



200 Years of Karl Marx: Call for papers

'Modern bourgeois society [...] that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.'

It was almost 200 years ago in May 1818 that one of the most influential thinkers of the modern era was born: Karl Marx.

In September 2007, almost 10 years ago now, the world experienced the start of one of the longest and deepest crises of modern capitalism – a crisis that is still ongoing in many parts of Europe.

With the 'populist backlash' of recent years, this economic crisis has also taken on a political dimension. Increasingly the legitimacy of the political-economic order itself looks as if it is in crisis, with many people feeling that their interests are no longer safeguarded by it.

At the same time yet another technological revolution – digitalisation and the advent of smart machines – threatens to unsettle almost all established forms of production and work.

How can Marx's body of theory help us to understand the current state of capitalism in Europe?

- Does it help us to understand the crisis of European capitalism – and its shortcomings in terms of guaranteeing economic growth and the state's capacity for action?
- What will happen to capitalist societies if manpower is largely replaceable by machines in this “second machine age”? What will happen to the growing ‘industrial reserve army’ of those people whose labour is no longer necessary in the era of digitalisation? Can and will capitalism function at all without workers – and hence increasingly without people able to consume?
- How does Marx' body of thought help us to understand a political-economic order that generates a unique level of wealth and at the same time threatens, in a major historical rollback, to deprive workers more and more of security, stability and control over their own lives?
- And what about the idea of ‘classes’ as historic actors? What has happened to the ‘working class’ and why does it no longer play a political role in Western societies - even though ever more people are in employment?
- Finally, is there today any social utopian idea that goes beyond capitalism – a concept of an emancipatory social order, of a society in which, to quote the Communist Manifesto, ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’? Or is defence of the welfare state of the 20th century the last stop before the ‘general barbarism’ of globalised capitalism - and anything beyond unimaginable?

As a prelude to the 2018 commemoration of Karl Marx's birth, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is organising an international conference in London on the topicality of Marxist thinking in the light of the crisis (or crises) facing Europe.

We invite you to submit short papers for a colloquium that we wish to organise in London on 8 September 2017. Please send the papers to ernst.hillebrand@fes.de or to the FES-office in your country.