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**Editorial: Neoliberalism, labour power and democracy - the sense  
of an ending**

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**Neoliberalism, labour power and democracy – the sense of an ending**

*‘Labour will take robust action to end the self-regulation of [UK] Department for International Development private contractors, establishing and enforcing new rules to ensure aid is used to reduce poverty for the many, not to increase profits for the few’*

*‘The current global tax system is deeply unjust. Africa’s economies alone lose more than £46 billion annually through corruption and tax evasion – more than 10 times what they receive in aid. Labour will act decisively on tax havens, introducing strict standards of transparency for crown dependencies and overseas territories, including a public register of owners, directors, major shareholders and beneficial owners for all companies and trusts’ (Labour 2017, 122).*

Not only promising to maintain aid commitments and international agreements, the above development policies and others in the UK’s Labour Party manifesto reflect its core aims to dismantle the rigged economic system, expand public ownership and strengthen workers’ rights. They expose the international development for the few that has persisted in the shadow of Thatcher’s reign, through Tony Blair’s pro-privatisation ‘New Labour’ regime, and which is now being pushed to extremes. More than a departure from neoliberalism, the stakes are even higher in the prospect of a disjuncture from British imperialism (Cross 2016). Meanwhile, the Conservative government projects the fantasy of returning to its heights in a post-Brexit world. The International Development Secretary, Priti Patel aims to use aid money to secure post-Brexit free trade deals that would drive down prices, remove tariffs, and cut regulation whilst increasing the private share of development aid (*Global Justice Now* 2016). Her party aims to ‘create millions of jobs in countries across the developing world’, a punishing prospect when the collaborating International Trade Secretary, Liam Fox has repeatedly undermined workers’ rights and claims they are unsustainable for business (Stone 2016).

Prime Minister Theresa May called the UK’s snap election on 8 June 2017 on the calculation that she would destroy the opposition to her party’s austerity programme and grandiose ‘Empire 2.0’ Brexit vision, backed by a plutocratic national media that promotes xenophobic nationalism and apathy. Yet the mass mobilisation of the Labour campaign offered unprecedented hope of an alternative. It significantly weakened her government and left her clinging to power, prevailing both over a media almost unanimously presenting leader Jeremy Corbyn as ‘unelectable’ at best, a supporter of terrorism at worst, and the stubborn adherents of neoliberalism in his party.

A major theme in this collection of articles, neoliberalism is a political project orchestrated by the capitalist class in the 1970s. It originates in the aim to curb the power of labour by opening up global competitiveness between workers, empowering finance capital, and crushing jobs with privatisation, deregulation and technological change. Think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation followed up with the ideological front, eventually infiltrating universities (*Jacobin* 2016). The neoliberal construct of ‘governance’ is hostile to politics, ‘meshing [the] political and business lexicons through which neoliberal reason is disseminated’ and reducing people to ‘self-

investing and responsabilised human capital [in] the project of a growing economy' (Brown 2015, 70). As a consequence, for Brown, Marx's depiction of capitalism as 'vampire-like, exploitative, alienating, inegalitarian, duplicitous, profit-driven, compulsively expanding, fetishistic, desacralising of every precious value, relation and endeavour' is inadequate to the damage neoliberal rationality has wrought to democracy as well as the economy (ibid., 111).

Yet the transnational capitalist class can no longer unite in this runaway project. The IMF and international organisations attempt to moderate the neoliberal programme of austerity in the increasingly roguish US and UK governments, while liberal international institutions that buffered its invasion in Africa and elsewhere can no longer reconcile themselves with the attacks on gender relations and rights, workers and standards of living (Giugliano 2015, Bretton Woods Project 2017). Regionalism is also breaking down its unity as the US' geopolitical power declines along with the other 'triad' countries in Western Europe and Japan. The power of financial oligarchies in their political systems faces fragility in the periphery because it does not accommodate political regimes of popular legitimacy (Amin 2016). Insights from Odinga and Dobler in this issue of the *Review* show respectively how the US is weakened by dependency on uncertain allies, and how, on the other hand, globalised liberalism in its erosion of regulatory power has opened up countries to the reproduction of comprador class dynamics by non-Western powers.

As Brown (2015) has explained so eloquently how neoliberalism is 'undoing the demos', now the demos is undoing neoliberalism in the countries that pioneered it. Its ideology has been fundamentally challenged by popular socialist campaigns that gained the majority of youth votes in US, French and UK elections (Blake 2016, Anderson 2017, Seymour 2017). Its hegemony is fatally eroded at the core. As a result, it can no longer be stabilised without recourse to increasingly authoritarian tactics, which disrupts the complicity of its bureaucratic upholders. Bereft 'centrists' might find comfort in Emmanuel Macron's victory over the far-right in France, but there lacks a more positive argument of support for the tactical election of a former investment banker who promotes 1990s-style 'modernisation' and entrepreneurship to be found in the dismantling of welfare and collective bargaining rights for workers (Halimi 2017, 2). This 'third-way' politics championed by Tony Blair and Bill Clinton has left much to grieve for – a world of cheap labour competitiveness and war, with more than 65 million forcibly displaced people and persistent deaths at sea, those caused by the disasters of deregulation and privatisation, not to mention the environmental consequences of unfettered growth. The violent ideologies of Islamic extremism and fascism have found support in communities that have been betrayed, impoverished, disempowered and patronised by self-styled liberal 'experts', while capitalist interests benefit from and sponsor these cultural interpretations of political and economic division. This regression was inevitable, not something that can be controlled with better management, and the remaining promoters of neoliberalism appear increasingly outdated and driven by narrow self-interest rather than rationality.

David Harvey, however, warns that 'most anti-neoliberalism fails to deal with the macro-problems of endless compound growth – ecological, political and economic problems. So I would rather be talking about anticapitalism' (*Jacobin* 2016). As distasteful as neoliberalism has become socially and culturally, the shock rise of Jeremy Corbyn's popularity in the UK, to become its most popular leader soon after

the election, has emerged in an equally shocking, but absolutely necessary, class framing of political struggle. 'For the many not the few' was a sufficiently simple message to rapidly shift political consciousness beyond the committed left, rendering the elite capture of social movements, such as that found in the 'Make Poverty History' campaign of 2005, unimaginable. The election campaign defied the pluralism and compromise often expounded in radical forms of democracy, instead promoting the substantive class narrative that destroys neoliberal logic, with impetus from newly empowered working class politicians and minority groups. The irony of its radicalism is that it is a moderate vision of socialist democracy to counter the neoliberal revolution that shifted the capitalist world order to new extremes and totality. It does not depart entirely from capitalism but does open up the space to conceive of a different world beyond capitalism – one that no longer accepts the hierarchical ordering of 'developed' and 'developing' countries or assumes Western elites' superiority of knowledge and interpretation, and instead remakes it according to material realities and the knowledge found in local resistance and global struggle, where the intellectual action is. As veteran activist Angela Davis (2017) argues: 'we always use as our standard, those who are at the centre of the structures we want to dismantle'. In dismantling these fraudulent structures, it is time to pursue a different standard by reimagining citizenship, work and democracy from a renewed socialist perspective.

### **Neoliberalism in Africa: carnage and resistance**

West African countries continue to suffer the consequences of the neoliberal logic of 'shared sacrifice' by whole communities, the demand that people suffer slashed jobs, pay, benefits and services, 'with no immediate returns to those who sacrifice or are sacrificed ... [for the] restoration of economic and state fiscal 'health'' (Brown 2015, 216). In the first article in this issue, Maclean examines the expansion of non-state providers (NSPs) of social welfare in West Africa in the context of 'neoliberal democratisation'. She argues that colonial legacies influence the numbers and types of NSPs on the ground, to be seen in the enduring normative frameworks of political elites and the persistence of roles for state and non-state actors. In Ghana, decentralised and diverse NSPs are found to aggravate local inequalities. In Côte d'Ivoire there is more of a top-down, interventionist role for the state and a tendency towards larger, international NGOs, with more of a regional impact. She finds in sum that non-state provision produces new inequalities of access, complex barriers to accountability towards citizens, and the long-term erosion of state capacity. This is not the consequence of state weakness, but instead of the neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, which left states competing with non-state providers beyond the Washington Consensus.

Another outcome of this 'shared sacrifice' has been the continuing importance of labour migrancy. The next article in this issue is based on a collaboration with RoAPE founding editor Lionel Cliffe, whose take on the political events of the last year would have been a delight to discuss. Our article comparatively examines the political economy of migration and labour mobility in West and Southern Africa, suggesting agendas and methods for approaching contemporary patterns. It does so on two levels of analysis: firstly the regionalisation of Africa as outlined by Samir Amin, and secondly by exploration of the mechanisms and characteristics of cheap labour on different scales of analysis, including a reconsideration of the 'modes of production'

discourse. This article emphasises the importance of understanding the changing configuration of the state in relation to labour and capital, not simply to be seen as 'rolling back' or being 'brought back in' but also in organising migrant labour, taking responsibility for costs of labour that employers do not cover, and constructing the ideology to mask the class structure.

The next two articles explore trade unionism in Africa, particularly in South Africa. Bernards analyses the history of interaction between the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and trade unions, assessing the 'tripartite fantasy' of formal institutions through which government mediates between workers and employers. It is a fantasy because the global rise of neoliberalism has restricted the capacity of tripartite institutions to advance workers' interests, instead 'blunting' its worst excesses. Moreover, it involves a commitment to 'free' trade unionism, based in freedom of association and autonomy from government and political parties, which in reality means their role is depoliticised and non-radical. The ILO views the wave of community protests in South Africa, in poor communities with high unemployment, precarious work and growing inequality, as a 'moral failing' where workers' organisations and the government have deviated from the tripartite ideal. While unions have been able to draw on ILO resources materially and organisationally, its moralistic and top-down approach lacks an answer to the attack on workers that is central to neoliberal strategies.

Between neoliberal pressures to cut labour costs and the strengthening of labour rights in post-apartheid South Africa, deviations from standard employment relationships have expanded in the form of casualised, externalised and informalised labour. Dickinson's article in this issue examines casual workers' organisation in the South African Post Office (SAPO), with a particular focus on the struggle of the Mabarete. This formation of workers has forced an end to employment by labour brokers in SAPO, has doubled the salary of casual workers and achieved equal terms and conditions of employment. It was formed by those excluded from the right to join or establish their own union, who instead organised outside the institutional methods of conflict and engaged in subaltern worker rebellions, projecting power through violence and intimidation. Their oscillation between these organisational forms is described as insurgent unionism, to be understood in South Africa's broader context of structural violence in a vastly unequal society.

The last two articles in this issue focus on the role of outside powers – the US and China – in African politics. Odinga examines US-Ethiopian intelligence cooperation through the lens of compliance bargaining, a process-oriented framework that analyses the ways states test the limits of compliance, respond to violations of agreements, and use tactics to generate bargaining leverage. This reveals how Ethiopia has leveraged the liaison for its regional objectives and has policed its terms, despite the power asymmetry between these states. It has, for example, 'exaggerated' intelligence that identifies Somalia as a haven for Al-Qaeda operatives and has an embedded human intelligence network there, more sophisticated than that of the US. Odinga highlights the tensions in this relationship, revealed in an Ethiopian seizure of US intelligence documents in the restricted area of the Ogaden. He concludes that the US was more reliant on cooperation than Ethiopia, allowing the Meles administration to evade criticisms or sanctions for its increasingly autocratic policies.

Finally, Dobler examines the ways that China's new role in Africa influences local lives, social and political relations with a focus on Chinese cultural diplomacy, the construction industry and Chinese traders in Namibia. Ethnographic fieldwork examines peasants' reactions to the Chinese presence and how this changes the fabric of society and local power structures. He finds that cooperation between Namibian and Chinese elites widens the rift between them and the people. It limits existing local manufacturing and trade structures in a similar form, but with different actors, to the local comprador bourgeoisie of the colonial era. In explaining this influence, he highlights the importance of the political and technical regulation capacity of the state for determining the role of international actors in its political economy.

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