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1

Globalization, the State and Class Struggle

An Introduction

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

This book publishes an exchange between neo-Gramscian and Open Marxism approaches to contemporary capitalism, ranging from theoretical debate on, for example, the meaning of the state and its relationship to the economy, to the analysis of the meaning and significance of class struggle. Our theoretical disagreements are significant and their practical or political consequences formidable. However, and here we agree strongly, our disagreements are too important to be left undebated and unexplored. The Marxist critique of ideology has been pivotal in enabling critical theories of society to make their mark on the study of world politics. Yet, there has been a notable silence within critical international theory on the contributions of Open Marxism and neo-Gramscian perspectives.

This book responds to this silence through a detailed engagement between neo-Gramscian and Open Marxist approaches, drawing out similarities as well as differences at the theoretical and empirical level. In more detail, the book explores the complex relationship between labour, capital and the state in the so-called era of globalization. The aim is not to present a detailed analysis of the workings of any one political economy but rather to reflect on neo-Gramscian attempts to understand the dynamics of modern capitalism. In this way, the book contributes to debates within critical international theory and to wider analysis of how Marxist approaches can be employed to understand contemporary developments in the area of International Relations and International Political Economy. It should be stressed at the outset that the objective of the

book is not to reconcile neo-Gramscian approaches with more orthodox Marxist analysis. Our aim is not to offer a synthesis or establish the 'superiority' of any one approach. Rather, we show how the fundamental concepts of Marxist analysis can be used in subtly different ways depending on particular readings of Marx and Gramsci. Indeed, we hope that our distinct approaches, and the debate between them, will illuminate the discussion on the meaning and significance of contemporary processes of restructuring, labour struggles, and the creation of alternatives to neo-liberal globalization and the world market society of capital.

One of the key themes to emerge from the book is how apparently similar starting points can lead to radically different conclusions concerning the nature of contemporary capitalism. The neo-Gramscian approach grants priority to a focus on the social relations of production whilst drawing attention to class struggle and the 'transnationalization' of capitalism (thereby theorizing periodizations within capitalism). The 'Open Marxist' approach wishes to reinstate a focus on Marx's analysis of the social relations of production, which it is argued are neither 'national nor global' whilst offering a critique of capitalism in theoretical terms (thereby denying the need for so-called updated concepts or the positing of periodizations within capitalism). From different perspectives, the book thus debates the significance and meaning of globalization, neo-liberalism, the changing relationship between state and economy, the importance of labour as a force of resistance, and the global restructuring of capitalism. The debate develops through more general theoretical chapters that set out our respective frameworks to develop critical assessments. The dialogue continues by means of contrasting interpretations of contemporary developments and it concludes with a direct exchange between the two theoretical perspectives.

The first part of the book introduces the key aspects of the neo-Gramscian and Open Marxist perspectives. In Chapter 2, Bieler and Morton provide an outline of the conceptual framework developed by Robert Cox that has been seminal to neo-Gramscian theorizing of capitalist world order. Cox's approach is situated in relation to the world economic crisis of the 1970s and more recent debates on the nature of structural power. The chapter also engages with the various forms of criticism and critique of neo-Gramscian perspectives. This provides the perfect context for Chapter 3 in which Burnham offers a critique of early forms of neo-Gramscian 'hegemony'. Burnham's principal argument is not that global capitalism needs to be theorized as a system of 'national capitalisms' but rather that neo-Gramscian approaches in their headlong dash to offer something new fail to fully conceptualize Marx's

account of the capital relation and its applicability to contemporary capitalism. Bonefeld, in Chapter 4, continues this theme through an analysis of Marx's approach to the world market, crisis and the state. Contrary to neo-Gramscian perspectives that posit a new form of class struggle based on the creation of a world market ushered in by globalization, Bonefeld notes that for Marx the world market is both the pre-condition and the result of capitalist production. The state cannot be understood in abstraction from the world-market society of capital nor can its class character be defined in national terms. Rather, its class character is entailed in its form-determined purpose to protect the capitalist law of property and contract and therewith secure labour's continued divorce from the means of production. This powerful critique draws attention, Bonefeld and Burnham would argue, to the fetishism implicit in neo-Gramscian analysis.

Part two of the book provides some indication of how these critical Marxist approaches understand contemporary developments. In Chapter 5, Bieler takes the subject of European integration and argues that a neo-Gramscian methodology can overcome the principal problems encountered in the mainstream and Open Marxist literature. Rather than being the outcome of inter-state co-operation and conflict, it is concluded that the deepening and widening of European integration has been part and parcel of the intensified neo-liberal restructuring of the European social relations of production driven by transnational class fractions. Utilizing a judicious mix of primary and secondary archival material, Burnham, in the following chapter (chapter 6), shows how Open Marxist principles can be employed to understand the politics of economic management. Drawing extensively on the British experience, this chapter analyses how state managers responded to crisis expressed in terms of labour militancy and inflation by switching from politicized to rules-based, depoliticized modes of economic management. Depoliticization is not in this context to be understood as a new mode of regulation corresponding to a new accumulation regime but rather as an 'old' mode of governing drawing on principles articulated clearly in the return to the Gold Standard in 1925. For Burnham, depoliticizing strategies are an enduring feature of capitalism. It is argued that this approach contrasts sharply with the neo-Gramscian contention that this form of management can be characterized as the emergence of a new constitutionalism of disciplinary neo-liberalism.

Subsequently in Chapter 7, Morton builds on the analytical distinction between an accumulation strategy and a hegemonic project to present a view of structural change in Mexico. The movement from Import

Substitution Industrialization to neo-liberalism was, he notes, constituted or authored by particular social class forces in Mexico. In short, structural change is explained in terms of an unfolding process of class struggle brought about by the expansion of capital and the *internalization* of class interests between various fractions of classes within state–civil society relations. It is clear that one of the central themes of this book is the contested relationship between the national state and the global character of accumulation. According to neo-Gramscian writers this relationship has undergone a fundamental structural change, necessitating the development of categories of analysis that understand current transformations in terms of a transition within capitalism. Bonefeld in Chapter 8 subjects this view to a rigorous critique. Crisis does not, he argues, entail the transition from one epoch of capitalism to another. Rather, crisis is an expression of the contradictory form of capitalist accumulation. Bonefeld develops this approach looking at the relationship between monetary and productive accumulation.

The final part of the book pulls together some of the main themes explored in Parts I and II. As noted above, the aim of the book is not to reconcile but to highlight some of the principal differences in approach and explore the implications of divergent views both in terms of method and analysis. In Chapter 9, Bieler and Morton start the section with a critical appreciation of Open Marxism, arguing that a neo-Gramscian development of critical economic analysis overcomes what they identify as the economism of Open Marxism. Developing insights from Nicos Poulantzas and Antonio Gramsci, their ‘critical economy’ conception of the state is shown to analyse capitalist processes of neo-liberal globalization without falling into the trap of economic determinism. Instead, class forces within the state are seen to contribute to the process of internationalization, shaping the form the state actually takes as well as being affected by it. In the subsequent consecutive chapters (Chapters 10 and 11), Bonefeld and Burnham contend that a central weakness of the neo-Gramscian approach lies in its conception of the relationship between the political and the economic. As Bonefeld summarizes in Chapter 10, the relationship is deemed to be indeterminate: at one moment the economy is run by the state, at another the state is run by the economy; and since globalization is said to be an epoch in which capital has attained hegemony one is led to believe that prior to globalization, the national state was in charge of capitalism and governing in favour of non-capitalist interests. In his wide-ranging critique Bonefeld reiterates that Marx’s critique of political economy amounted to a theory of the social constitution of ‘economic’ categories. This is the

starting point, in Chapter 11, of Burnham's articulation of the concepts of Open Marxism in terms of emphasizing the centrality of the circuit of capital. Anticipating Bieler and Morton's final chapter, Burnham contends that much of their critique is misplaced once states are seen as political nodes in the global flow of capital. Bieler and Morton's final contribution in Chapter 12 responds to the above criticism whilst stressing the value of the neo-Gramscian approach in empirical research. Their chapter highlights processes of class formation in the context of resistance to capitalist processes of neo-liberal globalization. They thus show how social class forces within state apparatuses internalize the interests of transnational capital and how this process also generates new collective actors that challenge neo-liberal restructuring.

Theorizing the character of labour, capital and state relations is central to all radical political economy and to critical theory accounts of international politics. This volume will have achieved its purpose if it brings these debates to a wider audience and contributes to understanding the character of contemporary capitalism and the possibilities for its transcendence.

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