

George Liodakis, *Totalitarian Capitalism and Beyond*. Surrey, Ashgate Publishing, 2010. 232pp.

Totalitarian Capitalism and Beyond offers a timely contribution to Marxian critiques of capitalism, its tendency towards crisis, and the need for a new model for organizing social relations. Liodakis' objective is 'to offer a historically informed, analytically rigorous, and politically relevant account of contemporary capitalism' using 'a Marxist, dialectical materialist methodology' (p.1) from a labour perspective. In so doing, Liodakis addresses the development of the capitalist mode of production (CMP) internationally, the restructuring of capitalism and the emergence of totalitarianism, as well as the basic trends of this phase, and examines the specific roles of – or relationship with – the state, technology, and nature in this development. Liodakis then considers the prospects of communism emerging today, offers political guidelines for a communist society, and stresses the need for a transnational emancipation strategy. The central argument is that totalitarianism is a failing attempt to counteract systemic crisis. However, the seeds of – and the need for – social emancipation via a working class revolution and communist future can be found within capitalist society itself.

Linking the emergence of new technologies to a revolutionary restructuring of production, the ascent of neoliberalism to changing patterns of appropriation, and economic and political internationalization to changing patterns of accumulation and social (state) authority, Liodakis outlines the rise of totalitarian capitalism since the 1970s. Seven basic trends of totalitarian capitalism are identified to be the subsumption of technological innovation to capitalist interests, a continuation of primitive accumulation, globalization, financialization, universal labour subsumption to capital, increased capital concentration and totalitarian political structures, and imperialism. Instead of elaborating on these seven trends, the next three chapters focus on the state, technology, and nature.

Liodakis argues that nation-states are (at least partially) being superseded by an emerging transnational capitalist state embodied by international organizations serving the prerogatives of a likewise emerging transnational capitalist class, in what amounts to 'super-imperialism'. Concerning technology, Liodakis stresses the non-neutrality of innovation and the important role it plays in crisis,

counter-crisis, and eventually the supersession of capitalism itself. The emergence of new technologies (communication, bio, nano, etc.) is said to stem from ‘an urgent need to upgrade the conditions of capitalist valorization’ (p.81) following the crisis that emerged in the 1970s, but has nonetheless been ineffective in curtailing crises. The ‘technological preconditions for a supersession of capitalism’ (p.92), Liodakis argues, includes the excessive costs of protecting intellectual property rights thereby threatening increased valorization, and a highly educated working class ‘capable not only of organizing labour processes, but also consciously and collectively managing social affairs’ (p.97). In regards to nature, Liodakis charges that the environmental crisis is an unavoidable consequence of capitalism for reasons, including: its competitive imperative that lends itself to a growth obsession ignoring scarcity, the rewarding of narrow mindedness by permitting negative externalities, and the inadequacy of private property for guaranteeing effective stewardship.

Despite counteracting tendencies such as technological revolutions, outward expansion, financialization (which permits a greater concentration of capital), primitive accumulation, and the state’s role in protecting property rights and bailouts, Liodakis posits that capitalism is unable to overcome ‘the tendency of the rate of profit to fall’ (p.142). Thus, the demise of capitalism is implied in its very modus operandi. However, Liodakis maintains its final end may only come from working class action. To fulfill its role, Liodakis suggests the working class needs a new narrative that goes beyond historically co-opted struggles and the failures of so-called ‘actually existing socialism’. He then spends the last two chapters presenting, albeit briefly, an unapologetic yet critically self-reflective communist alternative.

Liodakis conceptualizes communism ‘as an outgrowth stemming from the process itself of capitalist development’ (p.169), yet, one that negates all basic premises of capitalism including private property, money, class, and political power. While much of Liodakis’ envisioned communism is well-established in various literatures, his position regarding the target of working class revolutionary agency may prove provocative to Marxist readers. Liodakis warns against seizing state power, cautioning such a tactic would allow proletarian agency to become trapped in a new exploitative structure, effectively replacing one class’ dominance with another. His position rests on a charge that ‘the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat’ has been

misrepresented to justify a permanent ‘workers state’, but should only allow for a temporary period wherein all forms of political power would be forcefully demolished. At the same time, assuming the emerging transnational capitalist state may (at least partially) incapacitate national struggles, Liodakis calculates that capitalism must be targeted at an international level – implying a need for greater working class organization. However, Liodakis does not dedicate much space for elaborating on international working class coordination, an unfortunate omission considering he also called only for a minimal party role.

While Liodakis ought to be commended for this vastly encompassing critique of capitalism, there are several shortcomings that must be considered, many of which may be related to the books overly large scope relative to its brevity in length. The work covers a vast theoretical territory, yet provides little originality and glosses over several issues too quickly – lending certain discussions to superficiality; for example, no reference to structuralism and dependency theory is made whilst discussing uneven international capitalist development. The book is also guilty of several glaring omissions, the most apparent of which is the absence of feminist, racial, cultural, and peasant perspectives. Although Liodakis positions himself in the labour perspective, these different perspectives and concerns do not have to be entirely mutually exclusive and must be seriously considered in any true emancipation project. Furthermore, no mention of anarchism is made, which is perplexing given that Liodakis’ envisioned communist society closely resembles some strands of anarchism.

Liodakis can also be criticized for making several suspect assumptions without adequate exploration. The working class, for example, subject to neoliberal antagonisms and benefiting from better education is assumed by Liodakis to be well positioned to lead a revolution. Here, Liodakis is too mechanistic in his use of dialectics, is overly assumptive of class consciousness and the inevitability of transitioning from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself. He fails to acknowledge that during the temporal period of the book the working class has arguably seen its power wane, and ignores the theme of the book (totalitarian capitalism) by not acknowledging the biased role of curriculum. In so doing, Liodakis fails to consider whether working class political agency may be hijacked by dominant classes, and would have benefited from

earlier views on peasants found in Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and the works of Kautsky and Lukacs. Lastly, his argument that intellectual property is more difficult to protect, thereby challenging the capitalist property regime, is also suspect – especially since at one point he refers to instances of private land property being subject to sabotage and squatters, specifically in rural areas. One may ask if it is likewise possible to damage intellectual property, and refer to costs associated with protecting corporeal property which is also massive, but has nevertheless not only been maintained but expanded.

Notwithstanding the above criticism, Liodakis' synopsis of Marxist crisis theory and the brief introduction to communist society makes this text a useful course tool and a worthy read for non-academics intrigued by critical political economy or radicalism. Given its brevity, however, the work may not prove fruitful for advanced studies. Those looking for an in-depth analysis of the current crisis – or as this book insinuates, the current crisis within a larger capitalist crisis extending to the 1970s – would best look elsewhere, as Liodakis himself implies in the preface.

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Murray E.G. Smith. *Global Capitalism in Crisis: Karl Marx & the Decay of the Profit System*. Halifax, Fernwood Publishing, 2010. 179pp.

Global Capitalism in Crisis: Karl Marx & the Decay of the Profit System adds to the growing Marxist literature on the prevalence of capitalist economic crisis, taking advantage of the most recent economic slump and principally taking examples from the Canadian economy to contextualize what can often be a very dense Labour Theory of Value (LTV) explanation. Consistent with other Marxist theorists, Smith sees the current incarnation of capitalist crisis as 'conjunctural' within a much lengthier 'systemic' crisis imbedded in the capitalist mode of production, and thus sees no merit in mainstream attempts to 'save' the system in which the working class has been victim to a "decidedly one-sided class war" (p.3) since