

Marxism and World Politics

Contesting Global Capitalism



EDITED BY **Alexander Anievas**

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Contesting global capitalism

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Marxism and World Politics

This book brings together internationally-distinguished scholars from History, Philosophy, Development Studies, Geography and International Relations (IR) to examine recent developments in Marxist approaches to world politics.

Offering original and stimulating analyses of subjects traditionally at the forefront of Marxist studies of world politics, the collection also considers issues which have yet to be fully explored within a number of disciplines. Examining a wide array of topics ranging from the imperialism-globalization debate, the connections between social structures and foreign relations, the role of identity and imperialist norms in world politics, to the relationship between Marxist and Realist IR Theory, the contributors seek to further theoretical discussions and their implications for emancipatory radical politics. These contributions are structured around two major themes:

- The relationship between capitalist modernity and the states system in explaining the changing patterns of interstate conflict and cooperation;
- The debates within Marxist and IR discourses on the theoretical significance of 'the international', covering topics including uneven and combined development and passive revolution.

An impressive collection that seeks to advance dialogue and research, *Marxism and World Politics* will be of interest to students and scholars of IR, International Political Economy, Political Science and Historical Sociology.

Alexander Anievas is a PhD candidate at the Centre of International Studies, University of Cambridge, UK. He is also currently the managing editor of the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* and member of the Editorial Board of *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory*.

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Peter Gowan

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Origins and Acknowledgements

A number of the contributions in this book find their origins (in full or part) in two sections put together for the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (CRIA) (2007 and 2009). The chapters by Callinicos, Ashman and Lacher and Teschke originally appeared in these sections. The Callinicos-Rosenberg exchange was printed as its own free-standing article in CRIA (2008). Other chapters—such as those by Hobson, van der Pijl, Morton, and Allinson and Anievas—further develop their earlier contributions to the CRIA debates. Robinson's chapter is a revised and updated version of an article first published in *Sociologists without Borders* (issue 2, 2007). The pieces by Rupert, Gowan, and Bromley appear here in printed form for the first time.

This collection would not have been possible had it not been for the patience and hard work of all the contributors whom I thank. Heidi Bagtazo and Lucy Dunn were model editors and I greatly appreciate all their patience and help. I also need to thank, among others, those friends and colleagues whom, however indirectly, contributed to the making of this book: Nana Antwi-Ansorge, Duncan Bell, Charles Jones, Vincent Randazzo, Lisa Smirl, Srdjan Vucetic, Andrew Weck, Luke Williams, and the late Matt Gibney. Moreover, I must express my appreciation to Alena, Alex, Aurora, Chris, Danielle, Isabel, Keith, Renata and Stephanie of the Café (Cambridge) and Passport Café (Budapest), where most of this collection was edited. Special thanks must be given to my dear friends and theoretical sparring partners Jamie Allinson, Josef Ansorge, and Gonzo Pozo-Martin, as well as my PhD supervisor, Tarak Bar-kawi. Finally, I owe the deepest gratitude to my family, and particularly my mother, father and Uncle Ralph for their endless intellectual and moral support, as well my dear Linda Szilas—for without them none of this would have been possible.

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The renaissance of historical materialism in international relations theory

An introduction

Alexander Anievas

Introduction: why Marxism? Why now?

The first years of the twenty-first century have witnessed US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the worst global economic downturn since the 'Great Depression' of the 1930s. Consequently, the once self-evident 'common sense' truisms of the self-regulating market and the inherently pacifying effects of liberal capitalism have been destabilized once again. After three decades of neoliberal restructuring, the rapidity of such changes in both the financial landscape of contemporary capitalism and its hegemonic ideologies is indeed dramatic. Words not heard uttered in polite discourse are once again on the front pages. Headlines such as 'Capitalism in Crisis' and 'Communism: an alternative to capitalism once again?' decorate the financial pages. Thirty years ago, at the start of the neoliberal phase, it became standard to dismiss such talk as the ravings of 'one of those guys with saliva dribbling out of his mouth who wanders into a cafeteria with a shopping bag, screaming about socialism', as Woody Allen put it in his 1977 Oscar-winning film, *Annie Hall*. Today, neoliberalism may be reaching its limits, and the categories of 'Marxism' and 'socialism' are being recovered.

The resurgence of popular interest in Marx(ism) follows a major efflorescence in historical materialist thinking in the discipline of International Relations (IR). The revival of an intellectual tradition associated with Marx(ism) in IR within just two decades after the demise of the world's first self-identified 'communist' state might seem a rather ironic event. Indeed, for many, the fall of the Soviet bloc had represented a great blow to Marxism and emancipatory socialist projects around the world. While it would be 'faintly absurd' to deny the massive setbacks the disintegration of the far-Left as an 'organized force in the world' has been dealt (Cox 2002, 59), the collapse of the Soviet Union can be viewed as setting the (geo-)political grounds for a certain ideological 'liberation' of Marxist thought and (potentially) socialist praxis. No longer hostage to official Soviet ideology, or an automatic association with it, a space was thereby opened for a creative surge of historical materialist thinking.

This collection seeks to contribute to this recent renaissance of historical materialist thinking on world politics. A central reason for bringing these contributions together is to provide both students and scholars of IR with a single and easily accessible

volume laying out some of the major issues and themes within contemporary Marxist IR debates with an aim to further developing these theoretical discussions and their implications for emancipatory socialist politics. What then does it mean to speak of a Marxist approach to international relations? What relevance does Marxism hold for IR theory in particular and analyses of world politics in general? And what conceptual tools might it provide us with in navigating the turbulent waters of contemporary geopolitics?

A Marxist IR?

As the contributions to this collection demonstrate, there is no single 'Marxist' approach to world politics; but rather 'many Marxisms', representing different and contending interpretations of Marx and other key thinkers of the historical materialist canon.¹ This plurality of approaches is, of course, the logical result of any rich and wide-ranging intellectual tradition. What then might be considered the 'guiding threads' of thought uniting such a diversity of Marxist approaches? And what sets Marxism apart from other, more traditional theories of IR such as (neo-)realism or (neo-)liberalism?

Four central tenets of Marxist thought can be identified which, taken together, distinguish it from traditional IR theories. First, Marxist approaches to IR seek to 'de-reify' the seemingly 'natural' or supra-historical structures of world politics. Being committed to the 'ruthless criticism of all that exists' (Marx 1975, 142), historical materialists have sought to uncover the *historical* and *sociological* foundations of world politics and traditional IR categories, such as the 'international system', 'anarchy', 'balance of power', or 'the international' itself. The slogan 'Always historicize!' is 'the one absolute and we can even say "transhistorical" imperative of all dialectical thought' (Jameson 1981, 9). Marxist IR thus works with a radically 'historicist' and social-relational ontology of world politics—one which situates (though in no way necessarily reduces) international relations within the context of capitalist social relations. That people make their own history but not under conditions of their own choosing is the hallmark of any Marxist historicism. From this, naturally flows another central principle of Marxism: Its commitment to a *holistic* methodology in understanding and explaining world politics. This strong conception of 'totality' sets Marxist thought apart from much conventional IR theory.

According to the Hungarian Marxist philosopher, Györg Lukács, Marx's idea of society as totality was *the* defining component of the historical materialist method. As he put it, 'Marx's dictum: "The relations of production of every society form a whole" is the methodological point of departure and the key to the *historical* understanding of social relations' (Lukács 1972, 9).² Marxism thus rejects the analytical slicing of the social world into seemingly discrete spheres to be studied in isolation. It is against any methodological assumption positing bifurcated social realities of opposing spheres as exemplified by Waltzian realism's artifice of the domestic and international or Wendtian constructivism's binary conceptions of the 'material' and 'ideational'. Such dichotomous compartmentalizations of social relations are antithetical to Marx's idea of social structures forming organic, systemic totalities.³ Extrapolating this

holistic conception of the social to the inter-societal, the Marxist anthropologist Eric Wolf writes:

Concepts like 'nation', 'society', and 'culture' name bits and threaten to turn names into things. Only by understanding these names as bundles of relationships, and by placing them back into the field from which they were abstracted, can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase our share of understanding.

(Wolf 1997, 3)

From this holistic perspective of world politics, the key agents and structures are not simply the nation-state units and international systems of (neo-)realist and (neo-)liberal analysis, but also classes, ideological movements, economic market forces, ideas, identities and norms operating at the international and often connected transnational and global levels.

Underlying these methodological moves is a research programme to grasp social phenomenon in their essential relations and not be misled by ephemera. '[A]ll science would be superfluous if the form of appearance [*Erscheinungsform*] of things directly coincided with their essence ...', Marx (1981, 956) wrote. This basic dictum entails a *critical realist* philosophy of science and constitutes the third key feature of Marxist thought in IR.⁴ However, is this emphasis on 'essence' over 'appearance' proof of Marxism's economic reductionism? A common critique of Marxist theory is that it is inherently 'economistic'—that is, reducing all social phenomena to their technical-economic foundations and conceiving all other elements of society as mere epiphenomena (see, for example, Waltz 1979; Kubalkova and Cruickshank 1989; de Goede 2003; cf. Alker and Beirsteker 1984; Bieler and Morton 2008).⁵ To paint all Marxist thought with the economism brush is, however, to miss a central point of Marx's *Capital*—itself seen by many as his most economistic work. It is easily overlooked that, as the book's sub-title indicates, Marx's magnum opus was intended as a *critique* of classical bourgeoisie political economy which he viewed as economically reductionist. Hence, Marx's excavation of the human, social-relation substratum of the capitalist production process, so hidden by bourgeois economists, and his formulation of a *social theory of value* lie at the heart of his conception of capitalist modernity. One of the many ironies of Marx's interpreters is how this social theory of value would continually fall foul to the charges of economism.⁶

Finally, historical materialism is not only concerned with explaining world politics as it is, but radically improving it. There is no sharp distinction between theory and praxis for Marxists; the two are necessarily and dialectically related to one another. Marxism thus comes fitted with a particular conception of ethics and politics oriented towards radical, universal human emancipation. This further entails a reflexivity in regards to the role of knowledge and theory itself in concealing the contradictory and conflictual nature of capitalist social relations. Unlike the 'problem solving' theories of the 'neo-neos' (Cox 1986), Marxism is a *critical theory* involving a strong notion of the relationship of scholarship to politics. And, although much decried, the fact that Marxism has a theory of ideology provides it with a very different kind of analytical purchase in times of changing economic paradigms.⁷ At the most general level then, these four principles of

analysis—historicism, critical realism, methodological holism, theory-praxis nexus—can be said to define a distinctively Marxist approach to world politics.

Themes, debates, and contexts

Contributing to the creative regeneration of Marxist thinking in world politics, this collection seeks to address some crucial issues confronting Marxism and IR theory. Two central, interconnected sets of themes run throughout the following pages: (1) the geopolitics of capitalist modernity, and; (2) the significance of 'the international' (or inter-societal, in its less historically particular form) for Marxist theory. The first cluster of themes concerns the precise relationship between the modern system of sovereign nation-states and global capitalism to understand and explain contemporary patterns of geopolitical cooperation and conflict.

The issue of why there are many states under a global capitalist system invites a number of related questions. Are the connections between capitalism and the states system, as well as the tendencies toward geopolitical rivalry and war, contingently or structurally related? Is there anything *inherent* to capitalism which perpetuates a plurality of territorial states? If so, what mechanism(s) or tendencies might be identified to explain this? And, if not, is it conceivable that in the era of 'globalization' capitalism may be transcending the states system? In other words, has globalizing capital led to a transnationalization of state relations and forms? These questions are the centre of the below contributions by Alex Callinicos, Kees van der Pijl, Hannes Lacher and Benno Teschke, Neil Davidson, William I Robinson and others.

The geopolitics of capitalist modernity

In 'Does Capitalism Need the State System?', Alex Callinicos seeks to demonstrate the necessarily structural relationship between capitalism and a plurality of states, whilst allowing the international system a measure of autonomy in explaining geopolitical rivalry and war. Situating the above questions within the context of recent globalization-imperialism debates, Callinicos theorizes capitalist imperialism as the historical intersection of two analytically distinct, but mutually irreducible, forms of economic and geopolitical competition. This 'two logics' theory of imperialism, sharing much in common with the approach of David Harvey (2003), has been the subject of much recent debate in Marxist circles (see *HM* 2006). This is illustrated in the criticisms made, from very different perspectives, in the chapters by Davidson, Lacher and Teschke, and Robinson.

Taking issue with Callinicos's apparent resuscitation of the classical Marxist theory of imperialism, Lacher and Teschke propose an alternative theoretical framework building on the Political Marxist perspectives of Robert Brenner and Ellen Meikins Wood. This conceives the 'interstate-ness of capitalism' as being structurally internalized into, and thereby constitutive of, capitalist modernity. Thus, rather than subsuming patterns of international relations under the intersection of two 'generic', 'ideal-typified' logics of anarchy and capital, as Lacher and Teschke charge Callinicos's theory, they argue for an 'agency-centred and dialectical approach' which 'reconstruct[s] the real-historical

socio-economic and (geo)political conflicts in order to then arrive at the multiple 'logics' of capitalist geopolitical competition and co-operation' (p. 32). Lacher and Teschke's emphasis on an agency-centred and dialectical approach is shared by William Robinson, who also criticizes Callinicos's (and Harvey's) theory of imperialism as falling into the twin pitfalls of reification and 'theoreticism'. In contrast to the 'schizophrenic dualism of economic and political logics', Robinson claims that as capital has globalized, so too has the capitalist state. Arguing that world capitalism has witnessed the emergence of a qualitatively novel transnational stage of development, Robinson thus challenges Marxists to abandon their 'nation-state centric thinking' and move beyond the classical theories of imperialism (p. 74, 68). Robinson makes a case for the emergence of a transnational capitalist class and, with it, a transnational state apparatus formed by the nexus of supra-national organizations such as the WTO, IMF, World Bank, UN and others in conjunction with national states that are themselves experiencing transnationalization.

In a broad overview of recent Marxist IR perspectives, John Hobson questions both the desirability and success of approaches such as those offered by Callinicos and Lacher and Teschke seeking theoretical 'non-reductionism': that is, one aiming to avoid the pitfalls of economically or class-reductionist analyses of world politics. Offering a three-fold typology of non-reductionist strategies employed by contemporary Marxist IR ('relative autonomy', 'two-logics pluralism', and 'collapsed base/superstructuralism'), Hobson suggests that such alterations of Marx's base/superstructure model may be simply 'treating the symptom rather than the cause' (p. 121). From a very different perspective, Neil Davidson also takes issue with both Callinicos's 'two logics' approach and Lacher and Teschke's argument that the states system is 'contingent' to capitalism (the latter subject further explored by Allinson and Anievas). In contradistinction to both, Davidson offers a conception of states forming moments of a 'mediated totality'—a concept attributed to Lukács.

Davidson's approach emphasizes the systemic connection between capitalism and a rivalrous multi-state system through an analysis of capitalism's defining characteristic—competitive accumulation. Dispensing with the afflatus of 'perpetual peace' theses emerging with the age of 'globalization', he explores the myriad 'indirect routes by which economic competition is manifested politically' in the international arena (p. 95): So long as world capitalism continues to exist, so too will war and geopolitical competition. This is a conclusion shared by Peter Gowan in his contribution 'Industrial Development and International Political Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism' (as well as by Callinicos, Ashman, Allinson and Anievas and others). In this, Gowan examines a crucial dimension of industrial competition relatively unexplored within Marxist international political economy: that is, the 'logic of increasing returns to scale' and its relationship to interstate rivalry among 'core' capitalisms in the Global North. Focusing on how economies of scale operate in the industrial world economy, Gowan details the 'imperialist character of the organization of trade rules in the contemporary world economy'. In doing so, he explores the myriad ways in which the capitalisms of the industrial core engage in mercantilist practices, protecting their own markets while securing new ones. Demolishing the myths of 'free trade' capitalism, Gowan demonstrates the 'normless and politicized zone' (p. 136, 140) in which national capitals operate and compete.

Turning to an analysis of a role of US imperial power in the contemporary conjuncture, Mark Rupert offers a neo-Gramscian perspective tracing the contradictory social relations and processes underlying US imperialism in the context of the changing historical structures of global capitalism—specifically the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist globalizing capitalism. Rupert's 'multi-layered account' incorporates economic, political and cultural aspects of these historical structures of capitalism, whilst demonstrating how these structures have interacted with deeply embedded ideas of American Exceptionalism, and the recreation of masculinized forms of militarism in contemporary US popular culture. Thus, Rupert illuminates the multiplicity of factors pushing the contemporary US state/society complex towards an 'imperial exercise of coercive force' (p. 104).

Working from a shared neo-Gramscian perspective, Kees van der Pijl outlines his theory of the 'Lockean Heartland/Contender state' contradiction structuring modern world politics. This conceives capital emerging as an extra-territorial and disciplining social force originating in the Anglo-Saxon 'Lockean Heartland', from which it expanded outwards confronting and (for the most part) successfully subduing later-developing 'contender states'. Van der Pijl conceives this Heartland/Contender state structure as the latest manifestation of the '*contradictory unity of community and humanity*' forming the 'core contradiction' of different historically-limited 'modes of foreign relations'—defined as specific patterns of how 'communities occupying separate spaces and considering each other as outsiders, protect their own occupation and organize exchanges with others' (p. 42, 48). Van der Pijl's rich theoretical exposition culminates in an empirical analysis of the 2007 Bilderberg conference, illustrating the complex interconnections between transnational class agency and geopolitics in the contemporary conjuncture.

Marxism and 'the international'

Van der Pijl's theory of 'modes of foreign relations' points to the more general theoretical standing of foreign (or inter-societal) relations in Marxism: A key theme of Part II of this book. In particular, contributions to this section focus on three issues. The first concerns the potential utility of extending the historical and conceptual reach of Leon Trotsky's idea of uneven and combined development (U&CD) to provide a theorization of 'the international' beyond capitalism. A second, more implicit issue, regards whether inter-societal relations can be conceived as more than a superstructure of any historically specific mode of production. And, if so, the third relates to how one might then conceive the role of the political in the production of social orders and inter-societal relations.

Given the high level of theoretical abstraction debates surrounding 'the international' have proceeded from, some grounding of these issues in their specific historical and political contexts is useful. As with most theoretical advances in Marxist thinking, the genesis of Trotsky's idea of U&CD was a politically strategic innovation: A means of further developing revolutionary socialist praxis within the specific context of early twentieth century Tsarist Russian politics. The fundamental themes of U&CD were formulated, in all but name, in Trotsky's *Results and Prospects* (1906) and *1905* (1907). In these works and others, Trotsky explicitly rejected the 'stagist' theories of

development popular among contemporary Marxists—particularly those associated with the Second International. These generally held that within those countries where capitalism had not fully developed, the cause for socialism would necessarily take a back-seat to the primary task of completing the bourgeois revolution. In the case of Tsarist Russia, therefore, the proletariat of the most 'backward' of European capitalisms would be required, by the laws of historical development, to join forces with their national bourgeois in disposing of the absolutist monarchy. Only after making way for the unfettered development of capitalism, which would establish the material pre-conditions for socialism, could the Russian working class prepare for the coming socialist revolution.

This 'two-stage' strategy of revolution was adhered to by the majority of Russian Marxists at the time. It was based on an 'internalist' schema of social development which, in its crudest forms, held that all societies were destined to repeat the developmental trajectory of the more 'advanced' capitalist countries in the chronological succession of increasingly progressive (that is, technologically advanced) modes of production within each state/society. This took Marx's famous '1859 Preface' to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* to its logical *reductio ad absurdum*, dogmatically interpreting his declaration that

[n]o social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.

(Marx 1970, 21)

In contrast to the 'state-centrism' of these approaches, Trotsky conceptualized Russian development and its prospects for socialist revolution in its related geopolitical and world-economic contexts. From this perspective, Trotsky formulated an alternative strategy of 'permanent revolution'. This proposed that Russia's minority working class movement could successfully telescope the supposedly compulsory stages of bourgeois democracy and capitalist development into one single 'uninterrupted' or 'permanent' process. How?

In *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930), Trotsky coined the term 'uneven and combined development'. From this idea, Trotsky articulated an explanation of the origins and socialist nature of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution fundamentally based on the *international constitution* of the capitalist system. Despite Russia's relative 'backwardness',⁸ military competition (the 'whip of external necessity') with the more advanced Western European states allowed, indeed compelled, the Tsarist ruling classes to adopt the ready-made developmental innovations (technological, political, intellectual, ideological, etc.) of the European powers thereby permitting the 'skipping' of 'a whole series of intermediate historical stages'. As Trotsky famously put it: 'Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once without travelling the road which lay between ...' The resulting social structure formed a 'peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process'—an 'amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms' (Trotsky 1977, 26–27), 'smash[ing] the limited

boundaries of classification' (Trotsky 1998, 77). This 'combined' Russian social formation was characterized by islands of advanced capitalist relations and productive techniques enmeshed, in potentially socially and geopolitically explosive ways, within a sea of feudal relations. The result was the rise of one of the most advanced class-conscious proletariat, joining together with a majority peasant class, capable of overthrowing Tsarist power and leading the world's first socialist revolution.

Trotsky's concept of U&CD has the great virtue of capturing the dialectics of the particular and general—the intertwining and synthesis of different social temporalities (the 'simultaneity of the unsimultaneous')—in explaining phenomenon at both structural and conjunctural 'levels' of analysis. Trotsky's analysis was a response, Michael Buroway (1989, 187) suggests, to the emergence of particular anomalies within a Marxist research programme committed to a uni-linear conception of social development: An answer to Lenin's question of why socialist revolutions arose in the 'weakest links in the imperialist chain'. Yet, precisely because Russia remained the 'weakest link', for the socialist revolution to succeed it would need to internationalize itself through the promotion of revolution in the capitalist West. '*Without a more or less rapid victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries,*' Trotsky argued, 'the workers government in Russia will not survive. Left to itself, the Soviet regime must either fall or degenerate' (quoted in Löwy 1981, 72). In the absence of successful revolutions in Western Europe, the very idea (U&CD) formulated to capture the prospects for socialist revolution in Tsarist Russia thereby came to provide a framework to begin an inquiry into its Stalinist degeneration. The precise nature of the resulting social structure of the USSR, and subsequent Soviet bloc states, has been a matter of great dispute among Marxists and others.⁹ It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the questions of what the USSR was and why it failed underlies much of the recent debates on the international within Marxist circles.

It is these strategic, political and historical issues, among many others, which form the background horizon of the contributions to Part II of this collection. The first chapter of this section reproduces a series of letters between Callinicos and Rosenberg on the theoretical status of the international within Marxism and social theory. Debating the promises and potential problems of Rosenberg's extension of Trotsky's U&CD as a 'general abstraction' to capture the 'multilinear and interactive dimension of all sociohistorical development' (p. 155), they touch on a wide array of issues, including: Marx's method of abstraction and its connection to theorizing inter-social relations, and; the political and intellectual standing of Realism and its relationship to Marxist IR, among others. Their exchange forms the focus of Sam Ashman's chapter.

Critiquing Rosenberg's conceptualization of U&CD as a transhistorical phenomenon, Ashman argues for a necessary limitation of its conceptual reach by illustrating the 'specifically capitalist determinacy of combination and unevenness' (p. 190). Taking Brenner and Wood's analyses of the specificities of capitalist social relations and political forms as her point of departure, Ashman claims that the separation of the economic and the political identified by them as unique to capitalism meet important counter-tendencies re-uniting economics and politics. From this perspective, Ashman argues that U&CD can be usefully employed as a 'mediating level of