

Karl Marx, the Nation-State and the Evolving Geopolitical Economy of Capitalism
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At a time when international tensions are at a heightening to the point to the point of nuclear war, when economic tensions in the form of trade wars and financial sanctions are also rising and this is happening in against the background of fundamental shifts in the world order with the rise of multipolarity and the shift in the world's centre of gravity away from the west, Marx's ideas are more relevant than ever in understanding these developments. The last time this happened, in the run-up to the First World War, Marxist ideas were in the van of understanding international developments. Today, however, they are playing little part. Instead, thanks to decades, indeed, over a century of mounting misinterpretation of Marx's ideas, misinterpretations in which has analysis of value and of capitalism's contradictions have been erased, his ideas were appropriated to support views of the world order which current developments are discrediting.

Recent attempts to deploy Marx's understanding of capitalism in international relations have tended to take what Friedrich List would have called a 'cosmopolitan' view of international relations in which the existence of states is ignored. In such a view, capitalism is a world economy seamlessly unified by markets or a single hegemonic state enforcing a liberal world order of 'pure capitalism' in which any geopolitics is incidental and certainly not rooted in the dynamics or contradictions of capitalism. This is how Marx's authority has been marshalled to support the paradigms that have dominated international political economy in the twentieth century, such as US 'hegemony', 'globalization' and 'empire' and are also entirely consonant with nineteenth century Free Trade ideas.

However, as this paper argues, the conception of capitalism that arises from Marx and Engels' critique of political economy involve national states centrally in at least two ways. First, states play critical roles not only in establishing capitalisms but in managing their contradictions on an ongoing basis as they grew and matured. As such, Marx and Engels clearly thought of this role as increasing over time. Secondly, just as capital is inevitably plural, can only be conceived in terms of 'many capitals' within an economy, so at the international level the capitalist world order, as Marx and Engels envisaged it, was composed of struggling and competing national blocs of capital. This understanding, which is rooted in the works of Marx and Engels, matured into the idea of capitalism's uneven and combined development (UCD) and underlay the classical theories of imperialism.

Thereafter, however, a tendency to fit Marx and Engels' critique of political economy into the theoretical and methodological framework of neoclassical economics took over. 'Marxist economics' understood capitalism as a 'purely economic' system without contradictions and accurate understandings of the states and national capitalisms passed onto non-Marxist writers who were critical of neoclassical economics, pre-eminently Keynes, Polanyi and the developmental state theorists of the late twentieth century.

In recent years, I have proposed an alternative approach to international affairs, *Geopolitical Economy* (2013), which develops Marx's ideas about capitalism's contradictions and the inevitability of states' economic role and the inevitable and contradictory plurality of struggling and competing nation-states in the international system and in this paper, I develop the argument further by reviewing Marx's writings on international relations and his

understanding of capital, and how they have been deployed in Marxist understandings of international relations as well as imperialism in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Some of my Relevant Writings:

Books:

- (Co-edited) *Russia, Ukraine and Contemporary Imperialism*, with Boris Kagarlitsky and Alan Freeman, London: Routledge, 2017, being a reprint of *Russia, Ukraine, and Contemporary Imperialism*, Special issue of ***International Critical Thought***, Vol 6, no. 4, December 2016, co-edited by Boris Kagarlitsky and Alan Freeman
- (edited) *Analytical Gains in Geopolitical Economy: Volume 30-Part B of Research in Political Economy*, 2015, Bingley: Emerald, 2016.
- (edited) *Theoretical Engagements in Geopolitical Economy*, Volume 30-Part A, Research in Political Economy, Bingley: Emerald, 2015.
- Geopolitical Economy: After US Hegemony, Globalization and Empire*, Future of World Capitalism series, London: Pluto Press, 2013.

Journal Articles:

- ‘Imperialistischer Antikapitalismus’, *Das Argument* 321, 2017, pp. 66-77.
- ‘Canada as an Ordinary Imperialist Country: Comments on Paul Kellogg’s *Escape from the Staple Trap: Canadian Political Economy after Left Nationalism*, Review Essay in *Socialist Studies / Études socialistes* 12 (1) Spring 2017, pp. 137-146.
<http://www.socialiststudies.com/index.php/sss/article/view/27218/20052>
- ‘Wohin triebt der Weltkapitalismus, und was sind die Alternativen?’, Berliner InkriT-Debatte. Samir Amin, Radhika Desai und Manuela Boatcă, *Das Argument* 318, 2016, pp. 471-482.
- The Conflict in Ukraine and Contemporary Imperialism’ in Boris Kagarlitsky, Radhika Desai and Alan Freeman eds. *Russia, Ukraine, and Contemporary Imperialism*, Special issue of *International Critical Thought*, Vol 6, no. 4, December 2016. Principal Author: Co authors Alan Freeman and Boris Kagarlitsky
- ‘Marxist Engagements with Geopolitical Economy: Author’s Response’, *Rethinking Marxism*, 27:4, pp. 1-19. Symposium on *Geopolitical Economy*, 2015
- ‘Marx, List and the Materiality of Nations’ *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 24, 1, January 2012, pp. 47-67.
- ‘Value and Crisis Theory in the Great Recession’, *World Review of Political Economy*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 2011), pp. 35-47 (with Alan Freeman)
- ‘Is India Having a Good Crisis?’ *Soundings*, 48, Winter 2010.
- ‘Consumption Demand in Marx and in the Current Crisis’, *Research in Political Economy*, Volume 26, 2010, pp. 101-41.
- ‘The Absent Geopolitics of Pure Capitalism’, *World Review of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Fall 2010), pp. 463-484.