
The strange absence of class: Peter Gowan, Carl Schmitt, and the fascist face of neoliberalism in Europe

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Résumé

The end of USSR was interpreted by many as the victory of capitalism, the ‘end of history’ as Gowan’s work succinctly articulates. Since 1989 the absorption of the Eastern Europe and the Balkans into the EU as members or associates is almost complete yet the crises of geographical Europe have only increased, old EU and new. Gowan too foresaw the many faces of these crises and their roots that this paper explores. Now, 10 years after his death, accumulation of capital has pushed the limits of the possible embedded in the financialised accumulation regime to their extremes. The EU and its members, in their guarding of the interest of transnational capital and its entitlement to ongoing accumulation by dispossession/expropriation, must rely increasingly on coercion and consent by fraud, corruption, manipulation of public opinion (building on Gramsci 1971, Harvey, Luxemburg, Gowan). Neoliberal subjectivity is infected with false consciousness of emancipation through work and identity politics; neoliberalism’s façade of individual (economic) emancipation through work (paid, unpaid, self-”improvement”) is now showing its true fascist face in the ”cosmopolitan” EU too. Ongoing and manufactured economic crises are used as legitimisation narratives for further austerity, deepening of penetration of society by capital. Fraudulent narratives of labour mobility (physical, economic, social) in the EU contribute to manufacturing of illusions of overall benefits of economic integration where capital benefits at expense of masses of increasingly dispossessed labour. This paper draws connections between neoliberalism, populism, nationalism, and fascism, their dialectical relationship. Gowan’s work is illuminating here as it highlights – among other - the deliberate dissonance of Schmitt’s theory and political praxis where rhetoric and politics, thought and praxis differ yet are inseparable. Nationalism, as articulated by Schmitt, was instrumental for destruction of Marxism and democracy as a system and became one of the main underlying features that appealed to those resurrecting his thought. Class as an analytical category have been displaced by the narratives of identity politics that in the state of increasing dispossession instead accelerate xenophobia, nationalism and fascism.

Mots-Clés: Gowan, Schmitt, EU, neoliberalism, fascism

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