

Day Symposium: “The Contradictions of Liberalism From the 18th Century to the Present: Leftist Critiques”

Organized and Hosted by the Institute of Working-Class History/ Chicago, *Socialist History* journal/ UK, with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Society/ Berlin

Symposium Time & Location: Friday July 21st 2023, at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Berlin Headquarters, Strasse der Pariser Kommune 8a

Symposium Languages: German & English

Symposium Format: In-person with possibility of online presentations in exceptional circumstances. Presenters are asked to submit a draft of their papers in advance for circulation to participants, and to present a summary of the main arguments at the symposium. We intend to publish some of the papers in a special themed issue of *Socialist History*.

Symposium Theme: Liberalism grew from often contradictory ideas of individual liberty, representative government, and economic freedom that challenged feudal and hereditary power. It facilitated the development of capitalism and the rise of a new capitalist ruling class. While proclaiming universal human and civil rights, most liberals historically excluded large swaths of the population as unworthy or incapable of exercising them. To extents varying with time and place, designated ethnicities, women, people of color, indigenous peoples, as well as impoverished and working people were excluded.

Liberalism became the main legitimizing ideology of capitalism. It has allowed for some adjustments within the larger framework; however, it promotes and defends capitalism, and opposes all efforts that call the system itself into question. Capitalism not only exploits labor with the extraction of surplus value but required the dispossession of European peasants as well as Indigenous peoples in the Americas and throughout Africa as well as Asia. This makes liberalism complicit in racism, colonialism, and genocide. Since liberalism is not a monolithic tradition, it can accommodate variations, from laissez-faire economics to social libertarianism.

Through the twentieth century, liberalism’s once hegemonic status was severely discredited and contested, as liberalism, much like capitalism itself, became associated with imperialist warfare and the global division and redivision of the world. Anticolonial revolts and the persistence of revolutionary Marxism have offered hopes for a different world, one based on solidarity, participatory political, and economic democracy, as well as substantive equality. The concerns of institutional liberalism to save and

stabilize capitalism has aligned it with militant nationalism and Fascism. All three shared the policies of austerity and “pure economics” – what today would be summarized as the neo-liberal paradigm. This meant the breaking of working-class organizations and the privatizations and corporatizations of ever larger spheres of society, in the name of efficiency and rationality.

We would particularly welcome proposals for papers on the following general areas:

- What specific contributions have leftist and Marxist scholars made to understanding the contradictions of Liberalism more fully?
- ‘Big tent’ liberalism’s fragmentation and its relations with socialist movements
- Classical Liberalism and its relationships to both right-wing laissez-faire Liberalism and left-wing civil-liberties Liberalism (human rights, civil liberties, political pluralism)
- Classical Liberalism, social reformism, Keynesian economics, and the rise of Neo-Liberalism
- The impact and legacies of the Great War and Russian, German, and Austrian/Hungarian Revolutions
- Liberalism’s role in the rise of right-wing authoritarianism & Fascism
- Liberalism and capitalism, racism, colonialism, and settler states
- Liberalism, Illiberalism, and Fascism
- Capitalism and Fascism
- 1923: the final defeat of the German Revolution and the first major Conservative-Nazi alliance in Germany

We are looking for papers of between 5000 to 7000 words. Selected papers will be published in a special issue of *Socialist History*. Attendance at the symposium is free of charge, but donations are highly appreciated. We ask that anyone attending the symposium register in advance.

Tour of Revolutionary Berlin: For those interested, there will be the option to participate in a tour of sites related to working-class and labor-movement history, as well as the histories of strikes, uprisings, revolutions, and counterrevolutions. More detailed information forthcoming.

Instructions for Proposals:

Length of Abstract: 1-2 paragraphs

Application Deadline for presenters: June 15th, 2023

Submission of Paper Deadline: July 10st, 2023

How to Apply: Submit paper title, abstract, and brief c.v. Proposals for papers and any enquires should be directed to Axel Fair-Schulz. Email: fairsca@potdam.edu

There will also be space for a limited number of non-presenters at the event, and details of how to register will be circulated later.