

BOOK REVIEWS

David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London: Verso, 2010).

A Companion to Marx's Capital is geographer and social theorist David Harvey's effort to guide a new generation of leftists through Karl Marx's labyrinthine *Capital: Volume I*. Few are as well equipped for the challenge. For some forty years, Harvey has taught a lecture course on Marx's protean masterpiece (available online at <http://davidharvey.org/>), and the *Companion* affords an opportunity to elaborate material originally presented orally. In addition to explicating *Capital's* key arguments, historical contexts, and interpretative minefields, Harvey makes an impassioned case for the political indispensability of Marx's conceptual framework under conditions of twenty-first century neoliberalism.

The *Companion* is written in an engaging, often conversational tone at a largely introductory level. It may not appeal to scholars already intimately familiar with *Capital*, but provides sage guidance for those on the long road to learning Marx's political economy and critical philosophy. While Harvey aims to facilitate a historically nuanced reading of *Capital* on its own terms, he is clear that "those terms will inevitably be affected by my interests and experiences" (13). Far from a liability, when Harvey introduces concepts from his geographical oeuvre – time-space compression, spatial fixes, creative destruction – to contextualize or elaborate Marx's arguments, the results are illuminating and pedagogically helpful.

For Harvey, *Capital* is a fascinating literary construction, full of dramatic metaphors of blood and necromancy, if at times shifting to a dull economic style and prone to repetition. More substantively, Harvey memorably characterizes the text as a product of Marx taking three radically different conceptual blocs – classical liberal political economy, German critical philosophy, and utopian socialism – and "rubbing them together and making revolutionary fire" (4). Of these blocs, liberal political economy takes centre stage; Marx works largely *within* the propositions of the classical economists, such as Smith and Ricardo, to show that a utopian *laissez-faire* situation would result not in generalized prosperity but increasing inequality and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a capitalist class. *Capital: Volume I* also proceeds within assumptions of a largely closed system of production, generally ignoring macro factors in order to isolate the internal basis of value under capitalism, namely surplus-value extracted from labour.

Harvey wants readers to make up their own minds on specific debates over *Capital*, for example, regarding the import of autonomist Marxist interpretations, or whether the labour theory of value can withstand contemporary refutation by economists. Nevertheless, for Harvey there are certain fundamental, non-negotiable ways of understanding the text. Marx proceeds using a dialectical

method that explores the internalization of a contradiction within a unity (for example, the commodity as an embodiment of use-value *and* exchange-value), which in turn generates further contradictions that need to be explored, thus moving the inquiry from molecular components into an ever-larger system of relations without arriving at any final synthesis. For this reason, Harvey gets “impatient with people who depict Marx’s dialectic as a closed method of analysis. It is not finite; on the contrary, it is constantly expanding” (63). Furthermore, capital is not a stock of assets, a fixed quantity, or a thing. “Capital is process, and that is that”; it is money put into circulation by capitalists to make more money, and thus a defining characteristic of capitalism is constant motion and the destruction of barriers to circulation (92). Harvey also regards the concept of fetishism as fundamental to Marx’s critical method, as it captures how market exchanges and the money-form conceal the social relations and labour conditions under which commodities are produced and which constitute the hidden source of their value (41).

The *Companion* does not refrain from criticizing its hero. Harvey faults Marx’s discussion of the factory for inappropriately universalizing what was happening in Manchester. He charges that Marx does not adequately address the reproduction of human life under capitalism, and regrets that Marx uses language which can be interpreted as historically deterministic or teleological. Furthermore, Harvey criticizes Marx for relegating “primitive accumulation” to a past stage of history. Harvey prefers to call the process “accumulation by dispossession”, arguing that commons appropriation, slum clearance, privatization, and so forth remain vital sites of capital accumulation, proletarianization and class struggle in our own day (312). In general, Harvey is more convinced by Marx’s logical and theoretical arguments than by his historical accounts.

The *Companion* is not an unassailable book. While eager to connect Marx’s analyses to present-day globalization, environmental crises, and neoliberalism, there is far less concern with gender, which Harvey tends to equate with women, and even less concern with race and sexuality. Seemingly unmoved by poststructuralist and feminist critiques of his previous work by Doreen Massey, Cindi Katz, and others, Harvey still reads as though all categories of difference and inequality must be passed through the sieve of class-struggle to be politically and analytically significant. Moreover, if Harvey’s invocation of Derridean deconstruction is a bit shallow, his treatment of Foucault is reductionist and surprisingly inadequate. For example, it is simply incorrect to suggest that “when Foucault talks about the rise of governmentality, what he is really talking about is that moment when people started to internalize a sense of temporal discipline” (147). Governmentality in fact denotes forms of political rationality, reflections on government, and techniques of conducting oneself and others with antique historical roots.

Nevertheless, in its fundamental objective of guiding a new generation

of leftists through Marx's notoriously difficult *Capital: Volume I*, the *Companion* is very successful. While I am not exactly convinced that "we have, in short, been very much in the world of *Volume I* over the past thirty years", it seems clear that workers' share of profits relative to capitalists have been diminishing, while corporate monopolization, structural unemployment, economic crises, and social inequality have been surging under contemporary conditions of neoliberalism (246). Harvey is surely correct in insisting that the conceptual framework Marx lays out in *Capital* offers indispensable insights into this dire political and economic situation. As such, *Capital* remains essential reading, and one would be hard-pressed to find a better guide than David Harvey.

Scott De Groot
Queen's University

Silvio Pons and Robert Service, Eds. *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

For many students of the Left, particularly those in the formative stages of their academic career, the study of communism can often be overwhelming. Once a topic is selected, one must become an expert not only on the subject in question, but also the ways in which it interacts with larger national and international experiences and narratives. This is complicated by what can seem like a never-ending stream of abbreviations and acronyms, coupled with the reality that since the fall of the Soviet Union the historiography of this field has become one of the most dynamic in academia. It is with this in mind that *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* – advertised as “the first encyclopaedic reference work since the end of the Cold War on international communism” – should be welcomed into the historiography of the left.

Edited by established scholars Silvio Pons (University of Rome Tor Vergata) and Robert Service (University of Oxford), *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* contains over 400 alphabetic entries which can be divided into three distinct categories: leading political figures, organizations (political and otherwise), and ideas or concepts. Entries range from concise biographical sketches to longer multi-page articles detailing the main historiographical contours of contested topics. What really makes this volume stand out is its commitment to re-write, or re-think, entries vis-à-vis the enormous amount of information that has become available since the opening of the Soviet archives (vii). *A Dictionary of 20th-Century Communism* represents one of the most up-to-date sources of general information pertaining to international communism available at this time.

For many the value of this work lies not just in the entries themselves, but in the excellent indexes and references that are provided at the end of each