Who best captures this sensibility of disgust with the cancerous masses and the brain-deadening effects of modernity? Here we think of T. S. Eliot, that Anglo-Catholic, royalist and classicist whose merits as a poet do not efface his substantial investment in anti-modern reactionary politics. Eliot quietly plays a decisive political role in *Gramsci Is Dead*; in fact, he even supplies an answer to the central question, 'What is to be done?' For when that question is posed, Day answers with words from Eliot's 'East Coker', from the *Four Quartets*: 'You must "be still, and wait without hope/for hope would be hope for the wrong thing"' (p. 155). A fuller quotation more fully establishes the political implications of this programme of waiting without hope:

> O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark
> The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant
> The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
> The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,
> Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees
> Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark …
> And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,
> Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury.
> I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
> Which shall be the darkness of God …
>
> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
> For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
> But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
> (Eliot, 1940)

Mental emptiness, cancerous tumours, the encroaching darkness: it would seem that a Foucauldian/anarchist polemic that has freed the left from Gramsci has also liberated it from any resources of political hope. We (and our cancerous humanity) are always already dead.

So, what is to be done? In essence, Day – unconsciously repeating the gestures of that

great old libertarian anarchist of the nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer – counsels leftists to resign from the state. He is convinced that this strategy is new: 'so few experiments in non-hegemonic social change have ever been carried out' (p. 209). Actually, it is as old as 'socialism' itself – in North America, separate socialist 'experiments in living otherwise' date back to the 1820s – and as politically problematical as the kibbutz, which we remember was celebrated in Buber as a prime example of a 'socialism that works' in Palestine (Buber, 1966 [1949]: 137). Day hopes that by withdrawing quantums of energy from the neoliberal societies of control, one might somehow contribute 'to the long-term construction of alternative subjects, spaces and relationships' (p. 163). Maybe if enough people withdraw, 'the flows overall will start to decay beyond the ability of systems of control to manage them' (p. 33). Day seemingly believes that by resigning from the state (or 'society of control'), individual activists can thereby weaken it. It is as if a poststructuralist fascination with micro-politics, which effectively undercuts any possibility of hegemonic challenge and 'war of position', has led inexorably to Eliot's stance of Christian resignation: a death of the left punctuated (perhaps) by episodic gestures of heroic if futile resistance. If there are no 'people', no 'masses', and no systematic struggles for hegemony, then there can be little to fall back on but 'I', master of my fate and captain of my soul, as I wait passively for the darkness to swallow me.

Gramsci is Dead merits our attention not only in its own right, but also because it is part of a much bigger moment in left theory – one in which leftists around the world are struggling to transform the *refusal* of global capitalism into *supersedure*, a radically transformed vision of reality and, if possible, into an enduring *systematisation* of this new insight. John Holloway's widely-discussed *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2002), for example, although drawing more from Lukács than from Foucault, overlaps very considerably with Day's polemic. Both Day and Holloway respond to the débâcle of state socialism with viscerally state-phobic responses: the tragedy of the twentieth-century left was that its blind leaders followed the slogan, 'First we win power and *then* we create a society worthy of humanity' (Holloway, 2002: 18, emphasis in original). Although at a very general level, this polemic does identify a glaring weakness in many conspicuous attempts to found socialist regimes, when we think of a host of specific leftisms, it scarcely fits at all. Most early-twentieth-century leftists were far more attuned to socialism as the applied science of social evolution, one which many believed was best advanced not through the state but through revolutionary labour movements. Many late-twentieth-century leftists, socialist feminists most successfully, threw themselves into experiments 'with a variety of innovative connections and combinations between autonomous self-organised power and initiatives to transform, as well as confront, the state, especially the local state, and political parties' (Wainwright, 2004: 49). Similarly, Holloway's and Day's critiques of the 'Know-All Party' falter when they are applied *holus bolus* to the entire left, much of which has, since the 1960s, been following Gramsci in trying to imagine very different relations between the leaders and the led. It is in the work of Gramsci, and specifically in his close attention to civil society, the war of position and the centrality of cultural struggles, that we find the most rigorous *critique* of the rigidly party-centric and state-centric positions attributed to him by both Day and Holloway – which is why he was drawn upon so extensively by a diversity of non-authoritarian left movements from the 1960s on. Between 'statolatry' and 'state-phobia' lies a vast continent of actually-existing state–civil society relations calling out for realistic and critical investigation. One can apply to Day the same judicious critique that Hilary Wainwright applies to Holloway: 'To treat the alienation of the state from society as some kind of

universal fact means treating the state as necessarily above the struggles going on in the social relations of which it is part' (ibid., 51; see also Binford, 2005).

This reduction of Gramsci to just one more state-obsessed Stalinist is of a piece with the sometimes cavalier and often crudely dismissive attitudes of this emergent school towards history in general. 'Spit on history. History is the history of oppression told by the oppressors, a history from which oppression conveniently disappears, a history of Heroes, of Great Men. Spit on history. History, even our history, is a history in which the struggle against oppression is invaded by the categories of the oppressors, so that it too becomes the history of Heroes' (Holloway, 2005). The drive towards self-determination is 'a push towards a society liberated from history' (Holloway, 2002: 243). In images of screaming and spitting, death and disintegration, the new left libertarians verge on a despairing irrationalism: 'There is no positive force to hold on to, no security, no guarantee. All positive forces are chimeras which disintegrate when we touch them'. We are left with the 'dark void' of non-identity (ibid., p. 151). True, there is the 'unquenchable' light of the 'utopian star', (ibid., p. 245) but it shines only fitfully on the earth below. Dark, dark, unreasoning and despairing, they all go into the dark …

There is a deeper logic to all this spitting and burying. Such gestures proceed, ironically enough, from a certain hubristic conviction that one can stand outside history and gaze down upon it from a transcendent, god-like perspective. Confronted with the complications and enormities of socialist history, these theorists pin their hopes on the present, which they imagine can be a *tabula rasa* cleansed of the fearful complexities of the past. Let us plough the fields with the bones of the dead, and declare Gramsci and the *Prison Notebooks* 'history' – i.e. dead and gone. *Gramsci is Dead*: the very title declares its author's capacity to issue sovereign, decisive verdicts, seemingly open to no appeal.

Set against this form of hubristic, transcendent and reductionist historicism is the 'absolute historicism' of Gramsci – an approach to the philosophy of praxis that allows us to grasp 'both the extent to which the present is not identical with itself, but rather, is fractured by residual formations of the past and emergent formations directed towards new social practices, and also the means by which the philosophy of praxis' acknowledgement of its own determination increases its ability to contribute to social transformation' (Thomas: 251). Absolute historicism argues that systems of thought are 'practices directed to the resolution of determinant problems in determinant historical conjunctures' (ibid.), an insight it does not hesitate to apply to historical materialism itself as an element of the contradictions of a class society.

'Reconnaissance' denotes the determinate tactics of activism and research that derive from this stance of absolute historicism. Against the 'austere historicism' (see Morton, 2003: 127-9) so influential in the most recent 'left' performances of *The Death of Marx* – rituals that characteristically seek to quarantine past leftists and left formations in their specific times and places – reconnaissance argues that effective activism and scholarship require a critical-realist investigation of the dialectic of past and present. As Gramsci argued,

> the past is a complex thing, a complex of the living and the dead, in which a choice cannot be made arbitrarily, *a priori*, by an individual or by a political current. If a choice is made in such a way (on paper) it is not historicism that one is dealing with but an arbitrary act of will, a manifestation of a practico-political, unilateral tendency, which cannot provide the basis for a science but only for an immediate political ideology. What will be conserved of the past in the dialectical process cannot be determined a priori, but will be a result

> of the process itself, and will be characterised by historical necessity, and not by arbitrary choice on the part of so-called scientists and philosophers. (Gramsci, 1995: 374; Q10II§41).

The pity of Day's book is that, concealed by its ill-judged genuflections to late-twentieth-century irrationalism and to mid-twentieth-century performances of the *Death of Marx*, there is a much better text struggling to get out, one that would really pave the way for a more fruitful and less stereotypical dialogue between anarchists and Marxists (for telling historical parallels, see Levy, 1999). Misconceived in its depiction of both Gramsci and the Gramscians, *Gramsci is Dead* nonetheless testifies valuably to the historical contradictions of its time. It brings to light many thinkers and activists who deserve to be more widely known and influential, Martin Buber above all – potential contributors to a Marxist/anarchist dialogue that Day's book begins to open up. As is the case with Holloway, so it is with Day: although coarse and inaccurate when applied to many past left formations, there is obviously some *general* truth to the libertarian critique of state socialism. The movements (feminism, anti-poverty, queer activism, anti-racism) and tactics (summit protests, immigrants' rights, factory occupations, direct-action casework, *comitati di quartiere*, culture-jamming) that Day celebrates are all important indications of emergent innovative patterns in living otherwise. His recuperation of Landauer's vision of a revolutionary strategy of building a 'binding reality' through which oppressive structures are progressively undermined parallels, ironically enough, Gramsci's own work on the 'war of position'. As Day remarks, with respect to this emergent left framework, 'This can only be a practical theory and a theoretical practice, one that avoids both the quiescence brought on by excessive abstraction *and* the frustrations inherent in setting out to "do something" without paying adequate attention to what others are doing now and have done before' (p. 205). With its intimations of reconnaissance, and of a continuing conversation with a not-yet-dead Gramsci, this is perhaps the best sentence in this often perplexing book.

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Gareth Dale

Between State Capitalism and Globalisation: The Collapse of the East German Economy

Peter Lang, 2004, 371 pp.
ISBN: 9783039101811 (pbk) £45

Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945–1989

Routledge, 2005, 246 pp.
ISBN: 9780714654086 (pbk) £21

The East German Revolution of 1989

Manchester University Press, 2006, 256 pp.
ISBN: 9780719074789 (pbk) £17

reviewed by Martin Upchurch

This trilogy of books by Gareth Dale is a splendid achievement, tracing the rise and fall of the German Democratic Republic. The books are written from a perspective of Marxist political economy, and in traversing the path of a unique history, the author draws on cultural, social and historical analysis to paint a picture of this most interesting country.

I first met Gareth Dale in East Berlin in 1993. We were both active socialists in the new East Germany, struggling to adjust socialist theory to practice as the old values, norms and expectations of the former GDR were swallowed up by those of its bigger, brasher neighbour. Gareth had been in East Germany before the *Wende*, and he followed the rise of the new social movements in the period immediately before the fall of the Wall in 1989. In the process, he had made meticulous notes of his experiences and of interviews with key participants in the protest movements both before and after unification. This trilogy of books, therefore, benefits both from the author's closeness to the unfolding events as a participant and observer and to his excellent scholarship – a fine combination of an activist and academic searching for meaning in a turbulent historical moment.

The books should be read not just as a chronological trilogy, but also as three separate works focusing on different themes. The first book, *Between State Capitalism and Globalisation*, tracks the collapse of the East German economy prior to 1989. As such, there is a heavy emphasis on political economy. The second, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, examines the nature of opposition movements under the Communist regime and critically locates movements within social-movement theory. The final volume, *The East German Revolution of 1989*, explores the intricate counter-play between the main protagonists and actors in the revolution, ranging from sometimes reluctant Stasi operatives through to Protestant pastors and factory workers.

The thesis in *Between State Capitalism and Globalisation* is framed by a 'state capitalist' rather than a 'state socialist' perspective of the nature of the GDR regime. As such, Dale seeks to draw out the tension inherent in the economy, between a country subject both to the Communist system of state planning from above and to an external orientation in which

the GDR sought to survive in an increasingly internationalised economy. The GDR had begun life economically subjugated to the Soviet Union. Reparations (often in the form of the export of complete factories) to the USSR ran at a rate of two to three times those of West Germany to the Allies. But although much production and trade continued to be confined to the old COMECON bloc and directed from Moscow, Dale also traces the emerging trading relationships of the GDR with the wider world. By 1985, 40 per cent of GDR imports and 48 per cent of its exports were with the western market economies as opposed to the Communist states. It was precisely this tension between the exigencies of state-directed industry and the need to compete on the world market that created the conditions for a state-directed drive for capital accumulation through the creation of surplus value at the workplace. Within this general analysis, Dale provides sometimes amusing insights into the inner workings of the GDR ruling elite, including the operations of the infamous KoKo organisation, which operated outside the planned economy and embraced both smuggling and covert import/export deals with official blessing. However, by the 1980s the problems of an ossified system of state management had begun to show, as factory technology aged and debt levels soared. After the political downfall of Honecker, the rulers of the GDR eventually gathered their forces to attempt to jump ship from state-led to market-led capitalism.

The story of 1989 cannot be fully understood without reference to the years of brave and spluttering protest before the eventual internal collapse of the GDR regime. In *Popular Protest in East Germany*, we are given this story in fine detail. Most prominent are the events of June 1953, when ordinary workers shaped history by protesting in the factories and on the streets against higher work quotas. Dale describes in sharp detail how workers' ideas began to change as they engaged in struggle, moving from being strikers to being rebels against the system as the movement from below progressed. Dale leaves us in no doubt that the uprising was genuine in its support for social justice and equality against the increasing repression and manipulation of the Communist regime. He records the demands of workers in their workplaces, which included 'the reinstatement of sacked workers, equal pay for women, the abolition or restriction of "scientific" quota allocation, and even the call for performance related pay to be replaced with hourly pay rates' (p. 25). The uprising also included the commandeering of radio stations and street loudspeaker systems (a favoured weapon of control in the Stalinised states), while more than a hundred offices of the state and secret police were ransacked. Most importantly, the events of 1953 shook the regime leaders' confidence, and set limitations on the ability of the Communist rulers to repress the mass of the population. The revolt also laid down a marker as to the centrality of workers within the regime, again delimiting the degree to which the factory bosses, in tune with SED (Socialist Unity Party) authority, could exploit their own workforces. But it was not solely workplace struggles that defined the nature of protest in the ensuing years. In the remainder of the book, Dale treats us to a description of the 'other' social movements that existed in the GDR up until the 1989 revolution. In doing so, he frames his analysis within theories of mass protest and new social movements. He draws on the work of Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow, and refers more critically to the political-culture-oriented approach of Christian Joppke. The social movements coalesced into a generalised opposition that embraced peace protesters from the Protestant Church and elsewhere, ecologists and the women's movement. This longer history of dissent eventually turned to outright opposition in 1989, as both a citizens' and a workers' movement – a force too powerful for the regime to continue to resist.

The final book, *The East German Revolution of 1989*, provides the climax. Dale's approach to explaining the events is to present an

'algebra of mobilisation' (p. 35) from which forces for change can be understood. The emerging movement is tracked, and the relationship of 'exit' and 'voice' as expressions of discontent interpreted. Contrary to much conventional analysis, Dale uses a dialectical method and argues that the two responses are inter-related. Once the Hungarian–Austrian border had been breached by the 'Trabis' (Trabant cars), the power of exit exposed the fragility of the regime, thus giving new strength to voice. Indeed, the battle of Dresden railway station was fought collectively by those expressing their voice not only in favour of the right to exit, but also to call for democratic reform from within. Street battles between people and their repressors ensued; but as Dale records, 'Despite the use of clubs, water cannon, and the deployment of the army, protestors had held their ground. In testing the security forces and finding them wanting, they contributed to the public perception that the regime was vincible, and thus to its actual weakness' (p. 17). The book also deals with the politics of the organised citizens' movement, such as New Forum, and of some of the leading intellectual dissidents in the movements. What is of interest here is the 'liberal' nature of New Forum's leadership when faced with decisive moments in the revolutionary process in which the future direction of the movement was at stake. Rather than pushing forward to enable the creation of a genuine workers' state 'from below', the leadership of the citizens' movement hesitated and preferred instead to talk in the round table with the crumbling SED regime. In doing so, they blocked calls for a general strike just one month after the fall of the Wall. Many erstwhile dissidents such as Bärbel Bohley and the novelists Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym were also prepared to hold back the protests in favour of talks with the SED to reform the GDR from above. The combination of this trepidatious apology for the workers' state in the form of the GDR, combined with liberals' fear of real workers' power, acted to demobilise the movement from below. In the resulting vacuum, the idea of unity with the bourgeois state to the west gathered pace, and the story of unification was begun.

Taken as a whole, these books represent a considerable scholarly achievement by Gareth Dale. It is a pity that they appear in three volumes by different publishers, especially as there is some overlap in content between the last two volumes. Nevertheless, as a record of events they are invaluable, and their plethora of anecdotes makes them a pleasure to read. The books are also invaluable for social-movement theorists wishing to discover the relationship between theory and practice. For political activists, the books also provide an excellent commentary on the process of revolutionary change and its limitations.

Andreas Bieler, Werner Bonefeld, Peter Burnham and Adam David Morton

Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour: Contesting Neo-Gramscian Perspectives

Palgrave, 2006, 237 pp.
ISBN: 9781403992321 (hbk) £49

reviewed by William I. Robinson

Explaining the restructuring of world capitalism in recent decades – what many now refer to as globalisation – is surely the paramount analytical and theoretical challenge for scholars and activists who engage with the global system. Some of the most innovative work on capitalist restructuring from within the sub-disciplines of international relations (IR) and international political economy (IPE) has come from two critical Marxist approaches, neo-Gramscianism and Open Marxism. These two approaches share a historical-materialist method and a critical standpoint, yet they have been in tension with one another over the utility, interpretation and application of key Marxist and critical categories in understanding contemporary capitalism. This volume brings together a total of twelve contributions – from Andreas Bieler and Adam Morton, representing the neo-Gramscians, and from Peter Burnham and Werner Bonefeld, representing the Open Marxists – as an exchange between the two approaches on their respective interpretations of global restructuring processes, with an explicit focus on the centrality of the state, capital and labour to these processes.

The book is organised into three sections. The first introduces the key concepts and categories of analysis of the two perspectives. The neo-Gramscian approach congealed in the 1990s following seminal contributions in the previous decade by its doyen, Robert W. Cox. It applies Gramscian categories and concepts – amongst them hegemony, the historical bloc, passive revolution and state–civil-society configurations – to world order and global restructuring, and emphasises the transnational character of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century world capitalism. The Open Marxists, largely contemporaneous with the neo-Gramscians, emphasise the centrality of the capital relation – especially its internally contradictory nature – class struggle as open ended, and the inherent instability and crisis-prone nature of capitalism. Both approaches prioritise the social relations of production, ontologically as the core of capitalism and methodologically as the starting point of analysis. And for both, the state and the market are two different forms of these same social relations of production.

What, then, are the main points of contention between these two perspectives? The differences are brought into play in the second section of this volume, which provides several case studies on contemporary developments in world capitalism, and in the third section, intended as a summation of the debate. Open Marxists do not see globalisation as a qualitatively new epoch in world capitalism, and they reject much of what the neo-Gramscians refer to as *transnational processes*. Bieler, for instance, analyses European integration as fundamentally being a process involving transnationalising capital and transnational class struggle. He shows how neoliberal, neo-mercantilist and social-democratic fractions among dominant groups in Europe put forth distinct visions of integration based on distinct locations within transnationalising accumulation processes. This emphasis on the central agency of transnational fractions of capital stands in

contrast to Open Marxist accounts of integration, which according to Bieler, restrict 'the analysis of class formation to distinctive boundaries, only this time they are regional instead of national borders' (p. 76). On the other hand, Bieler seems to give analytical priority to competing interests among distinct fractions of capital over the capital-labour contradiction, which the Open Marxists see as the fundamental causal dynamic in explanations of contemporary developments. Hence Burnham, in his chapter on the changes in economic management in Britain in the 1990s, explains the shift from politicised to depoliticised forms of state economic management of contemporary capitalism in terms of capital's attempt to discipline labour in the wake of the relative class force the latter accumulated in the previous period.

In Chapter 3, Burnham charges the neo-Gramscians with a 'Weberian pluralism' in so far as the neo-Gramscian triad of ideas, institutions and material capabilities are said to exercise equal determination. In another chapter, Burnham criticises the neo-Gramscians for placing too much emphasis on the influence of ideology and agency over class and material relations, although Bonefeld, in Chapter 10, faults them in turn for just the opposite: for emphasising structural determinants behind the backs of agents. According to Bieler and Morton, in response to this, Open Marxism tends to obscure the way class struggle is mediated through specific material social practices, to prioritise the dominant reproduction of capitalism over resistance, and to engage in state-centric analysis and an overly theoretical and abstract style of discussion. For Burnham, class groups stop at their own borders, so that their further engagement in the world is reduced to expressions of inter-state relations. In Chapter 11, Burnham elaborates on his view of national states as engaged in 'political management of the global circuits of capital' (p. 190) and as 'political nodes in the global flow of capital' (p. 191). I find this characterisation useful. But it is not clear as to how or why Burnham then proceeds with what amounts to a leap of faith, so that because national states are such nodes, interstate dynamics must be understood as struggles between nation states over quotas of global surplus value. Indeed, Burnham, in this volume as elsewhere in his writings, unabashedly reifies nation states, which he sees as macro-agents engaged in a competitive struggle to 'enhance their position' in the global hierarchy of nation states (p. 191).

Bonefeld's three chapters in the volume are disappointing because he does not really engage the neo-Gramscians or other perspectives against his own. Rather, his style is to take snippets of quotes – out of context and meaningless in themselves – from numerous authors who themselves are often far apart in their positions, and then string these quotes together so as to construct a caricature or a straw man in order to claim the correctness of his own positions. He then advances these positions using what I find to be a dogmatic and at times not fully coherent delivery, laced with quotes from Marx. Bonefeld's dogmatic invocation of Marx points, in my view, to a more general problem of scholars from both these perspectives: the neo-Gramscians tend to turn Gramsci's writings into scripture as much as the Open Marxists do to Marx's writings. But Bonefeld is onto something in his charge that Bieler and Morton do not explain the social constitution of production relations. These social relations in the neo-Gramscian construct seem to be an external starting point. Changes in social production relations are seen to initiate causal sequences in a progression of changes in social forces, in forms of state, and in world order. But the matter of how these social production relations are constituted and how and why they change remains unproblematised.

While my own work has been associated with neo-Gramscianism, it has been the subject of critique from both approaches, and I have leveled my own set of criticisms at both. In Chapter 4, Bonefeld criticises me for

putting forth what he sees as my (and other neo-Gramscian analysts') framework of 'nation-state against globalisation'. Bonefeld wants to argue in this chapter that I and others see nation states as previously autonomous units that have lost their autonomy under the external pressure of globalisation, but that, as Marx showed, the world market has always been central to the capitalist system everywhere. According to Bonefeld, I claim that globalisation represents an epochal shift because it is characterised by 'the creation of the world market' (p. 46). In fact, the world market, I have always observed, is 500-plus years old: what is qualitatively new is a globalised production and financial system. More egregiously, Bonefeld attributes to me a quote that does not exist. On p. 46 of the volume under review, he attributes to me the view that a 'purely national economy that served "national interests"' has now 'been superseded by an international economy' in which it is now 'impossible to discern the national interest'. Bonefeld places the phrase 'national interests' here in quotation marks – that is, to cite me – and attributes this citation to p. 11 of my study, *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (see Robinson, 2004). Remarkably, however, no such quote exists on p. 11 of my study. I have never spoken of 'national interests'. To the contrary, I insist that such interests are fictitious – an ideological construct that mystifies antagonistic class and social interests within and across national boundaries.

If the Open Marxists are explicit in their rejection of anything *trans*national, the neo-Gramscians seem unwilling to make a clean break with nation-state/interstate-centric analysis. Instead, Bieler and Morton advance sets of inside-out or outside-in processes, in which transformations in a nation state are *either* initiated by social forces conceived as internal to that nation state *or* from a 'hegemonic' nation state, or by international organisations that impose these changes from outside. Hence, in their words, neoliberal hegemony 'achieved within particular forms of state, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, is transferred to the world order sphere' (p. 202). This is the outside-in process by which Morton analyses neoliberalism in Mexico. Alternatively, such hegemony is brought about internally by national social groups and then exported to the international arena. This is the inside-out case of Austria and Sweden in the EU that Bieler analyses. Such an approach reduces the conditions that generate neoliberal transformations to nation-state-level processes, rather than seeking the explanation for these transformations in the *global system* whose nature and dynamics cannot be grasped from within a nation-state/inter-state problematic that informs both neo-Gramscian and Open Marxist perspectives, and indeed, the very ontology of IR and IPE. For the neo-Gramscians, 'world order' seems to mean 'international order'. What extends beyond the nation state is not for them a *transnational state* (my own concept, which elsewhere the neo-Gramscians have criticised) but the *internationalisation of the state.*

Notwithstanding these observations, this is a timely and important volume because it shows what both these approaches offer in gaining a better understanding of contemporary capitalism. As the authors acknowledge, the aim of the book is not to reconcile but to highlight some of the principal differences in these two approaches, and to explore the implications of these differences for method and analysis.

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Paul Blackledge

Reflections on the Marxist Theory of History

Manchester University Press, 2006, 218 pp.
ISBN: 9780719069572 (pbk) £13

reviewed by Tony Burns

This book is a welcome contribution to the body of literature devoted to the discussion of Marxist historiography. It is a rich text, very well researched and well-written, containing a great deal of material and touching on a wide range of issues with admirable economy of expression. It is not possible to do the book justice by commenting on everything it contains. The remarks which follow are inevitably, therefore, somewhat selective, and to a certain degree reflect my own current research interests.

Blackledge's *Reflections* should appeal to a wide range of potential readers, including members of the general public with an interest in Marx and Marxism, and political activists of both a Marxist and a non-Marxist persuasion. It will be of particular interest to academic researchers and teachers within the discipline of history, especially those delivering courses on the philosophy of history, but should also be of interest to those working in a number of other disciplines usually associated with the social sciences, especially the disciplines of politics and sociology and particularly historical sociology. Finally, although it is not by any means a textbook, *Reflections* would provide a convenient and relatively inexpensive way in, for both undergraduate and postgraduate students working in these areas, to the various debates in which Marxists have been engaged in recent years, not only with each other but also with those who are not Marxists and even with opponents of Marxism.

Examples of the former include the debates between Marxists over the importance of slavery in the economic system of the ancient Greek world and the existence of a 'slave mode of production' (pp. 103–10); the debate over the transition from feudalism to capitalism (pp. 39–45, 119–27); and the debate over the concept of 'bourgeois revolution' which, according to some of the historians who associate themselves with Marxism, took place in England in the seventeenth century (pp. 127–39). The best example of the latter is the debate between Marxists and postmodernists over the nature of history and historical writing, especially as it touches on the notions of relativism and objective truth (pp. 1–16, 200–12).

Blackledge's discussion of the debate between Marxists and postmodernists, and of the debate amongst Marxists themselves about the character of postmodernism, is one reason for thinking that the issues dealt with in his book are not just of historical interest, but also possess an obvious contemporary relevance. A second reason for thinking this is his attempt, in the book's final chapter, to relate the issues dealt with earlier to the phenomenon usually referred to as 'globalisation' and, again, to postmodernism, although on this occasion the concept of postmodernism is associated with theoretical speculation of the kind usually entered into by sociologists concerning the nature of contemporary society, rather than being concerned with a certain approach to the writing of history.

One of Blackledge's main concerns in the book is to demonstrate the relevance of Marx and Marxism for those interested in understanding the world around them today, whether or not they are committed to the

effort to change it. But the Marxism he considers to be relevant is of a particular kind. A welcome feature of the book is its critique (pp. 24–30) of the crude (that is to say, scientistic, determinist, reductionist, unilinear) interpretation of Marx's views on history that has in the past so often been associated with the Preface to Marx's *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (1859 – hereafter the 'Preface'). Equally welcome is the attempt to demonstrate (pp. 53, 56–9) that the Marxist theoreticians of the Second International, especially Karl Kautsky, did not subscribe to such a crude understanding of Marx's views on history.

As is well known, this particular reading of Marx's views on history attributes to him the view that world history up to the present is composed of successive stages, each of which is associated with a specific 'mode of production'. There is disagreement over the question of how many of these Marx had in mind. Usually, however, the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the capitalist modes are singled out for discussion. It is suggested here that in Marx's view, each one of these epochs in world history and its associated mode of production emerges necessarily from the stage that precedes it, the driving force behind the dynamics of this process being the contradiction that exists between what Marx refers to as the 'forces of production', on the one hand, and the 'relations of production' on the other. From the late-nineteenth century onwards, this interpretation of Marx has been an influential one, especially (though not only) amongst Marx's critics. Even today, these views are still attributed to Marx and Marxists by the opponents of Marxism, especially by poststructuralists and postmodernists.

This interpretation of Marx's views on history, widely accepted by Marx's critics, is misleading. It is true that Marx's Preface does contain evidence to support it, so it could hardly be said to be a misrepresentation of the Preface itself. However, it does misrepresent Marx's views on history as a whole. This is so because it is a highly selective reading of Marx based on a consultation either of this one text alone, or of the Preface taken together with the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, with the latter's (inevitably, given the circumstances under which it was written) overly schematic account of the social relations that exist in class-divided societies. Advocates of this reading have a tendency to ignore Marx's other writings, including of course those writings in which Marx writes things inconsistent with it.

Of particular interest here is Marx's *Grundrisse* (1857), especially (but not only) its General Introduction, in which Marx advances philosophical and methodological views that are much more subtle than, and arguably inconsistent with, those later developed in the Preface. Also important in this connection are Marx's own historical writings, especially *The Class Struggles in France 1848–50* (1850), *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), and *The Civil War in France* (1871). These are of interest because they demonstrate clearly that when Marx undertook the task of actually writing history, as he did in these works, he did not in fact employ the kind of historical method one would expect him to, given the views on history expressed in the Preface.

Blackledge appreciates the significance of Marx's *Grundrisse* in this regard, and refers to it explicitly in his book as providing an important corrective to any reading of Marx that relies solely on the Preface (pp. 24–5). He does not, however, offer his readers a discussion of how Marx's historical writings might also be used to achieve the same result. This is arguably a lacuna in his own account of Marx's views on history. The Marxist theoretician who is most closely associated with an emphasis on the importance of Marx's historical writings in this regard is Nicos Poulantzas. It is not too surprising, therefore, that there is no discussion of Poulantzas's reading of Marx's views in this book. Indeed, Poulantzas is not even listed in

its index. Perhaps an even more significant absence is that of any sustained treatment of the work of Antonio Gramsci, who was an important source of theoretical inspiration for Poulantzas, and whose work had a significant impact on Marxist theoreticians in Britain in the 1980s. Blackledge does, though, refer to Gramsci (pp. 8–9, 86–7).

There are different ways in which Marx and Marxism might be defended from the misrepresentation alluded to above. One of these involves focusing on the humanism of Marx's early writings (1843–44) and contrasting this with the views of the later, allegedly more scientific or scientistic Marx. This is, of course, the argument developed by those Marxists in the twentieth century who are associated with what is usually referred to as 'western Marxism', especially the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in Germany and the Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre in France. Blackledge says very little about the former and much more about the latter (pp. 154–61) who, together with E. P. Thompson, he considers to be a proponent of a 'subjectivist' or 'voluntarist' form of Marxism (pp. 167–72). However, this humanist defence of Marx has often been presented by Marxist theoreticians who are concerned more with questions of philosophy and metaphysics than with questions of history and historical writing. Moreover, those who seek to defend Marx and Marxism in this way have a tendency to concede that the mature Marx just *was* scientistic, a determinist, a reductionist, and so on. Thus they are inclined to concede what some would consider to be the most important point of the argument to Marx's critics. In effect, they attempt to defend the later Marx against himself. This is not the line of reasoning Blackledge adopts in his book.

A second way in which Marx's views on history might be defended from such criticism, and the one favoured by Blackledge, involves making a conceptual distinction between a 'mode of production', on the one hand, and a 'social formation' on the other (pp. 28–9, 164–5). As Blackledge notes (p. 164), this distinction is usually associated with the 'structuralist Marxism' of Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar. It is, Blackledge suggests (p. 164), 'perhaps Althusser's most positive contribution to Marxism'. This is not quite accurate, as it was Balibar rather than Althusser who first explicitly coined this distinction. More to the point, however, this distinction has an association with classical Marxism. It is to be found, at least implicitly, not only in the writings of Marx himself (*Grundrisse*) but also, as a number of commentators have noted, in those of Lenin, especially Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia.* There is no over-riding reason, therefore, to connect this distinction with either Althusser or with 'structuralist Marxism' more generally. This may help to explain why Blackledge approves of it.

The idea of a social formation involves thinking about particular societies at particular times as being associated with more than one mode of production, in combination. This way of thinking about history allows for the possibility that one of these modes of production might be dominant in relation to the others, although it also accepts that this might not in fact be the case, and that the different modes of production in a given social formation at a particular time, such as the English social formation in the sixteenth century, might balance each other or stand in a relationship of equilibrium with respect to one another. Not surprisingly, given that it is Marxist, this approach to historical understanding attaches particular importance to the notion of class. It recognises, however, that because social formations can be, and usually are, associated with more than one mode of production, their class structure is far more complex than one would expect from a reading of, say, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party.* In particular, this reading suggests that Marxist historians should be cautious about making generalisations about '*the* ruling class' in any given social formation at a particular time, since this potentially misleading expression gives the unwary reader

the impression that it refers to a simple, unified, homogeneous entity, when in fact it does not. On this view, Marxist historians should not talk about just *one* class that rules within a particular social formation, but rather of two or more classes which together constitute a 'ruling bloc' and which, although they do occupy a superior position in relation to the subordinate classes within this social formation, may have conflicting interests in relation to some issues. The suggestion is, therefore, that all of these things need to be taken into account by Marxist historians who are seeking an explanation of the historical events associated with the social formation in question, such as for example 'the English Revolution of 1640', or 'the rise of the welfare state in England, 1880–1920'.

As Blackledge himself puts it in his book, the conceptual distinction between a mode of production and a social formation 'opens the door to a detailed study of concrete historical moments' in particular societies, and therefore to real as opposed to philosophical history (p. 165). It does so precisely because it is 'suggestive of the need for historical research' by Marxists into 'the concrete combination of modes of production within specific social formations' (p. 164). This is something which, in his opinion, is required because of the evident 'inadequacy of any attempt to deduce Marxist strategic conclusions from a priori claims' – claims based on entirely theoretical assumptions relating to 'the dynamic structure of any single mode of production' – of the kind Marx appears to make in the Preface.

It is evident that this way of thinking about Marx's views on history is far more subtle than the one usually attributed to Marx, which is put forward by Marx himself in his Preface. For example, it is more sensitive to the importance of the actual history of a particular social formation at a particular time, as opposed to the more speculative philosophy of history to be found in the Preface. Moreover, in comparison with humanist readings of Marx, which rely heavily on Marx's early writings, it possesses the great advantage of not conceding that the later Marx was indeed a determinist, a reductionist, and so on. Finally, it challenges the crude reading of the views of the later Marx on history, as referred to earlier, without abandoning the conceptual framework Marx deploys in the Preface, especially the notion of a 'mode of production'.

In my view, then, Blackledge's emphasis on the importance for Marxist historians (and also for students of Marxist historiography) of distinguishing between a mode of production and a social formation is one of the great strengths of his book. If the book is open to criticism at all in this particular area, it is only because Blackledge could have said much more about this issue than he does. For although, as we have seen, he rightly emphasises its importance, he does not actually make very much of this conceptual distinction when discussing the views of the Marxist historians who have contributed to the debates with which his book deals.

One obvious omission here is the work of Perry Anderson, one of the Marxist historians who employs the distinction between a mode of production and a social formation to good effect in his studies of classical antiquity and early modern absolutism. Blackledge does discuss Anderson's work in his book (pp. 168–70, 172–8). However, his discussion of Anderson's views focuses on the disagreement between Anderson and E. P. Thompson in relation to the 'structure versus agency' debate, rather than on Anderson's historical writings proper. In relation to the same issue, another historian whose work might have been discussed is Stuart Hall, who has also employed the notion of a social formation, to equally good effect, in writing a history of the British state at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

So far as historical research and writing by Marxist historians is concerned, especially in Britain, the book contains a brief but lively and informative treatment of the activities of the Historians Group of the British Communist Party in the 1930s and 1940s (pp.

82–7). It also contains a discussion of the work carried out by members of this group on the subject of English history in the seventeenth century, especially as we have seen in relation to the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England, and on the English Revolution of 1640, construed as an example of a 'bourgeois revolution' in the sense in which Marx and Engels employ the expression. Surprisingly, however, there is no discussion of Christopher Hill's classic pamphlet on the English Revolution. Nor, with the exception of the work of E. P. Thompson on the 'making of the English working class' referred to earlier, is there much discussion of the work carried out by Marxist historians on the later history of England, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the age of imperialism. I have already mentioned Stuart Hall in this connection. However, perhaps an even more significant omission is that of the work of Eric Hobsbawm. The works written by Hobsbawm present an analysis of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century British history in a period of relative economic decline. In these works, Hobsbawm emphasises the need for Marxist historians to take into account the conflict of economic interests which then existed between the different fractions of what was evidently not a homogeneous 'ruling class' in English society – especially the conflict between those whose interests were associated with financial capital, on the one hand, and those whose interests were associated with manufacturing capital on the other. One of Hobsbawm's central theses, of course, is that the dominance of the former over the latter is central to any adequate explanation of the policies of the British state in this period. Hobsbawm's writings, therefore, are an excellent example of a working historian who, although he employs the theoretical categories of Marxism in attempting to explain the events taking place within a given social formation at a given time, has nevertheless written a history which is far more subtle, and more sensitive to the specific circumstances of the particular case under discussion, than one would expect from a Marxist historian if one relied solely on the Preface for an understanding of Marx's historical method.

Writing about the distinction between a mode of production and a social formation, specifically in connection with structuralist Marxism, Blackledge claims (p. 164) that according to Althusser and Balibar, a mode of production is a 'theoretical construct' whereas a social formation is not. According to Blackledge, Althusser and Balibar argue that social formations are not theoretical constructs because, in their view, the expression 'social formation' refers to 'actual societies', which must be thought of as existing as 'unique combinations of modes'. I may have misunderstood him, but at this point in his text, Blackledge seems to endorse this way of thinking about the relationship between a mode of production and a social formation. For example he maintains, with apparent approval, that it 'powerfully restated the distinction' between 'real societies', on the one hand, and 'abstract' modes of production on the other. This implies of course that, according to Althusser and Balibar, as their views are interpreted and approved of by Blackledge, modes of production should not be thought of as being real, precisely because they are nothing more than theoretical constructs.

This seems to me to be an unfortunate position for a Marxist to take, and a good reason for distancing oneself from structuralist Marxism, no matter how much one recognises the value of the distinction between a mode of production and a social formation. Moreover, it is not consistent with the views Blackledge expresses elsewhere in his book, which on the whole are (quite rightly) robustly realist so far as their underlying ontological assumptions are concerned (pp. 6–7, 14–15, 118 n. 155, 146, 189). For example, at one point Blackledge explicitly rejects the view, which he attributes to John Haldon, that a mode of production

'"is not an ontologically real system of relations, but a conceptualisation of an ideal-type"' in the sense in which Max Weber employs that term (p. 118). Blackledge maintains, rightly, that Haldon's view 'is surely mistaken' (pp. 118 n. 155, 146).

However, the reasons Blackledge gives to justify his claim that Haldon's view is mistaken do not include any straightforward assertion of a realist ontological position. Realism is associated with the view that Marxists and others should avoid committing the so-called 'epistemic fallacy'. According to realists, those who commit this fallacy are guilty of confusing words with things (not necessarily physical or tangible things). For realists, then, there is a fundamentally important difference between a mode of production, understood as a system of social relations, the existence or reality of which can be established in a particular society at a particular time, and the term or linguistic expression 'mode of production', which Marxists employ to designate such a real entity. Hence there is an important sense in which modes of production themselves are *not* theoretical constructs, although of course there is also a sense in which this is not true of the *concept* of a mode of production. Moreover, because exactly the same thing could be said about a social formation, on the one hand, and the *concept* of a social formation on the other, it follows that we cannot, as Althusser and Balibar maintain, at least on Blackledge's account of their views, differentiate between a mode of production and a social formation by saying that one of these two things is real whereas the other is not because it is (nothing more than) a theoretical construct. For if one is a realist, then one must be of the opinion that in *both* cases, there is something which is real *as well as* something which is a theoretical construct. In short, for Marx the fact that the *concept* of the mode of production that is associated with a given social formation is a theoretical construct or an abstraction should not be taken to imply that the mode of production to which this concept refers is not real. I repeat that I may have misunderstood Blackledge on this point. However, with respect to it, my provisional conclusion is that despite the occasional affirmation of realism in his book, Blackledge's hesitation regarding the views of Althusser and Balibar, indeed his apparent agreement with what he takes to be their views on this particular subject, suggest at the very least that he could have dealt with this important philosophical issue somewhat better than he does.

At a number of points, Blackledge rightly suggests that Marx's approach to historical explanation, properly understood, is best seen as a mediation between two other approaches which stand in a relationship of opposition or contradiction to one another. One obvious example of this is Blackledge's claim, to which he devotes an entire chapter of his book (pp. 153–99), that Marx's views can be fruitfully discussed in relation to the 'structure versus agency' debate, both within the discipline of history and in the social sciences more generally. On other occasions, Blackledge relates Marx and Marxism to the debates between empiricism and postmodernism (p. ix); determinism and voluntarism (p. ix); fatalism and voluntarism (pp. 86–87); reductionism and voluntarism (p. x); reductionism and pluralism (p. 25); and, finally, between empiricism and idealism (p. 14, 22–3, 25). It is not always clear when these conceptual contrasts are intended to be different ways of referring to the same debate and when they are intended to refer to quite different debates. Nor is it always clear whether the participants in these various debates are the same or different people.

I particularly liked the fact that when at least some of those figures whose views are discussed in his book are mentioned for the first time, at that point Blackledge includes a footnote containing a short biographical comment, sometimes with a list of writings of the theorist in question. Thus, for example, there are notes on Antonio Labriola, Gordon Childe, Geoffrey de Sainte-Croix, Maurice Godelier, Paul Sweezy, Robert Brenner,

Rodney Hilton, Chris Harman, Edward Thompson, Perry Anderson, Alasdair MacIntyre, Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton. I think this is a very good idea, which could perhaps have been followed through more consistently.

Roland Erne

European Unions: Labour's Quest for a Transnational Democracy

ILR Press/Cornell University Press, 260 pp.
ISBN: 9780801446481 (hbk) £15

reviewed by Ian Bruff

This is a wide-ranging study that addresses two key questions: 'First, has there emerged a European trade union movement that crosses national boundaries in response to the political and socioeconomic EU integration process? Second, to what extent and under which conditions do European trade unions contribute to the making of a more democratic EU?' (pp. 1–2). Erne develops (and applies throughout the book) a fourfold typology of possible orientations that actors take towards EU integration: Euro-democratisation, Euro-technocratisation, democratic renationalisation, and technocratic renationalisation. His aim is not to classify unions according to one of the four possibilities, but to analyse the strategic choices made by unions, 'which are likely to vary in different situations and at different times' (p. 4). His reasons are clear: 'Often, the failure of unions from different countries to cooperate has been explained by national differences; but this explanation cannot elucidate why the national unions adopt different European strategies in different situations' (p. 5). Thus Erne uses the fourfold typology not as a series of hypotheses to be tested, but as a sensitising device that enables him to focus on units of analysis 'such as transnational union networks that are linked to different multinational companies or different economic sectors' (p. 5). As a result, the book considers unions' European collective bargaining strategies and their responses to transnational mergers.

What follows is a substantial, often engaging description of developments through the 1990s and 2000s. The second part of the book argues that national wage-bargaining strategies are ultimately limited in what they can achieve, given the development of the European economic space. However, Erne is cautious about the impact of a more coordinated approach due to the inability of organised labour to challenge in any way the centrality of price stability to the architecture of EMU. This makes it unlikely that 'the benchmarks [for Europe-wide wage coordination] can effectively set consistent European wages patterns' (p. 115).

The third part critically discusses a Euro-democratisation strategy and a Euro-technocratisation strategy with regard to, respectively, the ABB Alstom and the Alcan-Pechiney-Algroup cases. What is striking about these chapters is the light shed on the intricacies of the coordination of union activities. For example, the European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) was very cautious in its response to a proposed demonstration in Brussels against the post-merger dismissal plans made by ABB Alstom. However, the translation of the EMF letter into English by the administrator of the company's German work council, which was

subsequently sent to work councillors across Europe, 'emphasised much more clearly than the original letter that the EMF supported the demonstration' (p. 145), and presumably provided impetus for the demonstration to take place. Another example, from the demonstration itself, is given: many of those travelling to Brussels 'wrongly assumed that the EMF would take care of practical questions' (p. 146). This led to some delegations cancelling their participation in the event, and to others beginning their journey to Brussels without knowing precisely where to go upon arriving in the city.

The concluding chapter asserts that organised labour 'oscillated between national and European strategies in the area of wage bargaining', and that 'local-, national-, and EU-level unions adopted Euro-democratisation and Euro-technocratisation strategies in our transnational corporate merger cases' (p. 187). The differences are rooted in the fact that 'the central economic driving force that links unions across Europe is not the existence of a European market but the increasingly supranational reorganisation of the firm' (p. 192). This discussion reveals one of the central weaknesses of the book, for Erne's conclusion is that there is a need to emphasise the 'critical role labour *could* play in the Euro-democratisation process' (p. 200, emphasis added). So the book's title is misleading, implying as it does that European labour is striving for transnational democracy, when in fact the argument is that it *could* and probably *should* strive for transnational democracy *if* it recognises the limitations of the Euro-technocratisation, democratic renationalisation and technocratic renationalisation strategies.

In addition, there are considerable theoretical shortcomings. For example, Erne critiques Marxist frameworks for leaving little space for agency, underestimating as they do the space for institutional change through alternative repertoires of action (pp. 123–4). However, through making this point he commits the classic error of separating institutions from their contexts: no room is given for social forces to operate in and through institutions. Thus agency is possible *within the institutional environment only* (see also Bruff, 2008 for an extended critique of the varieties-of-capitalism literature on this point).

This explains why Erne completely ignores the possibilities generated by developments such as the European Social Forum, for these have taken place outside formal institutional (both EU and union) environments, and as such challenge the framework to which he adheres. In addition, it leaves him unable to account satisfactorily for the fact that, although the Brussels demonstration against the ABB Alstom dismissal plans had an impact, it did not derail the redundancy drive. Some job cuts were postponed but not cancelled, and countries that exhibited less resistance suffered more in the end – for example, the UK lost 1,500 rather than 500 jobs. Indeed, Erne acknowledges that 'the Alstom management recurrently broke their promises and tried to sack workers wherever and whenever they did not encounter strong local, national, and European resistance' (p. 154).

Nevertheless, the profoundly unequal capital–labour relationship characteristic of capitalist societies is left unexplored.

This should not be seen as a reason not to resist at all, but the fact is that Erne's laudable desire for a coordinated Euro-democratisation strategy is hampered by an under-developed and limited theoretical outlook. Therefore, this book should be read for its thick description of union activities in response to events such as the ABB Alstom merger. However, as a whole, the conclusion must be that a more convincing account is provided by Andreas Bieler's 2006 book *The Struggle for a Social Europe*. Thus European Unions is a useful supplement to Bieler's work, but it certainly does not surpass it.

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Kate Bronfenbrenner (ed.)

Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital through Cross-Border Campaigns

Cornell University Press, 2007, 261 pp.
ISBN: 9780801446160 (pbk) £11.50

reviewed by Richard Leitch

To the global reach of capital, the only appropriate response from the labour movement is an equally global trade unionism. This is the basic premise of *Global Unions*, a collection of essays edited by Kate Bronfenbrenner and drawn from contributions to a 2006 conference on global unionism sponsored by the AFL–CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations). The conference's stated aim was to increase 'labour's capacity to take on the world's largest transnational corporations and shift global economic and political power back into the hands of workers and communities' (p. 5) – an ambitious project, but one presented as being well within the reach of a suitably transformed organised labour movement.

The changing economic context of trade unionism forms the starting point of the whole collection, and entails a fundamental shift in the then mode of labour resistance, since traditional plant-/factory-level strikes no longer hinder employers who are operating on a global scale. Labour's response, argues Tom Juravich in the opening chapter, must be equally broad, locating and tackling the particular profile, weak spots and sites of intervention of a given employer. To do this, unions need to engage in systematic strategic corporate research (SCR), mapping out the complex power structure of the modern corporation, a model of which Juravich provides. This can then feed into comprehensive, long-term and multidimensional campaigning, linking unions with a range of global allies and external 'stakeholders' to apply leverage in various ways. Pioneered in the USA in recent years and taken up by mainstream unions, this new approach has, note the authors, had less traction elsewhere: in Europe, the persistence of consensual industrial relations has pre-empted any search for alternatives, whilst in the global South, hostile conditions for organising have not been met sufficiently by new research-led approaches.

The set of case studies that follows illustrates some of the potential and problems of global union activity, and Bronfenbrenner draws out the wider lessons they contain. First of these is that the favoured SCR model always needs adapting to the specific context of any campaign. The key points of leverage (profit centres, growth areas, range of decision-makers and the key relationships of an employer) cannot be deduced in advance, but only discovered through the research process itself. Not surprisingly, the need for more SCR training and proponents, in order to speed up labour's global response, is a key recommendation of the book. Another is that this research and the campaigning it informs should be an integral aspect of union activity,

not a piecemeal extra drawn upon only for specific organising campaigns and bargaining. Bronfenbrenner's point is a good one; but why then is the UE–FAT alliance between the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UE) of the USA and the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT) of Mexico not covered in the collection, despite its long-standing cross-border collaboration over the last decade and a half? A similar omission occurs in the book's endorsement of the political component of comprehensive campaigning, in which Latin American unions are recognised as being at the forefront of challenging neoliberal state policies, but no coverage of this is given.

Of the campaigns that are covered, several important themes are raised. Their extension of union activity beyond the single-site strike is both geographical and political, oriented towards wider issues of international trade policy, fair trade, etc., and directed at a variety of sites/institutions that can be 'leveraged' in pursuit of campaign goals. The European Parliament and international trade negotiations between southern nations and the US/EU are two such two examples covered. Such actions, more usually the domain of political parties and NGOs, are presented here as being central to disrupting the key relationships and future goals of TNCs. This political lobbying is not, however, a substitute for grassroots activity and workplace organisation, which has a crucial role to play in building long-term sustainable global solidarity networks across national boundaries, and new collective identities underwriting joint actions. The studies of union organisation in the unforgiving climate of a Sri Lankan economic processing zone (EPZ) by Samanthi Gunawardana, and of the successful efforts of European dockworkers to block EU port liberalisation proposals, recorded by Peter Turnbull, both illustrate this well.

Global linkages are not restricted to inter-union relations, however. In their struggles against modern TNCs, unions have allied with various NGOs. In the Sri Lankan case, the campaign for union recognition relied, crucially, on a local Women's Centre which teamed up with the free-trade-zone workers' union to recruit members from amongst the female workforce, built regional alliances with other Asian Women's Centres and the Transnational Information Exchange (TIE) Asia network, and became part of global campaigns on garment production standards (Clean Clothes Campaign, Maquila Solidarity Network). Through this 'relationship building at every level of the labour movement' (p. 222), unions can connect with new groups of workers and the wider issues they confront in order to successfully mobilise and win.

Obviously, collaboration of this sort can bring conflict as well as cooperative reinforcement. Henry Frundt's piece confronts head-on the tensions between a regional union federation in Central America (COLSIBA) and its allies campaigning to improve standards in the banana industry, highlighting the differing agendas of global NGOs (EUROBAN, US/LEAP), small farmer's organisations and consumer campaigns. In all this, North–South relations are a central focus. Ashwini Sukthankar and Kevin Kolben draw our attention to the historical context of Indian unions' disposition to engage in cross-border activity. The legacies of colonial rule (workforce segregation, voluntary agreements leaving workers unprotected) remain effective, and are manifested in unions' contemporary wariness of western initiatives or of buying into corporate social responsibility programmes. However, as Bronfenbrenner notes, there is a strong mutual benefit to be gained through genuine North–South union collaboration. Building an effective, independent union movement in the South is vital to tackling production and distribution global supply chains and aiding the organising/bargaining efforts of Northern unions with today's TNCs.

The growth of supranational union federations and international framework

agreements as additional routes for advance also come under the spotlight. The problematic issues of power distribution and enforcement surrounding these are clearly noted. And as many of the authors recognise, any agreement unions do achieve (whether voluntary or legislatively based) are only effective if they can be enforced, primarily through 'the power of the multilevel grassroots networks of workers and their allies in labour organisations and NGOs' (p. 222). Simply beefing up layers of union bureaucracy or relying on official bodies, at national or supranational levels, will not deliver real advance. For an AFL–CIO sponsored conference to come to that conclusion is, perhaps, something of an achievement.

Luis L. M. Aguiar and Andrew Herod (eds.)

The Dirty Work of Neoliberalism: Cleaners in the Global Economy

Blackwell, 2006, 263 pp.
ISBN: 9781405156368 (pbk) £20

reviewed by David Layfield

I jumped at the chance to review this book, for personal as much as professional reasons. Before I set foot in the hallowed halls of university I used to work as a cleaner, and would get up at 6am and walk across town to spend the first couple of hours of the day cleaning other peoples' toilets. After this, my time was spent clearing away other people's rubbish, making beds, vacuum cleaning, polishing floors and moving furniture – a seven-hour day for a cool £3.25 per hour. This meant that my take-home pay was £90 a week, in London in the early 1990s. I was able to leave my job in August 1993, but, according to the working lives documented in this outstanding collection, conditions for cleaners have grown worse – much worse – in the intervening fourteen years.

The various essays in the collection take the reader all over the world, from Canada to Europe and from East Asia to Chile. The rising insecurity, worsening conditions, increased intensity of work, de-unionisation, privatisation and risk of occupational injury are documented in graphic terms through the voices of cleaners themselves. It is these voices that set this collection apart from other, more abstract studies of modern work processes and their effects – these are the voices of workers rendered invisible in the brave new world of neoliberal capitalism. While they set their studies in the context of a neoliberal globalisation that is by now familiar, the authors manage to introduce some new and useful theoretical constructs and concepts.

The essays forming the body of the book are divided into three sections: 'Geographies of neoliberalism', 'Ethnographies of the cleaning body', and 'Cleaners' agency'. The first of these brings home to the reader the truly global scale of the cleaning industry: cleaning is, in fact, one of the fastest growing industries in Europe and North America. One important idea that I think the authors understate in this section is that the business practices of cleaning companies large and small, as well the pay and conditions endured by cleaners, are remarkably similar in both First and Third Worlds. The same patterns of causualisation, pseudo-professionalisation and inequality recur.

A couple of theoretical points come to the fore in this section, and there is a dire need for more research on these. One of these concerns the spatial inequality experienced by

cleaners. This caught my attention because spatial inequality is one of the most abiding memories of my working life in South London. Spatial inequality and its psychological effects are very difficult to convey adequately in words to an audience who may not have experienced them at first hand, but the experiences of the cleaners in this collection come as close as it is possible to get. 'Spatial inequality' refers to the disconnection between the physical environments in which the cleaners live and the environments in which they work. In reference to Bangkok and to Santiago in particular, the cleaners who feature in these essays work in the very brightest, most luxurious and self-consciously modern office towers, shopping malls and hotels. Their job is to clean and maintain these spaces as icons of a new economy, and yet because of their low pay and low status, they are forced to live in the worst housing, in dilapidated parts of the cities. They either walk or take buses between what have become two distinct and completely separate worlds. In economic, social and psychological terms, this spatial inequality reinforces the cleaners' experience of being in the modern world but not of it, they are left in a curious inside/outside relation to both work and home.

A further idea recurs throughout the collection and is also in desperate need of further research. This concerns risk-shifting by capital large and small. Reading this collection, it soon becomes clear that the supposedly bold, entrepreneurial, risk-taking contractors who have colonised services such as cleaning have become highly adept at protecting their own interests by off-loading risk onto others, particularly their employees. This is an essential subtext of privatisation, contracting-out and the new economy, investigation of which is singularly lacking in the mainstream media, but which affects millions around the world. Where contracts are made on a short-term basis, workers are also hired on a similarly short-term basis. In extreme forms, the business model that follows from this defines cleaners as subcontractors, not employees, and so leaves them devoid of employment protection, paid holidays, health insurance and so on. This was a practice Sheila Rowbotham noticed in London in the 1970s (Chapter 8), which reaches its low point in Santiago in the new millennium, as public bathroom attendants were turned into subcontractors. The attendant was 'expected to run the washroom facility on his own, charging fees and keeping whatever money he earned after providing toilet paper, soap and towels' (p. 89).

The final section is concerned with cleaners' agency, and here there is hope for future work. The section refers in part to individual attempts to reclaim some pride in work, so that a common defence mechanism adopted by cleaners is pride in the knowledge that they are doing work with which thin-skinned managers and executives could not cope; again, this was familiar from my own experience of such work. On a larger scale, this final section is concerned with the challenges of organising workers such as cleaners. Their pay is so low that they often cannot afford union dues; their workplaces are often small and geographically dispersed; and employers exercise closer surveillance over cleaners than over traditional manual labourers. Despite these problems, there are signs of hope, from Sheila Rowbotham's discussion of cleaners' strikes in London in the 1970s to the Justice for Janitors campaign in 1990s California.

This is a collection that deserves to be read and debated in every university around the world. Here is concrete evidence of the human costs of neoliberalism, the degradation of work and the mendacity of many employers, and because of this, it deserves to reach a much wider audience. Those lucky enough to work in social science departments in colleges or universities should start planning a course in the changing political economy of work. Put this book at the top of your reading lists, alongside David Harvey (2005). Send your students out to talk to the

cleaners and maintenance workers in your university and the local shopping mall. When they come back, ask them if they think economic questions have been settled, and whether inequality matters.

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Tara Brabazon

The University of Google: Education in the (Post) Information Age

Ashgate, 2007, 234 pp.
ISBN: 9780754670971 (hbk) £30

reviewed by David Harvie

The University of Google is a positive book, an affirmative book. Drawing energy from her rage against the neoliberal onslaught on higher education and the 'poisoning of teaching' (see Brabazon, 2002), *The University of Google* is Tara Brabazon's attempt to offer 'solutions and resolutions to the traumas and triage facing higher education. ... [It] is the result of [a] desire to restart the computer, activate the hard drive and return the sensitive touchpad to education' (p. 6).

The University of Google is a righteous book: 'now is the time for academics to confirm [our] worth and why the life we have lived, the students we have taught and the research we have conducted has mattered, and continues to matter' (p. 7). 'This book investigates the struggles, problems and responsibilities of learning, teaching and working in the contemporary education system. My goal is to probe assumptions and offer productive and positive alternatives and solutions to difficulties punctuating our classrooms and curricula' (p. 8).

The book is structured in three parts. In the first, on 'Literacy', Brabazon lambasts Google-based student research methodologies. Correctly noting that the popularity of a website – i.e. its position in a search-engine ranking – is no validation of its quality, she suggests that 'Google is the internet equivalent of reality television: derivative, fast and shallow' (p. 18). Instead, teachers must force their students to explore, reflect upon and evaluate other media – including books! – and thus create an 'information scaffold'. The author provides a number of useful and quite inspiring examples of how she goes about this in her own classes.

In the book's second part, on 'Culture', Brabazon's target is 'flexible learning'. This most often comes at a cost to teachers, intensifying their work. Moreover, 'flexibility is not a solution to a lack of resources, teacher education or student motivation. Flexible learning is a way to deny these problems, displacing questions of method, scholarly apparatus or economic inequality onto mobilities in time. ... Flexibility is a way to deny working class students the educational experience and attention they require' (pp. 96–7). Brabazon here structures her argument around the three elements of yoga: *pranayama* (which she translates as 'breathing'), *asanas* ('physical exercises') and *savasana* ('relaxation').[1] In a neat move, she essentially proposes a redefinition of flexibility to mean flexibility of mind – an education that opens and extends the mind, and that draws on all forms of cultural riches: 'new modes of living, thinking and writing are created on dancefloors, in darkened cinemas and through hypertext' (p. 134). This process, however, requires commitment, discipline and a certain

amount of *in*flexibility. It also requires that we recognise that the podcasts, 'i-lectures' and other technologies of the post-information age that 'enable' flexible learning are poor substitutes for the corporeal experience of the traditional 'Fordist' lecture, which in one of Brabazon's courses is likely to involve footballs, bolts of fabrics, or song and dance.

The book's third part is entitled 'Critique'. Here, Brabazon attempts to make sense of the role of education in the 'knowledge economy, a world of expectations and arrogance, of budgetary crisis and making do' (p. 155). There is much description here and a few insights. Brabazon notes the role of education in 'creating' not only employment but also unemployment. She likens the experience of higher education to 'living in someone else's iPod'. She attempts to sort out the questions of teaching versus learning, technology versus literacy, and hardware versus wetware (for example), which have become entangled in so much 'post-Fordist' discourse. She spells out the obligations and challenges facing educators in the context of globalisation and the 'war against terror'.

And this is all well and good. I am sure Brabazon is a wonderfully stimulating teacher (in fact, she reproduces – verbatim – numerous emails from appreciative students as evidence of this). But how does she manage? Where does she find the time? We find out at the beginning of the book's second part, when Brabazon informs us that she wakes up at 3am each day and works on her lectures until 5.15am. After an aerobics class, she's in her office by 7.20am. During term time, 14-hour days are the norm. I am not sure whether such 'professionalism' and commitment to one's students is admirable or not, but it is most definitely not a 'solution' or 'resolution' to the 'trauma and triage facing higher education'! I become even more sceptical a few pages later, when Brabazon praises her yoga instructor for his decision to teach for 90 minutes despite being paid for only one hour.

To be fair, the generalised overwork and overmanagement of academics is mentioned and criticised at points. But this critique is fleeting. So Brabazon treats sympathetically the case of one 50-year-old teacher, who has had 'the stuffing knocked out of me, I just haven't got enough energy left. I just don't want to be bothered'. But elsewhere, where she celebrates the traditional lecture and explains the days' and weeks' preparation she devotes to each of hers, she is unforgiving. Here, she suggests that those who don't put in the requisite 'research, intense preparation, mobilisation of diverse media and rehearsal' are 'bad lecturers [who] generate bad lectures. ... We have all seen bad scholars write a few headings on the back of a cigarette packet. They should not be allowed to teach, as they bring our universities into disrepute' (p. 104). Besides the insensitivity to those unable or unwilling to rise at 3am and put in 14-hour days, this statement also implies that the Brabazon method of preparing a lecture is the only method. Some people can deliver brilliant lectures spontaneously from only a few scribbled notes (and, contra a comment a few pages later, many of the best lectures *are* performances).

Peculiarly, given what its author writes about fostering this skill in students, the book is quite unreflexive. Brabazon's solutions are not situated in the context of neoliberalism, and thus her various arguments are disjointed. So in one place the 'impact of globalisation on higher education' is discussed, though in fewer than three pages. Elsewhere, the 1999 counter-mobilisation against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle is mentioned; but the obvious and significant connection is not made: a key item on the WTO's agenda at its Seattle Ministerial was the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the creation of a global market in education (see Rikowski, 2001).

Other neoliberal truisms are accepted without question. In a throwaway comment in the book's introduction, we read that, amongst other benefits, 'educating the citizens of a nation ... improves economic efficiency and development' (p. 9). Never mind the assumptions here about citizenship and 'nation':

it is 'efficiency' and 'development' that are driving so many of the processes against which Brabazon rails.

Interspersing the series of student emails praising Brabazon's teaching is a second series. These are emails from students who treat the university 'flippantly' and with 'disregard'; students who are 'lazy' or 'unscholarly'. We are invited to marvel at such students' assumptions and attitudes, but there is little attempt to understand why they may be 'ill-disciplined' or 'disrespectful' of education, why they might be tired and stressed out, or why they might feel that higher education was more an obligation than a choice. A student, not one of Brabazon's, who suggests that students should be entitled to eight hours' rest and eight hours' recreation daily is dismissed as 'whining' (p. 109).

Unfortunately, for all its interesting pedagogy, reading this book it is hard to avoid the feeling that Brabazon is sorting both lecturers and students into one of two categories: the disciplined, the committed and the organised, on the one hand, and the lazy and unscholarly on the other. In fact, in her discussion of the information scaffold, she draws on the example of a course 'small in numbers and competitive in entry requirements. Only the best and brightest were permitted to enrol' (p. 30). The drowned and the saved? Righteousness will only get us so far.

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Notes

1 This metaphor is rather forced. In fact, according to the *Yoga Sutras*, one of the foundational texts, *asanas* precede *pranayama*, while there should be little exploration in *savasana*.

Erol Kahveci and Theo Nichols

The Other Car Workers: Work, Organisation and Technology in the Maritime Car Carrier Industry

Palgrave, 2006, 232 pp.
ISBN: 9781403941916 (hbk) £55

reviewed by Kaan Agartan

Who count as 'car workers', other than those who sweat at the assembly line in a car manufacturing plant? Can we include in this category those who produce car parts in a subcontracting company? Or those who are employed in repair services? Kahveci and Nichols take this question seriously in *The Other Car Workers* in their attempt to reconceptualise 'the car worker'. In this endeavour, they focus on the maritime car carrier industry and observe the impact of technological, infrastructural and political-economic changes on workers.

The book opens with a quick review of the literature on sociology of work covering the post-Second World War period. It illustrates how this literature evolved from focusing on industrial capitalism and the perception of workers of their work and themselves, to a level at which such concepts as just-in-time production or total quality management became fashionable terms with which to understand the new nature of industrial production and more recently to the study of the 'geography of production', embracing the 'chain' metaphor to emphasise

the dispersed nature of commodity production on a global scale. The rest of the book is divided into two parts: in the first part, the authors provide the reader with a clear account of the developments that have been taking place in the maritime carrier industry. These include changes in registration and ownership structure, technological developments in design and carrier capabilities for more efficient containerisation and faster travelling, and the rise of carrier companies and crewing agents that operate globally. The maritime car carrier sector is, the authors contend, driven by the needs of car manufacturers to sail large numbers of cars from different points of production or warehousing to consumers all around the world. This results in the expansion of routes taken and ports visited by car carriers. One interesting feature of the industry is the practice of 'flagging out', which can be described as a sea-based equivalent of outsourcing certain production activities to countries where labour is cheap. By registering vessels to such countries, maritime carrier companies can avoid regulatory 'rigidities' pertaining to workers' rights, recruit from a global pool of workers for low wages, and outsource various logistical tasks to specialised companies.

In the second part of the book, the focus shifts to workers in the maritime car carrier industry. After an elaborate description, supported with rich demographic data, of the world of car carrier crews, the authors highlight the processes of stratification among workers, which culminate in the emergence of a strictly hierarchical and highly differentiated division of labour between officers, ratings and other workers in the vessel. Rigid task definitions, particular clothes assigned for particular ranks and segregated spaces for leisure time reinforce hierarchy and status differentiation among the seafarers. It is also not surprising to hear that carrier companies prefer to employ a mix of workers from different countries with different and flexible wage levels, which helps to control the crew by preventing the formation of strong bonds between them. Moreover, the authors provide convincing evidence to confirm that seafarers work more hours per week or month than do land-based workers. They feel obliged to do extra tasks (such as loading/unloading cargo at the ports during stopovers) because of their sense of vulnerability over job security. Disciplinary measures are harsh, and management is more powerful vis-à-vis the worker in maritime industries compared to land-based jobs. To borrow from Michael Burawoy, 'market despotism' on board is crueller than it is on the shopfloor.

While *The Other Car Workers* is skilfully crafted, well organised, highly accessible and backed with empirically rich details about the maritime car carrier sector and the workers employed in it, a couple of serious limitations need to be noted. First, at the outset the authors make an ambitious effort to prove that the maritime car carrier sector has a different nature from other maritime carrier sectors because of its special cargo: cars. They present the very structure of the sector and the various dimensions of transformation it has been undergoing through in such a way that the reader is left with the impression that the maritime car carrier industry does show very peculiar characteristics. It is not made clear in the text, though, why the developments taking place in the maritime car carrier industry are so unique. The authors' treatment of this peculiarity can at times be thin, as the boundary between the maritime car carrier and any other maritime carrier industry is blurred in the narration: in some places (except when the authors give specific ethnographical information about the workers they interviewed), it is not clear whether the authors are writing specifically about the car carrier industry or making general comments on the maritime carrier industry. This continuous shift in focus is not surprising, since the attempt to differentiate the car carrier industry from the rest of the maritime carrier sectors seems a bit far-fetched.

Second, the authors demonstrate in the book that despite new developments such as lean production, multi-tasking and other forms of flexible employment in highly stratified and differentiated work organisation in land-based industries, the organisation of work in the sea-based industry is still defined by strict hierarchical relations and rigid task allocations. The division of labour between different ranks of the crew is clearly defined and strongly reinforced and, unlike what has happened in most land-based sectors, has not changed much over the past decades. The authors, however, do not provide convincing justification and a reasonable explanation for this discrepancy. No thorough attempt is made in the book to tackle the question as to how labour relations in the maritime carrier industry could remain immune from the structural mutations, despite all the radical changes the industry itself has been going through. In that sense, despite all the satisfactory details in the book about the lives of the workers or the division of labour on board, the authors shy away from engaging in an effort to explain the endurance of rigidity in the work organisation.

Last, it is not clear what the authors have actually achieved in their endeavour to present the workers in the maritime car carrier industry as a part of the extended 'car worker' definition. One wonders how it is different to categorise them as service workers in the transport sector, instead of extending the definition of 'car worker' to embrace them. Despite the authors' effort to link the workers in the maritime car carrier industry to the larger group of workers in car production, it is hard to claim that this attempt helps to redefine 'car worker' as a revised category that would enable us to rethink the car industry in a different light. In that sense, although the analysis in it is empirically detailed, *The Other Car Workers* is theoretically weak and, despite the authors' ambitions, does not open up the new analytical space in which to reconceptualise the definition of car worker that the authors had aimed to achieve. The reader should be aware that while it is exciting to learn many details about this less-studied segment of the working class, the book's limited theoretical contribution is its main handicap.

David Victor and Thomas C. Heller (eds)

The Political Economy of Power Sector Reform: The Experience of Five Major Developing Countries

Cambridge University Press, 2007, 348 pp.
ISBN: 9780521865029 (hbk) £50

reviewed by Ian Bartle

Since the early 1990s, privatisation and liberalisation of the electricity supply industry has swept across the world. A standard neoliberal economics 'textbook model' has guided the designers of reform, and yet real-world examples, particularly in developing countries, rarely correspond to that ideal. This book examines the reforms in the electricity industry in five major developing countries – Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa – vis-à-vis the textbook model. The authors stress early on that they seek to go beyond a standard view that the political, legal and institutional dimensions of reform are simply barriers to be overcome on the way towards the textbook model, which seemed to promise a substantial comparative analysis of neoliberal economic reforms without neoliberalism's negative view about politics and institutions.

Conventional neoliberal wisdom sees political intervention (often pejoratively

described as 'interference') in the economy and markets as inherently negative, and leading to sub-optimal efficiency. Politics and government should be clearly detached from the economy, it says; and where some state intervention is necessary, such as for monetary policy or for the regulation of industries with a strong public-interest element, such as electricity, it should be undertaken by independent agencies – independent central banks for monetary policy, and independent economic regulators for utility industries such as electricity – run by specialists who are semi-detached from government and politics. In this way, the limited interventions in the economy deemed to be necessary are more rational, more stable and more certain.

This view informs the 'standard model' of electricity reform, which comprises a privatised industry 'unbundled' into its natural monopoly (the transmission and distribution infrastructure) and competitive (electricity generation and supply) elements. The infrastructure is set up on a regional or national basis, and is subject to regulation to prevent abuse of monopoly power, while the companies in the competitive part are broken up to promote competition and are subject to minimal regulation. Economic regulation (the promotion of competition and regulation of natural monopoly) is undertaken independent of government in order to depoliticise decision-making, ensuring that it is undertaken instead on the basis of 'rational' economic logic.

This can be contrasted with a view that leans more towards political economy, in which politics and institutions are inherent elements of markets and the economy. Industrial organisation and markets are politically and socially constituted and embedded, and their effectiveness and stability is dependent on that context. Political legitimacy is crucial: the commitment of key stakeholders is vital to effective functioning. Sub-optimal models (in neoliberal terms) might be more effective, efficient and stable if they are well embedded into their political and social situations.

An engagement with the latter view appears to be signalled in the first chapter of this book, in which the authors are critical of the view that 'politics, law, and institutions are barriers to be cleared before launching the real work of implementing market designs that accord with the standard textbook model' (p. 8). They point to the idea that 'hybrid systems' (or sub-optimal outcomes, in neoliberal terms) that have developed in their case studies 'should not be considered to be aberrations or way stations to the shining city but, rather, stable and likely outcomes' (p. 11).

However, there are also early indications that the book's critical analysis of neoliberal assumptions might be limited. The authors hold up the system set up in England and Wales as the 'textbook' model, partly because it corresponded fairly closely to that model, but also because the UK was the first mover in electricity reform in the developed world. While they recognise that reform in the UK has not been problem-free, they do not refer to the literature that questions the effectiveness of reform in the UK, looking at whether efficiency has increased, consumer prices have fallen and long-term investment been sustained (for example, Florio, 2004) – not to mention its part in embedding neoliberalism in Britain, with its attendant erosion of workers' rights and increases in inequality.

The paths to liberalisation and privatisation embarked on by many developed and developing countries since the early 1990s have not been clear and easy. In the EU, for example, some countries have resisted the adoption of an 'Anglo-Saxon' model of competition and fragmentation, and many neoliberals perceive an enduring protectionism on the European continent despite EU regulations on liberalisation. In many developing countries, the reform trajectories have been more rocky: reforms have stalled, and outcomes departed from neoliberal ideals.

The book provides a substantial comparative analysis of the political and economic forces and outcomes of reform in developing countries. Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa have been chosen because they represent cases in which much world investment in the power sector will occur in the coming decades, and where institutions are more 'fragile and varied' than in the developed world (p. 12). Separate and substantial chapters are presented by experts on each country, covering the history and context of the industry, the pressures for reform, the politics and the faltering steps towards competitive markets. The authors chart in detail the particular idiosyncrasies of the politics and the industry organisation that shaped the reforms in each case, but also stress the commonalities of rapid industrialisation and growth in the 1960s, the economic problems in the 1970s, and crises in state financing in the 1980s and 1990s, when investment in new capacity was required. Although the reforms occurred at similar times, they emphasise that it was particular financial crises in the countries that drove reform, and they reject the possibility that reform was merely 'a trend – an idea that had taken hold, spread by elite policy experts and ephemeral in fashion' (p. 266).

The case studies detail the varying and strong political opposition met by the reformers, as well as the consequent hybrid state–market outcomes. They introduce the interesting concept of a 'dual market' system, which generates 'dual firms'. The central point about the dual firm is not its ownership, which might be private, state or a combination, but its political connections. These connections enable them, for example, to secure fuel supplies at favourable prices, benefit from preferential treatment on planning and new sites, and gain regular subsidy payments (p. 261).

It is refreshing to see an aspiration to move beyond the neoliberal idea that outcomes that differ from the economics textbook ideal are sub-optimal and not stable. However, those looking for a more radical and sustained departure from neoliberal analysis will be disappointed. The country studies often revert to neoliberal assumptions, and question whether other outcomes are stable. For example, in Mexico (and other Latin American countries), the 'greatest challenge' to reform are powerful coalitions of 'illiberal crusaders', which have had a significant impact on public opinion and politics (p. 211). In a very different political context, the authors note that 'China's reform strategy to move in the direction of market reform without abandoning state power will create a continuing uncertainty about the rules that apply to the electricity system' (p. 105). This is not to argue that a hybrid market–state system will necessarily be stable and efficient, but that it might be. The dual firm, for example, might be more legitimate and may result in more commitment from key stakeholders, enabling the system to be more effective and economically efficient. Unfortunately, the authors do not engage with this possibility: they only note that a dual market outcome is not 'the most desirable in terms of economic efficiency or good governance' (p. 261).

The final chapter presents a structured and detailed comparative analysis of the circumstances and forces for reform within the countries. The cross-country analysis is extensive and is to be applauded. However, the analysis of the role of international forces is limited and unconvincing, and there is a lack of engagement with alternative and more critical explanations. We are presented with five very different countries in which reform guided by the same model is embarked on at around the same time, in the early 1990s. This suggests that some common international factors are likely to have driven reform. However, there is no extended analysis of the international forces, only a rather tacit assumption that they derive from what some see as the increased economic efficiency and consumer benefits of the standard model in electricity evident from the experience in Britain and some other countries.

An alternative analysis could be that reform was driven by internationally orientated business and financial interests supported by powerful western governments – the 'Washington Consensus' – and that it was not demanded by ordinary citizens, nor primarily in their interests (Beder, 2003). Although the authors clearly do not accept this, it is disappointing that works such as Sharon Beder's, which delve deeply into the international forces in the electricity sector, are not even referred to, let alone analysed at any length.

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Forrest Hylton

Evil Hour in Colombia

Verso, 2006, 174 pp.
ISBN: 9781844675517 (pbk) £13

reviewed by Jacob Lagnado

In this book, Forrest Hylton historicises and thereby questions what is often portrayed as the eternal and unique nature of the Colombian conflict. Beginning in the liberal republican fervour of the 1850s, he identifies three high points, since then, of 'radical popular' movements. He asserts that time and again, regionally fragmented elites with their own support from below have suppressed these movements and, unlike elsewhere, only responded to their demands in a limited, localised way. It is this pattern that has shaped the nature of the present conjuncture.

In seeing what he terms 'subaltern classes' as makers of their own history, focusing on their everyday practices whilst highlighting historical continuity, Hylton follows a similar approach to that of E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*. He balances this with his reading of the part played by the Colombian ruling classes. For a long time identified with either the Conservative or the Liberal Party more than with a nation-state project, and separated by geographical divides, they have since independence wielded power on a regional basis by co-opting local voters.

But in the nineteenth century in Colombia (and, one might add, in England too), this 'clientelism' was not exceptional. What is exceptional, for Hylton, is the survival of this relationship, and the subsequent way in which each time reform movements have gained force, they have been successfully met by counter-reform movements wherein provincial landlord-merchant elites have enlisted a sector of the local population to their cause.

The first high point of the 'radical popular' tradition is located in the 1850s when, in an echo of 'liberal revolutions' elsewhere, democratic fervour gripped the Afrocolombian, indigenous and peasant settler communities in the Cauca region, as well as artisans in Bogota. They took literally the 'radical reforms' proclaimed by Liberal Party leaders, and tried to take advantage of the latter's need to create a viable local power base. In the process, they made Colombia for a time 'one of the world's most participatory republican democracies'.

But Liberal leaders baulked at the prospect of grassroots democracy being taken too far, and at the threat to their free-trade agenda. Setting the pattern for the future, the Cauca experiment was put down and fifty years of

what was called the Regeneration (1880–1930) followed, during which capitalist progress, based on coffee production and US capital under Conservative rule, was symbolised by the 'light-skinned property owning frontier settler' from Antioquia, as opposed to the 'dark-skinned tenant, sharecropper, or communal landholder in the Cauca'.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a new wave of peasant and early trade union agitation in the new extractive industries such as oil and bananas sought to capitalise on this progress. This time, the movement was national. The first Liberal government in fifty years took power, but its land reforms only succeeded in benefiting a sector of small coffee producers. Inter-party hostilities reflecting class antagonisms but also the reactionary consequences of clientelism culminated in the period of civil war known as *La Violencia* (1946–57). A new 'radical popular' movement reached its zenith in the 1980s, when it was strangled by the dirty war unleashed against it, as yet again the more reform-minded elements of the ruling class lost any initiative they might have briefly had.

Bringing the analysis up to date, Hylton highlights the continued centrality of land ownership in an economy now based on extractive industry and drug production. He observes, pertinently, that in objective terms, a key factor in the accelerated growth of the guerrilla movements in the 1990s lay in the switch towards these sources of value and away from manufacturing, as guerrilla taxes on such production funded growth.

However, the real story in more recent years has been the way paramilitary formations funded by a mixture of old and new money, including that of transnationals, and stewarded by increasing US involvement, have expropriated vast amounts of land for cattle ranching and agrobusiness in a process of recurring primitive accumulation that has forced its victims to migrate to new urban and rural frontiers. Two elements here provide a vital thread to the past: first, the relative autonomy of paramilitary forces, which relates back to the relative autonomy of regional elites and to Cold War counter-insurgency ideology in favour of delegating terror. Second is the social base of paramilitarism as the latest version of clientelism, also a major part of post-war counter-insurgency thinking.

Politically, the book draws a clear line between Jacobin militarism on the one hand and social movements with 'non-liberal' radical democratic traditions on the other, without denying any relationship between the two or understating the material roots of the former. Nevertheless, greater recognition of the impact of both Stalinism and social democracy on the practices of the Colombian left would have provided a useful point of comparison with the rest of Latin America.

The book does much to explain the paradox of a highly urbanised society being riven by questions of land. But of the urban working class itself, it has little to say other than acknowledging its historic weaknesses. Given the extraordinary rate of urbanisation through displacement in recent years, I felt the political implications warranted more attention. Likewise, the very question of the supersession of capitalism is left alone, even though the author notes that social-democratic reform is no longer even up for negotiation.

Hylton is particularly good throughout on the racial dimension to class division. The global dimension is given more unequal treatment: it is very present in his discussion of the liberal revolution, but somewhat understated from there on. Furthermore, he defends pre-capitalist formations while ruing the failed promise of capitalist progress, suggesting that the latter could take place while protecting the former.

Evil Hour in Colombia is very well researched, in empirical terms, and it is hard to do justice to the number of connections the author makes between past and present. As such, it fulfils its aim of recovering 'the memory of alternatives' in order to avoid cyclical 'collective trauma', even if the political content of such alternatives needs to be explored somewhere else.

Henri Lefebvre

Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 3: From Modernity to Modernism

Verso, 2005, 179 pp.
ISBN: 9781859845908 (hbk) £20

reviewed by Neil Curry

Henri Lefebvre's epic trilogy is an attempt to grasp the most profound changes as expressed in the dynamics of the major social transformations that have taken place in modern societies throughout the last century. This, the third of the three volumes, is the culmination of a vastly developing oeuvre that is all about the unfolding relationship between modernity and everyday life and the way this has been transformed – in a way that is not innocent or neutral, and which has potentially dire consequences for our everyday lives. Lefebvre is not interested in merely charting this process, but rather in demonstrating the potential for a kind of revolutionary disruption. This is dialectical thinking at its very best, the likes of which we may never see again.

The fundamental point of Lefebvre's work is that there exists within the everyday a potential for things to be otherwise – but not merely otherwise. This otherness within the most mundane aspects of our lives encompasses a substantially new way of being in the everyday. Here lies the crux of his work, and this is how he formulates the critique of everyday life. From this emerges Lefebvre's dialectical discernment of what remains the same and what has changed in modernity. In other words, it provides him with a mechanism in order to understand the relationship between continuity and discontinuity in modern everyday life that is layered with a constancy of newness. At the same time, of course, this is insufficient; but it does provide the conditions to ask the question: How does one discern critique from such a malaise that permeates the everydayness of existence?

According to Lefebvre, in modern societies, exchange value and equivalence come to dominate and constrain the singularity of our everyday lived experience. This is the attempt to impose upon the everyday the idea that things could not possibly be other than what they are. Lefebvre's work set out to challenge this dominating form in modern societies by illuminating the everyday, and by showing that within everydayness there exists the potential to be different and, importantly, to demonstrate that this is not a superficial difference but rather something that is in the emergence of the everyday itself. To this extent, it is already embedded within the everyday and can be seen everywhere, such that the way things are is not necessarily the way they have to be. It affords a liberating potential (but only ever a potential) that may or may not emerge at any given conjuncture. This is the potential for dialectical disruption, and for Lefebvre this is where he locates his revolutionary hope for the future. This may seem somewhat naive today, but the logic of this would seem to stem from the argument that it is precisely because the everyday appears so secure that it is also at the same time at its most vulnerable to change. All closures merely extenuate the possibility of change, such that the point when something appears to be at its most secure is simultaneously the moment or potentially critical point of downfall. Lefebvre's optimism seems all the more profound today, especially with regard to the current academic fad surrounding globalisation. What we may glean from Lefebvre is the space to challenge

the academic hegemony surrounding globalisation and formulate a critical space to challenge the predominance of global capitalism and the dire consequences for our everyday lives. It is precisely through the relationship between continuity and discontinuity that such a revolutionary space exists.

In order to carry out such a task, we must understand Lefebvre's core concepts of continuity and discontinuity, which are central to his analysis of social change. For Lefebvre, continuity in modern life is a series of closures concerning the real, which reduces the present with superficial imaginaries that render the actual as a homogeneously dispersed spatial sequence of moments that operate as a function or schema with no other reason or purpose. The whole of social life is increasingly captured in this way – this is our modality! This passive modality is what Lefebvre refers to as the increasing deadening of social life – or perhaps what reduces social life towards everyday life as drudgery. That this process is occurring is not in dispute for Lefebvre, but this is not the focus of his work, for rather, and more importantly, he is interested in why we come to accept this as the way things have to be. This indignant question is what fuels Lefebvre's critique of the development of modern societies in a typically dialectical utopian moment. Why do we accept this reality, and what possibilities exist to challenge it? It is within Lefebvre's notion of discontinuities that we find the potential to disrupt this order.

To a large extent, Lefebvre faces the problem of all leftist thinking in a post-communist age, namely, how to conceive of an alternative without forming too restrictive a blueprint for a better world and the possible restrictions that may come to be imposed. Lefebvre refers to this as 'discontinuity' and argues that this is necessary because 'nothing is immune to recuperation', such is the intrinsic openness of social life. It is precisely this problematic that the 'discontinuities' section of the book is purposely attempting to think through. This absolutely crucial yet fraught task, according to Lefebvre, is an inherently transformative process and the key vehicle for social change. This is the political struggle of our time, and stands out as an alternative against the dominant neoliberal consensus. In such a way, this approach also stands as distinct from the postmodernist particularistic politics and the abandonment of transformative critique. So where is this space for potentially transformative social change? According to Lefebvre, the total state of equivalence has become all-encompassing, but there is always some point of excess, and this part of everyday life, which escapes because it is thought to be mundane, is the moment at which a challenge can begin and momentum be gathered. It is the role of the revolutionary to re-enchant these mundane spaces and transform them into sites of struggle to challenge the status quo. However, it is important to reiterate the point that nothing is achieved in advance, and that the strategic path of any recuperative operation is forged in political struggle and therefore only ever has the capacity to transform everyday life via practical activity.

In reading Lefebvre's work today, it seems somewhat dated and has a sense of nostalgia running through it. At times, it is difficult not to read his project in a sentimental way, especially in terms of missed opportunities. This is all the more poignant if it is considered within the peculiarly French context in which this work was written, and it is from here that it appears as a remarkably novel and refreshing mode of enquiry. To this extent, there is a stubborn resilience and determination here to uncover a mode of critical enquiry into the role of the state in daily life that is much needed today, especially in relation to the political acquiescence of left politics in a 'historical period whose duration cannot be predicted, but whose end we can possibly sense today' – perhaps all we are left to work with is a glimpse of the real!

Naomi Klein

The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism

Allen Lane, 2007, 558 pp.
ISBN: 9780141024530 (pbk) £9

reviewed by Trevor Bark

At the time, with *No Logo*, many in the media thought that Naomi Klein had written the bible of the new globalised social movement, and Klein made a worldwide name for herself describing the new branded age and international division of labour on the back of this new movement. Exploiting her newfound prestige, she produced various other articles and books, including *Fences and Windows*, but the latter was merely soundbite politics. Recently, there has been a new publication, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, which is the authentic sequel to *No Logo*.

Klein, as a journalist, can identify a good story, and *The Shock Doctrine* does grab the zeitgeist of recent years, producing a compelling critique of capitalist practice. Fear and tragedy are in the news and in people's consciousness, and Klein here looks at capitalist reproduction and development of our time. This includes a wider look at environmental issues, and the experience of this by and within capitalism and capitalists, and by the multitude.

Klein revisits old and newer events such as the Pinochet coup and Chile (Chapters 2 and 3), China and Poland (Chapter 9), South Africa (Chapter 10), Russia (Chapters 11 and 12), Asia (Chapter 13), Bolivia (Chapter 7), the USA (throughout the book) and New Orleans, post Hurricane Katrina (Chapter 20), Iraq (Chapters 16 to 18) and the UK (Chapter 6). She shows how capitalism does not simply develop in the way that it pleases, but how it has to overcome the resistance capitalism itself has created.

As part of this process, rather than capitalism's hiding behind the normalised reproduction of economic 'freedom', this had the effect of clarifying capitalist operating principles, ideology and oppression for everybody in the process. Concretely, this meant that instead of, for example, trying to rebuild New Orleans and its public facilities, capitalism instead mounted an attack on the public infrastructure, assaulting housing, transport, education rights, working and wage conditions. Two years after the disaster, the privatised electricity company had failed to get the whole city back on track and a privatised educational system had been created.

Humanity and its values are merely an obstacle for capitalism that must be eroded by any means necessary. The multitude will never vote for those who take away its income peacefully, so crisis, including military coups, is the opportunity to exploit with exceptional measures so that capitalists can bolster the rate of profit. Violence was a key ingredient in the original creation of industrial capitalism through primitive accumulation, and today 'free market' economic policies and 'development' require violence to support them. Autonomist theorists (e.g. Massimo De Angelis) have already pointed out that primitive accumulation (in which the working poor can survive without money) is a way of existing that capitalism has to permanently ensure does not happen.

The similarities with Marxism are clear: as Marx said, capitalism creates its own nemesis – the proletariat. Klein accurately documents how opportunistic capitalism is, and this book indirectly suggests how the left can improve its politics in situations like these. Chapter 8, entitled 'Crisis works: The packaging of shock therapy' sums up the book.

Milton Friedman's negative legacy is widely documented in the book, and the

account of his planning and the circulation of ideas that Friedman placed ready to be adopted in crisis is interesting. It complements what is known of the New Right in Britain, although there are weaknesses in the writing. Klein's treatment of this UK New Right and Thatcherism (including the Falklands War and the Miners' Strike) is reductionist and, in truth, virtually completely unresearched. This is evidenced by her failure to illustrate how the UK New Right had a similar role to Friedman's in the USA. However, this New Right was preparing for government from before the defeat of the 1974 Heath government. Klein portrays the UK New Right's structural changes to the economy as having being dependent on the Falklands war victory, which is to mistake the appearance of change for the substance. The ideological groundwork, away from traditional 'One Nation' Toryism and plans to mobilise the state by the New Right, had already been formulated by 1978. However, Klein elides these crucial issues.

Although her neglect of the politics of the New Right blinds her to its hatred of the working class as evidenced in practice – e.g. the redundancies, and plans to attack the NUM (see Beynon, 1985) – it is symptomatic of a wider problem within the book overall. That is that is Klein maintains, just as she does in *No Logo*, that there is another, *nice* capitalism possible, despite her own evidence. Klein presents 'disaster capitalism' as merely a moment of capitalist hyper-confidence and practice, suggesting that there are other ways for capitalism to be. This has numerous implications for the starting point of an alternative to 'disaster capitalism'.

This author is clear that capitalism is disaster, and that the multitude is the potential positive supersession of the negativity that capitalism creates. As in Klein's prestigious first work, *No Logo*, in this latest work there are shortcomings as seen from other Marxist perspectives too. The term coined by Mészáros is apposite here: it is clear that 'destructive reproduction' creates serious problems in the lives of billions, and that the multitude must work out alternatives to it. Mészáros neatly sums up Klein's interpretation of the current crisis: there is a 'depressed continuum, exhibiting the characteristics of a cumulative, endemic, more or less permanent and chronic crisis, with the ultimate perspectives of an ever deepening structural crisis' (Mészáros, 1995: 597–8).

Klein clearly thinks about the current times in a way similar to the way Mészáros and others have theorised it, but her apparent naivety is also her strength. Klein leaves space for administrative and bureaucratic managers of capitalism and government and 'hippy entrepreneurs' to be potentially part of discussions for alternatives, and Klein's naive writing from a liberal perspective – the 'left wing of capital' – can be widely spread and neutralised, and exploited for political and financial gain by capital.

To sum up, *The Shock Doctrine* is an important, well-written book and an essential addition to the range of evidence and theory against capitalism for the wider anticapitalist movement. It is easy reading and does not challenge left assumptions, which means it is digestible for all those on the left and anarchists. It will circulate on the business shelves of bookshops too, since it does show how to make profit, even if this was not the intention. It rationalises the capitalist chaos of Zygmunt Bauman's 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000). However, like Klein's other work, it is not as directly useful for activists in confronting problems in their own communities, or in directly helping a new movement to grow.

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Eva Golinger

Bush Versus Chávez: Washington's War on Venezuela

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reviewed by Charles Hawksley

Bush Versus Chávez updates Golinger's 2006 study *The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela*, which detailed US involvement in the failed April 2002 attempt to remove President Hugo Chávez Frías from power. This new work provides further evidence from 2005 and 2006 of direct funding from US agencies to Venezuelan anti-Chávez groups in business, politics and the wider community. It also observes a changed US strategy in its pursuit of regime change. Having observed the mass support for the Bolivarian revolution following the April 2002 *coup d'etat*, and the extent of popular support for Chávez in the recall referendum in 2004, the US strategy now is to paint Venezuela's government as a danger not only to itself, but to the world. According to the Bush administration, Hugo Chávez is a dictator and a supporter of terrorism, is implicated in drug trafficking and money laundering, and constitutes a general threat for Latin American states and democracy.

Golinger argues that the Bush administration frequently ignored positive cooperation by Venezuela on drug trafficking and regional security in its attempt to make a case for Venezuela's being a 'rogue state', and thus to provide a potential trigger for intervention. Washingon's 'war' on Venezuela takes the form of diplomatic, military and financial attacks. The former secretary of state Condoleeza Rice labelled Chávez a 'threat to democracy and a destabilising negative force', while the former secretary for defense, Donald Rumsfeld, raised the spectre of the 100,000 small arms (AK-47s) Venezuela purchased from Russia somehow spreading to Colombian rebel groups such as the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia).

Bush Versus Chávez shows how the Bush administration invested considerable resources in its destabilisation plan, and central to this is Venezuela's position as a large oil producer. Chávez has antagonised the USA by revitalising OPEC as a political force, arguing for differential pricing for poor countries, and abandoning the US dollar as the standard currency for pricing oil. In 2005, he embarrassed the USA by offering below-cost heating oil for the poor in Boston and New York, as well as in states in the northeast of the USA, through Venezuela's state-owned North American petrol station chain *Citgo*. Venezuela's influence with the leaders of Cuba, Bolivia and of other Latin American states, and with Iran, is causing the USA to take seriously this challenge to its logic of global neoliberalism.

The book's structure makes for easy reading. An introduction reacquaints readers with events from 2002 to 2004, covering the coup, the strike and the recall referendum. From then on, short chapters detail specific aspects of the multidimensional, covert US war. Golinger details the extent of funding for anti-Chávez groups – some $27 million between 2000 and 2004, and at least another $10.2 million between 2005 and 2007, including $3.6 million for the Office of Transition Initiatives in Caracas, a name of which George Orwell would be proud. This branch of USAID seeks to promote what is euphemistically called 'regime change'. Admittedly, the money is a small slice of the reported International Affairs Budget of the USAID budget ($38.6 billion in 2007; see

<www.usaid.gov>); yet serious questions remain about the use of public moneys to fund political opposition in another state.

Golinger shows how the USA has funded a range of regional and domestic groups opposed to Chávez, including those promoting 'good governance' and those building community-sector organisations. These range from a $12,490 grant to support a new initiative to 'professionalise community journalism' to $200,000 to the International Republican Initiative, to promote 'more responsive political parties'. Of concern for Golinger is that some of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) grants are now being directed toward Venezuelan communities that have traditionally supported Chávez in his initiatives to eradicate illiteracy and to protect indigenous land rights. If the USA is indeed attempting to construct a broad-based and class-linked opposition, then some reflections on the contest over ideas within Venezuela would invite analysis of the current hegemony that underpins the Chávez government, but unfortunately this is not attempted here.

Clearly, the non-government organisation Súmate has become something of a coordinating body for the anti-Chávez movement. In 2005, it received $107,200 from the NED to train 12,200 members in the requirements of election law, although it should be remembered that it was responsible for collecting the signatures that triggered the recall vote of June 2004. In May 2005, President George W. Bush had a fifty-minute Oval Office meeting with the director of Súmate, María Corina Machado, which reveals Washington's preference for change in Caracas. The official representative of the Venezuelan government had lived in Washington since 2003, but was met by an assistant secretary of state only in 2006.

US efforts to limit the regional influence of Venezuela tie in with another aspect of the destabilising plan. The activities of the US ambassador to Venezuela, William Brownfield, are linked, here, to other chapters on military planning, psychological warfare, espionage and sabotage. Golinger argues that Brownfield's activities fall well outside the normal diplomatic functions in their promotion of autonomy within Venezuela for the oil-rich (and anti-Chávez) state of Zulia. He has also established the 'American Corners' programme to promote interest in the USA. Diplomatic, economic and military pressures thus combine to create a multi-faceted attempt to subvert an elected government.

As in *The Chávez Code*, Golinger and colleague Jeremy Bigwood have found the bulk of their information in documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The strongest evidence for the secret war of destabilisation comes from more than seventy declassified documents from, *inter alia*, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Endowment for Democracy and the Department of Defence. These, sensibly, are not reproduced in the book, but are made available (some in English, others in Spanish) on the supporting website of publishers Monthly Review Press – see <www.monthly review.org>.

The main objective of this book is to provide further evidence for the thesis that the Bush administration is meddling in Venezuela's domestic politics, but Golinger provides other points of interests, such as her 2005 conference experience with NED president Carl Gershman. She has articulately combined various types of information to build a strong case that publicly disagreeing with a US president on global security, oil prices and economics has resulted in covert action. *Bush Versus Chávez* is a lively, well written and well researched account of the latest US attempt to subvert a popularly elected Latin American government, in a multi-dimensional offensive aimed at splitting Venezuelan society, isolating Chávez from the rest of Latin American region, and portraying him as a dangerous figure in international politics. Revolutions need their supporters, so the question will be whether the Bolivarian

revolution in Venezuela has strong enough roots to withstand the economic, military and diplomatic power of the USA.

References

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