

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Kees van der Pijl, *Transnational Classes and International Relations*. London: Routledge 1998. ISBN 0-415-19200-5 (Hb \$99.99), 0-415-19201-3 (Pb \$27.99).

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The three main contradictions of our era, according to Kees van der Pijl's *Transnational Classes and International Relations*, are the disappearance of contender states in the global system, the breakdown of community, and the threat of fundamental ecological disaster. These challenges spring from the foundations of the capitalist system, and find their most potent dialectical challenge in the development of the "new middle" or "cadre" class.

Van der Pijl traces the rise of the capitalist system to England in 1688. It was in the context of the Glorious Revolution that a new kind of state was created. Local power was not destroyed but co-opted. Citizens came to view themselves as possessed of inherent rights. A strong civil society evolved, with a legal system both independent and strong enough to enforce private contracts. States were weak within their boundaries, but strong externally. Within this context we find the development of important groups with strong transnational liberal interests. The discussion of these various groups, beginning with the Freemasons in the 17th century and extending to relationships between contemporary cabals such as the Bilderberg conference and the Pinay Circle, constitutes one of the great strengths of this book.

Strong groups forwarding transnational bourgeois interests included the Rhodes-Milner group, which strongly favored imperialism as a response to Britain's 19th century internal difficulties. Success in this regard led to the expansion of British power, and the spread of British attitudes regarding the social order. England's unique attributes gave birth to the "Lockean Heartland" of the international system. In opposition to this favored area we find the development of states behind bureaucratic classes. These states were often authoritarian in nature as their bourgeois classes, unable to compete with those of the Lockean bloc, could not institute more liberal systems at home. The result, a "Hobbesian" bloc of contender states, provided global competition for the Lockean Heartland. War, primarily for control of the rest of the world, was ". . . the ultimate test of whether a contender state has successfully advanced" (p. 86).

Two lessons emerge from the vicissitudes of recent Lockean/Hobbesian interaction. The failure of worker states suggests that progressive hopes ought be pinned not on direct wars of movement, but on what Gramsci called wars of position which in this case ought focus on popular sovereignty, democracy and social protection. More critical still is the Lockean victory, represented by the self-destruction of the USSR, which left contender states in total disarray and swept an important alternative model of social organization from the field.

This conceptualization of international relations, defined by Europe in the 17th century and relegating the rest of the planet to the status of the "prize" over which such powers fought, seems a bit out of date. The author notes that capitalist relations of production proper are not in evidence until industrialization took hold as much as a century later. Why then begin with England in 1688? Societies with a strong commercial heritage and enforceable contracts emerge much earlier and farther afield (Abu-Lughod, 1989). Ascendant bourgeois classes in strong states gain power in different European locations by the 14th century (Arrighi, 1994). A variety of market-based innovations can be traced back even before this (Modelski and Thompson, 1996), while the role the global system played in Europe's initial rise ought not be so cavalierly ignored (Gunder Frank, 1998). Van der Pijl is correct, however, in his concern for lack of significant counter hegemonic models to the prevailing neo-liberal synthesis. Though perhaps a function of the current business cycle upswing, few if any alternative movements capable of taming neo-liberal discipline are in evidence.

Neo-liberalism itself, however, forms the foundation of important contradictions. Van der Pijl spends the first two chapters setting the stage for an understanding of labor processes, class formation and fractionalization, and socialization. As commodification deepens the reach of capital, the human community breaks apart. After the Second World War the solution to this problem seemed to rest with the thoroughgoing corporatism of the Atlantic Community. But economic stagnation, external challenges from the periphery and the Soviet Bloc, and internal challenges from the green, anti-war and youth movements undercut this system. The rise of the Trilateral Commission and other neo-liberal organs gave birth to a new and less forgiving capitalist system that threatens the fabric of our communities.

I sympathize with the need to use, if not create, specialized language to reflect new or complex concepts. But the language adopted in the explication of labor processes and the class system in the first few chapters of this volume makes the argument quite difficult to follow and undercuts the series editors' hopes of providing books not just for specialists but for ". . . students, policy makers, trade unionists and other activists" (p. ix).

The final challenge generated by neo-liberalism is ecological degradation. Unfettered neo-liberal capitalism is suggested to be heading us toward real physical limits. This important argument, central as it should be, nonetheless goes completely undeveloped and ends up nothing more than an assertion.

Van der Pijl offers some glimmer of hope in the face of these critical challenges by way of new class relationships. As society gets more complex, as production processes come to depend more on knowledge inputs, and as the potential costs to instability increase, we see the rise of the "cadres," a "new middle class" of technocrats, managers, negotiators and educators. Especially in times of crisis, the technical prowess of the cadres makes them indispensable for negotiating and enforcing agreements on representatives of more established classes. Their central role in the process of socialization, their fidelity to systems analysis, social engineering and planning, give them the tools necessary to create and enforce rational outcomes. Yet the cadres themselves, often of lower middle class background, divided by the nature of their positions as representatives of both management and labor, and lacking in strong class consciousness, offer the best hope of transcending class relations within the context of class society itself. Rational responses to the ravages of neo-liberalism must include transcending its preferences on various central issues, and social planning rests at the heart of any such victory.

Cadres may hold the hope of transcending neo-liberal discipline, but the processes that would move us toward such outcomes are hardly clear. The anti-democratic and anti-progressive nature of technocratic solutions imposed by cadres in other eras is also described in this volume. The question of what leads to one outcome as opposed to another is never considered.

This is the first volume in a new series on the Global Political Economy published in association with the journal *Review of International Political Economy*. It is dedicated to applying Marx's historical materialism at the global level. Class analysis is an important and powerful tool that is wielded with real facility in this volume. Whether it can shed sufficient light on the challenges we now face, however, remains an open question.

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